

Clifton Merchant Magazine • Volume 31 • Issue 1 • January 2, 2026

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Mahmoud Ijbara is a real estate salesperson affiliated with Gild Realty. Gild Realty is a licensed real estate broker and abides by Equal Housing Opportunity laws. \*Source: GSMLS 2025 & NJMLS Ranking based on Individual Agent stats, these properties were listed and sold by various Participants of the NJMLS based on information from the New Jersey Multiple Listing Service, Inc. for the period 1.1.2025-12.31.2025





# Mustang Stakes

## Off to the Race on Nov. 3, 2026



*The Clifton Track, circa 1890, now Main Memorial Park and Clifton Stadium.*

### \$4,000 Purse

Annual pay for 26 meetings, endless flag raisings, chicken dinners, etc.

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Finish first (if 6 other winners follow tradition) earn \$500 Bonus as mayor!

Here is the early line up of candidates for the Nov. 2026 City Council election. Seven seats open. Preview and comments by Tom Hawrylko, Editor & Publisher.



**Tony Latona**—Studious, focused, sometimes more than a little intense, best bet for mayor.

**Ray Grabowski**—Loves everything about being mayor—except meetings.

**William Gibson**—Robin stepping up?

**Rosemary Pino**—Congressional goals.

**Chris D'Amato**—Has he had enough?

**Mary Sadrakula**—50/50 the outrage works and she'll squeak in—or not.

**Joe Kołodziej**—Always the smartest guy in the room; financial chops, smooth speaker.

**Fahim Abedrabbo**—Odds are 99% the 9th place finisher in 2022 won't run.

**Joe Siano**—Sitting this one out.

**Richard Mejia**—Youth on his side?

**Gerard Scorziello**—Tempted.

**Iris Reyes**—PC Dem Party endorsed, first out of the gate and already campaigning.

**Tarek Alnatur**—Passaic County Commissioner seat ambitions or City Council run?

**Tom Whittles**—CASA President not afraid to make noise and challenge status quo.

**Matt Ward**—Will clever talk turn to action? Can he build a team and fund a campaign?

**Assad Mujtaba**—Easy walk to city hall—literally—his medical office is across the street.

**Ed Nunez**—Game for another campaign.

**Alessia Aramo**—Has she found her voice?

### How They Finished

#### 2022 City Council

Ray Grabowski*	9,401
Bill Gibson*	8,191
Lauren Murphy*	7,680
Antonio Latona	7,420
Rosemary Pino*	7,292
Joseph Kolodziej	7,231
Mary Sadrakula*	6,146

Chris D'Amato	5,523
Fahim Abedrabbo	5,508
Alessia Eramo	5,476
Dana Beltran	5,381
Steve Goldberg	4,860
Dominic Iannarella	4,488
Tafari Anderson	4,370
Avraham Eisenman	3,513
Frank Kasper	3,188
Francesco Muoio	2,387

#### 2022 School Board

Antonio Santiago	6,235
Mark Bruniak	6,133
Richard Mejia	5,375
Samantha Bassford	4,654
Joseph Canova*	4,394
Abdallah Matari	3,760
Miriam Weg	3,581
Kurell Law	3,232

\* Incumbent

## Clifton Merchant Magazine

# CLIFTON

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Who would have thought after Corbo Jewelers announced their closing that a like-minded firm would step in and continue the business in Styertowne Shopping Center? Even better? It's still in the family. Kevin V. Brito is carrying forward the Corbo family legacy with the help of Stacey Corbo, daughter of Steve and Ellen, and the fifth generation of Corbo Jewelers. After 94 years and three generations, we bid adieu to DeLuxe Cleaners on Main Ave. Sister company DeLuxe Formal Wear followed in retirement six months later, on July 29. And Fette Auto Group remained steadfast on Rt. 46 with twins Hart and Dan Fette representing the fourth generation of leadership, working with their parents John and Kristin.



On Jan. 8, representatives of Geeland, LLC (above) were at the Zoning Board, presenting re-designed elements of the proposed self-storage facility at 811-813 Route 46. Residents strongly contested at previous meetings, as the proposed facility (on land occupied by the unused Aero-dyne building) abuts City Green, Clifton's community eco-center and farm.

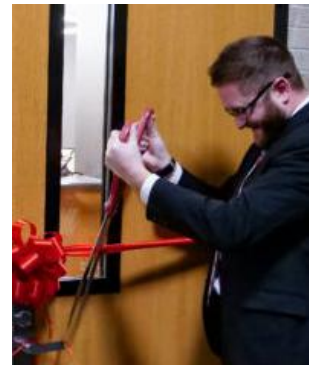


Corrado's retail area between Main and Getty Aves., will shrink in 2025. Architect Gerald Held outlined the proposal to move Planet Fitness, currently situated about 500 ft. away, onto Corrado's property. Space will be made for the fitness center and approximately 10,000 sq-ft. will be added to the building over an existing parking area, offering more storage and warehousing.



The Swiss Army Knife of Clifton Health Kasey Molner was profiled as was Tina Schvejda. Her therapy dog Heidi von Luftiz Weisse, is a regular visitor at NJEDDA—North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency.





*Clifton Cheer became champions at ImpACT Cheer & Dance, on Jan 7. Band Director Bryan Stepneski on Jan 15 cut the ribbon as the Mustangs marked upgrades to its Band, Orchestra, and Choral music rooms, the first since 1963.*



*Embrace Relief's Mobile Farmers' Market visited School 12 on Jan. 18. The visit was a milestone as the group distributed over 20,000 pounds of fresh produce since launching in 2021. Right, retired CCMS teacher and cancer survivor Kim (Carline) Mouzon (with husband Darryl) is a volunteer with Pathways Women's Cancer Teaching Project at Overlook Hospital and shares her story of recovery.*





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**2025 was about the arts.** The Clifton Arts Center celebrated its 25th anniversary with exhibits, classes and fundraisers to further its displays, sculptures and interactive programs for all. And Clifton Merchant couldn't have felt any prouder when the magazine's March 2024 cover star, School 2 fourth grader Vihaan Gupta, took first place in the 29th Annual Passaic County Poster Calendar Contest. Have you smelt the unmistakable aroma of a wooden fire at the corner of Main and Piaget Ave.? That's our neighbors—Campfire Coffee Roasting. But the business wasn't where you'd go for a cup of coffee. You can bring beans home with you!



*Some of our Love Stories...Omar and Rachel (Aponte) Benitez, Richard and Lorraine (Juschitseh) Simakowicz...others below.*



*On the cover: Giuseppe Mannina and Christina Ploch. From left: Jim and Kathy Federle, Richard and Marguerite Shackil, Rafael and Alicia Hasting, Frank Kozak and Claudia Azula, Michael Onder and Lisa Costanzo.*





*On Feb. 20, Passaic County Champs Boys Soccer and Boys Indoor Track were recognized at the Board of Education meeting.*



*Spouses Kevin Hunter and Alicia Reid Hunter published the children's book, "The Gift of a Journey", which is as much for adults who can benefit from slowing down and taking in the beauty of nature. Mustang junior Sarah Zwiebel finished 2024-25 with a 170.63 average in 24 games (not counting the individual tournament), totaling 4,095 pins.*



*Mustang freshman Sterling H. Kimble's themes and variations in his original composition "Caribbean Caprice" earned him a seat as one of three finalists in the NJ Young Composers Competition on Feb. 22 in the Atlantic City Convention Center.*



*Barbara Levi James, who joined Clifton Against Substance Abuse in 2012, was recognized by the grass-roots organization for her ongoing effort to protect and educate Clifton's youth about the pressures and dangers of experimenting with alcohol and drugs.*



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# CLIFTON

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*Show up early. Stay late.  
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- Mike Rowe

**Workin' 9 to 5**

Nancy Ferrigno  
City Clerk

Rashad Alawi and Hazem Asad  
Slap Burger and Chocolate House

Casey Walentowicz, Jr. and Dad Casey  
Aspen Tree Services

Dylan Amico  
Bartender at The Clif

Clifton may not always work 9-to-5 but our residents get their jobs done. Inventors and innovators like Nino Lupi, Angelo Crudele, Chocolate House and Slap Burger founders Rashad Alawi and Hazem Asad, or the father-son arborist duo of Casey Walentowicz, Sr. and Casey Jr. of Aspen Tree Service — told their stories of hard work, perseverance, and putting in the hours. Keeping our city green is more than a hobby for David Obssuth. The Passaic County Master Gardener developed his green thumb thanks to his family's farm roots at just five years old.



CHS Key Club members, in collaboration with Power of One, provided technology assistance to 11 senior citizens on March 18 at the Clifton Senior Center. The two-hour session saw students help seniors enhance their skills with iPhones, tablets, and computers.

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LEUKEMIA & LYMPHOMA SOCIETY VISIONARIES OF THE YEAR  
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Board of Ed Commissioner Joseph Siano and his Green Team launched a 10-week campaign on March 26 and ended up raising \$138,749 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The LLS' New Jersey Region would name the JK Realty Realtor as the 2025 Visionary of the Year in May.



The City Council celebrated Women's History Month on March 18 with proclamations for, from left: Yamilky Crisostomo, CEO of YNC Tax; Michele Butler, Clifton's Deputy Clerk; Rickey Di Maria, the owner of JK Realty and a charitable contributor; Maria Williamson, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Civil Rights; Liz Taranda, a volunteer director at the Clifton Animal Shelter. Above inset, Barbara Novack, retired Clifton Schools music teacher and board member of TLC and the Clifton Arts Center.



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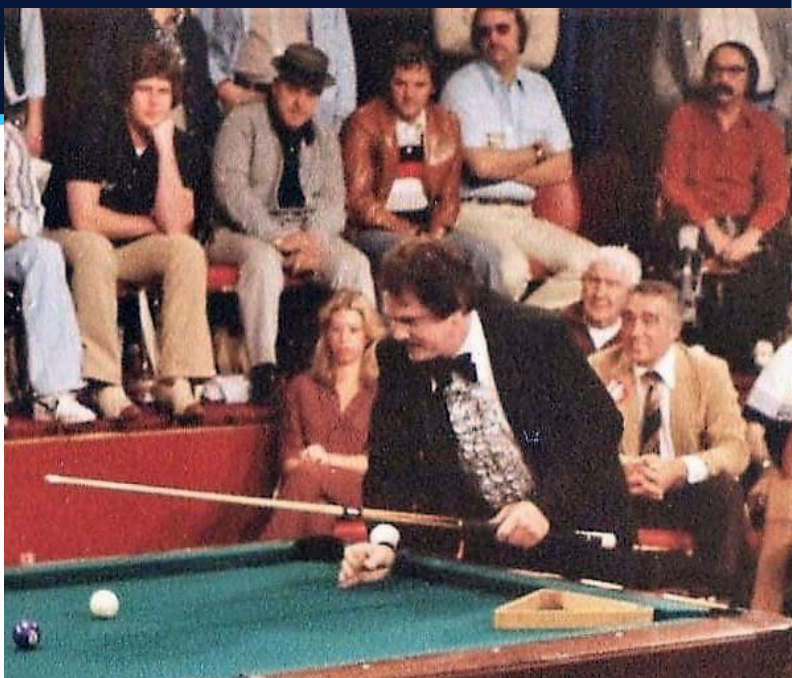


NEW JERSEY'S CONGRESSWOMAN  
**NELLIE POU**  
REPRESENTING THE NINTH DISTRICT





Billiards player Ray Martin, now 90, once owned Clifton Billiards in Downtown Clifton back in the 1970s. His career as a player took him to tournaments, movies and more around the globe. Still enjoying the game, we met him at his former hall where he shared his story and many successes.



