



# It's Happening Here

## TORRINGTON'S NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 5 • JUNE 2021



# WELCOME...



Summer is finally here, and with many of the state's Covid-19 restrictions being lifted, businesses are back in full swing. We are excited about what this summer has in store for our great city.

Enjoy this summer locally and discover the many hidden gems Torrington has to offer. For all the latest events and ventures in Torrington, visit our newly designed website, [www.its happening here.com](http://www.its happening here.com). Here, you can find the best activities for children of all ages, grab a bite at one of our many restaurants and enjoy a nice drink after a long day at work. Discover new trails and walking paths under our Take a Hike tab. It provides an interactive map of all the great routes surrounding Torrington. Use the Find a Trail tab to choose the trail that best suits you.

Starting next month, we will be posting a series called Hidden Gems, where we will show off ideal spots to take a selfie or group photo with your friends and family. Also, be sure to follow our newly created Instagram page, [@cityoftorrington](https://www.instagram.com/cityoftorrington), to see the latest spots and announcements that are going on in Torrington.

This summer, let's rediscover the treasures and gems Torrington has to offer and enjoy your staycation with us!

Sincerely,

*Rista Malanca*

Director of Economic Development



COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT

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# A TORRINGTON FOOD STAPLE

Vinny's Restaurant & Pizzeria has been serving the community of Torrington since 2009. It has evolved from the small store front on East Main Street to an enormous abandoned factory on East Elm Street. Vinny's is run and operated by two brothers, Arti and Tim Seferi, who first got their start from their uncle Vinny, who also owns a pizzeria in Naugatuck.

**Since bringing Vinny's to Torrington, Arti has sought to bring nothing but the best food for his customers.**

Vinny's offers an array of excellent Italian cuisine and a wide variety of delicious pizzas made in their specially designed ovens. Their bread is made fresh twice a day, and it makes the perfect pairing with all their meals.

As business began to boom, the small 2,000 sq. ft. storefront was no longer cutting it out for Arti and his team. They needed to move and needed to move soon to keep up with their customers' demands. The choice to move into their current location did not take much planning from the two brothers. "It just happened," said Arti, "My brother saw the building and wanted me to go and see it. When I saw the outside, I was not interested, but when I saw the inside, I saw that it had a good structure." From there, the move to the new building took only six months to get done. In October of 2019, they went from 12-14 people to more than 30 people with three times the space compared to the original location. The extra needed space was just what Vinny's required to provide nothing but the best experience for their customers. From opening day in the new building, Vinny's dining room hall was packed almost every week. "Every night, there were big lines of people outside waiting to come in," said Arti about the positive impact the new location has had on their business. "I even felt like space was beginning to feel small." One of the perks of moving into a new space was the ability for Arti to create his ideal kitchen. The kitchen has become a popular



point in the new building where people from all over come to dine and then ask Arti to take pictures of them in the kitchen.

Through the challenges of Covid-19, Arti recognizes how fortunate Vinny's was to have such a supportive and understanding customer base. Although indoor seating was closed due to government regulations, they could continue doing take-out options. Arti also chose to run specials every week and cut prices on the menu to provide the best price during the tough times. He even began offering \$5 pizza every Thursday. Vinny's pizza has not only been a staple of casual dining in Torrington, but it has also been active in their community. "We support everyone, anyone who comes through our doors and ask for support; we are there." Arti has delivered more than 5,000 pizzas to local organizations and public service personnel during the pandemic's peak. "I did it to help, but it also created good turnout for us in return. I did it because I wanted to help". Arti's post on social media about the donations sparked the community to support Vinny's and show their support to local front-line workers by ordering more food.

## A TORRINGTON FOOD STAPLE



The pandemic has caused many of Arti's plans for the new space to be on hold. By May of next year, Arti hopes to get the entire first floor cleaned and ready for people to come in and dine with new windows to be installed. Arti also wants to create an entrance from E. Elm Street that goes directly into the dining room. Arti also is planning on making an events hall that can fit about 300 people for large gatherings and social events. The gallery will also serve as an overflow room then the main dining room is packed during the week. Phase two of remodeling the building is to eventually add a gym on the second floor and open the space up and rent to a local business that might wish to set up shop in the area. "Many people have come to me asking me to rent the space, but I am not making any promised yet until the second floor is ready to be used."

