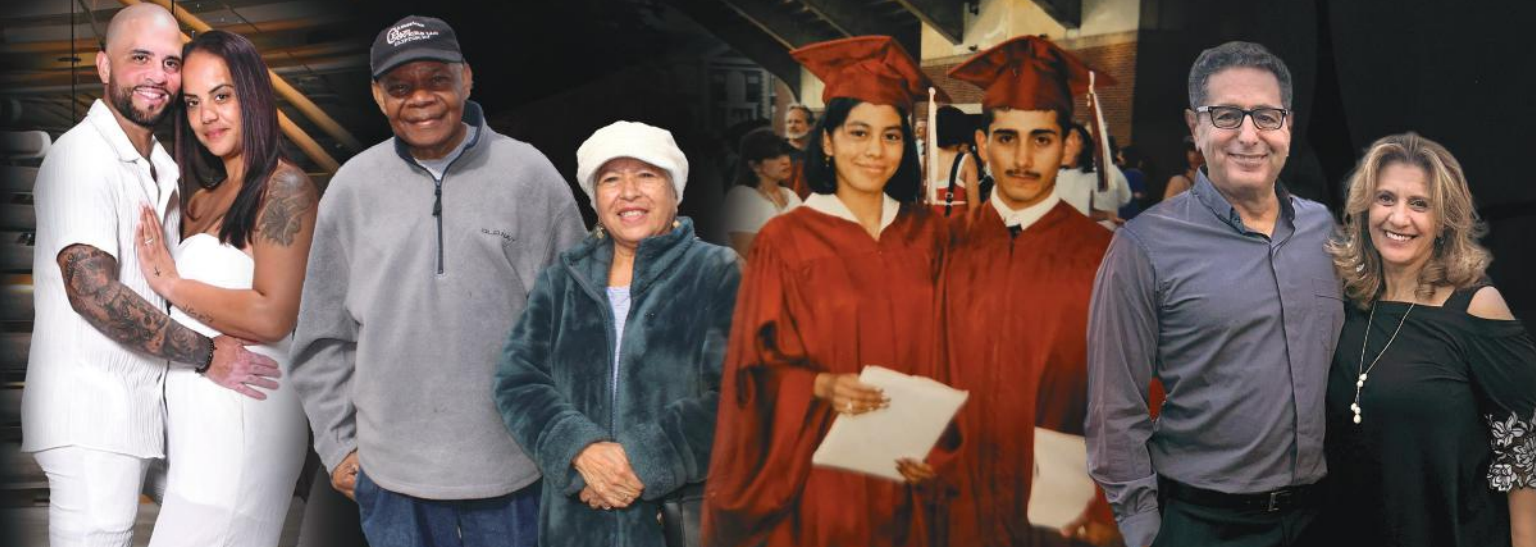


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# From the Editor

- **Tom Hawrylko**,  
Editor & Publisher



**We speak North Jersey up here.** It's an attitude, a short-cut, a laugh, but it is all about respect. And it's just not the way we talk. It's how we identify and connect to each other by our ethnicity, religion or our country of origin.

We speak pidgin, bits and pieces of languages to our neighbors, blending phrases and greetings. I yell *habibi* to my Arabic friends, *vitayu* to my Ukrainian brothers, *que pasa* to Latinos or give a smile and a wave to Turkish neighbors when I'm not sure of their names.

That's how many of us Cliftonites connect. It's a way to show respect to people we meet and interact with in this growing and densely populated town. Speaking 'North Jersey' is also a way to share the pride of who we are and where we came from...to represent.

Above is the cover of the 2025 Map of Clifton, an insert within this month's magazine, celebrating Cliftonites from across the globe. Many of the photos are from our 2017 files when Clifton was marking its 100th anniversary.

We organized a photoshoot along the *Many Faces, One Family* theme at the Clifton Library that year with about 50 kids and adults, asking them to come dressed in the garb that best illustrates their nations of origin.



Our first *Many Faces* project was in 1998, part of a campaign run by Gov. Christie Todd Whitman. The project celebrated and documented Clifton's growing diversity and we won a New Jersey's Advocate award for our work.

What I most enjoy about Clifton is that we speak dozens of languages and have many different cultures yet we still connect and take great pride in being a Mustang, a Cliftonite and an American. Of course this has been going on for generations, in Clifton and all across our nation.

Clifton is a place where the American Dream is sown, planted and grown by thousands of us, year after year. This magazine you are holding, now in its 30th year, is a testament to that can-do attitude. My staff and I are proud to chronicle our hometown's evolution with photos, stories and advertisements that celebrate who we are.

And for that opportunity, we say thank you.

## Clifton Merchant Magazine **CLIFTON** TOM•A•HAWK PROMOTIONS

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# A "REEL" LIFE Love Story

The course of true love has not only run smooth for Richard and Lorraine (Juschitseh) Simakowicz, but it's endured. For over five decades.

Their love story began when the CHS 1972 graduates met as seniors. "I was almost madly in love with her from the first time I met her," said Richard, 70. "Our first date was when we went to see *Love Story* on Halloween, 1971. It was the big movie."

Richard and Lorraine grew up on Arthur St. and Athenia Ave., respectively. Richard — who attended Sts. Cyril & Methodius for grade school — grew up with parents Leon and Wanda, along with three siblings. Lorraine, the oldest of three kids, was born to Stephen and Erika Juschitseh and attended School 2.

Shared family values and being first-generation Americans united them. Richard was the first of his family not to be born in Poland. Lorraine, 70, was the first not to be born in Austria.

Who said "I love you" first? "I did. On the third date," said Richard. "I was saying goodnight to her and told her that I was going to marry her. I couldn't be away from her."

"She had to think about it. She wasn't prepared," he laughed. "After about six months, she had no problem with saying, 'I love you.'"

## Five Decades Down

Richard and Lorraine shared more in common: A desire to help others. He joined the US Army after graduating and extended a year, serving until 1976. He went to Ft. Dix for Basic, then Ft. Knox in Kentucky for typing and Ft. Benjamin Harrison in Indiana for Finance School.

He was stationed in Ft. Myer in Washington, D.C. for three years and served in the Pentagon his final year as a Finance Specialist. He earned a History degree at William Paterson on the GI Bill and taught seventh grade in Passaic



for 31 years. He later earned his master's degree in Military History at American Military University.

All-in-all, he isn't too different from Sgt. Rock — the comic book character who inspired his love of history. And, eventually, his life's trajectory.

Looking back, he added: "I'm most proud that the Army thought enough of me to make me a Sergeant E-5."

Richard recalled coming home every other weekend to see Lorraine. She was at Bloomfield College and later became a Registered Nurse in Newark before she joined Passaic General. During her 35-year career, she worked in the ICU and Recovery Room.

"She was busy when I visited, but at least I got to see her," said Richard. "Some of my friends; forget it. They never saw their girlfriends."

In true New Jersey fashion, Richard proposed in a mall and the couple wed Aug. 7, 1976 at St. John Lutheran in Passaic with a reception at The Mountainside Inn.

Their wedding song?

"Love Story," said Richard.

The couple live in Cambridge Crossing. They are parents to four children — Nicholas (CHS 1999), Jeffrey (CHS 2000), Christopher (CHS 2001), Alexandra (CHS 2003) — and have two granddaughters, Cora and Piper. Christopher's wife, Yarida Sanchez, is a CHS 2000 grad.

"It's been a very happy life. I'm very proud of my kids," said Richard. "I love them and they love us. We're all born and bred Cliftonites."



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**You never know what Luis Cuba has up his sleeve.** Unless it's a romantic gesture for his wife, Sonia, even after 25 years of marriage.

The Mustang sweethearts wed on Dec. 18, 1999; just two and a half years after they graduated from CHS. The year that they both met as sophomores is the same year that Luis gave Sonia a surprisingly romantic gift on Valentine's Day.

"It was little by little that we started [developing] feelings for each other," said Sonia, 47. "Then, on Feb. 14, he got me a flower. He hid it in his long sleeve shirt and gave it to me."

"We weren't going out [yet]; just talking. It was really nice," she added. "I was like, 'Wow.'"

Fast-forward to the present day — Luis still buys Sonia roses or candy. But there are significant differences. Their eldest child is now a sophomore at CHS. Luis and Sonia are parents to Emily, 15, and twin boys Daniel and Gabriel, 13, who attend WWMS.

Starting a family is one of the big things that the couple always wanted. Although it came a bit later, it reinforces what they knew from an early age. They were made to last.

"I proposed on our prom night," said Luis, 46. "I bought a ring that I could afford and brought her to a gazebo where we were at. I knew I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life."

## History in the Making

It took some time before the two Clifton kids crossed paths.

Luis, who was born in Paterson, moved to Clifton in 1989 with his parents, Luis Sr. and Palma, and his older sister, Elizabeth. He went to Woodrow Wilson Middle School before he attended CHS.

Sonia, on the other hand, emigrated from Mexico when she was 9 years old. She grew up with her parents, Enrique and Martha Pelaez, and younger siblings Elizabeth (CHS 1999) and Edgar (CHS 2001). Sonia attended Christopher



*From CHS diplomas in 1997 to wedding gowns and tuxedos in 1999.*

Columbus Middle School before joining Luis and their other classmates in the Class of 1997.

They met in their 10th grade social studies class — with a little help from Mr. Sokolewicz.

"We had a four-to-a-group project together, so that's how we met," said Luis. When asked about first impressions, Sonia laughed and Luis replied, "I thought that she was cute, but I didn't really think that much about her, because at that time she was going out with somebody."

That relationship would end and the sophomores would be paired together for another project. That is when Luis began walking Sonia to her locker, carrying her books, and walking with her after school.

"I thought he was very cute. He had muscles," she laughed. "I liked his chest and arms. He was a gentleman and carried my books, no problem."

The couple recalled hiding their relationship for a while, because Sonia's parents were "very strict with me." But they suspect when they did go out, it was to the movies since that's what Sonia still loves doing today. "It was probably Titanic," Luis recalled. "We would have snuck out."

## Adventure of a Lifetime

Luis' prom night proposal was memorable for him, but it's not the only highlight as Mustang sweethearts. 🐾



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For Sonia, it was also the selection of Class of '97 superlatives. Sonia remembered how many of their friends put their names down when selecting couples and, although they didn't win, it was a great feeling.

"We were not expecting that. That was very nice," she said.



*Today with kids Emily, Daniel and Gabriel.*

People were still surprised that they went the distance, because they were so young, which led to some mixed reactions when they announced their engagement.

"But the reaction was mostly positive," Luis confirms. "We were young, so people would ask us, 'Are you sure?' We were both in love and said, 'Yeah, of course. No doubt about it.' Twenty-five years later, we're still together."

Luis and Sonia wed in Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church in Passaic. The reception was held at The Italian American Family Association, a co-operative organization that serves the Historic Botany Village neighborhood.

Sonia worked in a video store after high school, then she found a job as a payroll coordinator. She works today for SGS North America Inc. in Rutherford.

As for Luis, he joined the US Army and served for four years after high school. Basic Training was in South Carolina before his Military Occupational Specialty training at Ft. Gordon, now Ft. Eisenhower, in Georgia.

Luis' main post was Ft. Hood, now Ft. Cavazos, in Texas. He handled Telecommunications and completed his service as E-4 promotable. Today, he's self-employed and the owner of his father's construction business, LC Construction.

Luis and Sonia enjoy traveling, whether it's closer destinations like Atlantic City and the Poconos or more recently, Punta Cana for their 25th anniversary. But starting a family is what they both said made all the difference in their lives.

"We wanted to have a girl first," said Sonia. "Then, it was very surprising when we had twins. [When we found out], Luis almost fainted and I started crying. I was so happy."

"Having kids has been the best adventure," Luis added. "We always wanted a family and love our kids a lot."



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*At the Dec. 15 wedding of Giuseppe Mannina and Christina Ploch, from left: sister Donna, mom Mary, Christina and Giuseppe, her dad Rudy, brother-in-law Charlie with Donna and Charlie's kids Caitlyn and Danielle.*

**There's nothing cheesy about Giuseppe and Christina** (Ploch) Mannina's love story. You might even say it was meant to be.

"I love cheese; it's literally my favorite," said Christina, 39. "He always knew that and even when we were just friends, he would give me cheese at random."

It doesn't hurt that Giuseppe also knows how to make ricotta. "Which is my favorite!" enthused Christina (CHS 2004).

Giuseppe and Christina wed on Dec. 15, exactly one year to the day after he got down on one knee in Cape May. Ahead of their Caribbean honeymoon in March, the city residents explained how deep their bond is — and a lot of that is due to their mutually shared farming backgrounds.

Christina, the younger daughter of Rudy and Mary Ploch, grew up helping out on the 15-acre Ploch's Farm with her sister Donna (CHS 2001). Ploch's Farm, 148 Grove St., was established in 1867 by her great-great-grandfather George Ploch. The property was originally a dairy farm and was later converted into a fruit and vegetable farm.

Christina's summer breaks included spending entire days on the farm with Rudy. Whether she worked the register at age 9 or picked tomatoes and corn, she was around many familiar faces. She and Donna remain dedicated, despite having full-time jobs elsewhere, because the farm is "part of who we are."

"Dad ... tries to keep it just family," said Christina. "I'm proud to say that my dad is a farmer and can't wait until people ask what my dad is."

Giuseppe's own background excited the Plochs. He grew up in Sicily, Italy until the age of 14. He was raised by parents Tito and Susana as the fifth of eight children. But he also knew too well what it's like to grow up on a farm.

"[My family's farm] had everything. Cows, sheep, goats, horses. We had a great winery," said Giuseppe, 52. "The farm was over 700 acres. You name it, they had it."

What really intrigued Giuseppe was the cheese-making process. Go figure!

"It's fascinating how milk can be one thing and then turn to another thing," said Giuseppe. "One simple thing can turn into so many others."





“People say girls try to flock to someone that reminds them of their dad. He’s exactly like my dad in every way,” said Christina. “He is hard working, all about his family, and is an all-around great person with a kind heart. He’s the best.”

She added that Rudy, who is aged 81, has begun talking with Giuseppe about the farm. It gives Christina the impression that even Rudy is confident that the farm “will be in good hands.” Added Giuseppe: “She says to me, because I tell her stories that her dad tells me, ‘Wow he talks to you more than he has ever talked to us about the farm since we’ve been born.’ He tells me so much about the farm that the girls don’t even know.”

### Daily Dedication

Giuseppe and Christina met in a different kind of field: as workers for Clifton’s Department of Public Works.

