

Dear William,
 I have been searching for a young man born in Milford Connecticut with the last name Smith, and he was born on February 10, 1964. I have recently found information on a search site indicating that you had previously lived in Connecticut and have that same birth date. For that reason, I am making this contact. I do not know quite where to begin, and I do not wish to be intrusive. However, the person I am searching for was adopted, and I as his birth mother, have personal information to share with him regarding his biological siblings, as well as some health issues that he should be made aware of. If you are not the individual searching for please disregard it. If you do wish to contact me please contact information below. If you are this young man, I would like to contact you and I understand I respect your wishes.

Regards,
 Jane



But y
 Bill hac
 He coul
 lineup.
 died wh
 did he
 had giv
 old to
 the nex
 and ak
 semble
 only q
 is your

The
 of 196
 friend,
 high sc
 grader
 a clocl
 home
 riod ir
 seriou
 Her
 nosed
 tence
 of Jan
 Catho
 her f
 sneere
 He
 conce

The Reunion

A mother's 44-year search for her son comes to an end.

Bill Smith walks through the front door of his mother's house at 3 in the afternoon, tall, olive-skinned and handsome, his hair combed back—a mirror image of his late father. Upstairs, his mother hears him enter and races down to greet him.

"My son!" she shouts, bounding down the stairs. "My son!"

Bill hands her a bouquet of flowers. "These are for you, Mom. Happy Mother's Day." He kisses her cheek, and she lets out a grin that makes her face glow.

It's a 75-degree spring day in Stratford, and all four of Jane Eberle's children are coming over for a barbecue. They don't often get together like this. Bill, the oldest at 46, lives in Pennsylvania, two hours from the rest of the clan, and all four siblings—two boys, two girls—have families of their own. But when they do get together, the scene can be one to behold, stretching deep into the evening.

As the rest of Jane's kids arrive, everyone greets everyone else with a hug and a kiss: siblings, grandkids, cousins, even Jane's 6-foot-5 husband, Gerhard—no one gets away without a smooch. Kenny, Bill's younger brother and an ex-bodybuilder, shows up markedly thinner than the last time Bill saw him. "What happened to your Jabba the Hutt?" Bill chides. The two have a bet riding on who can lose the most weight before a family trip to Cancun, a dollar a pound to the winner. Both have dropped nearly 40 pounds, sparking side bets among the rest of the family.

Before long, the four grown siblings are sitting on the back deck hamming it up over margaritas, mojitos and cold beers, their proud mother observing from the sidelines as a maelstrom of grandchildren swirls in the yard behind her. If you didn't know better, you'd assume Jane's kids had all grown up together, bound like a litter since childhood.

Jane Eberle's letter to a man who she desperately hoped was her oldest son, and on the beach in Cancun with her children, left to right, Kim, Ken, Bill and Kristy.

But you'd be wrong. Until two years ago, Bill had no clue he was part of this family. He couldn't have picked his mother out of a lineup. In fact, as far as he knew, his mom died when he was 16. Not until August 2008 did he learn the truth: that his birth mother had given him away when he was three days old to a couple she'd never met, then spent the next 44 years searching for him, secretly and alone, cornering any stranger who resembled his father or brother and asking the only question she knew to ask: "Pardon me, is your name Smith?"

The story began in Stratford in the spring of 1963—a frisky time for Jane and her boyfriend, Ray. He was a tall, good-looking high school junior, she an irreverent eighth-grader. Their teenage hormones worked like a clock: Every day after school, they went home and had sex. When she missed her period in June, however, she knew she was in serious trouble.

Her mother, a nurse, had just been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer—a death sentence that cruelly coincided with the birth of Jane's youngest sister. Given Jane's strict Catholic upbringing, her misdeed shocked her family. "You little whore," her aunt sneered.

Her parents immediately made plans to conceal the pregnancy. There was no ques-

tion: She would have the baby. "Abortion was against our beliefs," she says. "It wasn't even something we considered." But her belly would not grow under their roof. Instead, her parents sent her to live with a divorcee in Milford—a 15-year-old outcast.

She dropped out of ninth grade the day she began to show, and went into labor on a bitter February night. Ray, who later would become her husband of 20 years and the father of her three future children, rushed to the hospital after school.