Three Mustang wrestling careers came to an end at the NJ-SIAA State Wrestling Tournament on March 7. Joe Geleta, Isaac Cazimoski and Nick Doktor (from left) took the mat for the final time as Mustangs and performed admirably, though each fell short of reaching the medal stand.

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On March 22, Dutch Hill resident Emily Thompson, four other adults, and 11 kids covered eight blocks of Dutch Hill in a clean-up effort that led to 12 bags of trash being collected in two hours. Most of the crew were School 15 students.





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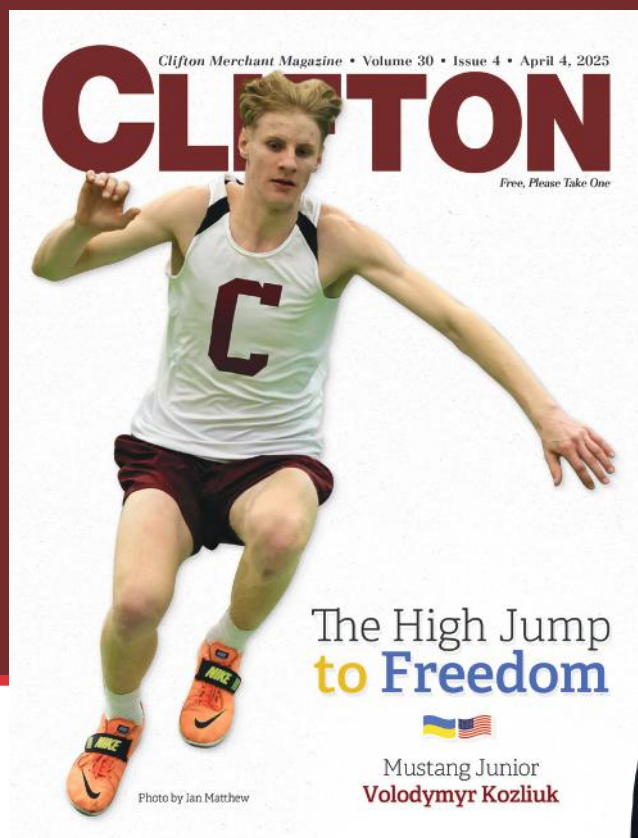
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**Aidan Reilly earned the highest advancement rank in Boy Scouting** and was awarded the Eagle Scout on April 14. A total of 88 Eagle Scouts have come up through Troop 123, including Reilly's older brother Liam, who earned the rank in 2019. The Reilly brothers, including brother Colin, got involved in scouting as soon as they were old enough. Their father, David, is also an Eagle Scout who, with wife Tara, volunteered with the boys' troop. Reilly supported Clifton Little Pantries's project by designing and constructing three Pantry boxes that were then placed around the city. Two were for human food and one was for pet food.

**Springtime brought Pysanky into our homes** and put honey on our radars courtesy of the CHS Beekeepers Club. Meanwhile, the Boys & Girls Club's Great Futures Gala honored the Health Department and the Fette Family for their ongoing support, contributing to the lasting success of Clifton's youth and The Club's overall operations. We also celebrated grandmas everywhere, including Fresia Carvajal, whose granddaughter Vanessa Pinto (CHS 2010) founded the Fresia Foundation one year prior. Pinto was preparing to give the \$1,500 Fresia Legacy Scholarship to one graduating senior to help defray future college costs like books, laptops, or a parking pass. On our cover, we told the story of Volodymyr Kozliuk and his journey from Ukraine and how he and his family have found a new home in Clifton.



*The family behind Fette Auto Group—John, Kristin, Hart and twin Dan—were feted April 3 alongside Clifton Health at the Boys & Girls Club's Great Futures Gala. The Fette family has a relationship with The Club that dates back to founder Henry Fette, who launched Fette Ford in 1952 and was an original Boys Club Board member.*



*On April 1, LLS Visionary Joseph Siano brought the community out to Uno Pizzeria & Grill to help raise funds for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. The judges of the brownie competition were the husband-and-wife duo of Siano and Rickey DiMaria, Board of Education commissioner Mark Brunciak, and Clifton Magazine's editor and publisher Tom Hawrylko.*





*The CHS Orchestra, directed by Paulina Edel, and the WWMS Symphony, led by Anthony Lanzerotti Jr. and Justin Louie, distinguished themselves by earning the highest distinction possible, a Gold Rating, at the North Jersey School Music Association Region 1 Orchestra Adjudication Festival.*



*On April 7, the New Jersey Music Education Association confirmed Clifton's Anthony Lanzerotti as the NJMEA President. The WWMS music teacher's tenure will be through 2031. His duties include overseeing the events and organizations sponsored by NJMEA while advocating for music education in public schools.*



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Clifton Schools recognized several employees of the month, including these custodians, in an initiative to recognize the district's staff. At right are some of the team most often working the grounds around Clifton Stadium and Christopher Columbus.



Giants player Montrell Washington was at School 5's Emergency Response training on April 28, where students learned how to call 911 and provide care for an individual in cardiac arrest.

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**Clifton Police 2025 Officer and Detective of the Year** are Kevin Collucci and Samantha Litchfield. Litchfield, who graduated CHS in 2007, joined CPD in 2021 and served as a patrol officer. Now a detective in the Juvenile Division, she is a field training officer, rifle operator, active shooter instructor, and was a Registered Nurse before joining the force. After graduating CHS in 1991, he worked at the Boys & Girls Club and attended college. Collucci has served with the CPD since 2001, working in the Patrol, Internal Affairs, and now in the Community Policing Division. A community-oriented officer, he often volunteers to change his schedule to participate in city events.

Clifton Magazine recalled the 300+ Fallen Cliftonites who died in service to our nation during WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf War, with a roll call of names. Memorial Day as a patriotic holiday in Clifton is commemorated with parades, wreath laying and solemn ceremonies. The Vietnam War and all who served were remembered as it was the 50th year since the end of the war. WWII vet Stephen Mihalovic, who turned 100 but was once strapped in the back of a Navy Dive Bomber, recalled his service. Two other words on our minds were more vague — “economic development” — but no less important as we spoke with county leaders about the function of middle government.



*The CHS Mechanical Mustangs won several awards in 2025. Known as team 3314, they ended up in second place in New Jersey, out of 93 teams, and placed 66th in the world competition of 3,690 teams. The team is led by advisors and CHS teachers Monique Dituri and Denise Fanelli. Long time in-kind support also comes from Mustang alumnus Jim Hobin (CHS 1975) who for years has donated warehouse space across the street from CHS. Working with Dituri and Fanelli, Hobin and the 24 students learned the design process and how to work as a team as they rack up honors and skills.*

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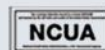
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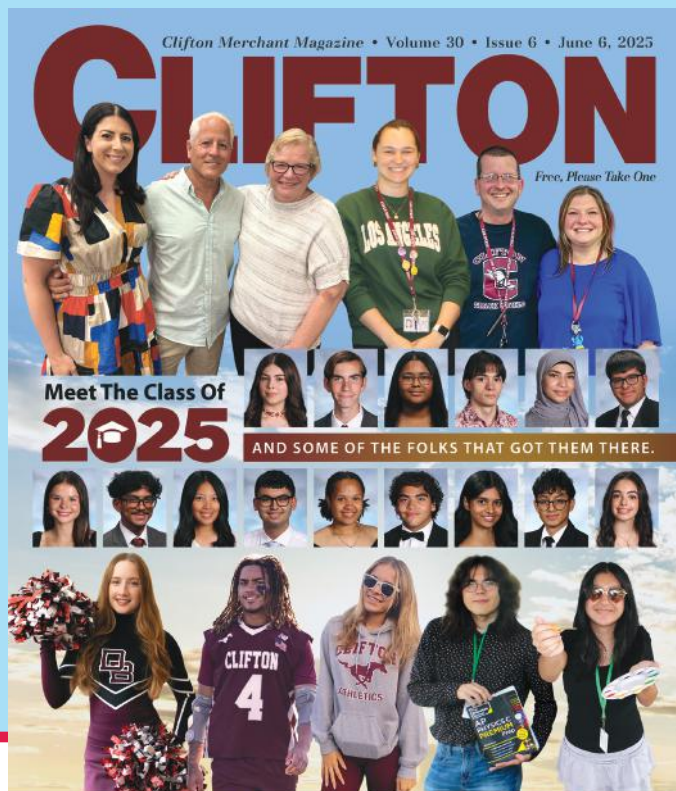
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**Clifton's Class of 2025** graduated with life skills and sports goals beyond the halls that they walked for the past four years. At the Boys & Girls Club, scholarship recipients included: Kaylie Trinidad (CHS 2025), Anthony Bells (CHS 2025), and PCTVS senior Elise Ragsdale. The 2025 Youth of the Year was Paramus Catholic senior Gian Uy, a 10-year B&G Club member and volunteer at St. Peter's Haven. CHS Social Studies teacher Michael Rogers and School 12 paraprofessional Maria Peña were also named Clifton's Teacher and Paraprofessional of the Year, respectively.



*Clifton Firefighters Paul Holzach (center) and Michael Bاندurski were recognized on June 4 at St. Philip the Apostle's Knights of Columbus awards. At left is Chief Michael Rowan.*

*CHS World Language Honor Society inducted 80 students on June 3. The new members were in 10th grade or higher and had a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher. Twenty-six students joined the French Honors, six Italian Honors, and 56 became members of the Spanish Honor Society.*



*Meet some of the Class of 2025 who attended CHS, PCTI and Paramus Catholic. Above, Emilia Wilk, Om Rana, Chelsea Hoang, Ryan Budhu, Yasmine Mills, Tristan Rivera, Virali Jariwala, Xavier Valverde, Angie Eljerou. Below, Yahya Ibrahem, Josephine O'Connell, Justin Leach, Jade Tables, Jacob Barahona, Karen Medrano, Declan Eineker, Kelly Franco, Dalky Shephard Bernard.*





# Clifton's HISTORIC BOTANY DISTRICT CLIFTON, NJ



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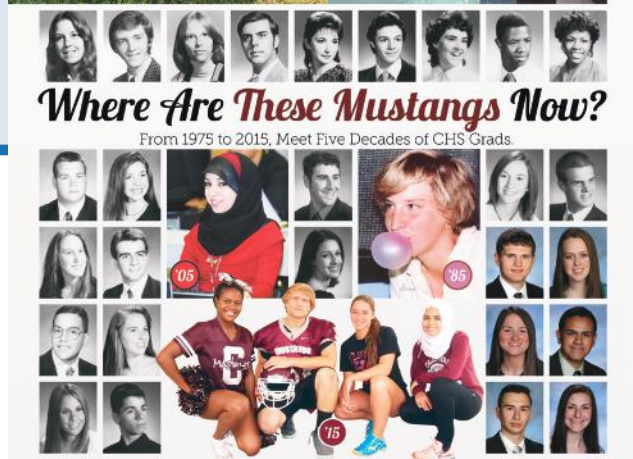
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Councilwoman Rosemary Pino, at center, launched her campaign for the Republican nomination for NJ's 9th Congressional District—the seat now held by Democrat Nellie Pou—on July 10. Pino was a Board of Education Commissioner for two years before winning her first term on the City Council in 2018. Now in her second term on the Council, she must first win a primary contest in June. Pino's primary opponent was Republican Billy Prempeh who ran in 2020, 2022 and 2024, but he recently withdrew his candidacy.

It's no mystery that the Theater League of Clifton puts on productions that engage adults of all ages to go out for a night of dinner and theater. TLC hosted "Murder at the Banquet" at Mario's Restaurant throughout late July and early August with plenty of suspects to keep you guessing. Jimmy Sturr and his orchestra covered the other side of performance entertainment when they returned to Third Ward Park to lay down polka tracks like they've done for some 21 summers. Music lovers could also rejoice, because July meant the return of Clifton Rec's Obser Concert Series and more shows in Historic Botany's Summer Concert Series.