Giuseppe started working at the DPW in 1997 as a Tree Climber for the city. He has since advanced to Superintendent of Public Works. Christina joined the DPW’s ranks in 2008-09, starting on the finance end and now handling personnel.

His first impression of her was that she was smart and “knew herself.” As for Christina, he became someone that she could rely on and who “always made me laugh. If I was down,” she continued, “he was always there.”

What ultimately led to them becoming a couple three years ago was their shared work ethic.

It is a value held by everyone in Christina’s family—from mother Mary, who worked for years as a paraprofessional at WWMS, to sister Donna, a CHS science teacher.

Then of course there is brother-in-law Charlie Stauhs (CHS 2002), who is a Lieutenant (and the historian) with the Clifton Fire Department.

Finishing off the line-up is Clifton’s favorite farmer, dad Rudy, who eight decades in, is still tending the fields.

Christina admired those qualities in a partner and a person — and it made her even more confident in their future together.



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At Michelle and Matt Fava's wedding on July 19, 2024. Kids in front: Scarleyte, Ethan and Chloe. From left: Aysa and Anthony, Laura and Andrew, Maggie, Matt and Michelle, Richard, Joe and Lindsay, Jacqis and Jacqueline, and Dan the man!

**“Forever” isn’t just a word** for Richard and Margueritte (Homs) Shackil. It’s a promise.

One that they’ve kept for over 40 years.

“I knew the night that I met her that I was going to marry her,” said Richard, 67. “About two weeks later when I told her that I love her, she said, ‘Forever?’ and I said, ‘Forever.’”

There was one hitch. Margueritte was, at the time, only in the United States to study. Born in Damascus, Syria, she came over age 18 and attended secretary school. Richard, a Paterson native, first laid eyes on her shortly after graduating from law school at Rutgers.

“My father had a guest here from Aleppo, Syria and wanted to keep him busy,” said Richard. “He asked me if I wanted to go to a church festival at St. Ann’s Melkite Catholic Church — in what was then West Paterson. ... I went and while I was there, I saw Maggie, my future wife.”

## The Greatest Adventure

The future couple made eye contact that first night, but Richard didn’t approach her.

About two weeks later, he heard that there was a dance at the same church and thought maybe he would have another opportunity. As luck would have it, she was there and was speaking with one of Richard’s previous neighbors.

They soon realized that she was living only a few blocks away from him, but that’s where the catch came in — she would be returning home in December.

“This was in October, so not even three months later,” said Margueritte, 63.

They weren’t discouraged. Although Richard didn’t propose before she returned home, he had begun talking about “when we get married” as an inevitability. Even once Margueritte returned home and phone calls weren’t an affordable option, Richard had a solution.

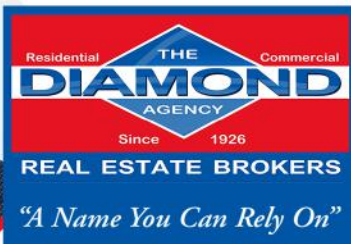


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It wasn't just writing letters.

"More frequently, I would make cassette tapes and would talk into them every day and let her know what's going on," said Richard. "I mailed them to her from December until September."

What came next was his own trip to Damascus with his father, Joseph, to meet Margueritte's family. They got engaged and were married six months later on Aug. 26, 1984 in the U.S. The couple have six children — Joseph, Andrew, Anthony, Daniel, Michelle, and Jacqueline — and were expecting their ninth grandchild in early January.

"It's just amazing to have six kids and that each is totally different from the others," said Margueritte. "I think that's the adventure of life."

### Doing It Right

Richard and Margueritte's life together is rooted in fam-



ily — and that certainly won't change.

Richard's parents, Joseph and Violet Shackil, and Margueritte's parents, Jamil and Madeleine Homsy, each had four children. They both felt a spark that first night, but Richard said it helped that they had some common ancestry.

His grandparents emigrated from Syria shortly after World War I, so he knew the culture from having grown up




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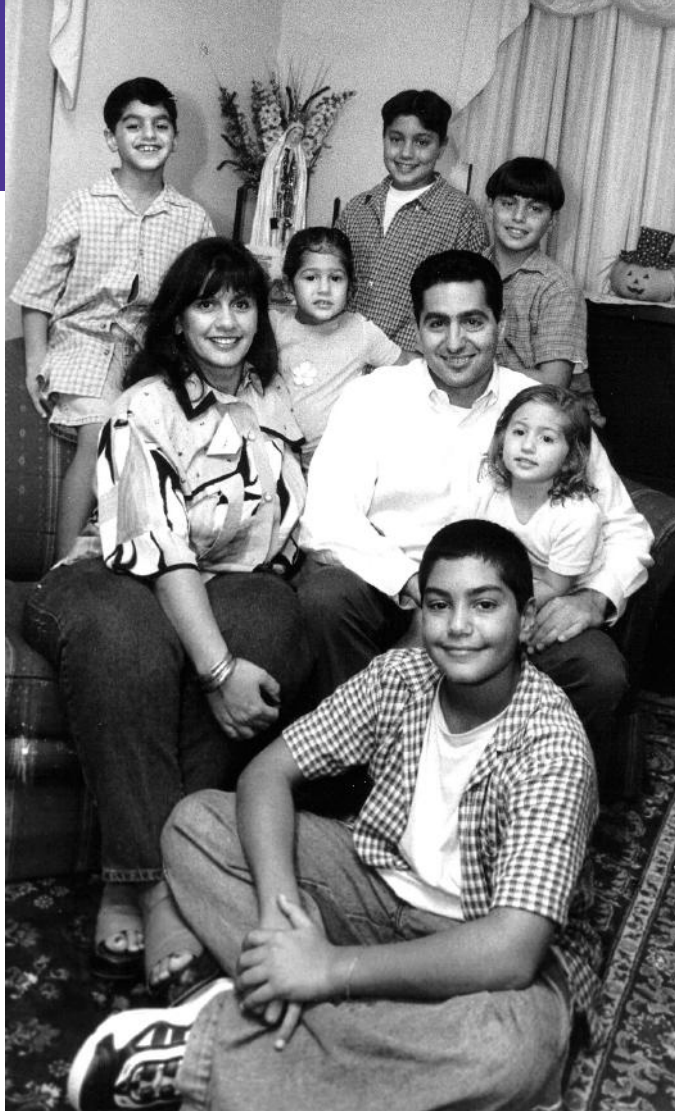


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*Rich and Maggie in 1999 with Joseph, Michelle on dad's lap, Jacqueline and from left Daniel, Andrew and Anthony.*

around it. Despite not speaking Arabic, his parents spoke it as first-generation born. It made a big difference to Margueritte while getting to know someone in a foreign country.

When asked her first impression of him, Richard chimed in: "American playboy" before Margueritte elaborated.

"I was afraid," she said, candidly. "You grow up watching TV and think an American guy ... might take advantage of you. But I got to know him as a great guy."

"We connected on a lot of stuff," Margueritte added, "and his parents spoke my language, which made it closer to my roots."

Richard practiced law for over 30 years in Paterson. When Richard gave up practicing law, he transitioned over to priesthood at the age of 60. You can find him at Sacred Heart Armenian Catholic Church in Little Falls and he's additionally served for six years as the chaplain at St. Joseph's Health in Paterson.

Margueritte is a recent retiree from Clifton Public Schools. After she and Richard had their kids, she worked as a paraprofessional at CHS for 20 years until last year.

During their free time, the Shackils enjoy their own hob-

bies. He likes to read, she'll paint or draw for her crafts. They also enjoy going out for dinner or just spending time with the entire family. It has become quite an affair in the summertime.

"When we go on vacation, we go to Wildwood with the whole family," said Margueritte. "By that, I mean 110 or 120 people. Cousins, second cousins, their children."

"Lifelong friends who we call cousins who technically aren't," Richard continued. "We go to the same condo complex every year. It's been the same people and same beach for 20-something years."

The "magical" moments for Margueritte are when everyone is together. Richard agreed, adding that it's even more special how everyone wants to spend time with one another.

"For your children to come back and enjoy spending time with you," said Richard, "I think you did something right in your life."

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**Back in the summer of 1968**, Jim Federle just finished his two-year hitch in the Army. His parents relocated from Long Island and moved into a new apartment at 31 Burgh Ave. on which they hung a *Welcome Home* sign.

Neighbors were curious. Among them were “two cute blonde sisters,” Kathy (CHS 1968) and Margie (1965 Pope Pius HS) Seabert, his mom wrote, that lived across at 30 Burgh.

Jim, then 21, and Kathy, at 18, soon began dating. “We were driving around in my black ‘67 Mustang Fastback becoming friends and getting to know each other,” recalled Jim. “It was like yesterday. And this year, it’s double nickles for us.”

Married July 11, 1970 at St. Paul Roman Catholic Church by Father Collins, Jim originally proposed on July 19, 1969. Looking back, Jim and Kathy accomplished much over 55 years.

Their family-owned Affordable Homes Services is a roofing, siding and home improvement business. They have three kids: Jimmy, 52, Jenny, 50, John, 48, and grandchild, Aria, who turns 14 on Feb. 15. “I had a ton of good luck,” Jim said. “The dice do roll 7-11.”

He offered a few other nuggets on the key to a happy union: “Marriage,” he pontificated, “is a 50-50 operation. But let’s be honest, the woman always gives 80%. I finally figured that out,” he concluded, adding, “Kathy has been my blessing.”



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Love can take unexpected twists, and Frank Kozak and Claudia Azula's story is proof that sometimes it's all about timing. The couple first met in 2019, but after three dates, they weren't feeling a connection. They went their separate ways, each thinking it was the end.

But a year later, Claudia couldn't stop thinking about Frank. Determined to reconnect, she faced an unexpected hurdle: she had switched phone carriers and no longer had his number. After pleading with Verizon, a compassionate representative helped her retrieve a list of old numbers. One of them was Frank's.

Taking a leap of faith, Claudia sent a text. Three days later, they met for a walk in a park. This time, they felt a spark. Since then, they've been inseparable, building a relationship filled with laughter and trust.



One key to their happiness lies in a simple motto: We never press the buttons that hurt. They've learned that while they know how to push each other's buttons in moments of frustration, they choose love and understanding instead. "Words can wound deeply," Claudia says, "so we make sure ours always heal."

Now, Frank and Claudia are planning their next chapter: marriage. They've chosen June 21, 2025, the summer solstice, as their wedding date. "It's the longest day of the year," Claudia explains, "filled with light and love—just like our commitment to each other."

Frank and Claudia's story reminds us that love isn't always instant, but when it's right, it's worth the wait. Sometimes, all it takes is a little persistence, a text message, and a promise to always choose kindness.

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**What's Michael Onder's is Lisa Costanzo's** and vice versa — and not just according to country music artist Kane Brown's lyrics at their wedding.

Michael and Lisa wed on Nov. 9, 2024 at Il Tulipano in Cedar Grove. The couple got engaged two years prior on May 22, 2022 while vacationing in Saint Lucia. The proposal took place the second night during their dinner on the beach.

"So we're sitting there, and he's acting all weird," said Lisa, 53. "Then, he stands up and gets down on one knee and I'm like, 'What? Are you serious right now?'"

"He kept saying he was gonna do it and I was like, 'Oh, he's not gonna do it,'" she added with a laugh. "It was very nice and romantic. People were cheering us on and whistling."

### The Right Connection

The Bloomingdale residents, who were born only a day apart, weren't opposed to finding love in a more modern way. They first connected with each other on Match.com in the summer of 2017. After speaking for a while, Lisa said she made it clear that she "wasn't looking for a pen pal."

The future couple met at Angelina's Ristorante on Staten Island and, although she was about an hour late, Michael is glad that he waited it out for her.



"We had a great time," said Michael. "It was one of those dates where you didn't want the night to end. One of the things that impressed me is that she bought me a drink, then I beat her butt at bocce."

"No, he did not," Lisa chimed in. She also denied with amusement that he let her win the next game because she's competitive. But she agreed that it was a good first date and that she did buy him a drink.

"I did buy him a glass of wine," she confirmed. "I feel like you should reciprocate; it's not just about them paying. He pretty much met me every day after that [first date]."

Lisa had her own way of knowing that Michael was something special. The couple moved in with each other by November of the same year, but first he needed an important approval.

"I let him meet my daughter," said Lisa. "My first husband died in a motorcycle accident and I was reserved about the whole situation because of everything I went through."

Lisa's daughter, Cierra, 27, will now tell Michael things before Lisa.





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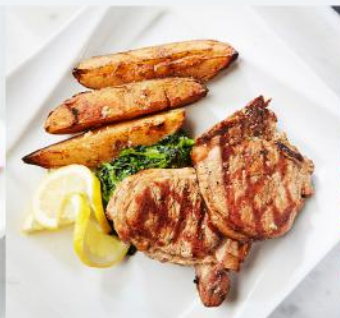


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"I saw how involved he would be with my daughter and [how he would] help her with things and be there for her," said Lisa, matter-of-factly. "That kind of did it for me."

### Clifton Meets Brooklyn

Ever wonder what happens when a Clifton boy and a Brooklyn girl meet? They might just fall in love.

Michael grew up in the Delawanna section, attending School 8, CCMS, and graduating with the CHS Class of 1990. He went to Lincoln Tech to become a HVAC technician and worked in roles for NJ Transit and Home Depot, as well as for his brother at Delawanna Plumbing and Heating.

He recently completed 26 years with the Clifton Fire Department, holding the position of administrative analyst and is the Deputy Office of Emergency Management Coordinator.

A Brooklyn native, Lisa attended the College of Staten Island for two years and pursued a career in healthcare administration. She works at Montefiore Nyack Hospital as a surgical coordinator.

The couple make the most of their free time together. They enjoy visiting wineries, staying at bed-and-breakfasts, and they collect magnets and shot glasses from their travel destinations.

One of their first trips away was to Hershey Park. They have since traveled to the Dominican Republic, Antigua, Cancun, and visited Mexico several times.

"Bermuda was definitely my favorite vacation," said Lisa. "That was my Mother's Day present in 2023. I was surprised with a cruise."

The core tenants of their relationship are how they support one another. Lisa appreciates how Mike is able to "fix everything" and how he "always makes things better." Their ideal future will involve getting an RV and traveling the world together with their animals — currently including four cats and two dogs.

As far as respect goes, they know when a disagreement requires space and when the time is right for each to say their piece. But their arguments don't last long, and Mike tries not to take anything for granted. Least of all, Lisa's trustworthiness. "I can trust her with my life," he said.



