

Sports: Sue Bird's number is retired as No. 1 UConn beats DePa

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Left, Carolyn O'Brien, owner of C.C. O'Brien's Sports Cafe in Pawcatuck, stands with her nutcracker done by artist Jan Fusco. Right, Christina Pimental, owner of Christina Ltd., sets her nutcracker outside her shop on Canal Street in Westerly.

## NUTCRACKER TRAIL WINDS THROUGH LOCAL BUSINESSES IN STONINGTON, WESTERLY



By SARAH GORDON  
Day Staff Photographer

**Stonington** — On a recent night at C.C. O'Brien's Sports Cafe a couple walked in the door. They asked to see the nutcracker.

It's a request Carolyn O'Brien, owner of the business on Mechanic Street in Pawcatuck has been getting a lot recently.

"That night that couple sat at the table enjoying a meal, taking photos with our nutcracker the whole time. Who knows if they would have walked in our doors otherwise, but now we may have new regulars," she said as she stood next to the nutcracker on Sunday.

The bar/restaurant hosts one of 110 6-foot-tall, handpainted artisan nutcrackers that make up Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce's Nutcracker Trail. Most of them started with the same four plastic molds, then business sponsors were connected with local artists to make the pieces their own.

In late November, all the nutcrackers were on display at The United Theatre, where visitors could see them all in once place before they were picked up by businesses and sponsors.

"It's so impressive what some of these artists did," said O'Brien, who carried her nutcracker home through downtown Westerly and Pawcatuck after the event at the theater. "Some of them had shells, some had snowgloves, some were covered in fabric or had realistic gelato cones." "It was incredible," said chamber



PHOTOS BY SARAH GORDON/TH

Above, visitors walk past a nutcracker done by artist John Tedeschi at The United Theatre in Westerly. Top, details of a nutcracker done for Mechanic Street Marina by artist Susan MacKay.

like a museum."

She estimates most of the artists from throughout Connecticut and Rhode Island spent 80-90 hours on each piece. Eight of the nutcrackers are currently up for auction at 32auctions.com.

Konicki got the idea for the project

used to decorate homes, for sale on social media. When she told her coworkers of her idea in the fall of 2024, they replied "Who would want a 6-foot-tall nutcracker?" Less than a week later, she was looking for a place to store the 40 she had purchased.

that has anything like this," she

Konicki's plan is her latest blockbuster to attract customers to area businesses. Five years ago at the Stonington Town Dock she launched the lobster trap tree, which has gained international recognition.