

# Q&A with Dianne Daniels

STORY BY ZACK LAMOTHE

**D**ianne Daniels seems to be everywhere in Norwich. Originally from Detroit, Michigan, Daniels has ingrained herself into the fabric of our community. She has many passions, among them the Unitarian Universalist Church, her Pagan spirituality and her involvement in community groups. She enjoys all that Norwich has to offer, from restaurants to entertainment at local venues. Here, she shares with us why she thinks Norwich is a special place.

## ***How did you come to live in Norwich?***

I was born in Hamtramck, Michigan — a small ethnic neighborhood within the City of Detroit and came to Norwich after moving to Connecticut. I followed my husband to Mystic after we married in 1990, but we found the prices too expensive on a military salary. When we searched a little farther, Al's school experience at Mohegan Community College (now Three Rivers Community College) had us check around in Norwich, and we found our home on School Street. We moved to Union Street after I went to work for the city as their MIS (management information systems) director and I started walking around the block for exercise. I fell in love with a fixer-upper and we've been happily ensconced on Union Street for over 20 years.

## ***What makes Norwich special?***

Norwich is special to me because of its "small town" and "small city" qualities. I heard about the theory of "Six Degrees of Separation" that states you're only six people away from literally anyone in the world, because people know people, and you could find your way to famous people by tracing their networks. In Norwich, I believe it's only three. Imagine my surprise, after growing up in Detroit, when I arrived in Norwich and found that people could simply walk into Norwich City Hall and ask to see the city manager, or more recently, the mayor. That you could visit a local grocery store and run into city council members, city department heads, or the chiefs of the police or fire department, just going about their business like "normal" people.

I love the small town aspect — that my children have friends that they've known for years and years, and now that they're adults, they're sharing stories about their own children with classmates. My kids have friends from Buckingham Elementary School who are still in their lives — unfortunately, I can't say



## **Dianne Daniels'** *Rose City favorites*

Daniels and her husband, Al, love the Norwich Arts Center for plays, music, open mic nights and art exhibits. She also loves Otis Library and all they do for the community and Howard T. Brown Park for festivals and fireworks. Her favorite restaurants include Uncle D's Blazin' BBQ and Philly's sandwich shop. She goes to concerts and shows at the casinos and Spirit of Broadway (now Chestnut Street Playhouse). She also likes visiting the gift shop and the Slater Museum on the NFA campus; she and Al catch a game there sometimes.

that about a lot of the kids I grew up with, partly because I've moved out of the area, and partly because we didn't have quite that tight-knit a community. I love the small city aspects of Norwich — that you can find ethnic food and entertainment, celebrations of history (our wonderful historic neighborhoods and variety of architecture) and diverse religious offerings.

### **Could you speak to your involvement in the Unitarian Universalist Church? With DivaStyle Ministry, are you continuing to work with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Norwich?**

I've been a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Norwich for more than 20 years. We were invited to a Kwanzaa service and attended with our children, Ronald and Ariana. I was taken with the sense of acceptance and community I found within the church — it was as if we'd always been there, and the 7 Principles that help form a basis for the faith also appealed to me. I experienced a number of types of sermons at the church — some with phenomenal speakers who held hearts, minds and spirits in their hands, some with beautiful music that transported the listener away from the mundane and some that challenged the

intellect and made me think.

With everyone, I found something to like, but the people I felt the strongest connection to were those that had attended the Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California. That was a big part of why I decided to pursue my master of divinity degree there — I am now in my third year, anticipating graduation in 2022, and pursuing ordination as a Unitarian Universalist minister.

DivaStyle Ministry is my way of combining my spiritual life with my lifelong desire to own my own business. It is separate from, but a part of, my Unitarian Universalist background, and also incorporates elements of my Pagan spirituality, particularly Ancestor Veneration. I feel a connection to my ancestors — through both my mother and father and beyond, and it's important to me that I continue to call their names and honor them, even though they are no longer with me here on this earthly plane.

### **As past president of the Norwich branch of the NAACP, are you still involved with the group?**

Not really. I'm a Life Member, and that will never change, but pursuing my master's degree and serving as the intern minister for the Unitarian Society of Hartford, in addition to working as a registrar of voters for Norwich, doesn't leave me much time for community involvement the way I used to have.

### **Between your involvement in groups, your career and writing and speaking engagements, how do you find time?**

Organization, a good computer and high-speed internet. Most days by 7 a.m. you'll find me walking with my daughter, Ariana Woody, and my brindle Greyhound dog, Duke. People that have no idea who I am, know my dog. Once my day begins I'm on the computer answering email, writing, audio recordings and social media.



## **MORE ABOUT DANIELS**

Daniels' husband, Al, is also an active community member. Among his involvement are these organizations: Norwich Board of Education, the Black Pilots of America and Norwich Public Utilities.

In 2016, Daniels succeeded longtime president of 30 years, Jackie Owens, as the Norwich branch of the NAACP president. Daniels' daughter, Ariana Woody, succeeded her as president of the chapter.