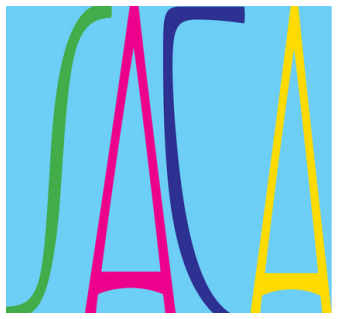




SOUTHBURY
ARTS AND
CULTURE
ALLIANCE

SOUTHBURY MAKERS SPOTLIGHT

SOUTHBURY ARTS AND CULTURE ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER
November 2025

Special Edition: Artist of the Year Nominees

Each year, the Southbury Arts & Culture Alliance (SACA) presents the Artist of the Year Award to honor outstanding local talent. Below you'll find information about each of these amazing artists (alphabetized by last name), their work, and their contributions to our community.

Dardo Galletto & Alonso Guzmán

Dardo Galletto and Alonso Guzmán are professional dancers and instructors specializing in Argentine Tango and Milonga. With backgrounds that include international training and performances at prestigious venues such as The Metropolitan Opera House, they bring both mastery and innovation to their teaching. Their artistry blends technical excellence with expressive depth, and they are recognized for fostering confidence, musicality, and joy in their students. Their Saturday night classes and Milonga gatherings in Southbury have become cultural highlights that draw dancers from across Connecticut and beyond.

Beyond their own performances, Galletto and Guzmán have made significant contributions to the Southbury community through classes at the Senior Center, public library, and local outreach programs. They have created an inclusive and welcoming dance community that spans generations and cultures, enriching the lives of participants while promoting fitness, creativity, and connection. Their dedication to sharing tango has transformed Southbury into a hub for this art form, building bridges between people and celebrating the universal language of dance.

Learn more about Galletto and Guzman: [August '25 Makers Spotlight](#)



Ellie Hanna

Ellie Hanna is a vocalist and community advocate who leads the band One Track Mind and contributes to the Southbury music scene. For 33 years, she was a teacher involved in theater production at Newtown High School and co-directed the annual variety show at Schaghticoke Middle School, inspiring countless students through creativity and collaboration. Today, One Track Mind is a popular local band that entertains audiences at concerts and community events. Her work as both performer and organizer reflects her dedication to enriching Southbury's cultural life.

Beyond the stage, Ellie has played a vital role in strengthening Southbury's music scene. She helped relocate and enhance the Summer Concert Series by organizing fundraising efforts that upgraded the Settlers Park Gazebo into a true performance venue. One Track Mind has also lent its talents to benefit causes including Whiskers Pet Rescue, Jane Doe No More, and a foundation supporting widows in Guatemala. Ellie continues to support fellow musicians, spearhead community initiatives, and develop new programs such as open mic nights and a proposed Porchfest, making her an important voice for both music and community engagement.

Learn more about Ellie Hanna: [One Track Mind Facebook Video Reels](#)





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Danielle Hawthorne (D. Noel Imagery)

Danielle Hawthorne, the creative force behind D. Noel Imagery, is a wildlife and landscape photographer as well as the publisher of Southbury Neighbors magazine. With a conservationist's perspective and an artist's eye, she captures intimate portraits of birds, wildlife, and natural landscapes that celebrate the beauty of the region. Her photography not only documents but also elevates awareness of the natural world, inviting viewers to see Southbury's environment in new and meaningful ways.

In addition to her photography, Danielle plays a prominent role in community storytelling as publisher of Southbury Neighbors. Each month, she highlights local creators, businesses, and organizations, giving visibility and recognition to Southbury's cultural contributors. Through her art and leadership, she has become a vital voice in shaping the town's artistic identity, blending creativity with community engagement in ways that strengthen Southbury's cultural fabric.

Learn more about Danielle Hawthorne: [D. Noel Imagery Website](#)



Laura Modlin

Laura Modlin is a photographer, writer, and environmental journalist with a background in film and television production. After earning her MFA from NYU and working in film, she shifted her focus to capturing and writing about the natural world. Since 2007, she has received multiple Connecticut Agricultural Journalism Awards and published work in local, regional, and national outlets. In addition to photography, Laura is a broadcaster on WPKN radio, where she hosts Mic Check to spotlight environmental issues.

Her creative work extends into community outreach, with photography shows and educational classes at the Southbury Library and recognition from the Woodbury Arts Alliance. Through her Substack, website, and exhibitions, she continues to share insights into sustainability and the environment, blending art and advocacy. Laura's photography and writing celebrate nature while encouraging stewardship, making her a vital voice in both the artistic and environmental communities.