On July 12, the first Flag Raising for Disability Pride Month at City Hall. Pictured is chair Ryan Powers of the Advisory Committee For Individuals With Disabilities with fellow committee members.



Jimmy Sturr and his orchestra have played with Willie Nelson, Allison Krauss and the Oak Ridge Boys. But thanks to Passaic's Greg Komeshok, Sturr, his band and guest artists have come to Third Ward Park for the past 21 summers to lay down polka tracks. He is seen here on July 24 with two dancers from Philadelphia.





*Mustang Beekeepers were abuzz with excitement as their local honey and products became available on July 30 in Agamies Deli on Market St. For sale were 12 or 17 oz. bottles of the Mustang-made gold, with 100% of the sale price supporting the CHS Beekeeping Club. The CHS Beekeepers Lip Balm was also available at Bluejay Pharmacy & Medical Supply, 377 Valley Rd., and Lunar E-Clips, at 62 Market St.*

*Teddy Mann and his children (from left) Isaiah, Joshua, and Sophia saw a turtle while walking home on July 3 from Racy's Pond in Main Memorial Park. Thinking the turtle was in distress, they called upon a police officer near the library and asked for gloves. They went to safely move the turtle back to the pond but noticed how the turtle was shaking and watched as it laid a dozen eggs in the soil. The lesson learned? Be kind, slow down and appreciate life's simpler moments.*

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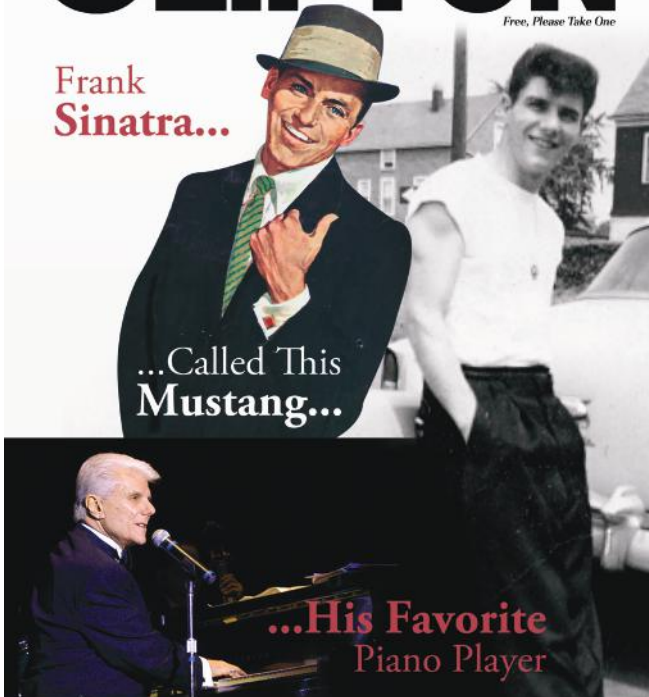


STAND WITH UKRAINE



# CLIFTON

Clifton Merchant Magazine • Volume 30 • Issue 8 • August 1, 2025



You didn't need to fly Frankie Randall to the moon to meet global icons who made heads turn. The late Mustang was Frank Sinatra's favorite piano player and rubbed shoulders with other Rat Packers, as told in our cover story. We also wished Clifton Schools Communication Director Samantha DeRose well in her retirement. And Clifton readers love nostalgia — just like us! Stories ranged from the Class of '65 reuniting to when The Jades won 11 of 13 Clifton Battle of the Bands. If you're the right age, you might also recall when CHS students protested speed bumps during the Age of Aquarius, better known as the 60's.



Clifton announced the appointments of Kathleen Tolosi as City Clerk, Megan Krusznis as Deputy Clerk, and Thomas Egan as City Attorney.



Clifton Health and NJ Blood Services hosted a Blood Drive in honor of Councilman Bill Gibson. The CHS 1971 grad has been on Council since he was first elected in 2014.



The Boys & Girls Club received a \$50,000 grant from Taco Bell Foundation to support the teen career exploration programs, helping kids prepare for their futures. Taco Bell franchisee HAZA Bell of Northeast, with locations in Little Falls, Passaic, Belleville, provided the connection.

This tall guy was among the performers at National Night Out Against Crime at Main Memorial Park on Aug. 5. The fun event was organized by Clifton Police Sgt. Gary V. Giardina and Community Policing Officers, as well as the Passaic County Sheriff and the Clifton Fire Department.



# 38 YEARS

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1988



## Rock Our Merch!



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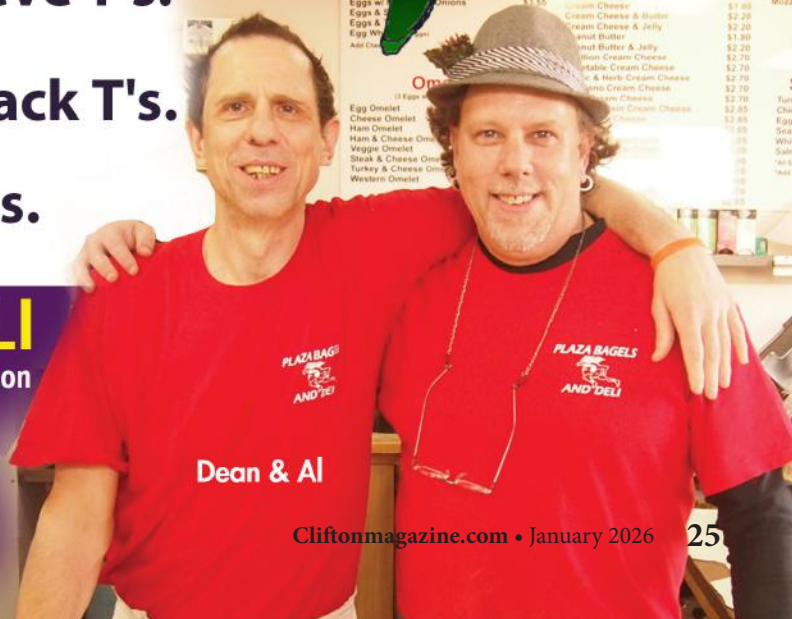
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**Two becomes three:** Maple Valley Middle School officially opens its doors and becomes the third facility for kids in grades 6, 7 and 8. Thirty team members, led by Principal Rob Bertolini and Administrative Intern Danielle Jeffers, would instruct some 200 sixth graders in the new middle school. On Sept. 3, congratulations were in order for Margaret Beissel who marked 50 years as a Clifton School Traffic Guard and can be found at her post on Van Houten Ave. and Kathryn St. We also spotlighted Mustangs heading into the new academic year, including senior and Drum Majorette Gabriella Labocki who later appeared on the cover of Clifton Merchant's December 2025 edition.



On Sept. 11, the community gathered in various locations to honor and remember the lives of those lost 24 years ago on 9/11. The remembrance ceremony held at the 9/11 Memorial Garden at City Hall was led by Master of Ceremonies Fire Chief Michael Rowan. The presentation of the colors was carried out by the Clifton Fire Honor Guard, the Clifton Police Honor Guard, and firefighter Michael Ciccone.



The Clifton Stadium Track was named for Coach John Pontes and his 50-plus years of coaching, which includes generations of Mustang harriers.



Hispanic Heritage Month began Sept. 15 and, in partnership with William Paterson, Latinx KidLit Book Festival members read across Clifton. Above, Emma Otheguy at CCMS.



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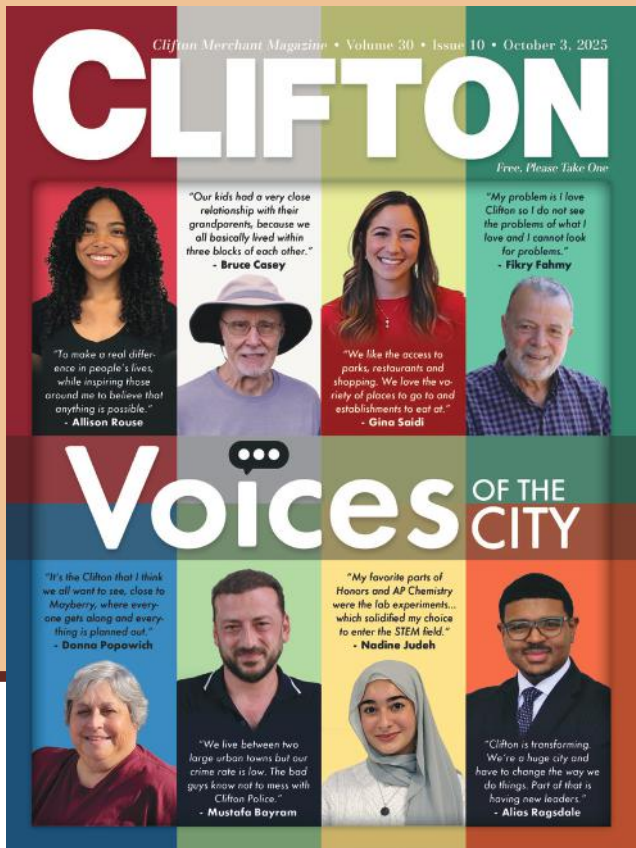


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We can all disagree better, don't you agree? Clifton Merchant's October 2025 edition leaned into optimism and the idea that contention does not need to be as common as it's become in our city and nation. Residents spoke about what they like about our community while also detailing what needs improvement. As for the arts, the opening of the Hispanic Heritage Month exhibit at the Clifton Arts Center saw attendees including Councilwoman Rosemary Pino, Carlos Yamberla De La Torre of the Consulate of Ecuador, Rosario Canarte Valle, Peter Cedeno Castro, Paquita Delgado Madrid of the Ecuadorian Alliance Organization and Roxanne Cammilleri, CAC director.



Clifton Girls Mustang Soccer secured its spot in the Passaic County quarterfinals with back-to-back wins over Passaic High. The first matchup on Oct. 4 was scoreless through the half until Abby Rascher broke the deadlock and the Mustangs kept the Indians off the scoreboard, with two saves by goalie Gianna Colon. On Oct. 9, Clifton came out firing and earned a 4-1 victory.



Maple Valley Middle School on Valley Rd. welcomed students, families, and staff for a family fun day on Oct. 3 at the Maple Valley Field. One highlight was a dunk tank, featuring Principal Robert Bertolini and other staff members who volunteered to take a plunge.

