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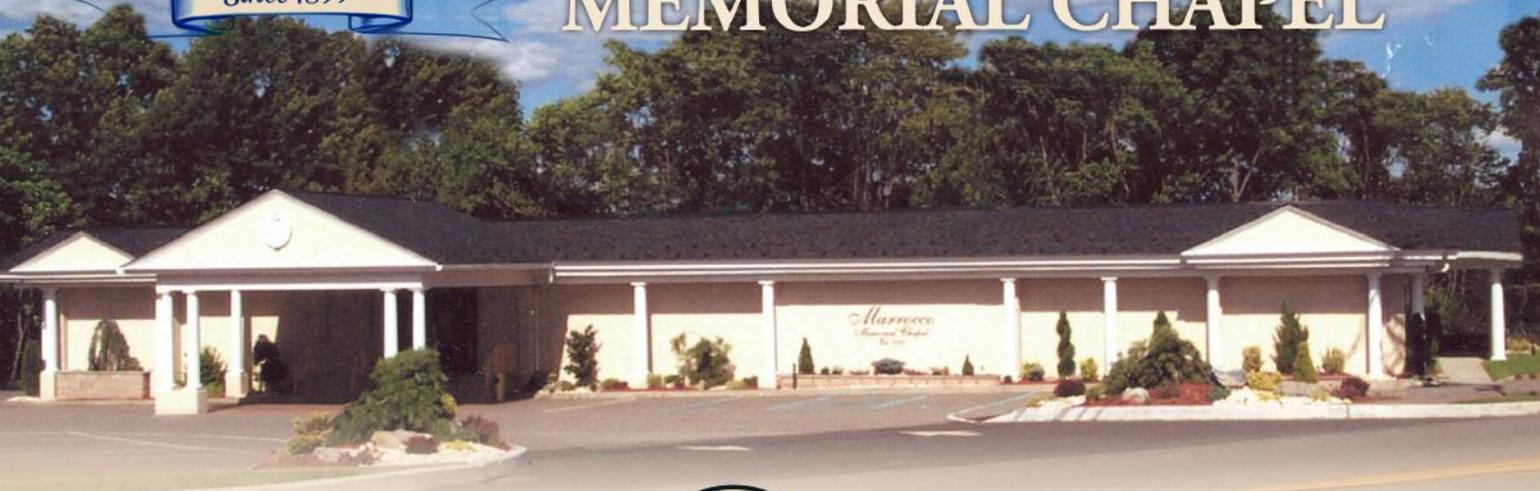
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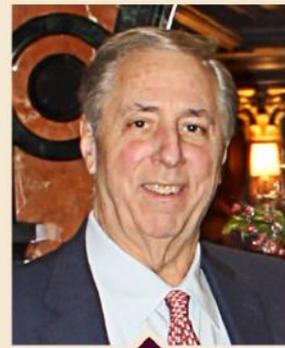
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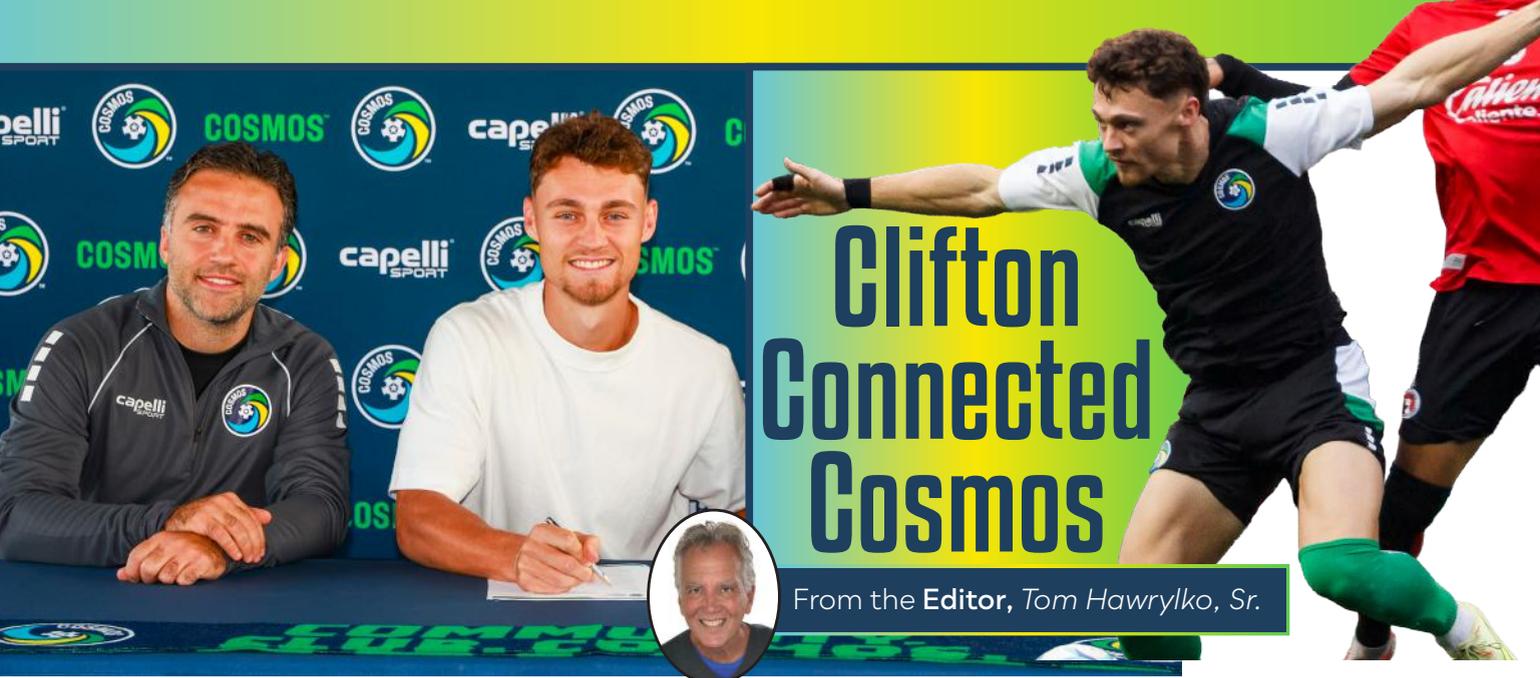
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Clifton Connected Cosmos

From the Editor, Tom Hawrylko, Sr.

With the March 14 debut of the Cosmos at Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson, the Ukrainian-American and Clifton communities are stoked. First, there is Giuseppe Rossi, the Cosmo’s vice chair and head of soccer. Now 38, he grew up on Luddington Ave. with sister Tina and parents Cleonilde, a CHS language teacher, and her late husband Fernando, the legendary Mustangs soccer coach.

Giuseppe played Clifton Stallions youth soccer and then at 12, moved with his dad to Italy to join Parma’s academy. In 2004, the left-footed forward began his pro career at Manchester United but spent most of his career with Villarreal and Fiorentina before retiring in 2023.

Here’s what the Cosmos CEO had to say when Rossi joined the team in 2025: “we’re excited to bring Giuseppe aboard because we think there should be more Giuseppe Rossis. There’s so much potential here in North Jersey. He understands how soccer is supposed to work—how good players are identified and nurtured—there’s no better place for him to start the next phase of his inspirational career.”

That brings us to Nick Zielonka, who signed with the Cosmos in December. The 23-year-old two-footed striker played for Wallington High and Clifton’s New Jersey Stallions. His parents, Jody and Pete, and siblings, Alex and Anna, are parishioners at St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church. Two decades ago the Zielonkas founded Precision Motors on Sebego St., now Integrated Power Systems.

Nick’s soccer story continued at UMass Amherst. During 2020-23, he tallied 13 goals with 14 assists then added two more goals and four assists during grad school at the University of Kentucky in 2024.

For the Hudson Valley Hammers of Newburgh, Zielonka hit 31 goals across four summer seasons (2022-25). In spring 2025 with New York Pancyprian Freedoms, he started two US Open Cup matches, including a first-round upset of MLS Next Pro side FC Cincinnati 2.