Learn more about Laura Modlin: [Instagram Account](#)

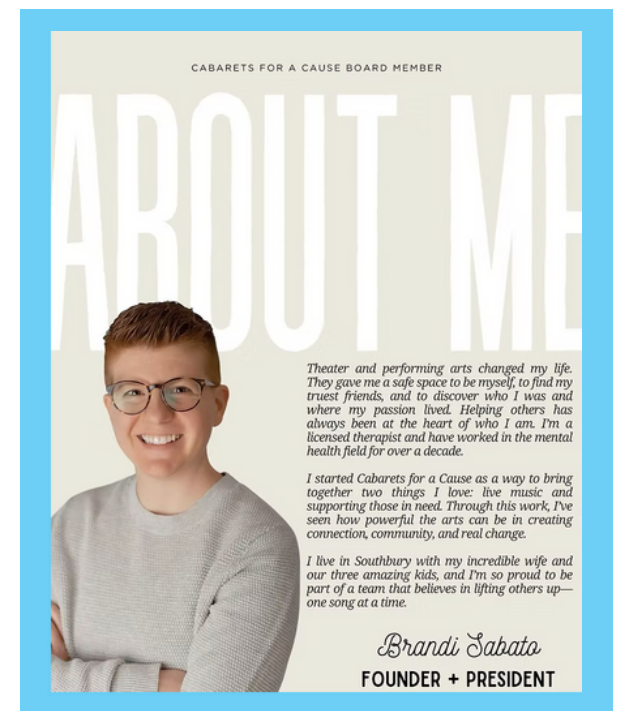


Brandi Sabato

Brandi Sabato is the founder and president of Cabarets for a Cause, a Southbury-based nonprofit that blends artistry and philanthropy. With a background in theater and performance, she brings together local musicians and performers to create meaningful cabaret shows that raise funds for community organizations. Through this work, Brandi has raised thousands of dollars for causes such as The Ana Grace Project and Gifts of Love CT, transforming the joy of performance into tangible community support.

Her efforts extend beyond entertainment to building bridges between artists, audiences, and charitable causes. Brandi's cabaret productions are known for their quality and impact, providing artists with a stage while also enriching audiences and directly benefiting those in need. Described as innovative, generous, and inspiring, she embodies the power of the arts to create positive change and foster community spirit, making her a leader and advocate in Southbury's cultural life.

Learn more about Brandi Sabato: [Cabarets for a Cause Facebook Page](#)





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LeahJoy Pearson (MayaRose SpokenWord)

LeahJoy Pearson, also known as MayaRose SpokenWord, is a poet, writer, and performer dedicated to uplifting others through creativity and resilience. She is the author of *Poems from my Broken Heart: Expressions on the Spiral of Life* and performs regularly at open mics and community events. Through her work, she explores themes of healing, personal growth, and empowerment, connecting with audiences of all ages. MayaRose is also the host of *Speak Your Mind Spoken Word TV*, a program on local cable and YouTube that highlights spoken word performance.

Her contributions go beyond her own art to include leading improv workshops and outreach efforts that encourage community participation in creative expression. Known for her innovative spirit and collaborative approach, she uses her artistry as a vehicle for dialogue and connection. Her performances and workshops embody a blend of strength and vulnerability, inspiring audiences while creating inclusive spaces for others to share their voices.

Learn more about LeahJoy Pearson: [YouTube Channel](#)

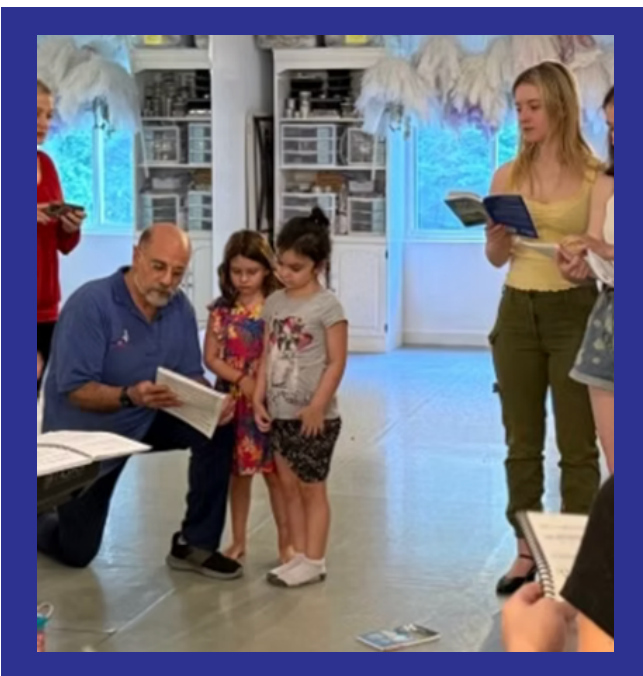


Jim Tornatore

Jim Tornatore is the Artistic Director of the Newbury Musical Theatre Company, a role he has held since 2008 and produced nearly 30 productions in the greater Southbury area. With over 50 years of directing experience in community and school theater, he is known for his wide-ranging skills in directing, lighting, sound, costuming, and stagecraft. A graduate of Manhattan School of Music, Jim also taught music in public schools for 40 years, where he instructed countless students in both instruments and voice. His passion for theater ensures that productions are polished, engaging, and enjoyable for both performers and audiences.

In addition to his theater leadership, Jim plays an active role in civic life, serving on the Southbury Parks and Recreation Commission and volunteering as an MC at community events, including Southbury Celebration. He is known for stepping in whenever needed—whether taking over a lead acting role on short notice or running lighting when staff fell ill—demonstrating his dedication to both the arts and the community. His contributions have provided invaluable opportunities for young performers while enriching Southbury's cultural landscape.

Learn more about Jim Tornatore: [Read the July '25 Makers Spotlight](#)



**JOIN US ON DECEMBER 11, 2025 AT 7:00PM
FOR THE ARTIST OF THE YEAR AWARD CEREMONY!**

Come celebrate with us as we honor this year's nominees for:

Artist of the Year, Lifetime Achievement Award, and People's Choice Award

This free event is open to the public but registration is required.

For more information, or to register, go to www.southburyartsandculturealliance.org