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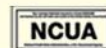
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**For Omar and Rachel (Aponte) Benitez,** there was never any need to find other fish in the sea. They found love while serving with the US Navy in Norfolk, Virginia.

It was the early 2000s. Omar was attached to the USS Ramage, an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer. Rachel was aboard the USS Laboon, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, with a few more years experience in the military.

The interest in knowing Rachel was instantaneous for Omar. There was a base club known as Pier 26 hosting Latin Night and both the sailors were in attendance.

“I went to the base club with a few of my buddies, and that’s when I met Rachel,” said Omar, 40. “I was sitting down and was hanging out when I saw her walk in. I was like, ‘Oh, my God. She is so beautiful.’”

“You’d better say that,” Rachel teased, with a laugh. Omar recalled how Rachel “played hard-to-get” in the beginning, but he eventually asked for her name and contact information toward the end of the night. They exchanged phone numbers and from there, they began spending time getting to know each other and going out to eat together.

“I noticed him while I was walking by, because I noticed he was staring at me,” said Rachel, 42. “He was very good looking, so I was interested. But I didn’t want to show how interested I was.”

## **Both in “active duty”**

Omar and Rachel grew up in Paterson and Rochester, respectively, before their ambitions and decisions placed them in each other’s orbit.

Rachel graduated from high school in 2000 and a month later was at boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois. She was an Operations Specialist with the rank of Petty Officer 1st Class (E-6) and dealt primarily with radar navigation and communications. Her active duty ended on Sept. 1, 2012.

Joining the military was a choice that she made to give herself the best future possible. “I wasn’t hanging out with the best crowd in high school,” she said. “I knew I wanted to change my life. Outside my lunch room, there were the recruiters one day. I said, ‘Hey, I’m going to do



*Omar and Rachel with children Ariana and Jordani.*

this’ and they really sold [the Navy]. I signed up that day.”

Omar’s realization that the military was the right fit for him also came during high school. He knew that college wasn’t in his future and already knew older friends who had enlisted in the Navy and Army.

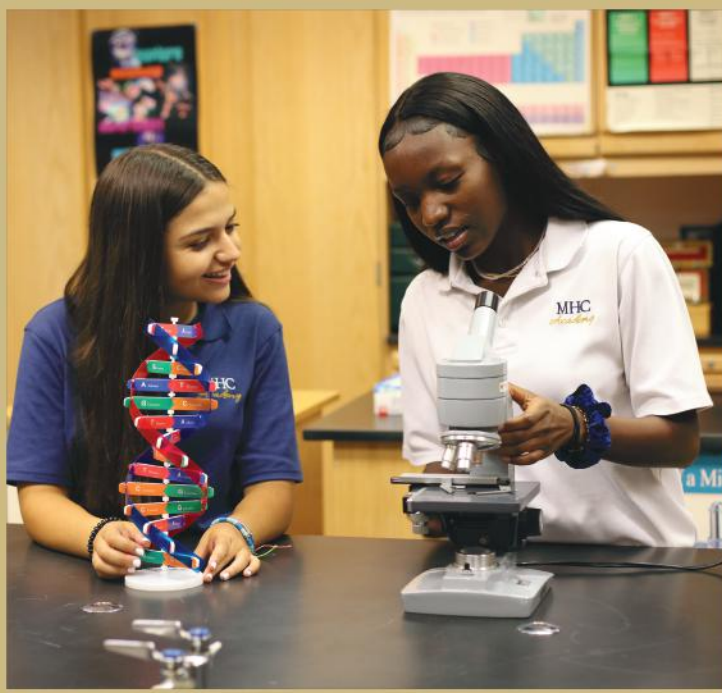
“While talking to them and weighing out the pros and cons,” Omar explained, “I decided to go to the Navy with the hopes that it would keep me on the east coast and closer to New Jersey.”

Unlike Rachel, who was deployed for six months and returned when Ariana was one year old, Omar didn’t experience any deployments. He started boot camp on Sept. 11, 2002 — exactly one year after the Twin Towers fell — and served until 2005.

Omar was a Boatswain’s Mate at the rank of Petty Officer 3rd Class (E-4). His responsibilities were to help maintain the ship, stand watch, and drive the ship when they were out to sea.

The military not only gave them direction, but it gave them an opportunity to start a family. The couple wed on March 8, 2004, which helped protect them from the military separating them. It also allowed them to provide a family unit for daughter Ariana, 21, and son Jordani, 13. The couple spent the majority of their service in





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Norfolk and in Jacksonville after she returned from her deployment and they were situated in base housing.

Communication not only prevailed for the Navy through Rachel's work; it remains integral to their relationship through their 20 years of marriage. "We still try to do date nights at least twice a month so our relationship doesn't get drowned out by our careers," said Rachel. "We usually do dinner, then to a lounge or pub and just hang out."

Life today sees Omar and Rachel working locally while living in Bloomingdale.



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After getting out of the military, Omar worked for CarMax and attended Paintless Dent Repair (PDR) school. Omar enjoyed the craft after he worked for some companies. In 2014, he opened King of Dents on Christie Ave. which specializes in paintless dent repair, including hail damage, with auto detailing services. Today he employs 14 workers. Info at [kingsofdents.com](http://kingsofdents.com).

"Since Paterson is a neighboring town, I thought opening a business around here with a family support system would be easier," said Omar. "Clifton happened to be a prime location for what we found that was best for our company."

Rachel's post-military career is in the medical field. She went to school once she got out to earn a degree in medical assisting. She returned to become a Licensed Practical Nurse and works at Hackensack Meridian Health, Paramus, in Primary Care. She worked previously for St. Joseph's Health.

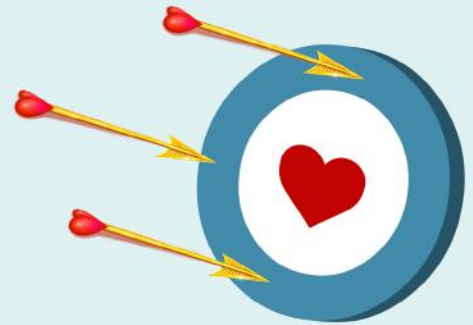
While they do not have an exact date, when she and Omar consider their future plans, they're most looking forward to retiring together and traveling the world. They also someday hope to become grandparents.

Until then, they find joy in each other's core traits. For Omar, it's that Rachel is kind and listens while managing to understand him in a way that other people aren't always able to achieve. As for Omar's most prized trait? "He is a very hard worker," she said, proudly.





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**Watching his parents grow older together** is one of the greatest joys of Jesse Hasting's life. For Rafael and Alicia Hasting, it was simply inevitable.

"I love everything about [Rafael]," said Alicia, 72. "I have so much fun with him all the time and every time people see us, we are always together."

Before immigrating to the United States, Rafael and Alicia knew each other in Honduras. Alicia was originally from El Salvador, where she lived until her family moved in the early 1960s. She and Rafael were aware of one another and spoke, but they had their own commitments.

"My dad was busy with soccer and my mom was busy trying to help her family by working on a coffee bean farm," said Jesse. "She never got to see him play, but my dad also didn't make a big deal about being a pro soccer player — and still doesn't."

Rafael, 78, played for Club Deportivo Olimpia, the nation's most successful team, and also played for three years with the Honduras national team.

Rafael retired in 1969, but not before his team had the opportunity to qualify for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. Honduras and El Salvador were in what became known as the Football War. It originated from a play-off game that the two countries played to decide which would qualify for the Finals.

The political crisis turned into a war that lasted approximately 100 hours. When all was said and done, El Salvador won 3-2 to qualify and eliminated Honduras from the qualifications. "He was in the game," said son Jesse, 39.

But something good did come out of El Salvador for Rafael: his future wife.

Rafael immigrated to the U.S. in 1971 and Alicia immigrated the following year. The couple reconnected through family while living under the same roof, got together around 1973, and have been happy together ever since.

Thirty years later, they made their marriage official on paper when they went down to City Hall on Jan. 14, 2002. Those three decades saw them raising two boys: Christian (CHS 1992) and Jesse (CHS 2003).

"They're always laughing. Dad's always joking around," said Jesse. "I love watching them interact. One day, hopefully, I will get to have that same thing."



## **Made In Clifton**

While Alicia and son Jesse took a break to speak for this interview, Rafael was hard at work.

The family owns American Piano Covers, 51 Chester St., a business born of circumstance.

Founded in the basement of their home in 2003, American Piano Covers made a name for itself in the world of pianos as a wholesale cover company, largely through word-of-mouth. They were recently featured in Piano Technician Guide Magazine when we profiled the business in October of 2006.

Shipments over the years have gone to Montclair State and Juilliard School of Music. APC even delivered covers to Warner Bros, as well as Universal Studios' "Desperate Housewives."





The business began when American Piano Supply Co. was bought out, which is where Alicia worked for 25 years. She supervised the cutting, sewing, and production of covers for the last 12 years that she was employed there.

She took her knowledge, enlisted Rafael and Jesse's help, and built it out to create a genuine family legacy that doubles as the American Dream. Along with a part-time seamstress, Alicia focuses on sewing the covers.

Rafael is responsible for cutting patterns out of the ma-

*Facing page: Rafael and Alicia Hasting. Above left: Rafael in white with Honduras Club Deportivo Olimpia, circa 1969, and at right, son Jesse and mom in 2006 when we did a story on American Piano Covers, part of our Made in Clifton series.*

terial, boxing them up, then packaging them. Jesse brings it all together by making labels and picking up materials when he isn't on tech duty or doing deliveries.

"It's the greatest thing that ever happened to us," she said. "And it was always in Clifton."

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*Mayor Grabowski and owners Nick Patel and Mehul Adhvaryu cutting the ribbon January 19.*





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# A Collaborative Team



*By Ariana Puzzo*

**Service, safety, and wellness found a permanent home in Botany Village with the April 8, 2022 opening of a neighborhood ‘city hall’ at 207 Parker Ave. Preventative health services and engaged officers from Clifton Community Policing make this collaborative effort work. The substation was launched after a 2019 study by Clifton Health showed that residents there lacked access to city services and the team took it to the neighborhood.**



**The decision to honor the Clifton Health Department** this year came down to one simple but crucial commonality between the institution and the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton: Supporting Clifton’s youth.

“We share a mission when it comes to Clifton’s kids,” said Gabriel Blau, The Club’s CEO. “Health Officer John Biegel and his whole team have been really tremendous partners. We have already worked on numerous projects in the year that I have been here,” continued Blau, who took the helm of The Club in 2024 following the retirement of Executive Director Bob Foster. “They all share our commitment to Clifton youth in a deep and actionable way.”

Over the past 13 months, the partnership between The Club and Clifton Health grew through The Steps to a Healthier Clifton Coalition. There was also programs run in coordination with PRAISE (Parents Requiring Action and Information for Special Education) to serve youth with disabilities. The collaborations expanded even more with a committee responding to the opioid crisis.

Annually The Club is responsible for serving roughly 5,000 kids, plus another 1,000 who participate in sports opportunities or CHS’ Career Exploration Day. Blau sees how “every single person” in Clifton Health is supportive and makes themselves available.



“It’s a fluid relationship in a very positive way,” said Blau. “When it came to honoring both of the honorees (the Fette family and Clifton Health) they are entities that have really been pivotal to the work that we do.”

Blau continued by acknowledging the generations of active support by the Fette family and how they stepped up during the most uncertain months of the coronavirus pandemic.

Blau went on to detail how Clifton Health takes similar steps to support their work “in all of the ways that Clifton kids need.” That includes supporting the future growth in teen programming. “They amplify the work that we’re doing,” said Blau. “It seems really clear, almost obvious to us, that these are the people that really deserve to be honored and that we want to celebrate.”

As you turn these pages, you’ll read how the caring Health Department team addresses various needs through seven divisions, including Environmental Health, Lead



At left, the Botany substation opening in 2022 and above, The Club’s CEO Gabe Blau.

Poisoning Prevention, Public Health Nursing, Health Education, Social Services, Administration, and Animal Control — the last one previously featured in our December, 2024 edition.

Here’s what Biegel and select members of dedicated staff working alongside him had to say ...



  
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*In 2021, frontline healthcare workers Jennifer Kidd and Laya Helwani were at the COVID vaccine drive-through clinics behind the high school. Health Officer John Biegel with his late dad, John Biegel, and below, mentors Stu Palfreyman and Al Greco.*

### John Biegel III

One source of pride for Clifton's Health Officer is seeing public health roll out in the way that it is intended: preventing disease while also promoting and protecting the well-being of all residents.

"What public health is supposed to be, we're actually doing it now," said Biegel, 59. "We're going out there and not just responding to a complaint."

Biegel (CHS 1983) attributed successes to community partners like The Boys & Girls Club; city officials like Mayor Raymond Grabowski, the City Council, and City Manager Dominick Villano; and the CHD staff.

Nothing is an outrageous idea and all ideas are welcome if it is in service to the community.

"They're not my staff; we work together," said Biegel. "We sit around the table [and determine] how we can help the community, then we go for it."

Biegel has a bachelor's degree in Health Education and a master's degree in Environmental Health Management from Montclair State University. He took his license exam to become a Health Inspector in 1989, a role that he held from 1990 until 1995. The following decade saw him as a Registered Environmental Health Specialist and then a Senior Specialist.

It was in 2004 that he became the Health Officer and Director of Health and Human Services for the City of Clifton's Health Department. Biegel has also taught an Envi-



ronmental Health course for about 14 years at MSU.

In an ever-evolving and growing city, Biegel follows in the footsteps of the two Health Officers before him. The late Stuart Palfreyman, who served in the role from 1971 to 1995, and Albert Greco, who held the title from 1996 to 2004, were mentors who embodied multiple leadership qualities that those who work with Biegel attribute to him today.

So while protecting a city of about 90,000 people is not a one-man job, there's no denying that the tone is set from the top.

"When The Club told me [about the CHD's recognition], I felt such a sense of pride for the staff and all their hard work," said Biegel. "Government workers, and especially Health Departments, don't do the work for the accolades."

"We do it to help people," he added. "When someone recognizes it, it's really an extreme honor."