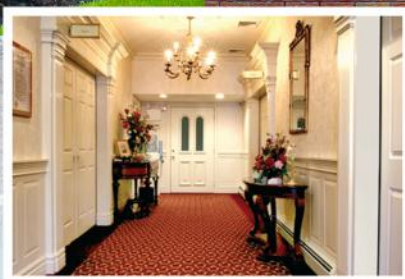




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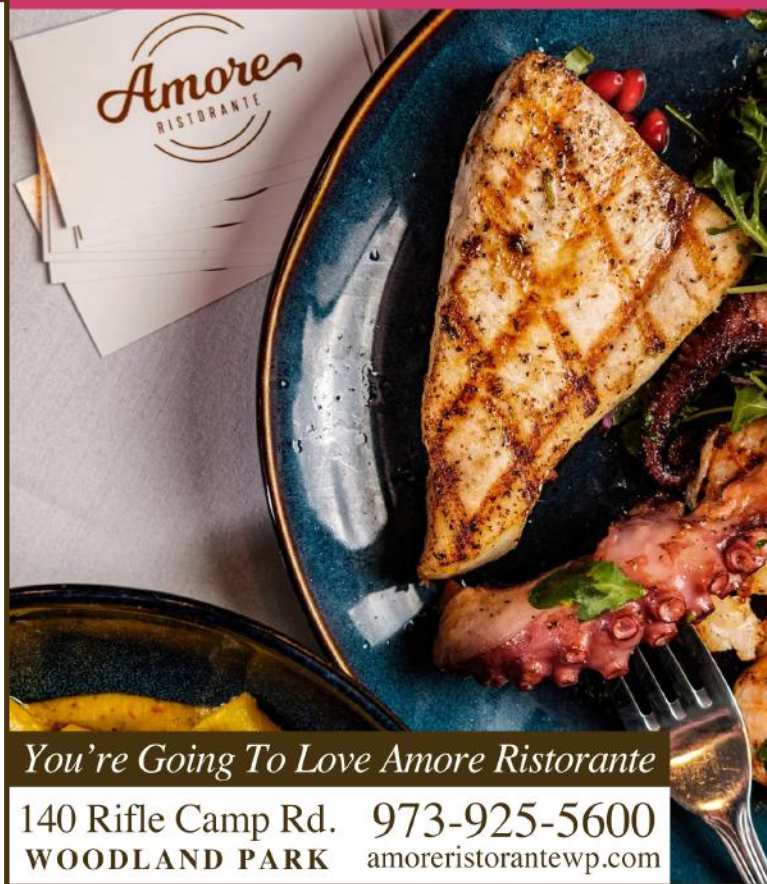
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OCTOBER **2025**

**IN REVIEW**



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Clifton Health Social Worker Nate King was honored on Oct. 9 with a civilian award for a rescue in which he, Clifton Police and Fire, conducted a wellness check and helped clear 4 feet of debris in a home before transporting the resident to the hospital.



Clifton Health Educator Layal Helwani (CHS 2012) led anti-vape education in Clifton Schools and cracked down on smoke shops to help prevent the distribution of products like flavored vapes. On Oct. 21, Clifton Against Substance Abuse (CASA) president Tom Whittles presented an award of apprecia-

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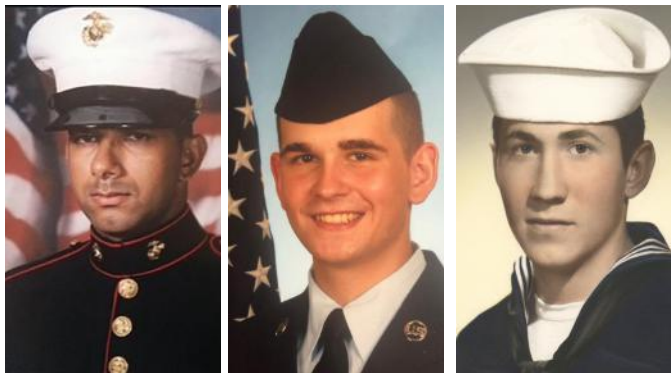
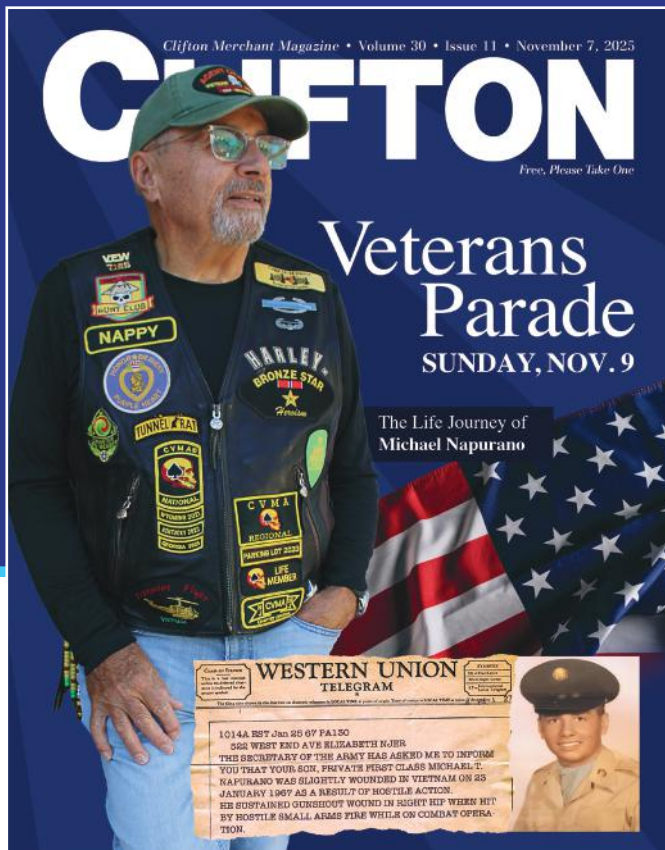
\*FIRST YEAR RATE. MINIMUM GUARANTEED RATE 2%. RATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE. NOT AVAILABLE IN ALL STATES.



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Our cover story took readers to the Mekong Delta where Michael 'Nappy' Napurano was a 19-year-old kid leading a US Army platoon. We also told the stories of USMC Joslin Joslin, CHS 1997; US Air Force Ryan Farnon, CHS 2008; and US Navy Mike Yurcheniuk, CHS 1965.



CHS junior Kaitlynn Garas was among 131 students state-wide chosen to perform at the Nov. 7 NJ All-State Chorus and Orchestra Concert in Atlantic City.

New Jersey residents cast their votes on Nov. 4. Three available BOE seats were won by incumbents Anthony Santiago (13,709) and Mark Bruniak (11,562) and newcomer Alias Ragsdale (12,899). New Passaic County Commissioners were Democrats Michael Ramaglia and Christina Schratz. NJ Assembly Democratic incumbents Rosy Bagolie and Alixon Collazos-Gill retained their seats. Democrat Mikie Sherill won 57.65% of the vote to become the 57th governor after running against Republican Jack Ciattarelli.

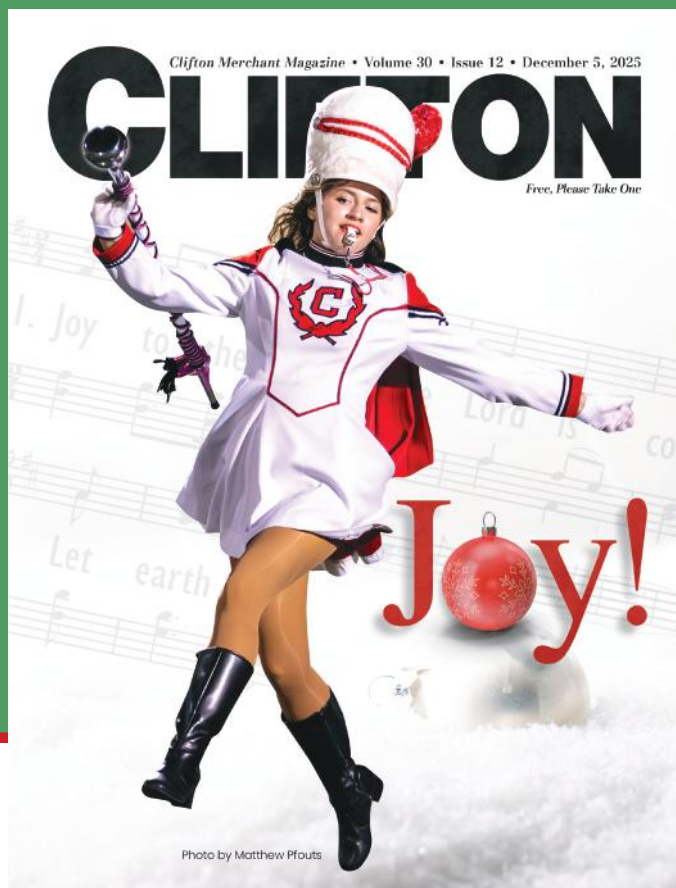


The Veterans Parade was Nov. 9 with Grand Marshal Paul Oliver, a U.S. Navy veteran who served in World War II and the Korean War. The keynote address was by retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Michael Gielbeda.



Donna Carpinelli Popowich of the Clifton Little Free Pantry Program supported the Health Department and the Lauren Murphy Warming Center by donating a truckload of food and necessities. Pictured with Nate King of the CHD, donations included soups, canned fruit, oatmeal, mac and cheese, cereal, and much more to help the unhoused community.





As lawn decorations and lights go up at 204 Clinton Ave., the joy and splendor that the Aguilar family brings annually to our community and their neighborhood during the holiday season are unmatched. So is the joy and sense of purpose that the Boys & Girls Club brings to youth with the help of the community. The Club's leadership and staff are busy during this season with the Annual Campaign. This year's goal for the 2025-26 Future Ready campaign is \$100,000, and every dollar helps support programming and a safe environment where kids can thrive and explore their interests.



*CCMS music teacher Lauren Kaufman completed a music meets poetry project that concluded on Dec. 19 in a slam poetry reading where students presented their poems while playing their rhythmic compositions.*

**Clifton Rec's Annual Holiday Door Decorating** contest was Dec. 8-12 and 36 participants each received a goody bag on their doorknob, filled with candy, coupons, and holiday novelties. Top 10 winners included: the Scorziello Family (Santa's Favorite), the Deribin Family (Most Artistic), the Winkler Family (Most Original), the Chidiac Family (Most Creative), the Rodriguez Family (Best Winter Theme), the Alicea Family (Holiday Classic), the Luczan Family (Best Craftsmanship), the Labriola Family (Most Nostalgic), the Torres Family (Most Trendy), and the Wollemburg Family (Most Cheerful).



**CHS seniors earned over \$1.4 million** on Instant Decision Day. Seniors who interviewed with admissions representatives from New Jersey colleges received non-binding acceptance decisions on the spot. In total, 60 Mustangs participated and earned \$1,416,600 in scholarship money, and each received at least one acceptance.







Word Seed Inc., dedicated to elevating writers of all ages, opened in the Westervelt-Vanderhoef House in Weasel Brook Park, pictured. They will collaborate with Passaic County's Cultural & Historic Affairs to present monthly literary arts events.



*Santa visited Clifton Early Learner Academy Speer on Dec. 23, bringing excitement and smiles to preschoolers. The children were thrilled to see Santa, share their holiday wishes, and enjoy the festive moment together. Happy Holidays!*



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**When New Jersey Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer** visited Clifton High School on Dec. 11, he saw first hand what the state's largest high school does to enhance academic programs, encourage student leadership and run daily operations which contribute to the success of the district and its approximately 11,000 students.

The visit intersected with a milestone moment for the district with the appointment of Ahmed Shehata, Assistant Superintendent of Finance, to Governor-Elect Mikie Sherrill's Interdisciplinary Advisory Task Force.

"Today's visit from Commissioner Dehmer was a meaningful opportunity to highlight the outstanding programs, talented students and committed staff that make our schools successful," said Mr. Shehata.

As a member of the task force, Mr. Shehata will collaborate with the Governor-Elect and senior leadership to help shape New Jersey's educational vision for the next four years across major educational policy areas.





*NJ Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer and Clifton Superintendent Dr. Danny Robertazzi, with BOE commissioners and staff members Richard Mejia, Anthony Santiago, Shari Merola, Marta Fortunato, Ahmad Hamdeh, Lucy Danny, students Gianna Colon, Alexis Smith, Mikaella Francisco, Ahmed Shehata, Tony Suarez, Alan Paris, Judith Bassford, Janina Kusielewicz, Michael McCunney and Paula Raygoza with Kobe.*

He will bring his years of experience at Clifton to this appointment. Mr. Shehata continued: "I am thankful for the recognition of our district's dedication to educational excellence and for the chance to bring the experience and perspective of Clifton Public Schools to efforts that benefit students across the state. I look forward to sharing the success of Clifton Public Schools across our state and likewise seeing and sharing the success of other districts."

