

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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“Russell Library Becomes Official Middletown Pride Partner”

Middletown, CT: The Russell Library has joined the City of Middletown, the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, and Wesleyan University as an official partner in Middletown Pride.

“We are thrilled to announce this partnership,” said Ramona Burkey, the Library’s Executive Director. “A primary role of the public library is to strengthen our community, and since Middletown Pride does exactly that, this collaboration makes perfect sense.”

Library staff member and Middletown resident Jennifer Billingsley will represent the Library on the Middletown Pride committee. “I’m honored and grateful to be the Library’s representative,” said Billingsley, who has served as the Library’s Head of Youth and Family Learning since 2017. “The Russell Library will be producing digital and virtual Pride events and providing general support for Pride activities year-round going forward.” After the cancellation of Middletown Pride 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Billingsley stepped up by producing “Middletown STREAM,” a well-attended series of live-streamed Pride activities for all ages this past June. She also collaborated with local business Cinder + Salt to run a socially-distant Downtown Clean-Up event, which was attended by Senator Chris Murphy, Mayor Benjamin Florsheim, several Russell Library staff members, and dozens of community members.

“I saw first-hand how successful the ‘Middletown STREAM’ and Downtown Clean-Up events were,” said Florsheim, “so I’m confident that Jenn Billingsley and the staff of the Russell Library will continue to make great contributions to Middletown Pride going forward.” Pride creator, lead organizer and staff representative on the City’s LGBTQIA+ Advisory Committee, Christopher Forte, echoed the Mayor’s sentiments, adding, “It’s been wonderful working with Jenn over the past two years, and I think that this partnership strengthens and enhances Middletown Pride and our entire community.”

Middletown’s first-ever Pride festival in June of 2019 brought an estimated 15,000+ visitors to town, most of whom visited local businesses. “Middletown Pride has been a huge benefit to Middletown, both in showing how we are an open and affirming community and by bringing attention to our downtown businesses,” said Larry McHugh, President of the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce. “We at the Chamber are excited to partner with the Russell Library to make future Pride events, including Middletown Pride 2021, even more impactful.”

Russell Library Board of Trustees President Eamonn Wisneski couldn’t agree more.

“Middletown Pride has become a signature event in our community,” he said. “I’m proud to see the Russell Library extend our reach by sharing our resources and expertise in order to make Middletown a welcoming and inclusive place in which to live, work and play.”

City of Middletown LGBTQIA+ Advisory Committee meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m.

For information about the Russell Library, visit RussellLibrary.org.

[*Photo of "Drag Queen Story Hour with Mia!" June 2018, Russell Library, Middletown CT:*
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/2jypFraY8HGj7MeG9>]