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*In 2023, Clifton Health met a significant milestone when it received National Accreditation Certificate from PHAB. Pictured from left: Jennifer Kidd, John Biegel III, Mayor Ray Grabowski, Board President Dan Neczpir, VPs Jane Scarfo and Tom Garretson, Commissioners Albert Greco and Dr. Timothy Kowal (also Clifton Health Medical Director) and Danielle Jones.*

## Jennifer Kidd

Providing our city with essential services requires someone capable of securing grant funding — and that someone needs to be a go-getter.

Health Projects Coordinator Jennifer Kidd's responsibilities range from fieldwork that sees her building partnerships and networking constantly with city organizations to collaborating across interdepartmental divisions to determine who would benefit from specific grants.

"A lot of money came down from the federal government because of COVID," said Kidd, 49. "We're not sure what the future is for some of these federal grants, in terms of the ones that provided us with infrastructure funding."

In 2024, the department received \$1.1 million in federal and state grant funding. That number was down from over \$1.5 million in 2023, according to the 2023 Annual Health Report.

Within that 2023 grant funding were the three largest grants: Enhancing Local Public Health Infrastructure Grant from the CDC (\$886,222), Strengthening Local Public Health Capacity Grant from the New Jersey Department of Health (\$320,955), and The Childhood Lead Exposure Prevention Project from the CDC and NJDOH (\$264,611).

"[The Lead Exposure grant] helps us respond to childhood lead poisoning cases where nursing and environmental departments have to become involved and perform interventions to do some inspections or investigations," she explained. "A few members of our Environmental division are licensed as a Lead Inspector Risk Assessor."



*Clifton Health also offers training to staff at eateries. Here Dan Neczpir awards Matthew Tyahla of Matthew's Italian Restaurant the Cream of the Crop Award for best practices in sanitary and handling standards at his restaurant.*

Kidd's background includes her undergrad at Drew University and then receiving her master's at Columbia University's Teachers College in Health Education.

She became a Health Educator in 1999 and transitioned in 2014 to Projects Coordinator, overseeing grants and the accreditation process. She works closely with Health Educators Layal Helwani and Danielle Jones. "It helps," said Kidd, "because we dot each other's I's and cross each other's T's."





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Accreditation was a new challenge for Kidd, who admitted it isn't a "quick and easy process." The pandemic delayed the process, but it took about nine years until the CHD was awarded initial National Accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) on Nov. 7, 2023.

The CHD was the sixth local health department in the state and the first health department in Pas-

saic County to become accredited. The city will maintain its designation for four years, but must show PHAB through reports that it is still upholding its qualifying standards.

"In the fifth year, we will go through a re-accreditation process, similar to the initial process," said Kidd. "We electronically submitted over 800 documents and thousands of pages to PHAB originally."



*Health educators Layal Helwani and Jennifer Kidd.*

Kidd misses her fieldwork, but she readily acknowledged the "work and value of accreditation."

"A lot of local departments started reaching out to us for advice and guidance, which makes us feel good," said Kidd. "We're ... at the forefront of public health in the State of New Jersey."


She added that having great colleagues makes a huge difference.

"Sometimes I feel like I do live in Clifton with the amount of time that I spend here," she laughed. "I can't imagine myself working in any other city or town."

"We want to help people. This is a helping profession and even if it helps only one person, it's worth it," Kidd continued. "I'm so happy that I chose this field and landed in a place like Clifton and got a boss like John."

### Layal Helwani

Layal Helwani's education and training are more than just letters after her name. "I think it makes me a better Health Educator," said Helwani, 30. "John Biegel and Jennifer Kidd encourage all of us to go out and get these credentials and better ourselves with these classes."



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# THE DANGEROUS TRUTH BEHIND HOOKAH

City of Clifton  
Health and Human  
Services Department



Essex-Passaic  
Wellness Coalition  
web.njms.rutgers.edu/EPWC



## NOT a Safe Alternative

People who smoke hookahs inhale significant amounts of nicotine, a physically addictive chemical, as well as compounds that can cause cancer, heart disease and other health problems, multiple reliable studies show.

Hookah is a bowl-shaped device with a tubular pipe. It also may be called waterpipe, shisha or hubble-bubble. Charcoal-heated air is passed through a tobacco mixture and then through a water-filled chamber and, ultimately, through the pipe for the user to inhale.

Often cited as a cultural practice, hookah is used in many countries around the world, and people seem to be accepting and embracing it quickly. In the U.S., it's usually young adults, with studies indicating that about 10%-25% of them used hookah in the past month.

While it is against the law to smoke in public places, except in three Clifton businesses, hookah is nevertheless often offered at some restaurants and coffee shops, with retail shops also becoming common.

Some say leave it alone and argue that hookah is a cultural practice. Others say that hookah smoking is a good alternative to cigarette smoking. But the facts dispute that.

The fruit, honey and other flavorings that are used in hookah tobacco may make it sound healthy, plus its moistness due to being passed through water, all mask the fact that what hookah users and those around them are inhaling is simply tobacco smoke—with all of the health dangers that accompany it.

The Essex-Passaic Wellness Coalition (web.njms.rutgers.edu/EPWC) and the Clifton Health Department are working to educate our communities about the hazards of hookah use. Read more information on Hookah and Health in future issues of this magazine.



**NEXT MONTH:  
We're Mythbusting  
E-Cigs and Vapes**

### Habit Forming

- Every bit as addictive as cigarette smoking (clevelandclinic.org)
- Water pipe smoking delivers nicotine – the same highly addictive drug found in other tobacco products (CDC)

### Oral Cancers

- Tobacco liquids from hookahs irritate the mouth and increase the risk of developing oral cancers (CDC)

### Other Diseases

- Other diseases associated with hookah use:
- Lung Cancer • Cancer of the Esophagus • Stomach Cancer
- Reduced Lung Function • Decreased Fertility • Bladder Cancer (CDC)

### Kills Brain Cells

- 1 hour-long hookah smoking session = approximately 200 puffs, while smoking an average cigarette = 20 puffs (CDC)

### Additional Health Risks

- Infections may be passed to other smokers by sharing the mouthpiece:
- Oral Herpes • Tuberculosis (CDC)

### High Levels of Toxic Agents

- Charcoal used to heat tobacco products contains high levels of:
- Carbon monoxide • Toxic Metals
- Cancer-causing Chemicals (carcinogens)



### It's Against The Law

Only three Clifton businesses—Jamie's Cigar Bar, Kamil's Restaurant and La Ziza lounge—were permitted to offer indoor smoking when the State-wide Smoke-free Air Act Initiative was approved in 2006. Since then, the Clifton Health Department has issued over \$70,000 in fines to establishment owners and most of these offenses are related to indoor hookah smoking. Both patrons who are observed to be smoking and establishment owners can be fined up to \$1,000 for smoking indoors. If you find any establishment in violation of the NJ Smoke-free Air Act, contact the Clifton Health Dept. at 973-470-5760.

The Essex-Passaic Wellness Coalition (on the web at web.njms.rutgers.edu/EPWC) is made possible by a grant from the NJ Department of Health's Office of Cancer Control and Prevention to Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. The EPWC implements the New Jersey Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan (see www.njcancer.gov) in Essex and Passaic Counties. The EPWC also receives in-kind support from Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and other organizations. Call the EPWC at 973-972-4623.

*In 2015, partnering with the Essex-Passaic Wellness Coalition, Clifton Health worked with Clifton Magazine to create a series of advertisements aimed at youth to tell the dangerous story behind e-cigs, hookah and smoking in general. The campaign won the Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt award for excellence in public health communications.*

Helwani (CHS 2012) is a lifelong resident, who also attended School 4 and WWMS. She earned her bachelor's degree in Public Health with a concentration in Community Health Education and her Master of Public Health at MSU.

Last October, Helwani became a Master Certified Health Education Specialist.

"Public health really does take you in all different directions," she said. "We're health educators, but we're not just standing in front of an audience and teaching. It's a lot more than that."

No two days are identical. Sometimes she'll be preparing health education materials or working with her colleagues on grant reports. Other days will see her visiting schools, local libraries, and organizations to implement long-term mental health and vaping initiatives.

Helwani has worked closely with the CHD partners like Hackensack Meridian, Mountainside Medical Center, Clifton Against Substance Abuse, Clifton Public Schools, and The Club. She officially joined the CHD in August of 2016

and created a foothold in vaping prevention.

She's currently overseeing the Clifton Tobacco Age of Sale Enforcement program that helps to ensure that local tobacco establishments are appropriately checking IDs and not selling illegal flavored vapor products.

"[These products] have been illegal since April of 2020 but, unfortunately, establishments still sell them, because youth are attracted to them and they're big money-makers," said Helwani. "They seem harmless, but a lot of the research is very concerning."

In December 2024, the CHD sent 10 teams of two into 10 different smoke shops to attempt to purchase flavored vapes. The CHD worked with both adults and teens, leading to a discovery that nine of the 10 inspected shops were not in compliance with flavored vapes available.

"That took a lot of time planning and coordinating [with the entire department], but it paid off," said Helwani. "It sent a strong message to smoke shops that unless they're operating legally and selling products to adults, not minors, we're not going to tolerate it in Clifton."



# Knapp *Legacy* of Service

On February 27, 1960, the day my mom and dad married, they opened R.F. Knapp Roofing. It was a bold move for Dorothy and Richard. But over six decades later, I'm proud to celebrate the 64th anniversary of our family business.

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At right, in 1990 that's my family just before my dad died... at the bottom is Richie, a great Skipper and Fisherman...and at right, that's mom and me in 2007, supporting the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton....

***Thank You,  
Clifton!***

- Don Knapp

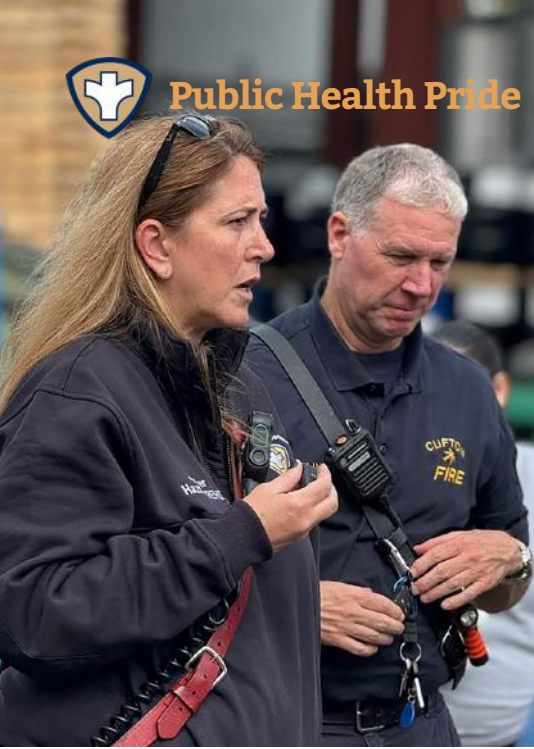


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*Clifton Health's Environmental Division interacts with other city, county, and state officials. At left, Jennifer Terwilliger with Clifton Fire's Daniel Collins on a HazMat response. Others on the Envio team, from left: Toyin Gayle-Sutherland, Matthew Lock, Jake Marchione, Nino Intili, Melissa Spencer and Enrico Caruso.*

### Jennifer Terwilliger

Working behind the scenes may not be uncommon for Jennifer Terwilliger, but the HazMat Coordinator and her colleagues are the ones who handle your quality of life and day-to-day concerns.

"It is probably a good thing that [the public doesn't] realize all that we do," said Terwilliger, "but there is an importance to it for public health."

Terwilliger, 49, works directly with the Fire and Police departments as a HazMat representative. She is responsible for relaying environmental concerns to the appropriate parties and when the city welcomes a new business, she'll know once they file a Certificate of Business Compliance.

Terwilliger is also the liaison to the city's Local Emergency Planning Committee. The committee consists of 12 required groups, including elected officials and representatives from the Building Department, Chamber of Commerce, Environmental Commission, and local industry. Meetings are public the third Wednesday of the month at 3:30 pm in the City Hall Conference Room.

"It's been meeting since the 80's," said Terwilliger. "We always did this kind of thing behind the scenes, but then the state made the County LEPCs [in the late 80's, early 90's] and they said, 'Clifton [already] does this ... so you're the model group.'"

Terwilliger started interning at the CHD in 1997 and came on full time in 1998. After taking her maternity leave and working on-and-off as a part-time employee, she returned around 2017. When she isn't doing food inspections to protect the city from foodborne illnesses, she is helping us remain Bronze-certified with Sustainable Jersey.

Another job function is handling Emergency Preparedness, which includes shelter operations in the event of opening up a shelter for the city during an emergency

Terwilliger was the Operations Manager when the CHD ran COVID-19 drive-through vaccination clinics during the pandemic. "Helping the community," said Terwilliger on the most rewarding part of her job. "We work to prevent situations like the Route 3 tractor-trailer explosion. We have people who have to suit up and go into those atmospheres. All of our preparedness behind the scenes usually prevents stuff like that from happening."

### Nino Intili

Understanding the function of a health department came with firsthand experience for Nino Intili, a Senior Registered Environmental Health Specialist. He is one of four REHS' and two senior specialists in the city.

But first he did his 22-hour prerequisite through MSU, where Intili went to three different sites to observe health agencies.

His final stop was the CHD, where Biegel was in Intili's role today. "I really enjoyed [my observation] and asked if I could do an internship here," said Intili, 47. "That internship led to me getting a job here and eventually, 20 years later, here I am."

Since becoming full time in April 2005, Intili has worked his way up and now supervises the Environmental Division. The division responds to environmental complaints from the public, which leads to them enforcing city ordinances. Complaints can include calls about rodents, garbage, heating, noise, and odors.





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The division inspects food establishments within the City of Clifton and Township of Little Falls. The township also receives health services under the CHD umbrella.

“Everything we do here, we do there,” said Intili. “We also do recreational bathing inspections of swimming pools open to the public, like the Boys & Girls Club or at gyms and hotels. I’m in the field with the inspectors and will assist them with difficult or problematic cases.”

Intili expressed gratitude for the city’s support, including its elected officials and city manager.

“From the city side, we’re in good shape,” he said. “If we have an issue where we need to tweak an ordinance, we always get the support that we need.”

The division conducts roughly 850 inspections per year between the municipalities. The number increases to around 900 with temporary inspections like The Club’s annual car show. He encouraged people to reach out if they have a specific concern, but to keep in mind that there are instances when a situation is outside of the CHD’s purview.

“Mold is one of those issues. People automatically think that is a health issue but there are various types of molds,” said Intili. “We don’t have authority on the local level to do indoor air quality sampling,” he added, “but we’re always here to help.”

