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GREATER HARTFORD BAR SCENE

HAPPY HOUR WITH A TWIST



Enjoy A Drink, Meet New People And Find Your Inner Artist At Paint Nite

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ELIZABETH VANNELLI checks on her husband, Nicco, as he works on his painting.



Downtown Hartford has introduced a new bar-night concept, and although it still includes mingling, music and drinks, the entertainment takes the form of paint brushes, smocks and a blank canvas.

For Paint Nite, which kicked off in May and runs four nights a week at popular Greater Hartford bars, patrons sign up for a night of painting, drinking and socializing.

"I've seen this event turn into a girls' night out or a date night," says Jessica Behm, a Paint Nite instructor who teaches most of the sessions. "It's basically a creative twist to a night out at the bar."

Patrons pay \$45 for paint, smocks, brushes, a 16-by-20 canvas, an easel and professional instruction from a local artist. Drinks are purchased separately. Customers can choose to paint the modeled painting or whatever they like. Once the session starts, the

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ART INSTRUCTOR Jessica Behm leads everyone in a toast to a night of good fun and painting during a Paint Nite Hartford event at the Black Bear Saloon.

Paint Nite Currently Is Held At 6 Greater Hartford Venues

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instructor gives step-by-step instructions.

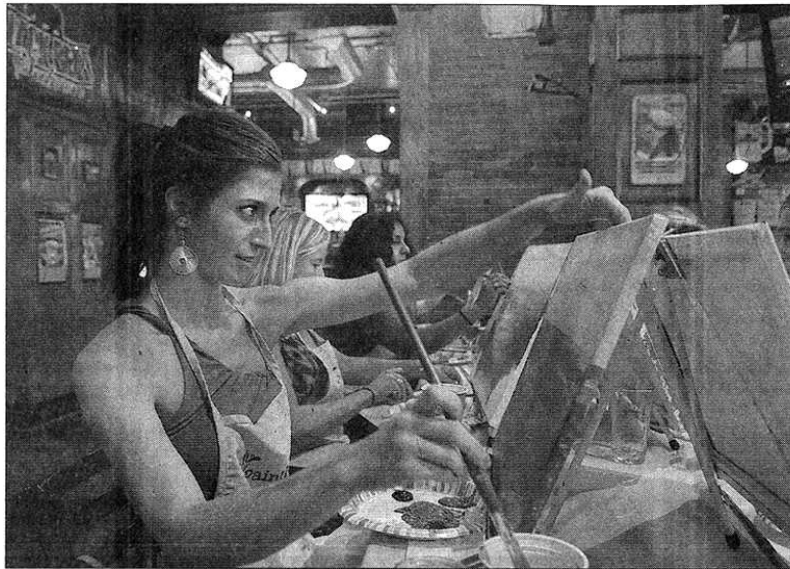
As the evening gets underway, Behm cautions consumers not to confuse their drinks with their paint cup of water. After giving a toast to a good night, Behm instructs patrons on different techniques, how to mix colors and to use a lot of water when painting. With a variety of music set in the background, Behm calls out instructions through a microphone, swiftly painting the next step. Paint Nite sessions typically last about two hours.

"It was helpful watching her give steps on how to do it or how to fix problems," says Sara Cavanaugh, 35, of West Hartford. "I had messed up on the horizon in my painting, and she gave really helpful tips on how to fix it."

A 10-minute break allows the first part of the painting to dry and patrons to mingle or grab another drink. Although Paint Nite requires a certain concentration, it also offers a great opportunity to meet people as the artwork is shared.

"It was a lot more fun than I expected," Cavanaugh says. "I have no prior skills in art, but it was a great night out. I would certainly come again."

Paint Nite is hosted four times a week at six venues: Hot Tomato's, Wood-n-Tap, Cuvée, Black Bear Saloon, The Adams Mill and Vito's by the Water. According to



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JENNA WALD of Hartford attended a Paint Nite Hartford event at the Black Bear Saloon with a group of girlfriends.

Marsha Lee, owner of Paint Nite Hartford, a seventh venue is planned: Barcelona in West Hartford.

"Certain bars attract different age

groups," Behm says. "The Adams Mill attracts more of an older, crowd while the Black Bear Saloon attracts a mix-aged group. At times there are even whole

families here."

Paint Nite has popped up in 20 cities, first in Boston in 2012, and it has boomed in popularity, even reaching into Canada.

"I heard about this concept in March and was intrigued by it," Lee says. "There are a lot of repeat customers. It's a great social time that can get the creative juices flowing. ... People are amazed at what they have created by the end of the night."

Discounts for Paint Nite already have been found on Groupon.com, where Lorraine Wentworth, 29, of West Hartford says she first heard of it. She came with two friends right after work.

"It's a lot of fun, and it's something different than your usual happy hour," Wentworth says. "I like the fact it's during the week and right around the corner since I work uptown."

"I learned a new skill," says Marissa Santangelo, 29, of Manchester, who also discovered Paint Nite through Groupon. "You never know what you are good at until you try it."

► The next Paint Nite is at 7 p.m. Monday at Wood-n-Tap in Hartford at 7 p.m.; Paint Nite at Hot Tomato's will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday. For a schedule of Paint Nite events in Greater Hartford and to register, visit paintnite.com.