**Arti and his team are excited for the future of Vinny's in Torrington. He invites you to come down to take a bite of their popular dishes.**



## WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Salt 2.0 is a family-friendly take-out restaurant. They pride themselves on offering various options, giving a little bit of something for everyone. Andy Stowers and Brook Noel are owners of the Saltwater Grille in Litchfield, CT, and saw the need to modify their sales model to keep afloat during the pandemic. "When the pandemic started and seating capacity came, we were struggling, as were most full-service restaurants. So, what do you do now?" They quickly made the change, converted their dining room, and turned it

into a parked food truck with a different menu. Andy and Brook keep with the spirit of their restaurant, providing family-friendly, affordable food but now adding quick service to the mix.



**"We opened it up with just [us], and two of my coworkers and people just loved it. It just grew beyond what we expected, and it helped us survive the pandemic".**

Because of their success with Salt 2.0 in Litchfield, Andy thought this concept would be great to bring over to Torrington. Their goal with this new model is to provide an affordable price point the whole can enjoy without breaking the bank.

The choice to move to Torrington was a natural crossover, says Brooke, as they had many customers from Torrington that would go to their Litchfield location. As they sought out different places to set up shop, Brook had already been a massive fan of the old Mertz building. So when they first arrived from Wisconsin, the former Backstage restaurant that occupied the Mertz was the first place they went to eat. Brook immediately loved the feel of the space, calling it a "neat space" to use. Then the opportunity came to use the space for Salt



2.0, and the deal came through. With their existing relationship with the Warner Theatre next door, Brook, and Andy formed the perfect partnership.

They opened their doors to the public on the 26th of April, and the community has embraced them wholeheartedly. Brooke uses the word "blessed" to describe how wonderful the people of Torrington have been towards them and have come out in support of their business. Brook describes an encounter with a mother and daughter on the day of their grand opening; she says, "I have to tell you, we're so glad you're here. We love your food. And it's just that reassurance that makes you feel okay. We are in the right place, at the right time. You know, this will work."

As we transition into a "new normal" after the pandemic, Andy and Brook will still keep the quick service model they adopted they implemented because of the pandemic. However, their customers have adapted themselves to use QR codes. A benefit both Andy and Brook see is the practicality of a do it your self kind of model that allows for their prices to be lower. "You're getting the quick service and convenience of a McDonald's, but you're getting higher quality food and a nicer space to enjoy it."



***The first week we had people that came three times, you know, that just loved it. And then you have somebody walk in and oh, so, and so told me and so-and-so, you know, so it was this really just kind of welcome***

**-Brook Noel**

Owner of Salt 2.0



A significant part of their business is take-out, with 80% of their business dealing with take-out orders, working closely with Grubhub and Doordash to handle their delivery service. However, they hope by this year to set up a full-service restaurant and have a more upscale vibe be set up in the dining room. They plan on serving an American fine dining experience for those who wish to sit down and enjoy their meal in the existing space. This part of the restaurant will be open only Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Andy and Brook will partner with the Warner Theatre to offer paired meals with every show and performance being hosted on that specific night. If it's country music coming to town, they might do a full-on barbecue price fix. If it's Melissa Etheridge, it might be sliders or wings. If it's the opera, it might be a lobster and steak dinner. They hope to provide the best experience possible for anyone who wishes to come.

Salt 2.0 will still offer its staple menu seven days a week during the lunch and dinner hours. They hope to become an attractive option to those coming off work or just a great choice the whole family can enjoy.

**"In our family, we have a meat-eater, a pescatarian, a vegetarian, and you're trying to find a place where everybody could go and find something they like is impossible. So we wanted to create a concept that would make that option for people."**

Andy and Brook are also beginning to do catered events and using their sizeable dining hall for events and weddings. So if you wish to make the old Mertz building the backdrop of your next corporate or private event, give them a call, and both Andy and Brook would be glad to speak with you to make your day a special one.