## **Melissa Spencer**

Lead prevention starts at home, and everyone’s role makes a difference.

“People may think that we’re out to get them or the city came up with a way to get more money,” said Melissa Spencer, a Senior REHS in the Lead Division. “The State of New Jersey ... saw a big issue. Lead can be taxing on health and a financial burden on everyone.”

The city’s official creation of the Lead Division — which brought new hires and advanced lead scanning equipment — took place about two years ago. Spencer acknowledged that although she always worked on lead for the city, it was in July of 2022 that a new law mandated certain rental dwelling buildings before 1978 be tested for lead.

There are now five lead inspectors, including Spencer, and the CHD possesses a Consumer Lead Analyzer.

“We never had our own in-house analyzer. We use it to test toys, houseware, and cookware for lead,” said Spencer, 43. “We also do screenings because of that law in the Senior Center and the Botany Village Satellite Office. Residents can bring toys and household pottery, especially imported goods, for us to test for the presence of lead.”

Testing, by her expert assessment, is good for “the community and the world.” In 2024, the World Health

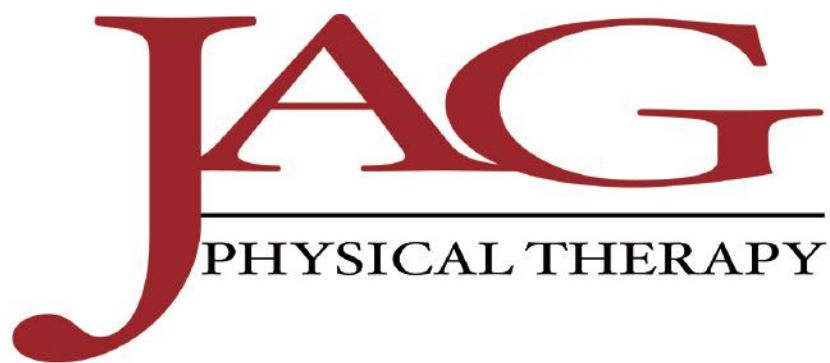
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Organization attributed lead exposure as the link to approximately 1.5 million annual deaths. The deaths were caused by cases of cardiovascular disease or irreversible neurological and behavioral damage, especially in children.

“Since starting our program with our first inspections in August of 2022, we have completed over 2,000 inspections,” said Spencer. “We’ve seen a decline overall, not just in Clifton but the state. There’s definitely been a shift, with more parents aware of lead and more pediatricians testing.”

Spencer earned a degree in Health Education with a concentration in Community Health at MSU. She encouraged parents to take a few simple steps moving forward.

“Know your child’s levels before you do any renovations and have your home tested for lead,” she said. “When it’s contained, lead is not a problem. It’s when you disturb it. Also, it’s important to maintain proper hand-washing and proper nutrition.”

The division is also creating a book: *Louis the Lead Dog* to explain lead poisoning and how to reduce it in an age-appropriate way, as well as focusing on some additional safety and preventative measures. “We’re hoping to have it available by our target date of this October,” said Spencer.



*In the Nursing Division, RNs Woo Rhee Kim, Barbara Luzniak, Ranmi Miyazawa.*

### Barbara Luzniak

Serving the underserved is the focus of any health department, which is a large source of pride for Nursing Supervisor Barbara Luzniak.

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“Most people don’t even know what a health department does, because they luckily haven’t needed to use it because of having their own private doctor and insurance,” said Luzniak, 68. “We provide screenings and evaluations. If anything is found on these, we can make referrals out to hospitals or other agencies.”

Luzniak is a lifelong Mustang who attended School 12, CCMS, and graduated with the CHS Class of 1974. She went to Fairleigh Dickinson University, where she earned her Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing before working for 14 years in the East Orange Veterans Hospital.

“I’m happy and thankful that I did have many years of hospital experience besides my public health experience,” said Luzniak. “I think it makes you a well-rounded nurse.”

She joined the CHD in 1997 and works closely now with Public Health Nurse Ranmi Miyazawa, who joined the department in December of 2021. Luzniak’s day-to-day work consists of tracking communicable diseases, whether they are cases of hepatitis, meningitis, chicken pox, measles, or pertussis (whooping cough).

The nurses also run clinics in the CHD, including a dental clinic that Luzniak worked in for over 22 years before becoming a supervisor. There is a free flu clinic and a children’s immunization clinic as well.

“We’re one of the first health departments in the northern area that provided vaccines specially for older children,” said Luzniak. “Most were just providing them to babies. It used to be much larger until a lot of other federally funded clinics developed.”

There are now sometimes up to 125 children who visit in a given

month for vaccinations within a three-hour period.

Luzniak was also on the frontlines during the pandemic. Over the course of three years, Clifton and Little Falls provided almost 18,000 immunizations to residents with assistance from school nurses, retired public health nurses, and non-medi-

cal individuals helping in other ways.

Now she’s eager to focus on forefront issues like mental health and cardiac disease. “I’d like to try to develop other screenings that can help with those issues,” she said. “As well as starting up oral cancer screenings again, even if we just conduct them once or twice per year.”

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## Danielle Jones

Is this thing on? Danielle Jones has teamed up with Lauren Scarfo, who works in Administration and was featured on our August 2020 cover as the Voice of Clifton, to be heard wherever you listen to podcasts.

“Clifton Health On Air” releases new episodes every other Monday. The co-hosts strive to bring on individuals who can discuss the many different facets of public health. They interview health inspectors, registered environmental inspectors, health educators, some social services team members, nurses, and local community partners.

“We like to get a variety of guests on the podcast, specific to the Health Department,” said Jones, 29. “We are answering the question of what the health department does ... on this podcast.”

The podcast began in January of 2024 and has amassed 18 full episodes, five update episodes, three mini series (two episodes for National Caregivers Month, five episodes for National Health Education Week, seven episodes for National Public Health Week), and a total run-time of four hours and 47 minutes for all of the 39 episodes.

“We’re actually going to launch a few episodes fully in Spanish. We’ll have the host be another entity of our team,” said Jones. “That’s something that we found might work. We do want to be inclusive to all residents.”

Although she is one of three Health Educators, it isn’t where Jones got her start in Clifton. Her background is in Kinesiology and Exercise Science at Penn State, before earning a Master of Public Health at MSU. She worked days as a city employee in the Zoning Department as she completed her master’s degree at night.

Then, the world shut down. Jones recalled reaching out to the Health Department about an internship, because “I was home and wanted to help.”

“We were in the midst of the pandemic and learning at the same time. It was an interesting time and not their typical day-to-day,” she said. “It was definitely public health at its finest.”

The purpose of the podcasts is for the public to understand what the CHD does, and not to sugarcoat it. She added that interviewing doctors and organizations gives them a chance to parse through resources for the community and make the entire process less overwhelming.

“We are excited to help our community members and want to connect them with all the proper resources that they need,” she said. “Consider us a matchmaker for resources in public health.”



*Danielle Jones and Lauren Scarfo of Clifton Health on Air.*

## Kimberly Finkler

“Health is wealth.” That’s Kimberly Finkler’s approach to public health and why she enjoys working in an environment like the CHD. “This field is honestly the best. It’s just amazing to work alongside people who are so passionate about helping others,” said Finkler, 27. “When people have optimal physical, emotional, and mental health, they can show up as their best selves.”

“Knowing that you can help a person become the best version of themselves and then they can serve their community is just [great],” she continued. Then, laughing, she added, “We’re making a little public health army.”

The Allwood native grew up attending St. Andrew’s and graduated from CHS in 2015. She holds two degrees from MSU in Human Development and Family Studies (BA) and a Master of Public Health. Finkler joined the CHD in August of 2021 and the Local Health Outreach Coordinator is a Certified Health Education Specialist.

Residents will often find her operating out of the Botany Village Satellite Office, 207 Parker Ave., with her colleagues Crystal Rodriguez, Ashley Peralta, and Kasey Molner. The health team sets up free and low-cost health screenings in the office and has striven since April of 2022 to deliver food distribution, diaper drives, and community resources and referrals for the 07011 zip code.

“We’re out there with residents,” said Finkler. “That is boots-on-the-ground, public health work.”

Sharing their office space with the Community Policing Division means that there is crossover. The team members in the Botany divisions work closely to assist the un-



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housed population by working off of the 2018 Community Health Assessment.

“That assessment showed the 07011 neighborhood as often being neglected due to an unequal distribution of programs and services,” said Finkler. “Now we’re bringing services and resources to the community, because there could be barriers like access to transportation and languages.”

Finkler noted Sgt. Gary Giardina’s report that over the course of the satellite office’s first year, there was a 63.5% decline in quality of life complaints. These ranged from disorderly conduct and noise to unhoused complaints.

The office partnered with 23 organizations in 2023, including Embrace Relief and Power of One, and received about 600 calls on their hotline from April 2022 until the end of 2024. For referrals or questions about events, call 973-265-1533. There is also a Botany Satellite Office newsletter and calendar sent out monthly.

### Tom Sadowski

Mental health matters at every age — and it often starts at home or at school. Tom Sadowski, 36, is a more recent find for the CHD. Sadowski joined the department in June of 2023 as a Social Service Worker. He has a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and a graduate certification in Autism Studies from MSU.

Prior to his current role, he taught for four years at Academy360 in Verona. “It was a pretty smooth transition,” said Sadowski. “Once you are in the area of human services in general, whether it’s education or healthcare, and you have a passion and willingness to help others, I think it’s a very easy transition.”

A lifelong resident until recently, Sadowski saw a need for helping youth with mental health on a general basis and following the coronavirus pandemic. A rise in anxiety levels is what led to him approaching the Clifton Public Schools with a plan of action.

Sadowski, Social Services Assistant Erika Shyroky, and CHD health educators brought Mindful Mondays to the elementary schools in September of 2023. The program for third graders began at School 17 after Sadowski spoke that August to Jessica Tremble, the district’s Supervisor of Counseling and Student Services, K-8.

“I mentioned ... my experience and interest in creating a program that would help students in elementary school with social-emotional learning,” said Sadowski. “Kids are having their own problems and there are things that they stress out over at home, in school, and after school. Why not



*Addressing issues such as mindfulness, stress, as well as drug addiction and homelessness, the Social Services team includes Thomas Sadowski, Erika Shyroky, Nathaniel King.*

create a program that teaches kids a natural and holistic way to deal with stress?”

In the 2023-24 academic year, Sadowski and the CHD reached six Clifton elementary schools (Schools 1, 5, 8, 9, 11, and 17) and one school in Little Falls. That amounted to 725 eight and nine year olds gaining breathing and stress-reduction techniques that can improve the overall school and test-taking experience.

The goal for 2025 is to reach the third graders in all 14 elementary schools, plus School 3 and Banyan High School in Little Falls. Or, a total of roughly 1,000 students. Sadowski noted that it would require modification for middle and high school students, but that is another goal that the team has for the future.

“Right now, the first class is an introduction to mindfulness and discusses what anxiety is, what stress is, and what they do currently when they feel nervous about something,” said Sadowski. “We introduced the movie *Inside Out*, which outlines the emotions that people feel in a fun and age-appropriate way.”

Along with Shyroky, whose area of focus is adult mental health and substance use disorder services, Sadowski’s other colleague in his division is Nate King. We spoke to King for our November 2023 issue and detailed his efforts to promote unhoused and veterans services.

When he isn’t returning to the classroom, Sadowski brings Mindfulness to senior citizens on Tuesdays. He visits Atlas Rehabilitation & Healthcare at Daughters of Miriam, Evergreen at Clifton, and Mira Vie at Clifton.

Sadowski also facilitates after-school classes with PRAISE, including Art and Music Therapy, and introduced



adaptive cooking classes on Jan. 21 to 16 registered students. Looking ahead, the CHD is eager to bring more mental health training to Clifton and Little Falls professionals who would benefit from knowing youth mental health first aid. That would include going into The Club and into the school systems.

When we spoke at the end of January, nine CHD professionals were certified after completing a seven-hour course run by two instructors from the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

“It was great training,” said Sadowski. “The goal is now to remind staff of the different signs and symptoms to look for when working with youth.”

But parents can and should also have a voice where mental health is concerned.

“It’s important to give your child time to talk about something if there is something that bothers them,” reminded Sadowski. “Some kids open up quicker than others. Make sure that they can trust you with the information.”

“Some kids may just want to speak with you in private in a one-on-one setting,” he added. “It’s different for everyone. It’s a matter of patience and understanding for every child.”

## Victoria Kaufman

If you’re looking for the CHD’s Mother Hen, look no further than Victoria Kaufman.

Kaufman, 56, was given that nickname during the pandemic when she quickly became the point-of-contact across the seven divisions.

“Emails came through me and [the divisions] would disseminate information through me,” said Kaufman (CHS 1986). “I was at the center when it came to assigning cases and working at the vaccine clinics. I got that nickname and they even bought me a shirt.”

Kaufman’s official title is Administrative Clerk. But the nickname fits, especially given that she’s worked the longest at the CHD of anyone that we spoke to for this story. Kaufman interviewed for a job and began on July 16, 1986, less than a month out of high school.

She works a different type of frontline — perhaps being the first voice that a resident hears over the phone or in-person. Whether she is busy working on issuing dog and restaurant licenses or keeping track of grants to maintain the operating budget, Kaufman is part of a team of four who get information where it needs to go. In 2024, the Administration Division issued over 450 establishment permits 🐾

# CLIFTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Strategic Planning Meetings

**We Value Your Input!**

All members of the Clifton Community are welcome to be a part of the process



**March 20, 2025, 7:00 p.m.**

**Clifton High School**  
333 Colfax Avenue, Clifton, NJ 07013







and 2,574 dog licenses. There are times when the work, itself, is less stressful than the communications.

“There are instances when a resident can be very rude and very demanding,” she said. “We try to stay calm and work with them to make sure that the situation is handled in the best manner.”

The other priority is ensuring that everyone within the division works as a team. The four team members — also including Lauren Scarfo, Christopher Peltszyn, and Sasha Gomez — meet monthly to discuss where improvements can be made. “If we’re not working as a team, we can’t function properly,” she said. “We’re needed, and that’s my thing. To keep things flowing.”

### Dan Neczepir

You might say that Dan Neczepir is the Clifton boy-next-door. A lifelong resident, he married the girl across the street — Anne Salerno (CHS 1975). Neczepir, 70, attended School 16, WWMS, and graduated CHS in 1972.