The Clifton and Ukrainian-American communities are coming out big for the season-opener. Join us; look for our flags at the stadium or go to nycosmos.com for more info.

Clifton Merchant Magazine

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By Ariana Puzzo



Allison Armstrong's first group of students in 2003 were just as sweet as the second graders that she teaches today at School 1.

"When I was younger," recalled Armstrong (CHS 1999), "my mom and dad got a school desk that I set up downstairs with my stuffed animals, and I would teach them each day using my imagination and playing."

She also had inspiration during her years as a Mustang. The Cliftonite, married to retired CHS teacher Bryan Armstrong (CHS 1998), got her own start by attending School 2 and WWMS. It was her second grade teacher, the late Mrs. Helen Velicky, who still stands out to her.

"She was just always kind. I remember that was the age that I really wanted to be a teacher," she said, "and I remember being in her class and loving that she read us stories every day."

Fast-forward to getting hired in 2003, Clifton Schools would truly become her home away from home. Armstrong has taught for her entire career in School 1 — the first 21 years in fifth grade before making a recent switch to second grade.

"I was able to move and kind of start over late in my career. I love teaching younger kids now, especially since mine are older," said Armstrong, 45. "I'm very fortunate to have been able to stay in School 1 for all these years. It really is my second home. It's the longest home that I've been in."

Armstrong's advice to her younger self is to be less hard on herself. Getting overwhelmed was easy at times with "so many things thrown" at teachers, but she emphasized it helps when you set aside some of the stress of deadlines to focus on putting a smile on children's faces.

That, she added, is the long-term joy of working in the same building and hearing from former students even after years have gone by since they left her classroom. Some of her fifth grade students are even parents now in the building with students who might come to her someday.

"A couple of weeks ago, a student got a full scholarship to Yale and emailed me to thank me," said Armstrong. "The best part of this job is any time a former student reaches out and shares something big that they accomplished. That's when you realize, 'I did make a difference.'"



Lindsey Cinque, Gianna Colon, and Joanna Huster.

Two teachers, Lindsey Cinque and Joanna Huster, truly helped shape me into the person that I am today.

Their impact on my life goes far beyond the classroom. The way that they genuinely care about their students stood out to me. They never treated teaching as “just a job.” They built real relationships, made time for every student, and they created an environment where people felt safe, supported, and motivated to be their best.

Two teachers helped this CHS Senior see her future more clearly by being inspirational and supportive.

As told by Gianna Colon to Robert Niessen

What influenced me the most was how they always found a way to reach every student and never gave up on anyone. They showed patience, understanding, and compassion while still holding students accountable and pushing them to grow.

On days when I doubted myself, they believed in me and reminded me of my potential. That belief gave me confidence and helped me realize how powerful encouragement and trust can be. I learned that leadership isn’t about authority; it’s about empathy, consistency, and showing up for people when it matters most.

I’ve started to see my future differently because of Mrs. Cinque and Ms. Huster. I want to create the same supportive environment that they created for me and be the person who listens, who adapts, and who pushes others to succeed while still caring about who they are as individuals. Their influence has shown me the kind of leader that I want to become and the example I hope to set for others in the future as a Physical Education teacher.

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By Robert Niessen

The stage lights might shine brightly, but for Jordan Orey, it's the guidance behind the scenes that has made all the difference.

The Albion resident has spent the last four years discovering the world of theatre, and himself, under the watchful and inspiring eye of Lisa Poggi, his drama teacher at CHS.

The senior said Poggi has had a lasting influence on his growth as a young actor.

"She has sparked my creativity and inspires me to go further in my journey of performing arts," Orey, 17, shared. From his first class in ninth grade, she encouraged him to take risks, explore characters deeply, and embrace the vulnerability that comes with performing.

"She's helped me push past my limits," he said, noting that her guidance was both gentle and challenging.



Whether it's experimenting with new performance styles or learning to trust his instincts on the stage, Poggi has guided him every step of the way. Her dedication, Orey explained, isn't just about teaching theatre. It's about showing students how to connect, to be confident, and to find their voice in whatever they pursue.

Poggi's guidance has shaped both Jordan's passion and confidence through the years. He says she "has had a big impact" on his

"interest in theatre and abilities as a young actor," pushing him to grow not only in skill but in how he sees himself on stage.

Long after the lights dim and the stage goes quiet, the confidence and creativity Poggi helped to spark remain. It's something that Orey carries with him into every performance, and he will carry into whatever comes next.



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The Next Chapter

By Ariana Puzzo

Working with kids makes Kimberly Green's heart happy, and so does introducing them to the world of reading and seeing wherever it takes them next.

Green is a Media Specialist at School 12, also traveling to Schools 4 and 9 to put books into students' hands. Although Clifton first hired her in 2008, she pivoted to this role in 2022 after getting her master's in Educational Technology and certification to be a media specialist.

"It's so great having kids be able to read and inspiring them to read," said Green, 41. "It's just the best."

And she has one of her Clifton teachers to thank for



Kimberly Green above and Ali Zeidan on facing page.

helping her get a foot in the door. "When I was looking for a job, my seventh grade teacher Bob Mullen reached out and got me the interview," said Green (CHS 2003). "Then I became a seventh grade English teacher."

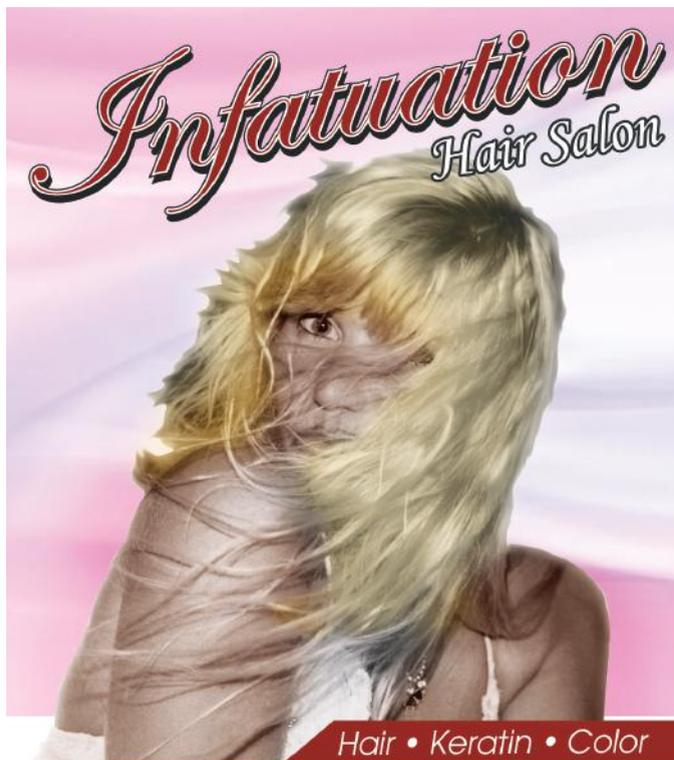
"I love teaching in Clifton, because I grew up here," said Green, who's also a School 13 alumna. "A lot of people that grew up in Clifton now teach here. Something about it just feels special."

Along with helping students select two books to check out every other week, Green's role is also tied into teaching about technology. She credited the Clifton Education Foundation for providing School 12's Makerspace materials as well, which were funded through a grant and are used to motivate students in all of the elementary buildings.

"We have LEGOs, Brain Flakes, and building blocks so that kids can create things, build, and use creativity and imagination, which is excellent," said Green early last month. "This Valentine's Day, I plan to read a book to the kids like I always do and then they'll do a related activity, where they can create hearts using any materials."

It's not just kids who are energized by what Green's job lets her bring to the schools either. She also runs a Teachers Book Club at School 12, proving that stories stay with us at any age.

"I get to spend my days helping kids fall in love with books and reading, and I still love reading," said Green. "Which makes it exciting, getting adults inspired to read. I honestly love my job."