Commissioner Dehmer began the morning in the CHS media production program, known as CAST. There, student journalists interviewed him before he moved on to visit performing arts classrooms as well as the IMPACT program, which supports student success and well-being.

Another stop was the CHS Junior ROTC program, where cadets highlighted the academic, leadership, and personal growth benefits of their training. No high school visit would be complete without a stop in the cafeteria, and the tour also included classroom visits where he en-

gaged with students and staff.

"We were honored to welcome Commissioner Dehmer to Clifton High School, an opportunity to highlight the talented students, dedicated staff, and exceptional programs that make our district a leader in education," said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Danny Robertazzi. "I am especially proud of Mr. Shehata on his appointment to Governor-Elect Sherrill's Interdisciplinary Advisory Task Force," he continued, "where he will bring Clifton's perspective to statewide conversations and help ensure that student-centered leadership and excellence remain a priority in every New Jersey classroom. This recognition reflects the district's growing statewide presence and the hard work of our entire community in providing students with the support and opportunities they need to succeed," the Superintendent concluded.



## 1928 - Roche Breaks Ground



## Orchestrating Progress ON3

Though not quite a city on a hill, the casual passerby might wonder if the ON3 redevelopment is actually closer to becoming a city on a highway.

That is in large part thanks to the vision of Eugene Diaz and the team behind the redevelopment project at Prism Capital Partners. Diaz, the Prism founder and principal partner alongside Edwin Cohen, hasn't slowed down the past several years. He also hasn't become discouraged as he's faced resistance to his "live, work and play" vision.

It is set to transform the approximately 116 acres of previously vacant land that formerly housed Hoffmann-La Roche's site on Route 3 East. And that'll make ON3 like its own city with just about anything that you could need for any aspect of your life.

People have had questions and, impressively, Diaz has seemed to have answers for them. He hasn't appeared to shy away from the media or from answering residents and politicians, alike, at City Hall meetings. He has shown up prepared, even addressing the dais and public without notes in front of him.

Diaz believes in the work that they've done for the past

decade. The obstacles along the way have only spurred on the project and encouraged the Prism leadership to bring much-desired ratables back to both Clifton and Nutley's municipalities.

"We closed in October of 2016, and we have had a long-term plan. [The redevelopment has] plenty of staying power," said Diaz. "We had COVID interrupt us quite a bit for two and a half years."

"Then, there was another two and a half years of litigation [with Nutley]," he continued. "So, five of the nine years were kind of spent doing nothing in certain areas or accomplishing very little."

That has changed this past year, and there is no indication that 2026 will be less efficient. The "work" and "play" parts of ON3's world-class campus are long-since established ever since the existing buildings were fully leased and occupied by a mix of corporate tenants.

International fashion giant Ralph Lauren Corporation signed a full-building lease with ON3, which provides the company with 225,000 sq-ft of the building 100 Metro. Two new tenants have also relocated their respective headquarters into that space.





2013 - Roche closed its campus



2026 & Beyond - Prism's Residential Development



## Upcoming Developments

- 116 acres of land with 20 acres of green space
- 1,078 residential units to be developed through 2030
- 250-300 construction jobs for residential development
- Prism paid about \$128 million for the property and are on track to spend \$1 billion in capital
- 6,000 daily visits to ON3 by medical school students, professionals, consumers
- 1.47 million sq-ft of occupied office and lab space
- Another 2 million more sq-ft planned
- In Nutley, 11 acres for a major data center

## Undated Developments

- A seven-story, 266-room dual-branded hotel
- 90,000 sq-ft of retail and restaurant space
- 150,000 sq-ft life sciences facility



**Prism Partners - Edwin Cohen and Gene Diaz**

One is Proponent Federal Credit Union, who has served the Nutley area for decades and has a full floor in the Ralph Lauren building. The second tenant is Reckitt, formerly Reckitt Benckiser, whose brands include Lysol, Mucinex, and Biofreeze. Reckitt has relocated their headquarters from Parsippany and is now on two floors of the Ralph Lauren building.

As for some of the “play” component, ON3’s goal was at its inception to embrace how walkways and bike trails connect the campus to surrounding parks, greenways, and local downtowns. The idea of featuring 20 acres of greenspace is so that any residents can lounge, office workers can unwind, and the community can gather for events throughout the year.

Now it’s a matter of giving people a place to rest their heads at the end of a long day ...

## Smart Growth

There’s a school-of-thought held by some at in-person City Council meetings and on social media: Clifton needs more residential projects like it needs more storage facilities. Yet more residences are on their way.

But when we last spoke to Diaz for Clifton Merchant’s August 2024 edition, he outlined the Phase IV proposal in the ON3 redevelopment plan. What their plan needed was municipal approval and, this past June, that’s what Prism finally received.

Councilmembers Chris D’Amato and Mary Sadrakula

voted not to approve the introduction of residential uses for the site, but they were ultimately outvoted.

Phase IV will feature a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly community with both mid- and high-rise residential units, plus retail and other amenities on-site. At the June meeting, Sadrakula voted against it with clarification that she did so because the developer was supposed to attend the meeting to answer any questions.

Prior to its approval last summer, the vision in 2024 included a 12-story, 1,087-unit apartment building as part of the remaining 22 acres of land in Clifton. Fast-forward to our conversation with Diaz last month, there were some changes.

Diaz explained, following the approval of this phase in the redevelopment plan, that there will now be up to 1,078 residential units.

“We’re in the middle of an advanced schematic design review implementation,” said Diaz. “We are looking at various scenarios of how best to ... incorporate the units. How we’ll phase it, the number of buildings, and the height of those buildings.”

Diaz anticipates having that review completed in this year’s first quarter and that Prism will then make a site plan application to the Planning Board by the summertime. Once work begins on it, the project is expected to create between 250 to 300 construction jobs.

“Do we have two very tall towers, which was our original design, and smaller buildings around it? Or



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multiple mid-rise buildings, with all at the same height?” asked Diaz, rhetorically. “We’re looking at a few scenarios there and how to best do that to meet market conditions.”

“One thing we can say is that we continue to employ smart growth principles rather than just, you know, taking the density that the town gave us and slapping it on there,” he added. “We have a methodical approach. [We’re looking at] the types of units that should be incorporated into the project to maximize the benefits.”

## Revitalizing Roche’s Old Innovative Campus

That’s just part of what the future holds for ON3. Other newer additions on the Nutley side of the site will include an improved 150,000 sq-ft R&D facility and the remaining 12 acres to be used to develop a data center.

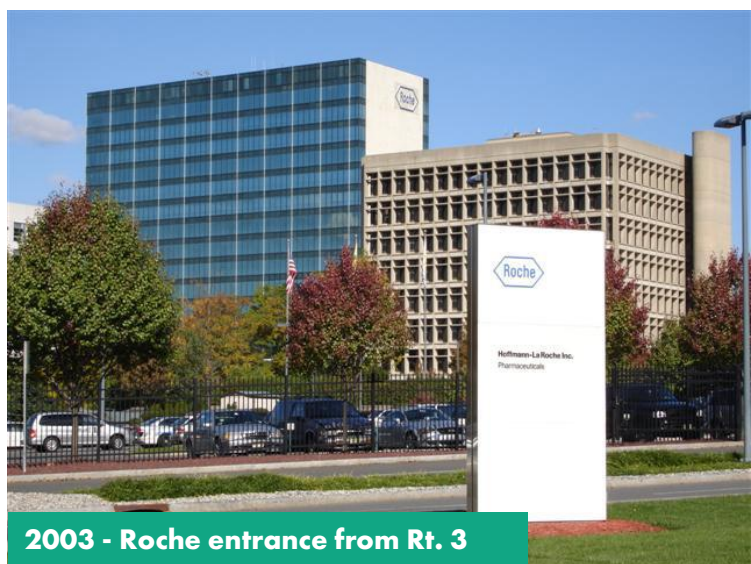
But that’s just the latest parts of the picture. When Prism purchased the former Roche property nearly a decade ago in October of 2016, the property was listed for approximately \$128 million. There were also questions about what might come next.

It was already four years since Roche had announced that it would close the Nutley campus. The loss was significant and Nutley, then with a town of 28,000, was set to lose \$9 million in taxes. Clifton, then a city of 84,000, was expected to lose \$5 million.

By the following year in December of 2013, Roche officially closed its campus with a move that ended or disrupted the careers of some 1,000 employees. Annually, Roche Group paid roughly \$14 million in property taxes to the two communities that the facility straddled. Both Nutley and Clifton reduced their tax rates for Roche in 2014, apparently hoping to avoid a tax appeal that Roche might file.

But 2015 was the year that things truly started happening. In June of that year, Seton Hall University and Hackensack-Meridian Health System formed an equal partnership, and the partners announced a future establishment of Seton Hall-Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. It involved signing a long-term lease agreement at ON3 for the new health and medical sciences campus, consisting of 16 acres and two state-of-the-art buildings.

A decade of doubts, opinions, and optimism have followed. Some expressed wariness about the potential strain on Clifton Public Schools, based on who might move into the multi-family units. It will include a mix of one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and studio units based on Prism conducting a final market review.



2003 - Roche entrance from Rt. 3



2026 - Prism’s One Molecule Drive

Others share in Diaz’s perspective — and also embrace the Economic Benefits Analysis that was submitted to secure the redevelopment plan — that redevelopment will support economic growth in both Clifton and Nutley. During their Phase IV presentation, Prism outlined that there would be over \$467 million in new commerce generated by the project annually in Clifton.

The outlook also included an “estimated 8% increase in the aggregate economic output for the entire City of Clifton.” The full PDF of the presentation is available at [prismpartners.net](http://prismpartners.net). But the big pull for many people is seeing a property that could have remained a shell of itself returning to its former glory.

“I think it’s pretty easy to see that, if the campus was empty ... Nutley would not be where it is,” said Diaz. “[The Promenade Shops At Clifton] across the street wouldn’t be either.” There’s additionally the thought, once people live and shop there, they may end up seeing that they



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like living in the area and buy a home in one of the municipalities.

“Without a doubt,” said Diaz, “the continued increase in property values was spurred on by this redevelopment. It’s also brought back 6,000 daily occupants to this campus since Roche left.”

## All Roads Lead to ON3

At the end of the day, Diaz said Prism is still on track to spend roughly \$1 billion in capital for the ON3 redevelopment project. And there are areas unrelated to housing that we can all anticipate seeing progress happen this year.

“I would like to get the hotel under construction. It’s an extremely challenging environment right now for financing hospitality [projects],” said Diaz. “Delays from Nutley had basically killed the project for four years.”

That ongoing conflict with Nutley was resolved when they “settled all outstanding litigation this past year.” Now that the township can no longer challenge development or approvals in Clifton, there is not expected to be the same hold-ups like for the hotel and medical office building.

The hotel will be a seven-story, 266-room Marriott AC/Element Hotel with a rooftop bar and deck. Since the hotel’s footprint is in the Clifton section of ON3, Prism didn’t need to obtain Nutley’s approval for the project.

“We lost the interest rate market and would like to figure out a way to get that done,” continued Diaz. “Beyond that, there’s still a grocery store announcement to be coming shortly for inclusion as part of that Phase III approval, which included a ‘neighborhood market.’”

Those are milestones on Clifton’s side of the border. Diaz separately anticipates seeing early construction on the lab building in Nutley. Although he cannot name the tenant yet since they have not formally announced it, Diaz said that the transaction was approved by the township.

“There are any number of milestones there before we get to Phase IV,” said Diaz. “If we could submit the site plan application in the summer, I hope to begin construction [on the multi-family housing units] before the end of 2026.”