**Andy and Brook are excited for what the future has in store for them and invites you to stop by and grab one of their delicious burritos, salads, grain bowls, and wraps.**



# TORRINGTON LIBRARY

ENGAGING • ENRICHING • EMPOWERING



## A CITADEL OF LEARNING

The Torrington Library has come out of the pandemic with a new perspective on providing a first-class experience to the community they serve. The director of the library, Jessica Gueniat, took advantage of the situation and shifted her entire operation online. Like most organizations, the library closed its doors temporarily on March 14th, "We all took on different electronic projects to try to keep people engaged in the community." Jessica and her staff began sending out e-newsletters and daily e-blast to get the word out that the library has gone digital. They were informing the public of all the resources they can access through their library card.

**"We wanted to tell people that just because they couldn't physically come into the building, it does not mean that the resources were not available."**

Processing online library cards was also a new feature that Jessica says would have never happened if it were not for the pandemic. The applications were filed online by anyone wishing to access the online library. Her staff at home would process the cards and mail them back to the person who requested them. The library also began to offer virtual kids programming throughout the pandemic. The children's librarians did storytime from home called wiggles and giggles from home through Facebook Live, a massive resource that families used.

Then on May 20th, the Governor allowed different organizations, including the library, to open up partially. Jessica then chose to implement curbside pick up for book people would request online or by phone. Then on June 20th, the library was allowed to fully open to the public. At first, some challenges and space had to be modified to accommodate social distancing protocols.

All of their study tables were down. Their computers weren't up and running, but at least people could come in, browse for books, pick things up. And then, as the state started to reopen little by little, the computers reopened, socially distanced, three out of

the nine at first, because that's all they could allow.

During the height of the pandemic, a hurricane passed through the city, leaving half of the people without power. The storm happened when people needed to telecommute to work or attend school from home, becoming a turning point for the library. "So that morning after the hurricane hit, we quickly just pulled tables, chairs, you know, power sources, anything we could that we felt we could fit responsibly distanced." They created 14 workstations for people to come in and safely telecommute to work or do any work. All of this has been made possible by a reasonably large grant the State of Connecticut gave to organizations, like the library, to help implement and purchase equipment that would help with the reopening. "We now are going with what the state guidelines are recommending for vaccinated versus unvaccinated people. And I think that's going over well."

Jessica expresses how lucky they were to have an expanded space going into the pandemic because it allowed them to spread out their collections and adhere to social distancing guidelines. "If we were still in our original space, it never would

have happened. We would have had to be far more creative with far fewer services, in my opinion. And we use every available inch of space in this building all ready even with the expansion. So for us, it was great to have it."

The pandemic served the library well to reevaluate most of their existing collections and see where the trend line is going regarding what the library's patrons are using nowadays. One of the reevaluations was the library's DVD collection. Much of the money used to update their physical DVD collection has now been transferred to a new live streaming platform called Canopy Video. A vast surge was also seen in the number of eBook downloads, causing Jessica to reevaluate specific book collections. "Nobody thinks of this, but our physical audiobook collection, lot of new cars don't come with CD players anymore. So many people are like, oh my gosh, I need to stream through my Bluetooth device to my car?"

Jessica and her team have had to ask themselves a few of the questions. They have had to learn to grow with the times if they wish not to become an obsolete resource for the community. Jessica is conscious that the library is shifting towards a hybrid model and is waiting to see what the statistics will say about people's habits and use of certain mediums.

***"We love people physically in our building because it's exciting for us and we get to interact with people and really get to know what they like and what they're used to. We also, understand that there's a majority of the public that may not be able to get here for some reason. ... So as long as people are reading and using services, we're thrilled across the board."***

**-Jessica Gueniat**

Library Director



***"We're all going to be like, okay, let's forget, 2020 existed, 2021 is going to be a wash. And then let's see what 2022 holds when we all get back to normal, and then we'll be able to kind of gauge the temperature."***

With the expansion, the library added a 100 seat community room and a 15 seat conference room available to rent. During strict restrictions, these rooms were closed but have now been reopened and available to rent on their website. "Before we closed, we were trending upwards to four or five rentals a week. Almost every day, the rooms were being used by the outside public for meetings, in addition to all of our programming." Demand for the use of the space has increased as more people begin to venture outside and do more in-person gatherings. If you wish to rent out one of these rooms, visit their website for

more information or [click here](#) to download their rental agreement form.