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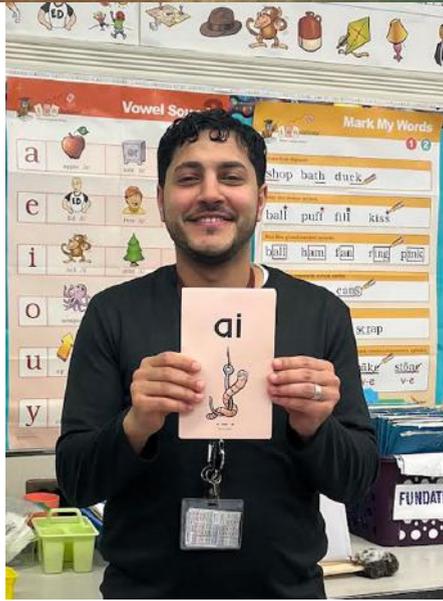


Reflection is integral to Ali Zeidan’s teaching philosophy, and it starts with tracking the growth of his students’ learning from the beginning of the year to the end of it.

Zeidan teaches second grade at School 11, which gives him an opportunity to work with a wide range of abilities. Whether he is gauging their reading levels or seeing them apply some higher level of skills to their writing pieces, Zeidan always makes literacy a top priority.

“Teaching skills that last beyond one school year is a highlight for me at the end of every school year,” said Zeidan, 34. “[Skills like developing] long-term study habits, persistence, organization, and curiosity. These things are my highlights.”

Zeidan, who attended School 4 and CCMS, is in his 10th year of teaching at School 11. His nine years of teaching second graders have taken place in an inclusion setting, meaning he supports students with and without



an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Even when he’s not reflecting on student progress, the lifelong resident is always assessing his own skills. It might mean getting new training or pursuing a master’s in Educational Leadership.

“It’s a huge task, the daily work that we do as teachers,” said Zeidan. “So I like to look into [new opportunities for professional development].”

His fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Susan Kopko, immediately came to mind when he considered the type of teacher that he tries to be for his students and their families.

“I’m in regular contact with parents to let them know about their child’s progress, their most up-to-date reading level, and to provide recommendations for further support at home,” said Zeidan. “I think back to [Mrs. Kopko] — a teacher where you can sense there is genuine care — who involved my mother throughout the entire process.”



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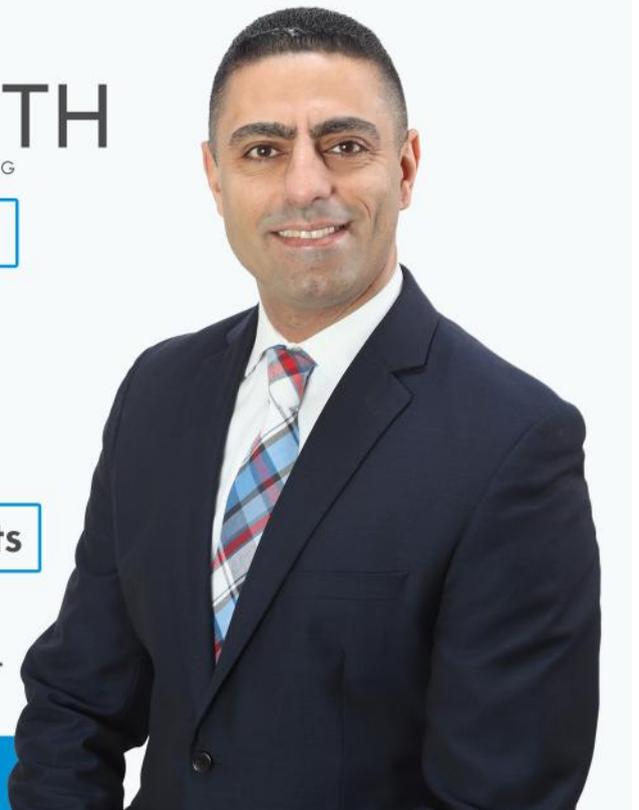
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By Ariana Puzzo

Mark Tomaskovic knows that it all comes back to staying active — and that’s exactly what he teaches his School 3 students. “Your health is important,” said Tomaskovic, 57. “If you don’t have your health, you won’t be doing much more. It keeps you focused.”

But teaching physical education wasn’t his original plan despite sports having a big role in his life. The CHS 1987 grad attended School 2 and Woodrow Wilson Junior High, which is where he played freshman baseball under Coach Paul Pignatello.

Tomaskovic lettered in three sports—he pitched Mustang Varsity Baseball, was the Fighting Mustangs’ quarterback and played forward for Boys Basketball. Once Tomaskovic realized majoring in Business at MSU wasn’t for him, he switched to Physical Education and Health.

“I even played a little college baseball at MSU. Athletics was always there,” said Tomaskovic. “I love being around kids and teaching them. I got into coaching a little bit. I coached in Elmwood Park and Teaneck as well.”

He credited Pignatello as the coach and educator in his



life who acted as a good role model. Tomaskovic learned organization skills and how to have the right demeanor from Pignatello, particularly when it came to how to talk with players.

“I still use [what I learned from him] to this day,” said Tomaskovic. “My boys Kyle and Dylan are in college now, but they played high school sports in Pequannock. [Coach Pignatello] is retired now, but he would come to watch their games and we’d sit together and talk.”

For the past 31 years as a full-time teacher, School 3 has remained Tomaskovic’s home-base. He also currently teaches in Schools 1 and 4. His sched-

ule includes: Four classes at School 1 and three classes at School 3 on Mondays, seven classes at School 3 from Tuesday through Thursday, and seven classes at School 4 on Friday.

“The colleagues that I work with are fantastic in all of my schools,” said Tomaskovic. “It’s the same for other schools within the Physical Education Department. We’re always talking with each other and getting ideas.”



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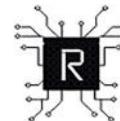
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It's not just about homework and class assignments in John King's English and History classes. Eighth grader Mykhailo Stoyanovych actually looks forward to listening to his teacher.

"He gives fair assignments and [gives a reasonable] amount of homework," said Mykhailo, 13. "He's fun, and makes work fun. Some parts are sometimes hard, but we can chat with our neighbors to help each other."

Mykhailo and brother Myroslav, 10, emigrated from Ukraine three years ago. Their dad Roman remains in Ukraine while mom Olena came to the United States eight months ahead of the boys to find a home and school.

They moved to Clifton and attend St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic School on President St. in Passaic. Mykhailo has had King for three years and the eight-grader said his teacher injects humor and anecdotes into the work. "You have to be funny sometimes," said Mykhailo. "You can't just sit there and talk about subjects with no emotion. That would just sound boring and uninteresting."

King pivoted to teaching after 20 years in international business when an opportunity arose for him to make a career change. He taught in Massachusetts for 15 years before joining the St. Nick's staff in September, 2019.

"When I came to a school like this, probably half the class was from different places. It really is rich when you see all the kids bring their own backgrounds into the classroom," continued King, 68. "It makes learning really fun. I haven't looked back; it's wonderful."

As for Mykhailo's appreciation for King and his teaching style, it isn't one-sided. King has plenty of admiration for the eighth grader. St. Nicholas affords teachers and students smaller class sizes to "really get to know the kids."

"Michael has been a delight. He came here as a war refugee and had a little bit of English, but what he's picked up, in the amount of time that he's picked it up, boggles my mind," said King. "He was just accepted into PCTI's STEM Engineering program. His grades are outstanding."

"He's got a great sense of humor," King added, "and he not only grasps the material very well, but Michael challenges me and his classmates. We have had some great class discussions because of that."



Mykhailo Stoyanovych and brother Myroslav with John King at St. Nick's and St. Phillip's 7th Grader Gabriella Healy.

Mrs. Jennifer Higgins is an amazing teacher and I love how she interacts with students (related story page 34). I had her for Science class in fourth and fifth grade, and one of the things that I enjoyed was learning about rocks and minerals. She brought in different rocks and ... let us touch them.