Neczepir has also served on the Clifton Board of Health for 16 years. When he was approached initially by former Councilman Frank Fusco, he asked if Neczepir would be interested in serving as a commissioner. Neczepir agreed and, for the past decade, sits as the Board’s president.

The seven-member Board reorganizes with leadership nominations each January. Neczepir and Vice President Jane Scarfo will remain in their roles for at least another year. Mayor Ray Grabowski is the liaison.

“We’re an advisory board,” Neczepir explained. “John Biegel, Jennifer Kidd, and Danielle Jones come and attend meetings with us and we have an agenda. They tell us about what is going on with any old, unfinished, and new business. We review everything the Health Department does.”

If the Board has a recommendation for something that the CHD should explore or increase awareness about, it’s taken under advisement and Neczepir added is generally pursued by Biegel and the CHD.

The biggest development was the accreditation process, which the Board helped to happen. But day-to-day work is just as important when it comes to having restaurants appear before them after receiving health code violations.

“There was a particular food establishment that appeared before us a couple of times,” said Neczepir, “and they are now Satisfactory and may be eligible for a Cream of the Crop Award that we do every few years for a restaurant with three consecutive Satisfactory health reports.”

Recipients are Risk Type 3 Food Establishments, estab-



*Keeping things juggling and landing accurately are Clifton Health’s admin team: Sasha Gomez, Victoria Kaufman, Lauren (Scarfo) Campolattaro, Christopher Peltszyn.*

lishments with an extensive menu involving cooking, cooling, and reheating at least three or more potentially hazardous foods. Past recipients included Alexis Steakhouse & Tavern, Valley Regency, and Noches De Colombia.

Board of Health meetings are once per month from January to June, with July and August off, before returning in September. Meetings are open to the public and are every second Tuesday from 6:30-8 pm in the CHD.

Now happily retired, Neczepir spent his 33-year career in the pharmaceutical industry. He was an HIV specialist for 18 years, then worked in oncology for about six years. The pandemic, he said, was a time when he could apply some of his knowledge to the decisions that the Board needed to make alongside the Health Department.

“I really believe that our health department is one of the best around,” said Neczepir. “I say that, because I work with them and have been out on calls with inspectors.”

He’s seen firsthand the difference made by the CHD at public events and at the Code Blue Center, 1232 Main Ave., since March of 2023. The warming center was a state-mandated response to the rise in Clifton’s unhoused population, and it also provides additional resources. “The people in our health department are all very hardworking, conscientious people,” said Neczepir. “They really care about the people, and even the animals, in our city.”

*The Club’s “Great Futures Gala” is April 3 at the Valley Regency and will honor Clifton’s Health Department as well as the Fette family of Fette Auto Group. Tickets are \$100 with beer and wine included, plus a cash bar. RSVP by March 21. Register online at [bgcciflton.org/great-futures-gala-2](http://bgcciflton.org/great-futures-gala-2) or email Maureen Cameron at [mcameron@bgcciflton.org](mailto:mcameron@bgcciflton.org) or call her at 973-773-0966 ext. 144.*



# Girls Night Out

By Rick Artis

Director: Linda Wielkottz  
Producer: Mark Peterson

Feb. 15, 16, 21,  
22, 23, 28  
March 1, 2

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# Where Has Campfire Coffee “Be-an?”



*By Ariana Puzzo*

**Approaching the corner of Main and Piaget Aves.** on some nights, the unmistakable aroma of a wooden fire mixes in the air with scents from White Castle, Master Pizza, and charcoal from the grills at Yasmeen, serving Middle Eastern food.

Campfire Coffee Roasting, 1308 Main Ave., isn't the place for a cup of coffee. But co-owners Scott and Sharon Wiggins understand ethical sourcing and sustainable roasting. The couple have lived in our city for almost 17 years and their son Avery, 13, is a student at WWMS.

The new business is one of the few roasters using wood fire instead of gas. It's a brand new endeavor for the couple, whose day jobs are as stagehands on Broadway.

As a union member, Scott has had a hand in the the special effects for shows like “& Juliet”, “Once Upon a Matress”, and he spent the end of last year loading for “Redwood the Musical”, starring Idina Menzel and open for previews at the Nederlander Theatre.

Scott has also contributed toward the special effects for the New York Giants when they score touchdowns and done for the New York Knicks. His other area of expertise is fireworks, which he's done at locations like the Empire State Building and for Macy's 4th of July Fireworks.



But his and Sharon's latest venture is a long-time coming. “This is our first time trying to do something like this,” said Scott, 43.

The couple conceived of the idea around 2018, established the business as an LLC in 2020, and bought the building in February of 2022. They officially started selling their coffee in late July, early August of last year.

Even though they're not selling it by the cup, they're excited to continue roasting and selling the coffee beans. They are also interested in a future possibility of hosting occasional tasting events and seminars.

“The building [in Downtown Clifton] was sort of the right price, the right size, but the location was also





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right,” said Scott. “Having lived here for as long as we have, we really do like the town. We like the idea of being right here and of having a business on Main Ave.”

“There are bus stops nearby, which is great,” he continued. “A coffee shop is something that Downtown Clifton can certainly use.”

## Roasted to Perfection

Scott and Sharon considered the possibility of a second home and workspace in Pennsylvania.

Until the Clifton location, previously a lawyer’s office, came onto their radar at the right time. The process of conceptualizing to actualization wasn’t without its struggles.

“We bought the building and there were lots of trials and hurdles to get through,” said Scott. “It took two years to get to where we are today.”

Scott and Sharon grew up in Medford and Union, respectively, before meeting in college at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. Scott transferred from the Music Education program over to Technical Theater, which is where he met his future wife.

The coffee business wasn’t a long-held dream. It was inspired by a conversation that they had with another couple who they met through Boy Scouts who had lived in Tanzania and returned to Clifton. Scott recalled how they told them that they roasted their own coffee, because there were many coffee farms around them.

After asking if he had tried it before, and he said he hadn’t, they gave Scott some green coffee beans and explained the process.

“I was never a huge coffee drinker to begin with, but I figured, ‘If I roast this, I have to try it,’” he said. “I used a cast iron pan and roasted up the first batch. I was amazed by how amazing some freshly roasted coffee could taste and got hooked.”

The next steps involved buying a small, 1-lb roaster and more coffee beans. As they researched different roasting methods and looked into a wood-fired roaster, they determined it was the route they wanted to take for a business model.

The Wiggins’ eventually found a manufacturer and bought a bigger roaster. “It was built to order over four months and then came from Israel,” said Scott. “It was shipped out right before war started out there.”

## The Decaf Project

The feedback is already positive, but Scott and Sharon



are still eager to expand their reach.

“We started by selling to our friends and co-workers ... and everyone says it’s some of the best coffee that they have ever tasted,” said Scott. “It’s not bitter whatsoever. They love the flavors.”

The dark roast that they offer is a “big favorite” and offers “a lot more flavor than people expect.” Scott went on to say it doesn’t possess a smokey flavor like you might expect; it is just a richer flavor that’s courtesy of the wood fire.

Sharon is a big fan of the 12oz Bonfire Blend (dark roast) and Scott leans toward 12oz Campfire Blend (medium roast); both from Brazil. They also sell a 12oz Kenya AB Top, which is a medium dark roast. The Kenyan coffee is a rotating option that they will sell until it runs out, just like they did with their sold-out Tanzanian dark and medium roasts.

“The medium dark roast seems to be everyone’s favorite at the moment,” said Scott.

These items have also gotten more attention thanks to Campfire Coffee’s participation in The Decaf Project. The project, created by English barista and YouTuber James Hoffmann, was a way for 50 roasters around the world to showcase how individual decaffeination methods can transform the same Colombian coffee.

“We bought four, 70-kilo bags of coffee to roast and created kits with one of each type,” said Scott. “When it goes out to people, they can taste how different processes affect the same type of bean.”

Their ability to participate in the project led to Campfire Coffee selling 877 kits, which translated to roasting about 600 lbs of coffee. Hoffmann announced The Decaf Project on a Wednesday in mid-November. Campfire Coffee sold out the following Saturday morning, which meant the team of two needed to get to work.

“It was amazing seeing all of these orders coming in. I’m pretty sure, if not all, most roasters in the country are completely sold out,” said Scott in

early December. “All in roughly the same time frame.” They shipped their kits all over the country, with the exception of Alaska, and fulfilled orders to Puerto Rico and Panama.

“A lot of people from New Jersey and Pennsylvania found us,” he said, “but people all over the country found us as well.”

Considering they run the business on the side during nights and weekends, the project called for long nights and late hours of roasting.

“It was quite the undertaking and a little overwhelming,” said Scott. “But it turned out to be a giant test and, once it came through, we couldn’t believe we got all this coffee out the door.”

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Cliftonmagazine.com • February 2025 59



## CLIFTON ARTS

On Feb. 1, Peter Marcalus gave a presentation about his newly installed sculpture “American Pieta” at the Clifton Arts Center. A two-sided, free standing, sculpted relief, “American Pieta” was created in 2023 as a commentary on gun violence and the sadness it creates.

“Pieta” measures 68” by 2” by 38” and is constructed from Pal Tiya to withstand outdoor elements. Pieta, an Italian word, translates to pity, mercy or compassion.

Marcalus’ contribution to the CAC’s Sculpture Garden makes it his fourth outdoor sculpture on public display. More of his art can be viewed at [pamarcalus.wixsite.com/sculpture](http://pamarcalus.wixsite.com/sculpture).

“I’ve been drawing, painting, carving, and sculpting almost all my life,” said Marcalus. “Figurative art has always been my focus.”

Marcalus has created art for over 50 years and is a member of the Cooperstown Art Association, the Ridgewood Art Institute, and a board member of the Arts In Oakland.

**Girls Night Out** presented by Theater League of Clifton at Mario’s Restaurant opens with four women on their way to the theater. They stop for dinner at an Italian restaurant, owned by the ex-husband of one of them.

Sometime between the salad and entrée, the ex-husband ends up dead. And each woman has a reason to wish his demise. The murderer will be revealed by the unwinding plot.

Performances are Feb. 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 28 and March 1 and 2. Friday and Saturday shows start at 8 pm; Sunday matinees begin at 4. Info at [theaterleagueofclifton.com](http://theaterleagueofclifton.com).



*American Pieta by Peter Marcalus at the Clifton Arts Center.*



*“Girls Night Out” cast members, seated: from left Janice-Lynn and Rebecca Mazumdar. Standing: Melinda DelPizzo, director Linda Wielkotz, Carl Bergmanson and Maria Russell. The Theater League of Clifton’s dinner/theater show will open Feb. 15 at Mario’s Restaurant. Tickets are \$65 and include buffet, coffee, tea and desert. Call 973-928-7668.*



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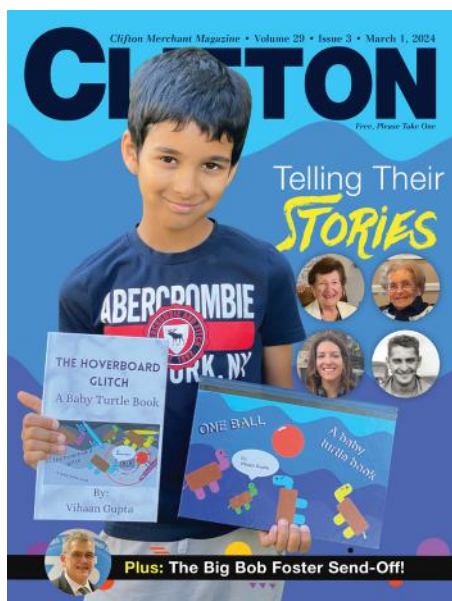
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**2025 marks a milestone for the Clifton Arts Center** as it celebrates its 25th anniversary. The Arts Center is featuring art exhibits, art classes, and fundraisers to reinforce its mission of creating an interactive environment where the arts can flourish and bring communities together for the common good. The current “Reach for the Stars” exhibit, runs through Feb. 22 and features 10 independent artists. The gallery is open from 1-4 pm on Wednesdays through Saturdays. Contact the Arts Center at 973-472-5499. Planning for visual exhibits for the years 2025 to 2030 is now underway. Visual artists and art groups are encouraged to help enliven the CAC’s exhibition space by showcasing their work. The CAC, on the city hall campus, offers 1,800 sq-ft of modern, well-lit, and HVAC gallery exhibit space at 900 Clifton Ave. Proposals are welcome by individual and group artists on a rolling basis.

**School 2 fourth grader Vihaan Gupta** took first place in the 29th Annual Passaic County Poster Calendar Contest. The record-breaking year saw over 975 poster submissions from fourth graders, who designed posters to reflect Passaic County’s great history, local interest, recreational sites, and cultural diversity. Gupta, who was featured in Clifton Merchant’s March 2024 edition, is the author of *One Ball: A Baby Turtle Book* and *The Hoverboard Glitch: A Baby Turtle Book*. Mother Megha published the books respectively on April 30 and July 30, 2023. Gupta’s poster, for January, is the only poster submission that won in Clifton. Honorable mentions went to: Xavien Berberabe (School 3), Ola Alhamayel (School 5), Amaya Galia (School 8), Tiyan Baker (School 9), Elizabeth Mathews (School 11), and Zamirah Alvarez (School 15). The posters will be displayed in civic offices and public buildings in Passaic County. You can also see a version of it online at [passaiccountyclerk.org](http://passaiccountyclerk.org).



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Cannot be combined with other drinks and lunch. Delivery fee not included





**Take what you need, and leave what you can.** That is the motto of the Clifton Little Free Pantry Program that came to our city a few months ago, showcasing just how much Cliftonites continue to care for their neighbors.

Non-perishable food location sites are at Jubilee Park on Clifton Ave. and behind the Senior Barn at City Hall, where there is also a pet food pantry. Restockers request that visitors take no more than three items and only take what they need to eat for a day.

St. Peter's Haven, 380 Clifton Ave., and The Food Brigade's Community Food Security Center of Passaic County, 236 Colfax Ave., are larger food insecurity resources.

Clifton's Free Little Pantries offer items for human or pet consumption. The food is safe from the weather. For pet resources, call Clifton Animal Shelter at 973-470-5936 or the Passaic County S.P.C.A. at 973-773-0459.

Free Little Pantries is a 401(c)3 that tackles food insecurity. For more info, visit Pantries Clifton on Facebook or email [CliftonLittleFreePantries@gmail.com](mailto:CliftonLittleFreePantries@gmail.com).