The library is still offering online activities for kids and adults; however, beginning July, the library will start to provide in-person outdoor programming through August for adults. Then in September, all children and teen programs will resume indoors. For more information on any upcoming event, visit their website or tap on the icon on page 9 of the newsletter page.

**Jessica invites you to come down and visit the library and take advantage of all the excellent resources they have to offer. If not, visit their website for more information on accessing the online library.**



# CITY OF TORRINGTON CT

## Police Department

### TPD JUNE MESSAGE

**WILLIAM R. BALDWIN JR.**  
Chief of Police



We have been through a tough year with the pandemic and other upheavals that have taken place in our country. Crime statistics have been on the increase over this past year throughout our nation. Our state has seen a rise in certain crimes, and unfortunately, our city is not immune. My focus in this month's newsletter is the recent rash of car break-ins plaguing our state and area. If there is anything positive about this, it is that our community is not alone. This problem is area and state-wide. In 2020, the police department investigated 75 incidents of car break-ins. Subsequently, we investigated 37 stolen cars. This number is up from 2019. So far this year, we are investigating 75 thefts from motor vehicles and 37 stolen motor vehicles.

The Torrington Police Department works very hard in identifying those responsible for these offenses. The use of many surveillance devices helps us in the investigations concerning these events. Patrol officers have increased visibility patrols throughout our towns and neighborhoods. In most cases, the suspects are juveniles. When identified, they are arrested and referred to the Juvenile court system.

As downtown business owners, I ask that you do your part in helping to curb these incidents from occurring. Remind your customers to take the extra steps necessary to prevent them from being the next victim. In many situations, anyone can avoid these thefts. I would also ask you to consider installing video surveillance or a security system to help with police investigations related to crimes that may occur in or against your business.

Car Burglaries are easily prevented but very difficult to solve. Very little physical evidence is left behind at the scene, and most of the time, there are no witnesses. That is why many times, we rely on video surveillance to assist us in capturing responsible parties. Follow these tips, and you can minimize your risk of being a victim:

- Always close your windows and lock your doors. That is an effortless step that most people fail to do. Many thieves go from car to car, grabbing the door handle to find an open, unlocked vehicle.
- Always remove your valuables or at least secure them in your trunk. That includes your car keys. Don't hide them under the mat or in the glove box. An open car door invites the thief to quickly go through the vehicle, searching for the car keys and other valuables.
- While this may sound silly, DO NOT leave your children in the vehicle unattended or any pets you may own. There have been several instances where stolen vehicles had the victim's children in them. That is common sense and could quite possibly be criminal.
- Leaving GPS mounts, cell phone car chargers, or satellite radio docking stations visible in the car will invite thieves to break your window. It is also vital that you put away any loose change that can invite a potential thief.
- Never leave your vehicle running unattended.
- Park in a well lit, visible areas
- Make sure the exterior lighting on your residence is working correctly.
- Park in your garage when or if possible

We urge you to report suspicious activity and do not hesitate to use 911. If you think it is questionable, it is. You know your neighborhood and your community, so we need your help identifying who doesn't belong there. Notify neighbors, neighborhood groups such as Neighborhood Watch or the business or apartment management or social media platforms. Again, I can't emphasize this enough----Report suspicious or criminal behavior to the Torrington Police Department.

As Chief of Police, I want to thank all of you for what you do for the City of Torrington. You are such an integral part of the "community," and together, we can make our city a better and safer place to shop and live through our partnership.

**"DEDICATED PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE"**



**CITY OF TORRINGTON CT**  
**Police Department**

# SUMMER PROGRAMS

TAP ICONS FOR MORE INFO.



## BUSINESS RESOURCES



U.S. Small Business  
Administration

### SBA Restaurant Revitalization Fund



**BETSY PAYNTER**

SMALL BUSINESS OUTREACH  
CONSULTANT



TAP TO EMAIL



TAP TO CALL

## COVID-19 RESOURCES



Hartford  
HealthCare



TESTING  
FOR  
COVID-19



COVID-19  
VACCINE

### State of CT COVID-19 Guidelines