In advance of the birth, Jane and her parents had agreed to give the baby away through Catholic Charities, a trusted adoption agency. There was no way Jane could keep the child with her mom so ill, no matter how much she longed to. Her only request was that Ray be allowed to see his son. But after Jane gave birth, she was allowed to hold her child for only a moment; then the nurse took him away before Ray could touch him.

"I'm sorry," the nurse said. "You have no right to see this baby."

"It's my baby," Jane replied, at once terrified and appalled.

"No. This baby has already been promised to another family. It's already been paid for."

When she heard those words, Jane erupted. She screamed at the nurses, cursing and flailing as if on fire, then vehemently rejected her prior deal with Catholic Charities.

plans tonight?

Let connecticutmag.com

light your way to a whole state's worth of cultural offerings from pirouettes to Picassos.



connecticutmag.com

GRADUATE STUDIES OPEN HOUSE



TUESDAY, APRIL 12 • 3 - 7 PM

ADANTI STUDENT CENTER

SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

- Meet with graduate faculty from more than 40 areas of study, including many programs that may lead to Connecticut teacher certification
- Find out about financial aid and graduate assistantships
- Get details on career services and living on campus



Southern Connecticut
State University

SCHOOL OF
GRADUATE STUDIES

Register for the open house at www.SouthernCT.edu/grad or call 203-392-5240

SCHOOLS OF ARTS & SCIENCES · BUSINESS · EDUCATION · HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

OPEN HOUSE & BOAT SHOW: March 19th 9-4 & March 20th 10-4

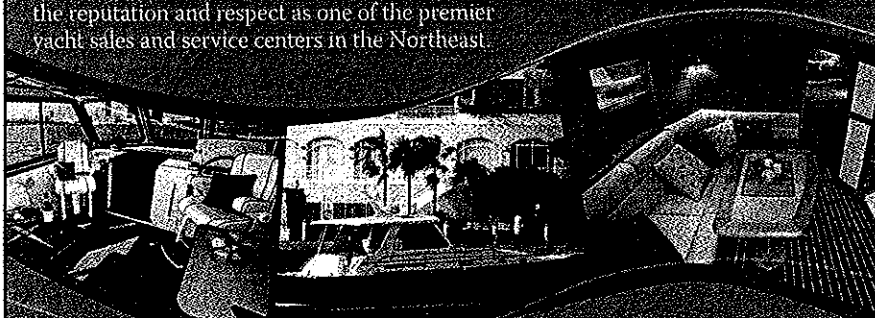


**PETZOLD'S
MARINE CENTER**

Petzold's Marine Center has been a family-run business for over 60 years. Combining our acclaimed new boat product lines and large inventory of quality pre-owned boats with our professional sales team and unparalleled service technicians, Petzold's Marine has earned the reputation and respect as one of the premier yacht sales and service centers in the Northeast.



SABRE



Our Family's Business is Your Family's Pleasure

37 Indian Hill Ave. Portland, CT 06480 • (860) 342-1196 • Fax (860) 342-0462
www.Petzolds.com

SABRE



Mainship
TRAWLERS



From the Field

Not long afterward, a woman approached cautiously from across the room. She couldn't help but overhear what had happened, she told Jane, and given the circumstances, she wondered if Jane would ever consider a private (read illegal) adoption. Her neighbors, an older couple who'd been unable to conceive, were having poor luck trying to adopt. Their name was Smith and they lived in Milford, she said.

Jane told her mother, who vetted the Smiths that afternoon in their living room. Three days later, Jane left the hospital with her baby, handed him to her mother and gently kissed him goodbye.

"The pain, when you see the baby and you know this is your child, was devastating," she recalls today. Her eyes well up, and she turns away.

Jane and her parents never spoke of the child again. Ray was much luckier: His family never found out. Jane moved back home and went on with her life as if nothing had happened. With her mother taking morphine each night, then melting off to sleep on the living-room couch, Jane took on the maternal role in the household. Her mother died within a year, at age 47.

Jane and Ray married when she was 17 and had three children by the time she was 21. He worked as a mechanic for Mack Trucks while she attended night school to finish ninth grade, the prerequisite for hair-dressing school.

Theirs became an average life: two young parents scrambling to provide for their children. Yet while Ray put their firstborn out of his mind, Jane never could—no matter how hard she tried.

"The constant not knowing whether he was okay," she says, "it was a hole in my heart—something missing, something gone. The pain was just always there, always."