*In our Dec. magazine we mistakenly identified a photo regarding a Paramus Catholic High School student. Above is Sarai Bayon-Tlamintzi, a Clifton resident and PC senior.*

**Echo Unity Series presents "Clifton Behind the Scenes"** to learn about the city's government for free in an up-close, inclusive environment. Residents are invited to tour city hall, learn more about how the city departments operate and what they offer, plus the chance to explore the city's grounds and landmarks. Hosted by Councilwoman Rosemary Pino, upcoming dates are March 26, April 10, May 15, June 12, Sept. 9, Oct. 15, Nov. 13, and Dec. 11. English and Spanish sessions are 5:30-7 pm and 7-8:30 pm, respectively. Visit [@rosiepino04](https://www.instagram.com/rosiepino04) on Instagram to RSVP.

**Troop 21 Boy Scout Pancake Breakfast** is Feb. 16 in the St. Philip the Apostle Auditorium, 797 Valley Rd. Breakfast is from 8 am to noon (last seating is 11:30 am). Adults: \$18, seniors: \$15, ages 4-11: \$10. Kids under 4 eat free with paying adult. Tickets sold at the door. Pancakes, sausage, eggs, juice, and coffee are the menu. For info on the pancake breakfast or to learn about joining Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts, email: [troop21clifton@gmail.com](mailto:troop21clifton@gmail.com).

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**Clifton Education Foundation's 1st Tricky Tray** is May 30, 6 pm, at the Boys & Girls Club. Ticket details in March. The CEF is a nonprofit volunteer organization and 100% of the event proceeds will fund classroom grants, programming and initiatives in the Clifton Public Schools. Interested in being a sponsor? Gold: \$500, Silver: \$400, Bronze: \$300. Donations are tax deductible. Make checks to Clifton Education Foundation, and mail to P.O. Box 2071, Clifton, NJ 07015. Email Loretta Ahmad for details: at [cliftonef1998@gmail.com](mailto:cliftonef1998@gmail.com).

**Get out and walk:** Power of One Christian Coaching and Outreach Ministries walkers meet at Richardson Scale Park, 680 Van Houten Ave. Mondays and Wednesdays at 8 am for an hour walk. For info: <https://powerofoneccom.org>.

**Birch Trees in Winter** is the theme of an art class for first to sixth graders, on Feb. 8 from 12:30-2:30 pm. Arts Center Co-Chair and former Clifton District Arts Supervisor and Art Teacher MaryAnn Baskinger will instruct. Cost: \$22 for residents and \$25 for others. Call the Arts Center to register at 973-472-5499 or find out more at [cliftonrec.com](http://cliftonrec.com).

**The "Barefoot in the Park" fundraiser** is a joint production by Kismet Performing Arts Theatre and the Arts Center. Show dates are March 7, 8, 9 & 14, 15, 16. Tickets on-sale soon. Details on [kismetperformingartists theatre.wordpress.com](http://kismetperformingartists theatre.wordpress.com). Kismet Performing Artists Theatre develops new theatrical creations and celebrates established works. Aspiring performers and seasoned professionals all gain a platform to experience a broader view of the world through theatre that entertains, educates, and enriches audiences.

**Passaic County 200 Club's** membership event is Feb. 20, 6 pm, at The Barnyard, Totowa. There are free appetizers, a cash bar and plenty of networking. RSVP by Feb. 13 by emailing [pc200club@aol.com](mailto:pc200club@aol.com). The primary mission of the group is that within 48 hours of the death of a police officer, firefighter or EMS professional, the 200 Club presents a \$15,000 check to the family of the deceased to help them get through the difficult times that accompany such a loss. Questions? Want to join? Visit [pc200club.org](http://pc200club.org) for details.



## City of Clifton

### 2025 Dog License Registration

You may now register your dogs online at:  
<https://pets.munindex.info/clifton-nj-1602>

Residents may also obtain their dog license by applying in person at:  
**Clifton Health Department,**  
**900 Clifton Ave., 2nd floor,**  
**Clifton, NJ 07013,**  
**Monday through Friday, 8:15am to 4:15pm**  
or by mailing in the application.

All dogs, 7 months of age or older that live within the City of Clifton are **REQUIRED** to be licensed as per City Ordinance 203-2.

	1-Year License	3-Year License
Spay/Neuter	\$17.00	\$48.00
Non Spay/Neuter	\$21.00	\$60.00

*License Fees are based on if your dog is Spayed/Neutered and has valid proof of a rabies vaccination, per state guidelines.*

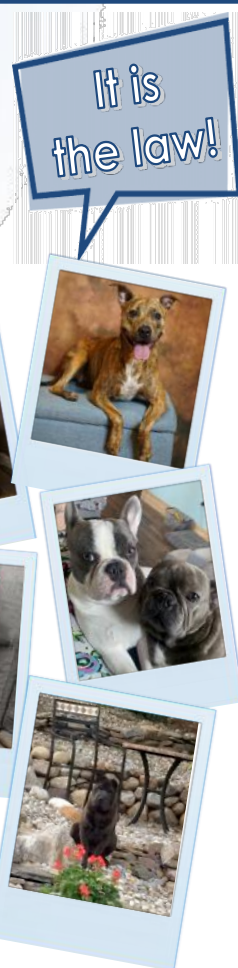
**You may also stop by our City of Clifton Satellite Office located at 207 Parker Avenue, Clifton, NJ 07011:**

- February 13, 2025 from 2:00pm to 4:00pm
- February 27, 2025 from 2:00pm to 4:00pm

#### Benefits of Licensing Your Dog!

- Licensing will ensure that dogs are vaccinated against rabies, which is a terrible disease that can be fatal.
- A dog's license is a way to ensure your dog gets home safely if they get lost. The license tag is an easy way for authorities to identify and contact their owner.
- Licensing fees are significantly less than not having a license.
- Dog license money stays in your community to help rabies clinic funding and Animal Control Services.

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If community starts at ShopRite and Cuellar Family Markets, then Guillermo Garcia is without a doubt the beating heart of that organization.

Garcia, the Executive Director of the Paulison Ave. ShopRite, ShopRite Wines & Spirits and Crunch Fitness, keeps it all running smoothly and furthers the Cuellar Family's mission of staying involved and giving back in the community it serves.

That's why the Passaic Optimist Club will honor him as "Person of the Year" at The Brownstone on Feb. 7. Tickets are \$150 and the scholarship dinner fundraiser and tricky tray begins at 7 pm.



Positive, upbeat and always there to help, Garcia makes good things happen. He is the point person at the store... the guy that connect all the dots.

Garcia has arranged for Junior Optimists to bag groceries and solicit funds in the store. Cuellar Markets hires people with special needs and is a sponsor of the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton.

A US Army veteran, Garcia also stays connected to his roots as he was the Peruvian Parade Grand Marshal in 2021.

For tickets, call Passaic Optimist Daniel Sheridan at 973-715-6693. Need more info? Visit [passaicoptimistfoundation.org](http://passaicoptimistfoundation.org).

The United Way of Passaic County offers a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program of free tax preparation services to low- and moderate-income individuals at the Clifton Senior Center on the city hall campus.

Volunteers help with federal and state taxes, and filling out claims to receive tax credits and property tax reimbursement. Visitors will also get help in navigating health insurance and other state assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, and School Meals. Go to [unitedwaypassaic.org](http://unitedwaypassaic.org).

Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) is a club for CHS students considering a career in the health-care field. Learn entry-level CPR and how to check vital signs of the heart, lungs, and bowels. Students will handle blood pressure cuffs and stethoscopes and at meetings, members practice these skills with trained advisors. To test their clinical knowledge of all the skills taught, students engage in a competitive game of Medical Jeopardy! HOSA meets Feb. 24 after school in the CHS Media Center.



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Playing to a full gym of fans at CHS, the Christopher Columbus and Woodrow Wilson middle schools basketball teams played its annual cross town competition in a program that emphasized school spirit and Mustang pride. WWMS Girls starting five from left: Deanna Alnatur, Gabriella Fusco, Mia McIninch, Madison Carbora, Sophia Fisher. Starting WWMS boys: Aiden Gomez, Jayden Canello, Robert Pagano, Julius Estrada, Jeremy Hidalgo, Nicholas Contreras, Brennan Vander Horn, Coach Dan Calandrillo.



The CCMS girls: Coach Tim Jacobus, Dareen Jaffal, Montserrat Hernandez Gonzalez, Juliet Georges, Sabreen Ramadan. Kneeling: Kendra Soriano Baez, Janeilys Gomez, Abbey Carless, Victoria Khawan Kalousie, missing is Michaela Rojas. The CCMS boys starting five: Romeo Marmelejos, Coach Naseer Walker, Jehad Ali, Enrique Benitez, Chase Corbin, Ronald Lopez,

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By Tom Szieber

# MUSTANG

SPORTS

## CLIFTON BOYS TRACK *Brings Home The Bling*

With its rich history, Clifton track isn't used to being an underdog. But this season's indoor squad has embraced that role and used it to its advantage.

The Mustangs pulled off a shocker, of sorts, on Jan. 20, riding several exceptional performances to a Passaic County championship at Ocean Breeze Athletics Center on Staten Island. Their 81 team points were 15 and 2/3 better than second-place Passaic County Tech, who was denied a third consecutive crown.

"Even I was thinking, OK, we are battling for second, but then as the meet was going on, we kept track and we were only down by about five points," said Clifton head coach Kareem West. "[With the win], I think a lot of people are starting to pay attention [to us]. They are starting to notice."

Not every contribution to Clifton's victory was unexpected, though. Senior Lamarr Olive's first-place finishes in the 1,600 (with a time of 4:33.87) and 3,200 (10:16.59) were easy to forecast, as was the winning performance by Volodymyr Kozliuk, who recorded a 6'4" high jump.

It was another big day for the junior, who, on Jan. 11, continued his outstanding 2024-25 campaign by winning the Garfield High School Shot Put/High Jump Invitational #3 with a 6'2" leap. It gave Kozliuk a clean sweep in Garfield's series of three competitions this winter.

It was Wander Dilone, however, who may have been the name on spectators' minds when all was said and done near

the Verrazano. The junior took home the 55m title with a time of 6.78 and also finished second in the high jump.

"Wander was on the team last year, but he also plays lacrosse," West said. "I have known him for years and he has a tendency to walk on his toes. He is light [on his feet] like a gazelle. He has just been progressively getting better and counties was the culmination. Everyone else knew he was that good, but I think he figured it out at counties. It was his coming out party."

Senior Nathaniel Phillip had a big day, as well, finishing second in the 55 and third in both the long jump and triple jump. The championship was Clifton's first in three years and fifth all-time. The Mustang girls took fourth.

### Boys Wrestling has month of accomplishment

It took Clifton boys wrestling some time to find its groove, but the Mustangs seem to be turning head coach Dan Geleta's preseason prophecy into reality. After an up-and-down start that put them at 4-4, Clifton has surged as of late, bringing them into February feeling good.

Most notably, in Jan. 25's Passaic County Wrestling Tournament at West Milford, 165-pound senior Joe Geleta—the #2 seed in his bracket—took home his second county title, earning a 2-0 decision over top-seeded Chad McConnell, a sophomore from Pompton Lakes.

Seniors Nick Doktor and Issac Cazimoski, the top seeds in the 190- and 285-pound brackets, respectively, each fin-



ished in second place, while sophomore Jarrett Rodriguez (120 pounds) and junior Joe Dumeng (175) each took third.

Wayne Valley won the team competition, with the Mustangs ending the day in fifth place. Geleta and Doktor also reached career milestones during the month of January.

On Jan. 10, the latter recorded his 100th victory via 22-second fall over junior Dan Truszkowski in his team's 50-25 home win over Ridgewood. A day later, the former did the same, defeating Red Bank junior Jason Huss by 10-2 major decision in a tri-match at Old Bridge.

As a team, victories over Nutley, Bloomfield, Paterson Kennedy, Passaic, Paterson Eastside, Cliffside Park/Ridgefield and Union City gave the Mustangs an 11-5 record heading into a Jan. 31 matchup with Hasbrouck Heights that did not make press.

### Girls Wrestling gets into win column

The first-year Clifton girls wrestling team made some history on Jan. 15, defeating Nutley on the road, 33-18, to earn its first-ever dual match win. It lost at home to Cliff-



*Joe Geletta and Nick Doktor.*

side Park/Ridgefield, 36-28, one week later, though that was largely due to forfeits, as the Mustangs won five of seven individual bouts where each team sent out a wrestler.

Several Mustangs have impressed in the program's inaugural season, namely junior 126-pounder Ruth Lara, who sat at 7-4 as of Jan. 25.

### Ice Hockey comes back to earth

Clifton United's January was more trying than its December. The three-school co-op (with Cedar Grove and Passaic Valley) has struggled in the new year, going just 1-5 following a 6-1 opening month. The Mustangs lost their opening round game of the Passaic County Tournament to Wayne Hills, 3-1, though their offense remains potent, as shown by a five-goal performance against Montclair on Jan. 24 (they lost to the Mounties, 6-5).

Junior forward Ryan Montana of Cedar Grove is the team's top point scorer with 31 as of Jan. 25. Junior forward Trevor Rascher of Clifton leads the squad with 15 assists as of that same date.

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# Mustangs of the Month



*Nathan Smith, Antonina Kiszkiel, Adner Encarnacion, Zuri Gonzalez.*

## Here are the **Mustangs of the Month** for February 2025.

These four students, one from each grade, were selected by the vice principals at CHS, to be spotlighted for their personal achievements and school-wide contributions.

### **Nathan Smith – Freshman**

Nothing can slow down Nathan Smith. Not as a three-sport Mustang athlete and certainly not as a dedicated student. Smith (CHS 2028) enjoys History the most at CHS.

“Because my family travels a lot, I am able to relate and understand on a deeper level many of the things we’ve studied,” he said. “Greece, Italy, Iceland, England, Africa, and Cuba are just some of the places I’ve visited and learned about.”

The freshman has attended Clifton Public Schools since Kindergarten. It’s for that reason why he cannot choose just one favorite teacher.

“I have always had inspiring teachers and am grateful for all of the insightful lessons they have imparted to me,” said Smith.

In the fall and winter, Smith ran Cross Country and Indoor Track with older sister Alexis (CHS 2026). He’ll join older brother Benjamin (CHS 2026) in spring on the Lacrosse team. His other extracurriculars include Mustang Ambassadors, Interact Club, and Robotics.