“It will take all of five years to deliver that number of units,” he added. “We will be actively developing the site through 2030 or 2031.”



While Diaz acknowledged that it’s up to the City of Clifton and Township of Nutley to make their determinations on the breadth of ON3’s economic impact, he specifically pointed to ratables as the significant advantage.

The medical office building generates taxes for our city, plus there’s the sales tax revenue that comes from the corporate chains on the campus. Last September, Prism announced that both Chase and Chipotle would be coming to ON3 in Clifton.

Fronting Route 3, the bank branch and fast-casual restaurant became the second and third retail tenants after Starbucks, which opened in late 2024. They are both under construction.

Prism has also received approval from the New Jersey Department of Transportation. People on both sides of the “town line” will receive a full new acceleration and deceleration lane. That lane will stretch the entire half-mile length of the campus on Route 3. It was approved in conjunction with the developers reconstructing four new entrances to the campus from Route 3.

“That work should happen in early springtime and be a 60- or 75-day project,” said Diaz. “About two and a half months.”

Emphasizing that Prism is “pretty much on track with what we thought” from an overall financial perspective, it seems like both Clifton and Nutley can expect steady movement going forward.

“In 10 to 12 years, we could have most of the site back to full economic vitality,” said Diaz. “And, sure enough, we’ll be getting there in the next two years with the residential [component].”





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# Mustangs of the Month



*Mostafa Ahmed, Jhanaia Lora, Christopher Galicia, Daisy Zuniga.*

## Here are the **Mustangs of the Month** for January 2026.

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.

### **Mostafa Ahmed – Freshman**

Mostafa Ahmed is an aspiring engineer but, first and foremost, he's a hardworking son. "My parents motivate me," said Ahmed (CHS 2029). "They always encourage me to keep pushing forward, and I want to make them proud."

"I also stay focused on building a successful future. Once I set that as my goal, I made sure that every decision aligns with that vision," he continued. "That mindset helps me stay motivated and on track so I can reach my full potential."

Ahmed's favorite subject is English Language Arts thanks to his eighth grade CCMS Language Arts teacher Ms. Sharon Schwarz. Ahmed appreciated the balance that she struck in terms of being strict but keeping the class fun and engaging.

"She celebrated our hard work with class parties but, when it was time to work, she was focused, clear, and supportive," said Ahmed. "Because of her, I improved my reading level, and ever since then, ELA has become my favorite subject."

Ahmed's future plans include joining the Track team and the Academic Decathlon. One major hurdle this year is learning a new language. "Learning [Spanish] at the high-school level is challenging, but I'm overcoming it by paying closer attention, asking more questions, and studying more for assessments," said Ahmed.

### **Jhanaia Lora – Sophomore**

Jhanaia Lora embraces complexity, which is exactly why Math is her favorite school subject.

"I find its layers beautiful. To understand higher levels, the simpler must first be understood, which is a concept also applicable to day-to-day life," said Lora (CHS 2028).

The sophomore's extracurricular activities include Pre-Med Club, CSA, HOSA, Allied Health Academy, Interact Club, and NSHS. She credits many of her teachers over the years as all having inspired her and helped her in becoming who she is today.

"Out of all these teachers, the most influential has been [Social Studies teacher] Mr. Christopher Henry," said Lora. "Since the day that I entered his class, Mr. Henry has encouraged me to be my best self and has pushed me to work my hardest."

Lora isn't totally set on what her future career will entail, but she has some preliminary ideas. The Mustang is leaning toward becoming a Nurse Practitioner or Advanced Practice Nurse. That means preparing herself for the future rigors of pursuing higher education.

"During times when my motivation is lacking, my method of regaining enthusiasm, other than religious tactics, is thinking about my future," explained Lora. "Oftentimes, we're too obsessed with the past and the present and rapidly lose motivation to keep going."



### Christopher Galicia – Junior

Christopher Galicia doesn't count his sheep. But his routine before getting his eight hours are rigorous and goal-oriented. Each night before he falls asleep, he thinks about what he wants to do with his future and is getting closer to reaching a decision.

"I decided on either two things," said Galicia (CHS 2027). "To start my own chain of retail stores that rivals other big companies like Walmart or to settle down and open up a little bodega for me to run."

It'll be a lot of work, but Galicia draws inspiration from his family whenever things get tough and thinks about how they have supported him through the years. After a long day at school, there's also someone else who is always eager to boost his spirits.

"I also think about my dog and how good it would be to see her when I get home from school and she jumps on me," said Galicia.

Galicia's favorite subject is English, saying he loves to write and express himself on paper. He isn't currently involved in sports, but he is interested in running Track in the spring. He began training last year so that he's prepared for those warmer months.

"I hope I can make the team the next time that tryouts come out, so wish me luck."

### Daisy Zuniga – Senior

Creating better futures is what Daisy Zuniga wants to do with hers. That looks like becoming an immigration lawyer, where she can help to reunite separated families. Zuniga is looking at MSU or William Paterson right now.

"They both have excellent programs and campuses," said Zuniga (CHS 2026). "Overall, I'm excited to see what's in store for my future."

Zuniga is a four-year member of Key Club, serving as vice president for three years. She's also participated in the Teacher Assistant program, Model UN as the secretary, National History Day Team, NHS, NEHS, Global Mentorship, and in the Writers Center.

Her love for reading has existed since she was a young girl, and Zuniga said that English is her favorite subject at CHS.

"When you read, you just get lost in your own world and transported into another, and go on grand adventures with the characters," she said. "I don't know how to describe it, but it's like you're with them."

English teacher Ms. Jacqueline Turk and Social Studies teacher Mr. Michael Rogers are two role models. "I learned a lot about ... myself as a writer [in Ms. Turk's class, especially] paired with Mr. Rogers' critical thinking classes," she said. "It really tested me as a student."



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Winter Sports by Tom Szieber

# MUSTANG

SPORTS

## BOYS WRESTLING

*From top left: Nathan Monsalve, William thompson, Jarrett Rodriguez, Joe Dumeng, Anderson Azanedo, Jonathan Maldonado, Aadil Rana. Kneeling: Abdul Shaabua, Jordyn Rivera, Manuel Pena, Lucas Melo, Sebastian Blanco.*

**Clifton boys wrestling is raw.** With a roster largely consisting of athletes who have not experienced significant mat time, the Mustangs will endure some growing pains in 2025-26. But with a proven and successful leader in coach Dan Geleta, it seems a foregone conclusion that it won't take long for them to become contenders.

"Does the team have potential? Absolutely," Geleta said. "I will tell you this, we are going to be much better at the end of the season than we are right now. It is a young team."

Joe Dumeng, a district champion at 175 last year, is back for his senior season. Dumeng is a gritty, shifty grappler who will wrestle at 165 or 175, depending on matchups. He won his bracket in Clifton's Mustang Invitational Tournament on Dec. 20, pinning Passaic senior Benjamin Valle in the finals.

Junior Jarrett Rodriguez was a district runner-up last season and will compete at either 132 or 138, as Geleta plans to use him against opponents' stronger wrestlers at those weights. He won the 138-pound bracket at the Mustang Invitational by pinning junior Mason Mackay of Montclair.

Senior Jandell Borrero (120/126 pounds), junior William Thompson (138/144), seniors Braviell Rodriguez (144/150) and Jordyn Rivera (144/150), currently out with an injury, are the other returning starters for the Mustangs.

Senior 120-pounder Anderson Azanedo has impressed Geleta with his work ethic and scored a nice early-season tournament win by pinning Cliffside Park sophomore Joshua Fuentes in the finals of the Mustang Invitational.

Fuentes will be in a rotation with Borrero, senior Aadil Rana and sophomore Jonathan Maldonado in the 120, 126 and 132 classes.

Sophomore Nathan Monsalve will compete at 106, while freshman Aidyn Velez takes the mat at 113. Both finished third in the MIT.

Junior Manuel Pena (144/150/157), senior Lucas Melo (157/165), senior Sebastian Blanco (165/175/190), sophomore Giovanni Guevara (215) and junior Abadirahman Shaabna (285) fill out the lineup.

Clifton had a tough start to the winter season, losing to Passaic County Tech in their December 18 opener. They took second as a team in the 12-team MIT with 190.5 points, just 2.5 behind winner Passaic. It was the first time ever that Clifton did not win its own tournament.

**Girls wrestling is rapidly growing in New Jersey,** and Clifton is looking to become a program to watch sooner than later. After going 3-2 last winter, the Mustangs bring a powerful combination of youth and experience to the





*From left front: Nadine Millet, Jenmarie Javier De La Cru, Allison Europa, Nicole Romero, Minnah Mohamed, Dana Ramirez, Jade Mayo, Keyla Fuquene, Yadira Figueroa, Aviani Garcia, Angel Mozombite, Liliana Cuapio, Lillianne Addabbo, Yasmin Mohd, Olivia Panek, Sylvia Panek, Yitzel Martinez, Madison Navarro, Salma Mohamad, Valeria Veliz, Ruth Lara.*

mat, and head coach Zuzana Geleta expects them to make significant gains this season.

"I am very excited about the whole team because the girls are hardworking, and they show up," Geleta said. "They want to learn. We have eight returning and the rest are brand new. For a lot of these girls, wrestling is their first sport ever."

Sophomore 114-pounder Lillianne Addabbo is perhaps the squad's top returnee, having won a match in last year's North 1 tournament before falling to eventual finalist Grace Riley of Paramus Catholic. A strong thrower, she will look to build on a solid 10-7 freshman campaign. "Addabbo is very determined," Geleta said. "She wrestles year-round. She is very dedicated to the sport."

Senior Olivia Panek will also compete at 114. She and two fellow seniors, Ruth Lara (12-5 last year) and Valeria Veliz, have provided vital leadership in the wrestling room. Lara and Veliz will compete at 120 and 126, respectively.

Junior Kathalyn Tavarez will take the mat at 165, with the remainder of the starting lineup consisting of ninth- and tenth-graders.

Freshman 152-pounder Nadine Millet is among them, and has opened eyes with her athleticism, energy and as-

tuteness. "Nadine is a dynamite girl," Geleta said. "She is strong, learns quickly and has great takedowns, especially doubles. We have really high hopes for her."


Sophomore 185-pounder Minnah Mohamed returns for her second year, having gone 9-6 in 2024-25.

Freshman Allison Europa will start at 107, with sophomore Madison Navarro also getting mat time. Aviani Garcia (100 pounds), Keyla Fuquene (132), Jade Mayo (138) and Nicole Romero (185), all sophomores, will be key contributors, as well.

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*Kneeling from left:  
Aaden Nolan,  
Stan Danylo,  
Yousif Abroumi,  
Yandel Nina,  
Messiah Campbell,  
Kevin Mora.  
Standing:  
Xavier Nunez,  
Josh Lora,  
Evan Poulis,  
Amr Elithy,  
Anthony Jimenez,  
Kyler Jones,  
Deuris Abreu,  
Andrew Dupree.*

## BOYS BASKETBALL

**Clifton boys basketball has been knocking on the door for a while.** Now, they hope to finally break through.

The Mustangs are 39-43 over the past three years, and while they qualified for the state playoffs each time, they are still looking to prove they belong with Passaic County's elite.

"Obviously, I wanted [our win totals over the last few years] to be a little bit more," said tenth-year head coach Mike Cadmus. "We've wanted to compete at the highest level and I think we've done that in terms of [being competitive]. But it's about taking the next step and actually finishing the job, which is always the hardest step."

The Mustangs are excited about this winter, thanks largely to the duo of Aaden Nolan and Yandel Nina.

Nolan, a junior guard, averaged 9.5 points per game as a sophomore, also finishing the season with 70 rebounds and 48 assists. The point guard was forced into action early as a freshman and showed his toughness. He has handles and the Clifton staff trusts him.