I've attended St. Philip since preschool. Now that I'm 12, I hold my Catholicism and my faith as very important to me. I always pray to God; He's my Father. All of the teachers are amazing and set you up for the future. I see myself attending PCTI or DePaul Catholic and then Harvard or Princeton. I want to be a cardiovascular surgeon and think that to be a doctor, you have to have a lot of responsibility. My mom always tells me, "Never be a follower, be a leader." — *By Gabriella Healy*



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Janine Hogel’s advice to new teachers is simple: Never be afraid to try something different or new. That’s what she has done after her move from School 1 to School 13, and she’s thriving.

“If what you do today doesn’t work, try something different and compare the two,” said Hogel, 60. “Reflect on day and the week, and see what you can do better.”

The fourth grade teacher taught at School 1 from 2010 until last year. Now spending her days on Van Houten Ave., Hogel has a new group of students that she can set high expectations for in order to see them succeed in and beyond the halls.

“I’m absolutely loving everything about my change to School 13,” said Hogel. “The change was hard for me at first, but I feel very welcomed at 13, and I think I fit in pretty well.”

Hogel is involved with School 13’s Safety Patrol, PBSIS Universal team, Labor Management Collaborative, and she has supported 10 of Clifton’s ISEE musical theater program’s shows.

It took a few years for Hogel to pursue teaching, but it wasn’t for lack of interest. Her father, the late Richard Hogel, initially encouraged her to reconsider since “there were no jobs in teaching at the time, and he kind of saw things were changing.”

Times changed again after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. That’s when Hogel decided to go back to school and get her dual degree in English and Education K-5 from Felician University.



“I wanted to do something more meaningful,” said Hogel. “I wanted to make a difference in the future and figured our children are our future, so that’s where I should start.”

Like her father, all roads lead back to Clifton Schools. Richard taught at School 2, School 5, and he was later the principal of School 14. For a time, he served a dual role as the principal of School 16, but he retired from School 14.

Along with admiring her third grade teacher Mr. Grimes, Hogel also credited her father as an inspiration; both in her life and her career. “I never saw him in action, but I’ve heard stories that parents, students, and colleagues of his told me about him,” said Hogel. “He actually would kneel and sit on the floor with [students].”

“I try to sit at my students’ level. I don’t like talking down to them,” she continued. “I’ll squat next to a desk. I don’t stand above and speak down to them, because I don’t think that’s proper to do to anyone.”

As one of the younger students in elementary school, Maria Herschbein knows the support of a teacher can go a long way.

It certainly did for her. “I was one of the youngest in my grade, so I struggled a lot in elementary school. I was a remedial kid,” said Herschbein (CHS 1990). “There were teachers that I always remember, because they took me under their wing and helped me to do better. They gave my mom stacks of work over the summer to help me catch up.”

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Herschbein, who attended School 11 through sixth grade and CCMS, pointed to Ms. Petrasek for first grade, Ms. Demming for second grade, and Ms. Terry Lynch for sixth grade. “They were all teachers who really helped,” she said. “I look back on first and second grade fondly, because [they] ... really had compassion for my situation.”

She makes sure to lead with that same compassion today. Herschbein’s career in Clifton began in October of 1995 at her alma mater, School 11. There was a class-split needed due to having too many students, and that was the only year that she didn’t teach at School 14.

Herschbein has taught at School 14 since September of 1996, and she is a Basic Skills teacher for English Language Arts with grades K-2. The push-in program lets her work with the students who need extra support in the “foundations area.” It means giving them a double-dose of content areas, like reading, to help them be more successful.

There are six teachers that she services, two in each grade, and she sees three to five kids per group at a table



in the back of the classroom. Providing that individualized help and seeing how it makes a difference means everything to Herschbein.

“When a kid [becomes more independent] that’s the most rewarding thing,” said Herschbein. “Some kids take longer and there are some kids that I only see for half the year or a full year, because they start off the following school year strong. That’s ultimately my goal.”

And others have noticed. Herschbein recently received an email stating that she was nominated for Educator of the Year, which she acknowledged on its own as being a career highlight.

“I have no idea who would have recommended me. I’m just in awe that I was even nominated,” said Herschbein. “It’s such a prestigious award.”

It all ties back to the gratitude and love that she has for the School 14 community. Whether it’s students, parents, colleagues, or the administration, it all has made a difference. “I don’t know how to convey my feelings for School 14. It’s my life outside of my family,” she said. “I love

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By Ariana Puzzo

Amy Krainski's earliest memory of art was making a poster for science class in elementary school and how it involved her drawing for it. "I remember drawing this crab and then running to my dad and being so proud of it," said Krainski, 37. "I submitted what I did, and didn't change anything, and my teacher loved it."

What stood out to her was how she was able to get the subject across, as well as feeling a "sense of pride" about something that she made and received positive feedback about. That's what she strives to bring to her students at the School 12 Annex and School 12. She still remembers how when she was in kindergarten, she got in trouble while they were mixing colors for clapping and pounding excitedly on the table to say that yellow and red make orange.

"I was so proud that I remembered that, but I got a phone call home because I was a little too enthusiastic," she laughed. "I like to tell my kindergartners that ... [in case] I tell them a story that makes them realize maybe they want to be a teacher, too."

Krainski has officially taught in Clifton for two years, but she first came onto the scene 13 years ago with her involvement in the after-school program Minds in Motion. It's federally funded and meant to supplement the educa-



tion of over 200 students in grades 3-5 between Schools 4, 12, and 17 from 2:50-6 pm, taking them on field trips and collaborating with the Boys & Girls Club.

But no matter the age group or the setting, Krainski loves hearing from former students who still have their art projects. She also loves the good chaos that happens in a classroom. "Plaster and clay are probably my favorite materials," she said. "I think the messier, the better."

A Do-Over

Eva Velez, 16, is a CHS junior: "I would retake American History with Ms. Deanna DeCorte. She is amazingly understanding of all her students. She has given me the best advice when it comes to academics, athletics, and friendships. She supports me in sports by encouraging me whenever I feel like giving up and by always trying to come to my games and plan it in her schedule. In school, she helps me realize my goals and potential when things start to get hard. Especially within friendships and relationships, she is always there to give the absolute best advice. She makes me feel seen and gives me the confidence to realize everything is going to be OK."

by Robert Niessen





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By Ariana Puzzo

Supporting her community by educating its youth is a value that Erin Saba learned from those closest to her at a young age.

“My mom, Cathy Burke, and my aunt, Lani Pollastro, were teachers within the Clifton School District,” said Saba, 42. “Watching them in their roles while I grew up was a big inspiration for why I wanted to go into teaching.”

Burke spent her career at School 15 and then CCMS, whereas Pollastro taught in School 2. Saba has followed in both of their footsteps, spending 10 years as a Kindergarten teacher at School 2 before moving in 2019 to School 15 in Special Education.

Saba, like her mother and aunt, grew up and went on to raise her family here. She attended School 5 and WWMS, now sending kids Addison, 10, and Michael, 7, to School 9.

“I saw how much they loved our town,” said Saba (CHS 2001). “They grew up in Clifton, then they had their families, stayed, and worked in Clifton. I wanted to continue that. I thought they had such a beautiful impact on the community, which inspired me to follow on that same path.”

After subbing in most buildings for about a year, Saba was hired by Clifton Schools in 2009. It was when she returned from her second maternity leave that she made the



switch into School 15’s Resource Room.

“It was a change that I didn’t know I needed. I loved kindergarten, and I still love the little ones, but it was a complete change of pace,” said Saba. “I went from working with a big group of students to a smaller group, which meant more opportunities to create more of those bonds, which was nice.”

It also let her work with fourth and fifth graders, which she described as a “completely different dynamic.” Despite her apprehension about

stepping into a role that she had a degree in but no experience working in a Resource Room for, she acclimated and quickly saw the positives.

The qualities that she thinks every Special Education teacher needs are straightforward.

“It’s definitely important to find the strengths in everybody. Not just in teaching, but also in life. Build upon those things,” said Saba.