He’s also interested in joining the Early College program, like Alexis did, to get a head start on his higher education. “I am taking advantage of all that CHS offers,” he said. “Because I can successfully manage my time, I have maintained high grades while being a part of many extracurricular activities.”

### **Antonina Kiszkiel – Sophomore**

Antonina Kiszkiel knows there’ll always be a voice in the crowd cheering her on a little bit louder.

“The person who inspires me the most is my mom,” she said. “She is hardworking and has made so many sacrifices for me and my brother. She is also my biggest cheerleader.”

Kiszkiel (CHS 2027) swims with the Mustangs and is a team member of the Clifton Seahawks, the traveling swim team of the Boys & Girls Club.

While on dry land, Kiszkiel lays down the law on the high school’s Mock Trial team. Her future plans will include taking advantage of the academic programs that CHS offers its students.

Her favorite school subject is History.

“I love to learn about the choices that people have made in the past and how those decisions impact my everyday life,” she said.

Teachers who have influenced Kiszkiel’s life include WWMS Social Studies teacher Mr. Erik Oxenbridge and WWMS Basic Skills Instruction teacher Ms. AnnMarie Sheridan. Two of her CHS teachers — in Social Studies and Math, respectively — stand out for her as well.

“Mr. John O’Reilly has shown me how important it is to learn about the world around me,” said Kiszkiel. “Mr. Rafat Ewais is not only an amazing teacher, but he also brightens my day with his jokes.”



### Adner Encarnacion— Junior

Just call him Mr. Worldwide. Adner Encarnacion, that is. Encarnacion (CHS 2026) has big plans for his future and is putting the rest of us on notice.

“I would most definitely want to finish college and be the first in my family to do so,” he said. “My aspirations [are] to be a very successful company owner and have a global business.”

World Language teacher Ms. Norma Stagg is his most influential figure over the past two years. Encarnacion credited her as pushing him to be successful and to “have a better understanding about the world.”

“She is also like a mother to me,” Encarnacion continued. “Ms. Stagg has brightened me to how important it is to work really hard to get to the current point in life.”

Encarnacion’s favorite school subject is Spanish. One major hurdle at CHS was adapting to new teaching methods.

“Having to adapt to teachers that sometimes aren’t clear like the ones that I had before [can be difficult],” he said.

Rather than pick one person as his greatest inspiration, Encarnacion admires the successful people around him. He gains the most by learning how they each achieved their successes. Outside of the classroom, he plays Baseball and is in the Teacher Assistance Program.

### Zuri Gonzalez – Senior

Zuri Gonzalez’s desire to learn about the past may be good news for our country’s future.

The senior is interested in majoring in Political Science when she attends college this autumn, with a special interest in foreign policy.

“By learning about the past, [we] can see how people lived, what they experienced, and how events shaped the present,” said Gonzalez (CHS 2025). “History feels like connecting the dots between past and present. Giving a deeper meaning to everyday life.”

“It’s a way of discovering who we are and why things are the way they are,” she added. “History also tells the stories of people, their struggles, victories, and mistakes — making it easy to find lessons that can guide us in the future.”

There are specific people who guide Gonzalez. One is Social Studies teacher Christopher Henry, whom she credited as opening her eyes as a “first-generation student” to the resources around her. Gonzalez is also grateful to her mother, who taught her to never give up and always ask questions. “My mother is one of the most inspirational people I know,” she said. “As a cancer survivor, she faced tremendous challenges but always found a way to support us, all while wearing a smile on her face.”



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# Birthdays & Celebrations - February 2025

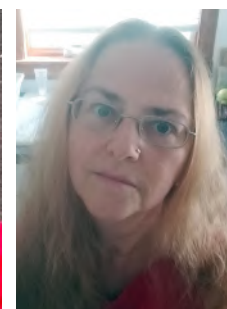
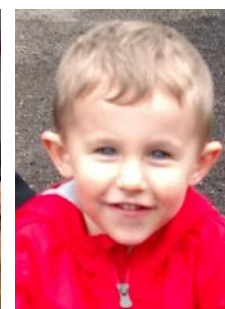
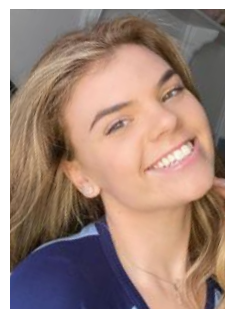
## Happy Birthday to....

Send dates & names .... tomhawrylkosr@gmail.com



**Alexa Manzueta** turns 11 on Feb 12! **Jayden Wilkins** turns 15 on Feb. 8. **Sister Donna Hawrylko** celebrates Feb. 25. **Ernie Rodrigues** turned 49 on Jan. 14. **Ashley Rose Montague** is 19 on Feb. 6. **Maxine Presto** turns 37 on Feb. 29. **The Lux siblings**—**Eric** turns 29 on Feb. 3 and **Renee** will be 23—on Feb. 14. It's 7-0 for **Orest Luzniak** on Feb.14.

Alison Degen.....2/1  
 Robyn Feldman ..... 2/1  
 Jack Houston ..... 2/1  
 Kristin Reilly ..... 2/1  
 Mary Jane Varga..... 2/1  
 Emil Soltis, Jr ..... 2/2  
 Joseph Fierro ..... 2/3  
 Dwayne Williams..... 2/3  
 Catherine Grace Burns..... 2/4  
 Diane Di Pietro ..... 2/4  
 John Nittolo ..... 2/5  
 Richie Szepietowski ..... 2/5  
 Courtney Carlson..... 2/6  
 Don Knapp ..... 2/6  
 Joseph DeSomma ..... 2/6  
 Ashley Rose Montague ..... 2/6  
 Robert D'Alessio ..... 2/7  
 Nicole Tahan..... 2/7  
 Tara Fueshko..... 2/8  
 Natalie Pych..... 2/8  
 Jamie Carr ..... 2/9  
 Craig Grieco ..... 2/9  
 Steven Becker..... 2/10  
 Bryan Kelly ..... 2/10  
 Matthew Seitz ..... 2/10  
 Valentine Le Ster..... 2/11  
 Sarah Mikolajczyk..... 2/11  
 Nick Zecchino ..... 2/11



**Christena (Ludvik) Peters**, CHS 1973, hits the big 7-0 on Feb. 18.. Happy 25th Birthday, **Alison Moran** on Feb. 10. **Bodhi Latham** turns 6 on Feb. 20. **Jo Ann Bellini** celebrates her 64th on Feb 22.



**Brinda Chauhan** celebrates a birthday on Feb. 20. **Chris Voit** turns 17 on Feb. 1. **Gianna Louise** turns 3 on Feb. 1. **Frank Kozak** sends Feb. 26 birthday wishes to **Claudia Azula**. **James Payton Fogle-Hrina** turns 1 on Feb. 1. Parents are **Steven Hrina** and **Sharian Fogle**.

Joseph Hilla ..... 2/12  
 Anthony Musleh ..... 2/12  
 Dolores Rando ..... 2/12  
 Ixiana Westfield ..... 2/12  
 John Hodorovych..... 2/13

Amin Zamlout ..... 2/13  
 Mark Gallo..... 2/14  
 Jeanette Ann Saia ..... 2/14  
 Orest Luzniak ..... 2/14  
 Christine Canavan ..... 2/15



**Aria Federle** turns 14  
on Feb. 15.

Chickie Curtis .....	2/15
Ashley Brandecker.....	2/17
David Fazio .....	2/17
Leann Perez .....	2/17
Lorraine Rothe .....	2/17
Sam Citero.....	2/18
Michael Del Re .....	2/18
Richie Bandurski.....	2/19
Stephanie (Peterson)Yoda.....	2/19
Michael Papa.....	2/20
Robert Mosciszko .....	2/21
Taylor Jesch .....	2/22
Diana Murphy.....	2/22
John T. Saccoman .....	2/22
Robert Adamo.....	2/24
Eileen Feldman.....	2/24
Kimberly Mistretta.....	2/24
Robert Krupinski.....	2/25
Kimberly Gasior.....	2/26
Jayke Williams .....	2/26
Joseph J. Schmidt.....	2/27
Brittany Helwig .....	2/27
Joyce Penaranda .....	2/27
Brittany Pinter .....	2/27
Lauren Ricca .....	2/27
Charlie Galluzzo .....	2/28
Mark Zecchino.....	2/28



Standing from left back: Alex, Junior & John  
Standing from left front: Mondo & Yahia

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## Birthdays & Celebrations - January 2025

Due to an editing error we missed the following birthdays...



**Sister Yosephata Litvenczuk**, MSMG, turned 90 on Jan. 15. Belated greetings to **Michael Hrina**, '01 CHS Grad and lifelong resident who turned 42 on Dec.16. Time to smile! **Makayla Rodriguez** is 13 on Jan. 24. Birthday greetings to **Barbara Bivaletz** (Jan. 5) and hubby **Steve** (Jan. 9) who both celebrate 70!

Jamie Mikolajczyk ..... 1/24  
Anna Redling..... 1/24  
Larissa Unis..... 1/24  
Robert Duffy ..... 1/25  
Ashley Gagnon..... 1/25  
Debbi Koch..... 1/26  
Michelle Nahass..... 1/26

Karen Rice ..... 1/26  
Michael Bandurski..... 1/27  
Gianna Caramucci..... 1/27  
Nicholas Grippo..... 1/27  
Scott Crawford..... 1/28  
Patrick Ferrara III..... 1/28  
Robert C. Henn ..... 1/28

Stephanie Smith ..... 1/28  
Alexis Camp..... 1/30  
Donna Chipura ..... 1/30  
Laura Kuruc..... 1/30  
Sean Sabo..... 1/30  
Evangeline Joy Kohler ..... 1/31  
Jessica Sonn ..... 1/31



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# April Fools Green Team

## Brownie Bake-Off for LLS

**Realtor Joseph Siano** likes to help others — and that's no joke. That's why he picked April Fools Day for a brownie bake-off and karaoke party with proceeds to benefit the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society—serious details at [lls.org](http://lls.org).

To become Clifton's top brownie, bake your best and show up on April 1 at Uno Pizzeria & Grill, Siano by 5:30 with brownies, your recipe and some friends.

Bring a \$10 entry fee (or more for brownie points) made to LLS. Sweet-toothed judges will make their selection at 6:30 pm and crown the best Clifton brownie. Beyond the brownies, there will be karaoke and munchies. Can't make the party? Visit from 11 am on April 1, mention Siano and LLS, and 25% of your bill will be donated to the cause.

Siano is the co-owner of JK Realty and a Board of Education commissioner. He was nominated by Joe Cupoli for the 2025 "LLS Visionaries of the Year." LLS strives to find cures for blood cancers and assist patients and families.

Siano's Green Team goal is to raise \$100,000 between March 26 to June 4, for LLS' long-standing goal: A world without blood cancers. Exceeding \$50,000 by June 4 will connect the team's name to an LLS-funded research portfolio to honor their efforts. To help Siano reach his goal or ask any questions, call 973-563-1449 or mail checks made to LLS to JK Realty, 270 Colfax Ave., Clifton, NJ 07013.



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# Tom's 2<sup>nd</sup> Column

In the early days of the newspaper trade -30- was placed at the bottom of a news article to indicate to typesetters and editors that they have reached the end of the typewritten story.

But in an era of computers, smart phones and new ways to report news, that mark went by the way of typesetters, smoky newsrooms, grouchy editors and early deadlines.

So today in 2025, in the world of Clifton Magazine and Tomahawk Promotions, headquartered here in lovely Downtown Clifton, -30- means we are taking a third lap. This year, this colorful and well-written magazine of Clifton storytelling will mark 30 years of serving our hometown.

By the numbers, since we launched in October, 1995, we have published 623 editions. Add to that portfolio 19 years of the Map of Clifton, 22 years of the Clifton Fire Safety Coloring Book and three editions of Clifton Teen, which we published in 1999 and 2000. That is a lot of storytelling.

And guess what? We're not calling it quits.

Over the three decades of Telling Clifton's Story, I've observed and reported, kow-towed and followed the crowd, and even led a revolution. I won battles, moved public opinion (remember No More Housing?) and did what I think is a lot of positive and good stuff.

Over that time, I also lost a few battles, got spanked, and became disillusioned with government.

But a few years ago, I got over that, too.

In an era whence (got to use that crazy old word) venerable standards like The Star Ledger have sadly stopped printing a daily newspaper, we are still chopping down trees (actually we print on recycled newsprint) and using soy-based ink. Pulled together with my creative team, we publish colorful stories about Clifton people like you, me and our neighbors.

What to expect going forward? More of the same! Thanks to my team, Ken Peterson in graphics, Ariana Puzzo in editorial, Irene Kulyk keeping the bills paid, and Frank Burke in distribution, all I do is show up with a camera five or six days a week.

My job is easy. Every month I try and think up interesting themes for my team. They make it come to life and bring it to the printed page. My other task is to sell our valued business community advertising which is the way we pay all the bills.

**So -30- is a milestone, not a time to stop.** God blessed me in 1995 when I started this magazine. Today He gives me the smarts to keep it going. Thanks to support from readers and advertisers, I've got a few dozen more editions left in the Tomahawk tank!

*Editor & Publisher Tom Hawrylko*

**-30-**

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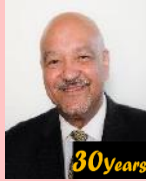
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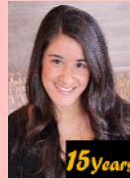
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At Nicholas Real Estate, we pride ourselves on having a team of real estate professionals who are not just skilled but deeply committed to serving our clients. Many of our agents have been with us for years, building trust and delivering exceptional results.  
The most important thing for our clients.

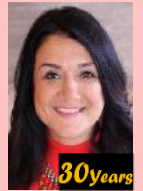
**"Fill a House with Love and it becomes a Home"**  
**Happy Valentine's Day!**

### **THINKING OF SELLING OR BUYING IN 2025?**

**Let our Nicholas Family help your Family  
because you deserve the best!**

### **NOT READY YET BUT THINKING?**

**Let us help you prepare a strategy  
for when you are.**



**Sophia Constandinou**  
Sales Associate



**Alberto Mesones Jr.**  
Sales Associate



**Gladys Mesones**  
Sales Associate



**Micah Francis**  
Sales Associate



**Sheila Esdaile**  
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**Wendell Maki**  
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**Juana Torres**  
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**Bobby Persaud**  
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**Angelica Saenz**  
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**Maribel Feliz**  
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**Raquel Familia**  
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**Denny Cruz**  
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**Nina Robayo**  
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