Nina, a 6'2" forward, averaged 9.3 points and 5.6 rebounds per game in 2024-25, and is described by Cadmus as a "natural scorer." Cadmus believes Nina's ceiling is incredibly high, stating that the junior can be one of North Jersey's best players.

"Yandel is a strong lefty who puts the ball in the basket," Cadmus said. "He really helped us down the stretch last year and turned it up once he got comfortable with varsity basketball."

Guard Kyler Jones, a senior, will join Nolan in the

backcourt and is among the best defenders Cadmus has coached. Xavier Nunez, a 6'0" senior forward, is a tough, gritty player who isn't afraid to battle inside. Junior center Yousif Abroumi, a 6'4" rebounding specialist, has improved tremendously since last year.

The Mustangs, who went 10-16 last year and lost in the first round of the state playoffs, have a host of reliable role players who will provide valuable minutes off the bench. Junior guard Evan Poulis—the nephew of Clifton's all-time leading scorer, Sam Poulis—is, unsurprisingly, a quality scorer.

Juniors Messiah Campbell and Amr Ellithy provide additional depth at guard. The former has a fast first step and is a solid shooter; the latter is a transfer from Passaic County Tech who is a true point guard.

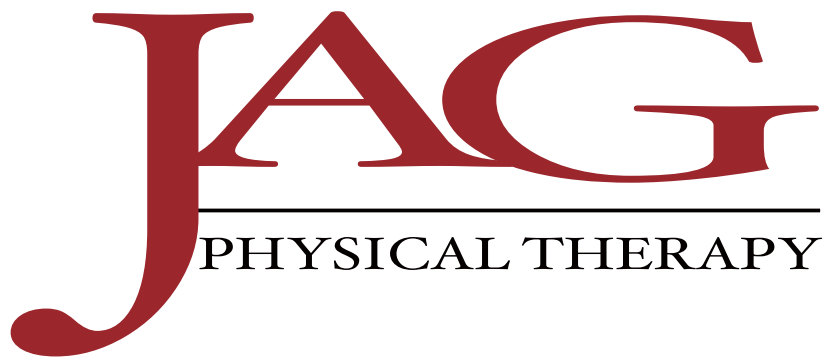
Forward James Hagans as well as center Stan Danylo, both seniors, will see time.

Clifton has looked good in practice and displays the same toughness as every Cadmus team. Still, the Mustangs are trying to get a major monkey off their back in the form of a county or sectional title.

Whether they are there yet remains to be seen, but 2025-26 is poised to be a fun and successful season for Clifton fans.

"This team does the small things really well," Cadmus said. "We have great cutters and great role players. If Aaden and Yandel can carry the scoring load, I think we have a chance to be really good. We are still in this uphill climb. But, at the end of the day, it's about getting the job done."





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## GIRLS BASKETBALL



*Varsity front left front: Sophia Rabell Ramirez, Ayanna Payano, Christina Briguglio, Stephanie Flete. Standing from left: Gianna Colon, Jaslene Montoya, Hailey Abreu, Li' Ajah Ramos, Casey Mullen, Sonia Healy, Leila Hatcher.*

**The Clifton girls basketball team** is ready to make a serious leap this year.

The Mustangs went 7-20 last season under coach Lou Lotito but won their final four games to end the year on a positive note. Now, with a group of talented returnees and a year in Lotito's system under their belts, they are hoping to open some eyes on the girls basketball scene in North Jersey.

"We are still trying to figure things out," said Lotito. "We have new pieces in the puzzle, but I feel good compared to where we were last year at this time."

Senior guard Christina Briguglio is back and started the season with a 17-point performance in a win over Bergenfield. She led the Mustangs in points, assists and three-pointers last winter, and Lotito is pushing her to take a greater leadership role in her final high school go-around.

She will play alongside Stephanie Flete, a high-energy, versatile senior guard who scored 14 in the season opener against the Bears. Lotito describes her as "relentless" and loves using her to lock down the opposing team's best player. Senior guard Gianna Colon is a solid, scrappy floor general who provides leadership on the court.

Senior forward Li' Ajah Ramos, a four-year varsity player, is a strong rebounder who was a first-team all-league honoree as a junior. She will be a presence down low, as will junior center Natalie Vasquez, who is out with a broken toe but should be back in the lineup at some point this season.

The bench includes sophomore guard Casey Mullen, Clifton's flag football quarterback; junior forward Sonia Healy, whose toughness has impressed her head coach; and senior center Haley Abreu, who Lotito says may have the highest basketball IQ on the roster.

The Mustangs' progress in one year under Lotito is evident. After going 6-2 in summer league play and 4-4 in fall league competition, they jumped out to a 2-1 start in the regular season (with a matchup against struggling Hawthorne on Dec. 27 that did not make press). It is encouraging for Clifton fans, as well as the leader of the program.

"I believe if we do not get 10 to 11 wins, it would be a disappointment," Lotito said. "I am confident that we will get into states. I believe we have the horses if we are healthy."



**Clifton bowling is young, for sure.** But the Mustangs are also hungry and talented, giving head coach Alex Berberich optimism about the future of the program.

“The newcomers and the freshmen are getting into it and doing better each week,” Berberich said. “We can definitely be in the middle of the pack this year, but we need to build the program up as far as numbers.”

Senior Sarah Zwiebel (168 average as of Dec. 17) will lead the girls squad this winter. She will be joined in the lineup by freshmen Addison Mirkovic and Makayla Budhram, as well as sophomore Emoni Moses-Mouzone.

Berberich is excited about Moses-Mouzone’s natural talent and athleticism, and lauds Mirkovic and Budhram’s rapid improvement.

The boys, meanwhile, are led by junior Jeremias Granados, who averages a 168 as of Dec. 17. He will bowl alongside seniors Nikita Shchekotikhin and Rian Pierce and sophomore Noah Karacay.



*From rear left: Emoni Moses-Mouzone, Jeremias Granados, Rian Pierce, Noah Karacay. Front: Makayla Budhram, Sarah Zwiebel, Addison Mirkovic. Missing is Nikita Shchekotikhin.*

Both teams had a tough start to the year, with the boys going 0-4 and the girls 0-3 in December. Berberich is working hard to rebuild the Clifton roster and is excited to have former Clifton football and lacrosse player Matt Meade as part of the Mustangs’ staff. The two have been working to recruit more crossover athletes and establish a summer program.





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## MUSTANG HOCKEY

With two winning seasons in the last three years, expectations have returned for the Clifton United tri-op with Cedar Grove and Passaic Valley. United went 11-9 a year ago, and with a host of talent returning to the ice, head coach Mike Santosuosso believes his team is poised for a special winter.

“I think this team is primed to make their biggest jump we’ve made yet,” Santosuosso said. “Our core group is primarily seniors. They have played together so long and

they love playing together. They play hard for each other.”

Offensively, United brings back several top offensive threats, including Clifton’s Trevor Rascher. Santosuosso describes him as the squad’s “heart and soul,” lauding the senior for his fire and energy.

Rascher tallied 22 assists and 19 goals a season ago. Senior Leo Marzullo of Cedar Grove will be Rascher’s linemate a year after his 30-point junior campaign.

Senior Ryan Montana of Cedar Grove—last season’s team leader in points (48) and goals (31)—will play on a separate line with his brother, freshman Michael Montana.

“Ryan tends to find the back of the net often,” said Santosuosso. “The thing that always stood out to me is that he is so calm with the puck. He isn’t a kid who rushes. He gets good shots off. We try to get him with the puck in front of the net as much as possible.”

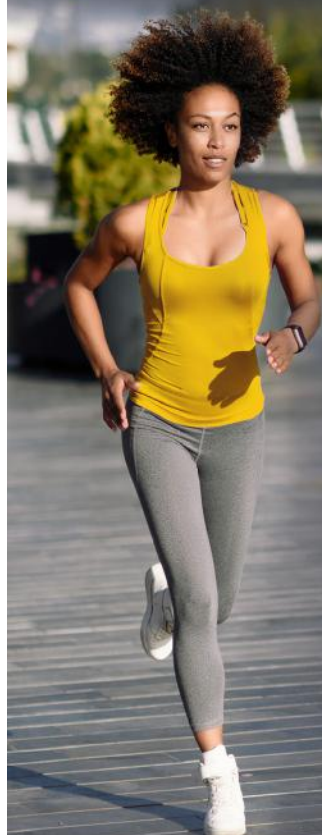
Clifton’s Ben Smith and Passaic Valley’s Connor Peterson, both seniors, will be in the offensive rotation, as well. Cedar Grove freshman Antonio Buolo is a utility player with travel hockey experience who will likely start the year as a forward.

Defensively, United will return Clifton sophomore Ryan Sisco, Cedar Grove senior Eric Ring and Passaic Valley senior Ioannis Koularmanis—all accomplished and talented players.

Cedar Grove senior Thomas Cannataro—a standout football player for the Panthers—is back in goal for United, a year after making 508 saves with an .877 save percentage.

“As long as we can be disciplined enough to play the style of hockey that we know makes us effective, I think this team can be very good,” Santosuosso said. “If we can stay healthy and win the games that we need to, I think we should be competing for a county, have a shot to win our league again, and make a deeper run in the states.”

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## MUSTANG TRACK

Front from left: Hillary Batista, Mikaella Francisco, Rosana Boge, Jeimmy Picado, Alexis Smith. Boys from left: Jason Molina, Carlos Paulino, Luis Beristain, Kaiden Sasso, Carlos Gonzalez, Josue Lopez, Joel Vera, Liam Oliveras, Izaiah Velez, Tapan Mis-try, Tarik Pesocan, Anthony Pichardo, Mykhalio Kozliuk, Yash Nadiyadhara, Christian Cabanilla.

**A year after winning the Passaic County championship**, the Clifton boys indoor track team is looking to make it a second straight winter to remember. The Mustangs have a solid core returning and, despite the loss of several key contributors, including former star Nate Phillips, appear primed to contend once again.

Senior Volodymyr Kozliuk, a Meet of Champions high jump qualifier in both the indoor and spring seasons last year, is back and will no doubt continue to be a name to watch. Kozliuk was also a sectional champion last indoor season and is skilled in the triple jump and long jump.

"We expect Volodymyr to do even better than last year," said Clifton head coach Kareem West. "You always try to progress. Hopefully he can get to 6'10" or 7'. We'll see."

Senior Joel Vera has overcome injuries and looked sharp this preseason. Vera will contribute in the 55-meter hurdles, high jump, long jump and triple jump, and West feels he is ready to be a consistent point-getter.

Senior Izaiah Velez will also be a valuable contributor in those same events and continues to improve each time he hits the track.

Sophomore Logan Ojeda (400m, 55m) and senior Tarik Pesocan (triple jump, hurdles, pole vault) are two other Mustang athletes who seem primed for a big winter.

**The Clifton girls will be led by senior Mikaella Francisco**, a seasoned long jumper, triple jumper and sprinter. Francisco will spearhead a balanced group that also includes senior Alexis Smith, who will compete in the 1600m and 3200m.

Sophomores Melissa Garth and Mallory Nicol give the Mustangs a strong middle-distance duo, while senior Rosana Boge figures to be a standout sprinter.

With experienced leadership for the boys and girls, West believes Clifton's depth and versatility could play a key role as the season unfolds. If younger athletes continue to develop and veterans build on past success, the Mustangs could once again be a factor at the county and league level.

"Last year we did alright with the boys winning," West said. "I expect them to compete again. I think there are a lot of girls who are going to bring in some points and there might be some surprises. I would love to see the girls win counties or leagues. They've weathered the storm, and hopefully they can put it together."