“Also, compassion and empathy by realizing that people struggle or deal with things that we might not all struggle with. Seeing it from their perspective ... [allows you to] help guide [students] in their education.”

Making Creative Connections

It started with a desire to help people. Then, Brianne Saccomanno realized she had an aptitude for teaching.

“[I also had] a genuine interest in science and the art of communication,” said Saccomanno, 31. “[Becoming a Speech-Language Specialist] felt like the perfect marriage of both.”

Saccomanno is in her seventh year of teaching at School 16 and is also a lead speech therapist at a private practice in Little Falls.



The clinical setting allows her to explore a variety of pediatric speech, language, and feeding disorders in kids ages 1 to 12.

As eager as she is to help young children, she would also like more people to understand that speech therapy is a broad field that covers many specialties.

“I think a lot of people think that speech therapy is just fixing sounds. Really, most work that we do is language and we also work in a medical setting with feeding therapy,” said Saccomanno.

She continued: “More awareness about that [would be great] and that there are a variety of patients, including pediatric clients, adults, and geriatrics.”

Saccomanno’s niche is helping students with complex communication needs who use high-tech augmentative and alternative communication — in other words, tools that supplement language like iPads, Sign Language, and static boards.

A memorable moment from Spring of 2025 was when the Clifton Education Foundation provided a grant that al-

lowed for the installation of a static communication board on the playground. Now, Saccomanno explained, classmates can connect with each other in another way.

“It reinforces inclusive communication in natural environments,” said Saccomanno. “Connection is my primary theme of working with students.”

Her teaching is inspired by her Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Oberlin.

“It was my first meaningful school experience. She was patient, passionate, and cared about the whole child.”

Music Creates a Learning Framework

Music reaches out and connects us, regardless of our ages or backgrounds, and David Boyes encourages others to see it up close and firsthand.

It starts with the School 17 Music teacher opening his classroom door to members of the school district.

“I always love to see people around the district, whether it be administrators or principals. I love people coming into my classroom,” said Boyes, 44. “More visitation ... [allows them to] see what music teachers are doing; not just at performances but on a daily basis.”

“I think we have a lot of great involvement with students,” he continued, “and having supervisors and administrators come in would impress them. They’d be happy to see what is happening with the arts in Clifton.”

The Elmwood Park resident lived in Clifton for 10 years, from around 2005 to 2015, and is in his 23rd year of teaching in the school district. Boyes has taught in Schools 1, 13, and 9, but he has primarily taught at School 17 since it opened in 2005.

What makes music “such a wonderful art” for him is he can teach students with different musical abilities and still make it a positive experience for them. Outside of teaching, he has participated in the ISEE program’s musical theater camp. That means realizing that some students can bring singing talents to the table or they might have stronger movement abilities.

“Some students are good at creating things. They might not feel musically inclined, but they can contribute to creating artwork or building designs,” said Boyes. “Maybe



they’re better at working the sound equipment if they’re technologically capable.”

“It’s all about finding the talent and interest of a student in the greater framework of what you’re doing,” he continued. “If you make them feel like they are a part of something greater, then you can really inspire and motivate them.”

As for Boyes, he started taking piano lessons in fourth grade and played trumpet in his school’s band in Kearny. The inspiration, in part, came from his father, John, who was a talented trumpet player as well. But by high school, a series of great teachers also made it click for Boyes that he wanted to pursue a career in

music education.

“When I was about 15, I started taking piano lessons with Dr. Min Kim,” recalled Boyes. “She opened my eyes to a new level of musicianship that I had not known before. That really drove me to work as hard as I could with music.”

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Corey and Roofer

Stories by Robert Niessen

A caring teacher has a lasting impact; an important lesson that Krystian Wojtylo has already learned at age 12. When asked about his favorite teacher, the Woodrow Wilson sixth grader didn't hesitate: Kasey Morse, at right.

"She's always there for every student no matter what," he said of his Social Studies teacher. A simple statement that speaks volumes about the trust and respect that Morse has earned by setting the tone for her classroom early.

Krystian recalled an open and comfortable class, despite the nerves of the first day in middle school.

That, Krystian explained, gave students the courage to speak up, stay curious, and explore new ideas without fear of judgment. Yet what stands out to Krystian isn't just Morse's knowledge; it's her steady, positive energy and "her attitude and how she acts." That energy spreads quickly, lifting the mood of all.

"She always, and I mean always, noticed if something was wrong and helped," he added. For Krystian, Morse is more than just a teacher; she's a steady guide who shows that learning isn't simply about memorizing facts on a page.

School is about asking questions, exploring the world, and discovering your own voice. In her classroom, Krystian said every student knows they matter and their ideas are valued, an impression that stays long after the bell rings.



Some classes stay with you because of the subject. Others, however, stay with you because of the person standing at the front of the room. For Joseph Zuniga, a 17-year-old junior at CHS, that person is Norma Stagg.

She teaches Spanish 2 Native Speakers and AP Spanish. He first met her sophomore year when he enrolled in her Native Speakers course. What he expected to be just another class quickly became something much more meaningful.

"Throughout sophomore year, I grew so much," Joseph shared, "not only with my Spanish, but also as a person, with her guidance."

Joseph (with Mrs Stagg at left) describes her as more than just a great teacher. She "ensures comprehension and productivity in all of her lessons while maintaining a fun environment," creating a classroom where students feel both challenged and comfortable.

Now taking AP Spanish under her instruction, Joseph said, "I am so thankful to be able to learn from her another year and be in her classroom every day." Reflecting on the impact she's had, he added that he can say "with full confidence" that being Mrs. Stagg's student has "taught me so much, and benefitted me academically and morally."

For Joseph, the lessons he's learned in her classroom go far beyond grammar and vocabulary—they've helped shape who he is becoming, both inside and outside of

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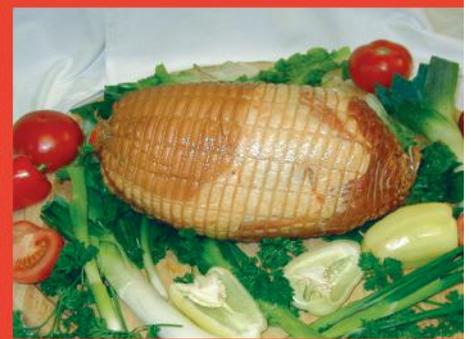
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Collaborating with her colleagues has helped Diane Jakimec grow over the past 36 years in Clifton. From starting as the only Special Education teacher at School 3 to now working with other teachers and therapists in School 2, the synchronicity is part of why she loves her job.

“It has really helped me to grow and be a better teacher. It really does take a village,” said Jakimec, 61. “And I have my village right here.”

Jakimec started in School 3’s Resource Room in 1989 and keeps mementos of that time in her classroom today. One memento is from former student Ana Calderon who went on to have her work displayed at the Paterson Museum and gave Jakimec one of her pieces.

“That helps and motivates me,” said Jakimec.



Jakimec moved to School 2 in 2010, now in a self-contained Learning and Language Disabilities Severe classroom. This year’s class size is 12 students across grades 2, 3 and 4.

“They are so diverse ... with multiple classifications,” said Jakimec. “There are so many different needs that it’s really testing my teaching strategies so I meet kids where they’re at.”

Working with paraprofessionals Cathy Barnes and Ana Martinez is more than helpful; it’s a “lifeline.” The three women have worked side-by-side for 11 years.

“I can’t get by a day without them,” said Jakimec. “We have the same expectations. We’re all old-school. ... We just look at each other and can help each other. They’re just so valuable to me and make me look good.”

Early Adventures

Melisa Sternberger’s kindergarteners shine at School 9, but some of them are now heading out to shine in the grown-up world.

“My first kindergarten class graduated last year,” said Sternberger, 37. “That was a big moment. It still gives me goosebumps.”

Like her students, Sternberger is a product of Clifton. She attended School 14, WWMS, and she graduated from CHS in 2006. The lifelong Richfield resident is now in her 14th year in the same classroom, and she understood her calling at an early age.