Jane considered looking up every Smith in the phone book and knocking on every door until she found her son. She thought about staking out elementary schools and dreamed of watching him walk to class. But she knew it would be wrong.

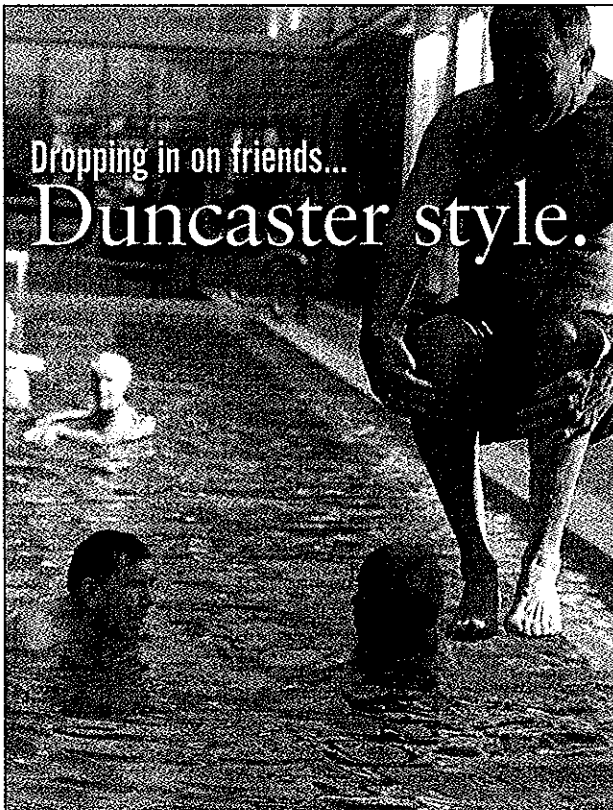
When she had turned 21, a lawyer had shown up at her door with a stack of papers—apparently the Smiths had decided to legalize the adoption. Jane had signed the papers almost without looking at them, remembering just the name "Francis" from the pile before she ripped them up, horrified that her children might find out. (Later, when they were teenagers, she came clean.)

From then on, whenever the subject of adoption came up, Jane made a point of discouraging women from making the same

choic
keep
so m

M
if un
pare)
him
Even
He fi
ing v
neve
H
His c
fami
Flori
tuall
whe:
his h
jack
Mor
H
him
with
zled
a lat
wan
his s
Nav
plac
ranc
J
wou
he r
or v
nar
and
Jani
S
face
the
for
are
in t
son
198
was
V
mic
ado
die
Kn
dis
tha
ren
of l
sha

firr
mo
der
sec
ma
the
Sm



Dropping in on friends...
Duncaster style.

- 32 EXERCISE PROGRAMS
- ON-SITE COLLEGE COURSES
- 4-LANE LAP POOL
- ART AND MUSIC CLASSES
- ON-SITE LIBRARY
- BOOK CLUBS
- GARDENING
- LOCAL ACCESS TO GOLF AND TENNIS
- COMPLETE ON-SITE SKILLED NURSING CARE
- DISCUSSION GROUPS
- RESIDENT COMMITTEES

Duncaster

Duncaster Lifecare Community
Bloomfield, CT
860-380-5005 ~ duncaster.org

choice she'd made. "Do whatever you can to keep your child," she'd plead. "The pain hurts so much."

Meanwhile, Bill Smith grew up in a loving if unconventional home. When he was 5, his parents drove him to Vermont and handed him a baby. "This is your sister," they said. Even at his age, the event seemed strange. He filed it away for decades, always wondering whether his sister had been adopted, but never once suspecting he might have been.

He didn't have many attachments as a kid. His dad was an engineer whose jobs took the family from Connecticut to Cameroon to Florida to Iran, all before Bill was 15. Eventually they settled, ironically, in Stratford, where Bill enrolled in high school. He grew his hair down to his shoulders, wore a leather jacket, and spent more time working on his Monte Carlo than attending class.

His mother's death when Bill was 16 sent him into a spiral. He had little in common with his father or sister, which always puzzled him. Every girl he dated seemed to have a large, happy family, something he'd always wanted. Needing an escape, he dropped out his senior year of high school and joined the Navy at 18, spending the next four years in places like Germany, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

Jane always figured her firstborn son would search for her once he turned 21. But he never did. She had no idea where he lived or what his first name was, only that his last name was Smith. She rarely mentioned him, and when she did it was only to her sister, Janice. But she never stopped searching.