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The entire Mustang Swim team at the Boys & Girls Club Martini Aquatics Center. Seniors include Sevilay Orta, Yaretzi Castillo, Dhruvi Sharma, Judith Montes De Oca, Adrian Wilson-King, Joshua Henry, Aarmani Reynoso, Joseph Rojas.



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**Clifton swimming may not be ready** to win titles, but the program is determined to get better each day.

The Mustangs brought back a number of skilled athletes who are improving, and head coach Mike Velez is hoping it won't be long until the boys and girls teams get into the win column.

"It has been good to see kids wanting to do something different [and join the swim team]," Velez said. "I'd like to see progress toward achieving a better record than last year. I'd like to see our kids getting PRs in their normal events, or maybe finding a new event they can help us with."

On the boys' side, Clifton is led by Adrian Wilson-King, a senior who swims the 500-yard freestyle, 100-yard backstroke, 200-yard medley relay and 400-yard medley relay. Wilson-King was an All-Passaic County honorable mention last year.

Senior Joshua Henry is back, as well, a year after earning honorable mention in the Big North Liberty Division. He participates in the 200-yard medley relay, 100-yard backstroke and 400-yard freestyle relay.

Among Clifton's other returnees are juniors Julio Montero (200-yard medley relay, 200-yard individual medley, 100-yard fly, 400-yard freestyle relay) and Nicolas Liscano (200-yard medley relay, 100-yard freestyle, 400-yard freestyle relay). New to the lineup are freshman Thomas Rhodes (200-yard medley relay, 100-yard freestyle, 200-

yard individual medley, 400-yard freestyle relay) and junior Neil Harvey (200-yard freestyle relay, 100-yard breaststroke).

The girls have one swimmer who earned postseason honors in 2024-25 — Antonia Kormos. The sophomore received all-county honorable mention and takes part in the 500-yard freestyle, 400-yard freestyle relay, 200-yard medley relay and 200-yard individual medley.

Yaretzi Castillo is the Mustangs' top returning senior, racing the 200-yard medley relay, 200-yard freestyle relay and 100-yard breaststroke.

The junior class features Sara Juzga (200-yard medley relay, 100-yard fly, 200-yard freestyle relay), Antonina Kiszkiel (200-yard individual medley, 100-yard fly, 400-yard freestyle relay), Amanda Pinnock (100-yard backstroke, 100-yard freestyle, 400-yard freestyle relay), Nicole Velasquez (200-yard freestyle relay, 100-yard breaststroke) and newcomer Shirley Leiva (100-yard freestyle, 100-yard backstroke).

Sophomore Dyani Rodriguez handles the 200-yard freestyle relay, 100-yard breaststroke and 400-yard freestyle relay, while first-year swimmer Sevilay Orta, a senior, competes in the 200-yard medley relay and 200-yard freestyle relay. The boys finished December at 0-5 and the girls 0-4, but both squads will look to get off the schneid Jan. 7 at Paramus Catholic.

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# CLAIMING WHAT'S YOURS

By Ariana Puzzo

For the new year, Councilman Antonio Latona has a lofty goal of helping people that he knows collectively reach \$1 million.

It's not for a political reason. Latona, a retired city firefighter who's served as a councilman since 2022, helps residents, organizations, and the city find unclaimed funds. Based on what people have reported back to him, the effort has amounted to unearthing at least a collective \$250,000.

"When I got better and started doing more key-word searches, so many people had [unclaimed funds]. Business-after-business has them," said Latona, 52. "I'd love to reach that million-dollar milestone of getting people money. One of my favorite lines that I've said in jest is, 'Most times politicians show up and want your money. I show up to find and give you money.'"

To search for unclaimed property, upload claim documentation and/or check your claim status. Visit the State of New Jersey Department of the Treasury Unclaimed Property Administration at [unclaimedproperty.nj.gov](https://unclaimedproperty.nj.gov).

To check for unclaimed property by mail, mail a search request form to: State of New Jersey Unclaimed Property Administration, P.O. Box 214, Trenton, NJ 08625.

"I'm on top of finances and I've had multiple claims over the years," said Latona. "It was an old military account from when I was going to get a mortgage years ago. I ended up not using that company to do my mortgage and forgot I had \$280 in that account."

Latona heard back from one individual who found \$10,000 in Disney stock that they bought 30 years ago. Another person's family discovered two \$20,000 CDs in

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a deceased relative's bank. Others discovered old deposits or forgotten funds from previous moves or due to changing an email address.

The unclaimed property abandonment timetable varies based on the property. Dividends and insurance are presumed abandoned after three years, gift cards after five years, and utility deposits are one year after the service ends. There is no statute of limitations on claiming unclaimed property. "There's nothing to do to prevent it," said Latona (CHS 1992), "but something [that you can] do is take the time to search."

## Positioned to Help

The lifelong resident began casually plugging names into the system about three years ago. A year later, his friend Lizz Gagnon (CHS 1973), who retired in June of 2023 after 24 years working in the city's tax assessor's office, reminded him of the process.

"Now I was an elected official and, in my head, I start-



ed saying, ‘Wait a minute, this could be a good thing to help people.’” said Latona. “I had gotten [money for] a lot of family and friends, but this was a whole new level.”

Latona entered the names of his Council colleagues and found almost all of them in the system. He started sending more notices to the people that he knew. As he kept finding more, the next approach was to look up organizations and nonprofits. Latona noticed unclaimed funds for the Boys & Girls Club, the Board of Education, St. Peter’s Haven, and the City of Clifton.

On Oct. 27, the Office of Assemblywoman Rosy Bago-lie held an Unclaimed Funds Event at City Hall in collaboration with the City Council, helping residents recover over \$100,000 in unclaimed funds. Representatives from the Unclaimed Property Administration attended to help residents find forgotten bank accounts, uncashed checks, or insurance payouts.

For any questions or assistance with claims, call 609-292-9200 Monday-Friday from 8 am to 4 pm.

They additionally helped people utilize programs like the Affordable New Jersey Communities for Homeowners and Renters (ANCHOR) program. The 2025 deadline to apply was just a few days later on Oct. 31. Separately, NJSave helps low-income older adults and individuals with disabilities save money on Medicare premiums, prescription costs, and other living expenses, plus a Community Housing in Partnership (CHIP) program.

“Many of our residents were able to sign up for [ANCHOR]. For renters, that is about \$450 per year,” said Latona. “For people who signed up for the CHIP program ... that is up to \$20,000. The residents who signed up for that bring it into the hundreds of thousands of dollars range. There’s a lot of money out there in grants.”

### Safety First

Unclaimed funds have the sliding-scale potential of improving someone’s day to changing someone’s life. That further holds true for the nonprofit and community organizations that provide their services to local individuals and families.

Six different churches in our city had unclaimed funds. So did the majority of the women involved in the Allwood Women’s Club. If it’s not you, you may discover a family member missing out on a financial windfall.

Latona has made it a point to reach out to multiple communities, including the Palestinian American Community Center (PACC) on Lakeview Ave., the Knights of Columbus Regina Mundi Council 3969, and St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church in Passaic.

“If you put ‘Ukrainian’ as the search word, not a town, and just search the whole state, there are a dozen other Ukrainian communities around the state of New Jersey,” said Latona. “Have your community reach out to all of these people.”

**Happy New Year 2026**

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*He noticed unclaimed funds for the Boys & Girls Club, the Board of Education, St. Peter's Haven, and the City of Clifton, as well as churches, social groups and countless individuals.*

That is just one segment of the population. There's also the police and fire departments, unions, and Clifton High School. When he spoke with the Board of Ed administration, he informed them of dozens of claims connected to elementary schools, CHS, and the Board, itself.

"A check was sent five years ago, and it never got cashed," said Latona.

He also mentioned a goal for this year, where the state would come to the city during a Street Fair where there are thousands of people in attendance. That would further expedite claiming funds, because he explained that representatives of the state can do the work right there with their computers.

In other words, there isn't the same wait time as an individual filling out a form and sending it in to the Unclaimed Property Administration. That will also help overcome one hurdle affecting the process: Residents and seniors are rightfully cautious about sharing their personal information.

"We teach our residents, and seniors especially, to secure [their] information. 'Don't put your date of birth and Social Security number into the computer. Fraud, fraud, fraud,'" said Latona. "What I remind people is, this is the State of New Jersey's 'dot gov' website."

"It's the one time where it's going into a secure server, because it does require you to put in your date of birth and Social Security number for them to confirm who you are," he continued. "That's why I want to bring in the state and like to go places and do it directly. It helps make people feel more comfortable and secure when they see this is what we're doing."

### **Touching Lives**

It's those personal encounters that truly make the act of giving — or, in this case, informing — all-the-more heartwarming. That has always mattered to Latona, whether it was his time as a Red Cross volunteer from ages 13 to

## **CLAIMING WHAT'S YOURS**



*Just before they began the 55th Tour of Clifton, Tony Latona was helping Santa and Mrs. Claus look for unclaimed funds.*

18, when he joined the US Air Force over 30 years ago, or during his years with the Clifton Fire Department until his retirement in June of 2022.

Among the causes that he works closest with today are ones where he can support seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans.

Toward the end of last year, there were a couple of stand-out moments when he saw how just a simple search can change a life. The first instance was when he visited The Hot Grill and he ran into a gentleman that he knew who had fallen on hard times. After they reconnected, Latona put the man's name into the system and later informed him that he had 11 claims for \$2,800.

"He started crying and hugging me, telling me how he's in a rough spot in life," said Latona, "and how meaningful that was to help him find that money."

The following day, he visited the Lauren Murphy Warming Center when Code Blue was in effect to bring some trays of food. While he was there, Latona spoke with a woman and ran her name. She had two claims sitting there, untouched.

"Eventually, my goal is to run everyone's name who goes there that wants to look," said Latona. "They've lived some place, so they most likely will have the same type of lost claim as everyone else. Who needs it the most right now? Them. It really melted my heart going home that day."



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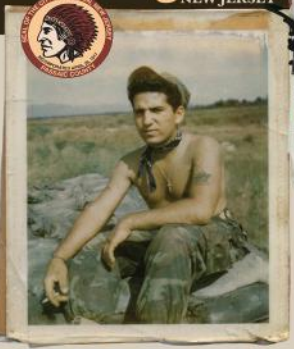
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Map of **Clifton** 2026 NEW JERSEY



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# Advertise On The 2026 Map



Inserted within February's magazine will be the 2026 Map of Clifton. It will feature images from stories of veterans like USMC Guyler Tulp who served in Vietnam. In May, 2011, we published photos and letters Guy sent home which the family shared with us. As a result, his voice lives on despite his death in the jungle of that country on April 30, 1969.

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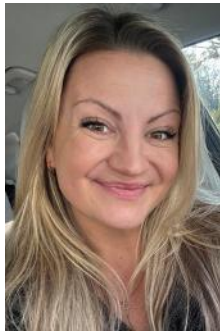
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## Birthdays & Celebrations - January 2026



**Austin Blesing** turns 20 on Jan. 17. **Kyle Stone Osborne** is 20 on Jan. 19. **Cindy Hawrylko** is 35 Jan. 22. **Isabel Victoria Calvo** turns 11 on Jan. 12. **Kevin Gorman** turns 68 on Jan. 29. **Angely Sotomba** will celebrate her 14th birthday on Jan. 26.



**Alyssa Philhower & Becca Potocki** shared a birthday on Jan. 1. **Vicky Petrovic** will party on Jan. 5. And many birthday wishes to **Bob Sandri** who celebrates on Jan. 6. **Joan Murphy** turns 92 on Jan. 7. She is seen at right with husband **Gene**, grandsons **Nick** and **Joe** and son in law **Joe**.



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**Barbara Bivaletz** turn 71  
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