“I know every kid likes to ‘play school’, but ... I loved school supplies, and that’s always a good sign,” laughed Sternberger. “I also had inspirational teachers. From the moment that I met my first grade teacher, Mrs. Judy Dudlo, I knew I wanted to be like her, and that never changed.”

It’s a profession with new adventures, which Sternberger loves, and it gives her an opportunity to connect with both students and their families on a daily basis. It’s also an “exciting time” that allows her to get students excited for their futures and where education can lead them.



“I tell my students that they’re in school all day ... but: ‘When you go home, you get to be the teacher,’” said Sternberger. “I encourage them to teach their families about the new skills that they’re learning and developing ... so they can feel ownership over it.”

It isn’t a day in Kindergarten without a book, and a big hit with the students and teacher is *Thelma the Unicorn* by Aaron Blabey. It reminds everyone to love who they are, sparkles or otherwise, and is just one of the lessons that Sternberger hopes her six year olds take after moving onto their next adventure in a few months.

“Whether you’re five or 100, you never stop learning,” said Sternberger. “Always try your best. Always believe in yourself, because you know that I always will.”

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By Ariana Puzzo



Humor is important in the classroom, but Smruti Mehta also strives to create a space where children can learn and feel safe in School 8. And she'll never say "no" to a bit of mystery.

"I keep my age a mystery," laughed Mehta. "It keeps my students guessing and engaged in class."

Thinking outside the box and keeping things flexible are practices that Mehta would encourage her past self to embrace at the start of her career. It's ultimately what led her to leaving work in the business world and becoming a paraprofessional in Paterson Public Schools.

"I began working with kids and was immediately hooked," said Mehta. "I enjoyed being with them and seeing them grow. I worked in a special education class, and I learned from their teacher how to take care of kids with different disabilities."

After a few years, Mehta returned to school for her certification. She did her student-teaching in Leonia Public Schools with second graders and has worked in our district full time since 1995.

Now a fifth grade teacher at School 8, she's uniquely

positioned to help students prepare for all the expectations of middle school.

"I start by trying to get them to understand the importance of being responsible and, in the first two marking periods, I'm kind of easy before instilling some similar rules to follow like in middle school," said Mehta. "I mimic the middle school format a bit so they have more success."

"It's important to build up their self-esteem and confidence and their ability to be proactive," she added. "Asking a teacher a question and being proactive about your learning is the most helpful thing for them when they go onto middle school."

That preparedness is also made possible by the School 8 community, as well as support from organizations like the Clifton Education Foundation. Mehta received a grant last fall from the CEF to do a podcast with her students. Students are currently being trained to host, use the equipment, and do soundchecks.

"I'm fortunate that Clifton has a lot of great teachers [and community members]," said Mehta. "It makes a big difference."



The Joy of Reading

can be remedied and they can be on the path to academic success,” she explained, “which leads to improved confidence and success in other areas of their lives.”

“When I am teaching a six-year-old how to read, I am not just thinking about their present abilities but where they will be 15 or 20 years from now

as adults,” continued Reale. “It’s not simply about academics. It is about educating the whole person and preparing them for life.” Reale appreciates each moment. “I have learned to focus on the things that truly matter,” said Reale, “[like] the difference I’m making in the lives of children and the legacy that will have.”

Even with a rigorous curriculum, Kristin Reale prioritizes finding time to bond with students over fun activities and games.

The School 4 Reading Specialist plays POP!, a sight-word game, as well as sight-word Jenga, Word Scramble, and the Can Do! Comprehension Game.

“Games are a great motivation and make learning fun,” said Reale, 47.

Reale grew up in our city, attending School 12 and CCMS. The CHS 1996 grad returned to her hometown’s school district in December of 2001, and she still remembers the teacher who was remarkable in her adolescence.

“Definitely [Mr. Michael Chomiak] ... for US History I and II,” said Reale. “He did a really great job explaining the purpose of our constitutional democracy and the legislative process. He also had a great sense of humor and really cared about us as students.”

Helping and caring for students is now Reale’s priority, saying that between the ages of 5-8 is when reading and language acquisition support is vital.

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Lori (Lill) Santosuosso's full-circle moment was returning to School 5 as an adult and working alongside a colleague who shaped her own childhood.

"Cheryl Bender is retired now but she helped me when I was becoming a teacher and became [my teacher again] in a different way," said Santosuosso, 41. "I learned a lot from her. She was always a kind, caring teacher, and I saw that in how she treated the kids. I carry that over into my teaching practices as well."

Lori is married to husband Michael (CHS 2002), who teaches Physical Education and coaches Baseball and Hockey at CHS. The couple live in Cedar Grove with their kids Dominic, 10, and Sloan, 8. Santosuosso (CHS 2002) grew up in Albion with brother Ryan (CHS 2006) and sister Megan (CHS 2010).



She first began by subbing in Clifton, but she has taught permanently for 16 years. After teaching fifth grade and then second grade, her latest change came three years ago when there was a Basic Skills Instruction opening in School 5.

Today, Santosuosso services students ages Kindergarten to second grade in Language Arts. She pushes into classrooms and does small group breakout lessons at back tables, teaching students to sound out words, spell words, and read together based on their grade levels.

"All those moments that I've watched my students have success at something [are the most rewarding aspect of the job]," said Santosuosso. "Whether it's them learning something or a social-emotional moment and hearing them say, 'I did it! I figured it out!' Celebrating all their successes has been my most memorable moment in teaching."



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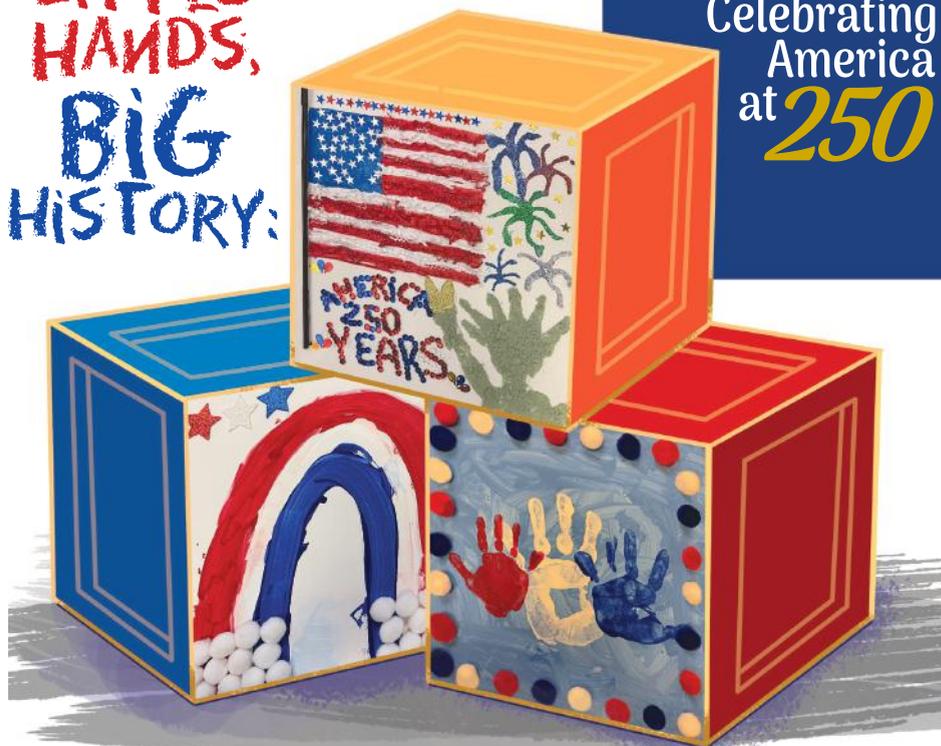
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“A little kindness goes a long way.” Those are the words that Stephanie Rizzi lives by and brings to her preschool students at CELA Brighton.

As a Preschool Instructional Coach at Clifton Early Learner Academy on Brighton Rd., Rizzi strives to support teachers by observing the classrooms, modeling effective strategies, and providing feedback. That collaboration is done with the purpose of ensuring that every child receives a meaningful and engaging learning experience.