She got into the habit of studying men's faces: on the street, in the grocery store, at the mall, in her office hallways. She checked for Smiths in her company directory and area phone books. Whenever she saw a man in the right age range who looked like her son, Kenny, or Ray, whom she'd divorced in 1985, she'd walk up and ask if his last name was Smith. It never was.

When the Internet became popular in the mid-'90s, Jane entered her information into adoption registries—to no avail. Then Ray died of colon cancer in February 2003, at 56. Knowing a man is more likely to contract that disease if a direct relative has had it (more than twice as likely, in fact), Jane frantically renewed her search. As always, the futility of her search felt like a knife to her heart, as sharp as the day she gave her son away.

Twice she consulted private investigative firms, only to be told she didn't have enough money to pursue the matter. Eerie coincidences kept her engaged. When she and second husband Gerhard, a German watchmaker, moved into their home in Stratford, they met their next-door neighbor, Francis Smith, who had a son the same age as Jane's

firstborn child. Her heart nearly leaped out of her rib cage. Alas, the son clearly resembled his father.

By 2005, exhausted from four fruitless decades, Jane finally was ready to stop searching. "I can't stand the pain of this," she thought. "I just want it to be over."

Then, during a business trip to Philadelphia, she found herself sitting next to a woman who had adopted a child. Jane told her about the son she'd given away and her unsuccessful efforts to find him. The woman burst into tears. "Without people like you," she sobbed, "I wouldn't have a child."

Jane went home that night and changed her mind.

Early in the summer of 2008, Jane's phone rang. It was Kenny, and he told her some sort of inner voice had spoken to him. "Mom," he said, "have you ever done anything to find our brother?"

Jane wasn't prepared for that question, but she answered honestly. "I think I already found him."

More than a year before that call, Jane had used an updated people-search site to narrow thousands of Smiths born on Feb. 10, 1964, down to about 50. She homed in on one in particular: William Francis Smith of Easton, Pa.—formerly of Hamden, Conn. "I don't know how, I just knew it was him," she says.

She ordered a comprehensive report, which confirmed her suspicion—and turned her gut inside out all over again. After so many years and enough tears to fill a bathtub, the regret that had hung over her life since the day she carried her son out of the hospital suddenly returned full force. She wondered whether to intrude on his life—or if she'd forfeited that privilege the day she gave him up.

From June 2007 to August 2008, Jane wrestled with herself over what to do, but shared her dilemma with no one. At one point, finally at peace with her decision to make contact, she called William Smith at home. But when his voice came on the answering machine, she freaked out and hung up.

She decided to write a letter.

Dear William,

I have been searching for a young man born in Milford Connecticut with the last name Smith. . . . I do not know quite where to begin, and I do not wish to be intrusive. However, the person I am searching for was adopted, and I as his birth mother, have personal information to share with him regarding his biological siblings, as well as some health issues that he should be made aware of. . . .

Bill Smith read the letter at his dinner table. "My initial thought was that it was some kind of scam," he says now. He called Jane and left a message. "I'd love to help you find your son, but I'm not adopted," he said.