Which is what Rizzi, 36, has always had an interest in providing.

“I’ve always been drawn to working with young children. I wanted to be part of their earliest learning experiences,” she said. “It’s nice now in preschool, because it’s where [a student’s] curiosity, confidence, and love of



learning begins.”

Rizzi has taught for over 10 years, previously in Newark, and joined CELA-B five years ago. No two days are ever the same, but Rizzi consistently sees how children learn their best when they get to explore and play.

“We really believe in making learning fun and meaningful, and I’m always coming up with fun and hands-on activities,” said Rizzi. “I love to sit and learn right

alongside them.”

But she emphasized that preschool isn’t just about playing; it’s about building a foundation.

“We really are the first step for them to enjoy learning,” said Rizzi. “We’re teaching them about themselves and how to ask questions. It’s meaningful [play] and they’re learning so much. Not just academically, but socially and emotionally.”

Breaking The Ice

Seeing students grow and break the ice with one another fills Rachel Rotolo with pride. Even if the game that they play together has a slightly different message.

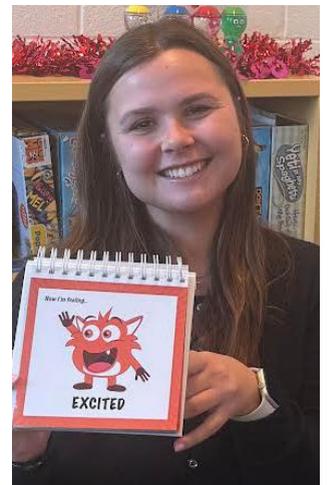
“One of my favorite games to use for the first time is Don’t Break the Ice. I think that it works figuratively and literally,” said Rotolo. “It gets [students] talking, sharing, and taking turns with their peers.”

Rotolo was a substitute in Clifton before joining CELA Speer as a Social Worker two years ago.

Rotolo supports students with their social-emotional growth and learning in small, in-classroom friendship skill groups. But she also does individual counseling and provides resources to help parents “support their little learners.”

Working with preschool-aged kids was unexpected, but Rotolo loves it as much as she loves seeing their growth throughout the academic year.

“When they’re three, they’re so young and it’s hard for them to leave their parents,” said Rotolo, 25. “They’re so quiet and scared on the first day or week or month. Seeing them grow and start to be super engaged [is one of the highlights].”



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Gaining Trust

Going home messy isn't for everyone, but it's a sign of a good day for Courtney Legg.

"Having paint on you. A couple broken pieces of crayon in your pocket. A LEGO piece," said Legg, 43. "[Seeing] smiles on kids' faces as they are running out the door, excited to share a project that they did at school today with their grownup. That's what makes a day successful."

Now in her 21st year of teaching, Legg is currently a Preschool teacher at CELA Allwood. But teaching preschoolers isn't the direction that she expected for her career. Legg's first teaching job in Clifton was at St. Philip the Apostle Preparatory School, where she hoped to teach in third or fourth grade.

"Barbara Zito was my first principal, and she wanted to try me in Pre-K," Legg recalled. "'You have that vibe,' she said, and I never once looked back."

Legg, who had her certification in K-6, went back for her P-3 certification. She worked for 10 years at St.



Philip's and then in Kindergarten for three years before going to Passaic Head Start for a few years during the coronavirus pandemic. This is her fourth year in CELA-A.

"You [really need] that calling and personality. It's not just about your vibe with the kids," said Legg. "Parents are trusting you with their heart that is walking outside of their body. To have both of those things isn't easy ... and, for a lot of [parents], it's their first school experience."

And she's not just making an impression on parents. Legg remembered one parent who wrote a quote on a card in her first year of teaching and how it stuck with her.

"The influence of a good teacher can never be erased.' That always [stuck] with me," she said. "These kids are like little babies. They are just four. They want to know that school is safe, fun, and a happy place. I'm privileged to get to do that every day."

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A Lineage of Teachers

By Ariana Puzzo

When a bond between teachers transcends their job descriptions, it means you're feeling what Jennifer Higgins has felt for nearly 15 years of her career.

Higgins has taught fourth and fifth grade at St. Philip the Apostle Preparatory on Valley Rd. since 2012. "We are a family," said Higgins, 55. "I love that we shape the whole student. There's a saying that God only gives you what you can handle, but the struggles that you do have are given to prepare you for life."

There was never doubt that Higgins' life would involve a career in education.

"Some families have a lineage of firemen or law enforcement," said Higgins. "My generation, so my cousins and sister, we're all teachers. I like to say, 'This was my God-given talent. It's just in my blood.' It felt like more of a calling."

Higgins taught in public school until budget cuts pushed her into educational publishing. But the mother of Allison, Ella, and Sarah told her husband, William, that she didn't feel she was doing what she was meant to do.

After the Butler residents enrolled their daughters in St. Anthony's preschool, she saw the family-oriented nature of Catholic schools. That's when Higgins started to look for teaching opportunities through a new lens.

"I was supposed to work for St. Anthony's, but then they closed, and I'm a big believer in signs from the universe," said Higgins. "I was praying to God and thinking, maybe this is a sign that I am not supposed to go back to teaching. Then, St. Philip's hired me."

Lively Lessons

Having the freedom to "create these meaningful lessons and experiences" is what Higgins loves most about teaching at St. Philip's. She is currently the Coordinator of Intermediate Schools and this year teaches Math, Language



Arts, and Science. One program that she created is called Writers' Café, where students get to become published authors. Some kids work on a novel while others write books of poetry.

Once they pick their genre, they write their own chapter books that the school publishes by the end of the year.

"They love the fact that they get to show their creativity and God-given talents," said Higgins. "We're not just teaching their minds. We can nurture their souls and teach them more about their faith and that they're never alone."

Originally from Barrington, Rhode Island, Higgins is the younger daughter of John Mendes and Rebecca Lefebvre. Her older sister, Karen Arciero, is an Anatomy professor who offers Higgins inspiration for how to expose students to a higher level of learning.

So did the teachers that Higgins had in New England. One of her favorite teachers was her own math and science teacher, Georgie St. Vincent.

"He loved teaching ... and took it to another level. Teaching was his life, and it resonated in the classroom," said Higgins. "I had him in third and fourth grade. He was one of those people that no matter what he did, it was the best thing ever."

He made sure that students got to see the lungs of a healthy person versus someone who smoked. More than that, Higgins didn't know if there was ever a topic that he didn't like; he never showed it.

"I didn't realize until I started teaching how much of an impact he had," said Higgins. "I try to have that same energy ... so that my students can feel the way that I felt in his classroom."

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Seeing the world and traveling to 103 countries isn't just for Guinevere Sanchez's benefit. The CCMS Spanish teacher shares those experiences with her students, bringing back stories and lessons from abroad.

"I've been to 20 of the 21 Spanish-speaking countries. I love Spanish," said Sanchez, 49. "Just not Equatorial Guinea. It's the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa ... and the government there is not dangerous per se, but it's not super safe. It's not really set up for tourism."

Sanchez wants to travel there, but she wants to make sure that she does it the right way. She's also got a new goal of visiting 150 countries around the world. Bringing back these experiences to her students excites and inspires her.

"It's my joy to share it with my students," said Sanchez. "[They] won't be fluent in 45 days, but I want them to continue learning or travel to Spanish-speaking countries to open up new worlds."

Sanchez taught for one year in Bloomfield before she was hired by Clifton in 2001. She taught in Schools 9, 16, and 8 before moving to Christopher Columbus in 2016. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, she taught three sixth grade classes and one seventh grade class. This year, she is teaching three classes at CCMS and one at Maple Valley

Middle School.

And her lessons are wide-ranging. Sanchez recalled taking a leave of absence in 2009 to travel to South America for six months. See more at: offexploring.com/senoritasanchezadventures.