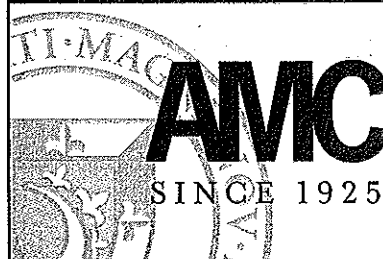
Nonetheless, Jane called him the next

CONGRATULATIONS ANDREW FOSTER

Fostering the Future

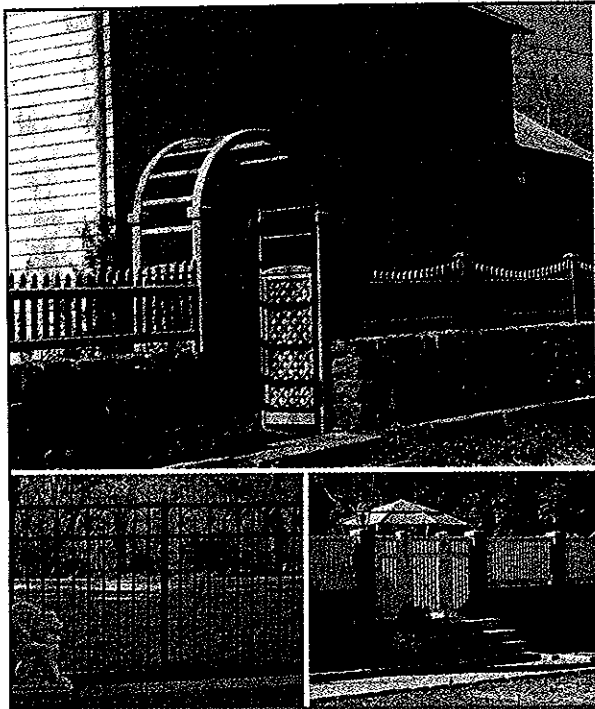
As Director of Financial Aid for Albertus Magnus College, Andrew Foster helps students of all ages realize their dream of attaining a college education. From Greenwich to Groton, Andrew volunteers his time with the CT Association of Professional Financial Aid Administrators to conduct free financial aid workshops for students and their families. Andrew knows the impact of education on the lives of Connecticut residents; we are proud to have him as a member of our college community, and one of this magazine's

40 Under 40



Albertus Magnus College
203.773.8505
albertus.edu

For more information, see page 130



**CELEBRATING
81 YEARS OF BUSINESS**

Free Estimates
& Professional
Installation Available

Full line of Cedar,
Chain Link, Vinyl
& Ornamental Fencing

Gate Access
Control Systems

Garden Furniture

Residential,
Commercial, Industrial

Custom Design
Services Available

ORANGE FENCE & SUPPLY

205 Boston Post Road • Orange, CT 06477
203-799-2437 • toll free 800-722-3828 • fax 203-795-3948
orangeence@optonline.net • www.orangeence.com

ActiveYards™
SOLUTIONS FOR BUSY BACKYARDS™
AUTHORIZED DEALER

From the Field

morning and they got to talking. Too many details made too much sense. He agreed to take a DNA test to help her find closure, then got anxious and e-mailed Jane a photograph.

"I opened it up and it painted the screen," she recalls. "They heard me screaming down the hall at my office—'Oh my God, this is my son. That's my son!'"

She had Kenny's wife send Bill a photo of Kenny and Ray, which clinched it for Bill. At 44, having lived most of his life without a mother, he called Jane and said, "Hi, Mom."

Two weeks later they met at a hotel in Newark. Jane was sobbing but clearly recalls their embrace. "The very first thing Bill said to me was, 'Thank you so much for giving

"The first thing Bill said to me was, 'Thank you so much for giving birth to me. You had other options, but you gave me life. And I've had a wonderful life.'"

birth to me. You had other options, but you gave me life. And I've had a wonderful life."

She was floored. For most of her life she'd carried an indescribable guilt. In a moment, he'd forgiven her. "There's no explaining how wonderful it feels to know I did the right thing," she says.

Bill, meanwhile, found himself in a peculiar position. "I was not happy for me," he says, "I was happy for her—that she'd found her son. And I happened to be that person."

He pauses. "How can you find a Bill Smith? I didn't even know I was missing."

As his feelings toward his new family developed, the most difficult part for Bill was confronting his 80-year-old father, who still maintained Bill was not adopted four months after Bill met Jane. "What does she want," his dad asked, "money or something?"

Bill looked his father in the eye. "We took a DNA test, Dad. She's my mother. You got to give it up. If it's about love, I love you. You're my father."

His dad broke down and confessed: He'd promised his wife before she died that he'd never tell Bill and his sister they were adopted. "I was afraid of not being your dad anymore," he said.

Bill's dad had a harder time forgiving Jane for exposing their secret. After a while, she



We take
the custom price
out of
custom closets

closetsetc.®
creative designs since 1987

Call us for a FREE in-home consultation!
866-642-1705 • 203-238-1705
closetsetc.com

Your son will succeed.



St. Thomas More School

- Renowned college preparatory boarding school for young men who have not yet realized their potential
- Located on scenic Gardner Lake in southeastern Connecticut

860.823.3861 • stmct.org

Five Week Summer Academic Camp

July 3 - August 5, 2011
Grades 7-12 • Make-up credit offered

For more information, visit
www.MoreSummer.org

sent l
the b
W
him,
many
"V
"B
really
Fc
ing R
him,
Jane?
peop
unwi
arme
Bi
go fi
once
one
dow
their
thro
then
F.
treat
one
3,00
him
sug
got
secc
"
"bec
the
E
sorr
Bill;
'rec
talk
mee
for
"
had
The
up
bee
enc
I
tha
stre
my
me
spe
kitc
tar
sor
nig
"Hi
the
ing
fro
she

sent him a letter explaining her motives and the burden she'd carried all these years.

When Bill talked to his dad, his dad told him, "I got the letter and I read it. I've read it many times, and I've been crying."

"Why's that, Dad?" he asked.

"Because it touched me. She seems like a really nice lady."

For Jane's family, meeting Bill was like seeing Ray's ghost. "He acts like him, he talks like him, he's the same bit of cheap like him," says Jane's sister, Janice. Likewise, there are times people look at Bill and Kenny and see them unwittingly perched in the same position, arms up, rocking back and forth like twins.

But they're just happy to be brothers. They go fishing together and talk on the phone once a week. When asked about Bill, everyone tells of the time he and Kenny walked down to the local baseball field and played their first game of catch. It only took a few throws before the moment overwhelmed them and they both started to cry.

From the beginning, Bill's siblings have treated him like they've always treated one another: with no mercy. They call his 3,000-square-foot house a "shed" and tease him when Jane buys strawberries for the sugar-free cheesecake he likes. "We never got strawberries, Mom!" protests Kim, the second-oldest.

"It's so strange," says Kristy, the youngest, "because it's almost like he was always part of the family. It's very comfortable."

But there are still fragile moments. Jane sometimes slips and says, "When I first met Bill," before correcting herself to say, "I mean, 'reconnected.'" It's still sad when Bill's siblings talk about their dad, whom he never got to meet. But Bill has never blamed his mother for giving him away.

"I understand that she had to do what she had to do," he says. "I'm not resentful at all. The only thing that I miss is getting to grow up with my siblings, and what that would've been like. But I wouldn't trade this experience for anything, man. I'm happy."

And so is Jane. In fact, she says, "I'm happier than I've ever been in my life." She is also less stressed, more relaxed and at peace. "I have all my chickadees," she says. "There was a piece of me that was missing, and I'm whole now."

The night of the barbecue, Jane's children spent three hours laughing together in her kitchen. Eventually Kenny broke out his guitar and started jamming, singing song after song alone, until Bill joined in around midnight and they spent 10 minutes belting out "House of the Rising Sun" like teenagers in their parents' basement.

Their sisters stood across the room, cheering and clapping. Their mother watched from the doorway, marveling at a scene only she had believed in.

Overweight?

Call Bariatric Associates of New England

203.318.0100 (MADISON) • 203.786.5007 (NEW HAVEN)



A Nutrition, Preventive Medicine & Weight Management Practice

- Customized Weight Management Programs
- Approach to Disease Prevention
- Improved Control of Hypertension, Diabetes, Cholesterol & Sleep Disorders
- PCOS-Related Infertility Programs
- Weight Regains After Bariatric Surgery

Gift of Health Certificates Available
for Family and Friends
Retail Store Open to the Public

www.banellc.com



BARIATRIC ASSOCIATES OF NEW ENGLAND, LLC

168 Boston Post Road, Suite 4 • Madison, CT • 203-318-0100
200 Orchard Street, Suite 402 • New Haven, CT • 203-786-5007

For more information, see page 130

Want Freedom from Shaving?

Laser Hair Removal May Be For YOU!!

We have the only
Cutera CoolGlide YAG Laser
in the New Haven Area

All Skin Types and Colors, even
TAN and AFRICAN AMERICAN

Bring This Coupon for a
20% Reduction in Price

CTM 3/11

Expires 4/30/11

THIRD PLACE
ADVOCATE
★ BEST ★
OF
NEW HAVEN
READERS POLL
2010

Best Med Spa

Laser Body Solutions

Call now for a **FREE** consultation
Jeffrey D. Gold, M.D.

Medical Director
Laser Body Solutions

203-281-5737 • www.laserbody.com

For more information, see page 130

March 2011 CONNECTICUT 31