"I keep money from all the countries and do a money walk [with the students]," said Sanchez. "They get to look ... and feel plastic money. I try to make the cultures come alive as much as possible."

That's also made possible by a team of colleagues that she admires. Sanchez is grateful for Clifton's entire World Language Department, but especially WWMS Spanish teacher Melina Aguilar. The "collaborative relationship" that the sixth grade teachers built began before the pandemic and has continued to grow in the years since.

"She's an amazing teacher. We both studied Spanish at Rutgers and took a couple of classes together [there]," said Sanchez. "The people that I've worked with personally are dedicated all the way around, but I'm personally very lucky Melina and I have a close relationship."

Fresh Start

Now in her 15th year as a school counselor, Lauren Manni has a unique opportunity to wipe the slate clean.

Manni, 42, spent her first year in Schools 1, 4, and 13 before settling full time at School 13 for 14 years. This year is her first, along with everyone else, at Maple Valley Middle School. Right now, there are 200 sixth graders in the building.

"They're wonderful, the staff is incredible, and the building is great and beautiful," said Manni. "I think we have a unique opportunity to mold these sixth graders into what we'd like to see for the future."

The most rewarding part of the job is working with the kids, whether it was on the elementary level or now with slightly older kids in middle school. But it is important to take care of herself, too, and the mother of two said that spending time with her children helps her to recharge.



"I also love to cook and work out. I go to the gym often and read a lot," said Manni. "Maintaining my own social relationship with my friends is really helpful."

But she is doing what she has always wanted to do from an early age: spending time in school. Although she worked first as a training coordinator for the Mental Health Association of NJ, she came to realize that merging her love of school and counseling was the right move for her. "Before I even got into kindergarten, I remember asking my parents when I'd get homework. I was excited about that," Manni laughed. "I always felt very comfortable in school."

And that's the sort of environment that she tries to provide today. Whether a child feels more comfortable verbalizing their feelings or expressing them through writing or artwork, Manni is dedicated to helping them open up with a collaborative approach. "I just think it's important for educators to remember that the work we do is meaningful," she said. "We make a difference. Even little things can be a big thing in a kid's life."

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WWMS Mechanical Mustangs 3784, from left, Lucas Ventura, Zinedine Lambaz, Isaac Rios-Matos, Isabel Velez, Isasias Velez, Mathias Ruiz, Namka Gyaltzen, Armaan Mahtani Shahdadpuri, Luke Attieh, coach Todd Conklin, Julian Ortiz.

Every day is different in middle school, but Todd Conklin always brings his A-game to WWMS in and out of the classroom. Conklin has seen how his Math students benefit from it, as well as the Mechanical Mustangs 3784 team.

WWMS' team advanced to the State First LEGO League (FLL) Robotics Competition last year, marking a significant achievement. Coached by Conklin and parent-coach Mrs. Diana Lambaz, the team is made up of 10 seventh and eighth graders, plus an alternate.

The state championship took place on Dec. 13-14, 2025 at Mount Olive High School in Flanders and featured 80 teams from across North Jersey. The Mustangs earned their place following an impressive showing at the regional championships in November.

"We hope to motivate other schools within the school district to start their own Robotics teams," said parent Anjali Mahtani. "I was quite surprised to see how many elementary schools from other cities throughout New Jersey participated in the competition."

"It's a shame that our town's elementary schools or even the Rec Program don't offer classes or programs," continued Mahtani. "I think this is a vital field that our students should have exposure to at a young age."

Conklin is dedicated to making sure the club members take it as seriously as he does. His other involvement at WWMS includes advising the Coding Club, serving as the sound engineer for the Winter Musical, and overseeing the audio and visual tech for all assemblies.

Robotics Club meets Tuesday-Thursday in Room 108 from the second week of school until Thanksgiving. Meetings last until 3:45 pm, or 4:30-5 pm as they conclude.

"I'm a little more strict in that club than I am in the classroom," said Conklin, 39. "I use Coding Club as a scouting tool with sixth graders, then I recruit the ones that I think will be successful and apply those to the Robotics Club."

One student is seventh grader Armaan Mahtani Shahdadpuri who, with team members, gained collaborative skills. He credited Conklin's "invaluable" guidance and

support, along with each member's "unique strengths" in coding, engineering, or design.

"We work together to harness those talents effectively," said Armaan. "We [also] owe a huge debt of gratitude to our parents and guardians. Their unwavering support, whether through transportation, encouragement, or providing snacks during our meetings, has made a significant difference in our journey. They are a vital part of our success, cheering us on every step of the way."

Humor and Hard Work

Before he was their coach, Conklin discovered that he had his own unexpected skills to contribute in a classroom.

He was volunteering at Camp Quality New Jersey, a 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to bringing joy to children aged 5-17 diagnosed with cancer, when he saw how rewarding it was for children of all backgrounds to unite for one week.

Conklin volunteered from 2009 until two years ago when he became a father, and the nonprofit created a lasting shift in his career. He was hired as a sub in October 2016 and became full time in 2017 as a seventh grade Math teacher.

His teaching style has changed slightly over the past nine years. Conklin goes more by the book now, not necessarily applying real-world experiences to the mathematical principles since some "students want to ask more questions about the story and do not grab the educational point I'm trying to get across."

But one thing hasn't changed, and it helps keep students engaged.

"I like to always apply a sense of humor," he said. "I still try to be bubbly and make it entertaining while getting the educational lesson across."

Even in a stricter Robotics setting, his demeanor has paid off. During the robot game portion of FLL, the teams design, build, and program a LEGO robot. The Mustangs' robot, Cooper, did

14 missions in the 2 minutes and 30 seconds limit. "Although the Mechanical Mustangs did not advance beyond the state round, students and coaches said the experience provided valuable lessons in leadership, collaboration, and problem-solving," said Mahtani.

Armaan recounted "countless hours" brainstorming and prototyping the robot. "We faced challenges along the way, from programming bugs to design flaws, but each obstacle brought us closer as a team," said Armaan. "We learned to communicate better, respect each other's ideas, and adapt our strategy when things didn't go as planned."



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By Ariana Puzzo

Enthusiasm for the past sparks an interest in where we're going, and Christopher Henry has spent over two decades teaching Mustangs to appreciate both perspectives.

Henry's AP US History I and II students admire him for it. From Top 10 Students to Mustangs of the Month who said he's their most influential teacher, or the graduating seniors who said they'll miss his class the most, Henry's name has appeared many times on our pages.

As we interviewed the man, himself, for the first time last month, he shared how he makes those connections with students.

"I think, one, you have to be enthusiastic. To teach the drama of human life, you can't possibly be blasé about it," said Henry, 58. "The second thing is, I really do want my students to do well."

"Not just in my classes, but I want them to do well in life and in their social lives and personal being. And I think they know that. I hope they do," he continued. "I can't tell you the value of that. The value you have to place on the importance of the student."

The Piscataway resident, who originally hails from Glen Rock, shared that teaching wasn't his original career path. He had previously worked on some campaigns while in school, did some speech writing, and he had worked on a newspaper.

Henry worked for roughly six years handling copy for big sporting events like the US Open, the Houston Rodeo, the Super Bowl, and the NBA's All-Star Game. On Sept. 11, 2001, Henry was in the city at 60th St. and 2nd Ave. for a final interview for the role of Director of Personnel at Madison Square Garden.

"After the planes I hit, I had to call them and let them know that I couldn't take the job," he said. "[That is when] I started looking for education programs."

Henry has always enjoyed public speaking and writing materials for others to use. But he also had an interest in words, history, and politics during his own schooling. After student-teaching and now working at CHS for 22 years, one thing is abundantly clear to him. "I'm incredibly lucky," said Henry. "I say it every day to myself."



A Teacher's Legacy

APUSH students past and present also feel lucky, and they're always emphatic about why Henry's class stood out to them. Junior Abigail Prawetz said early in the 2025-26 academic year that Henry encouraging them to think critically while requiring handwritten notes has influenced how they all process information.

Top 10 Mustang Brian Weglinski (CHS 2024) agreed, stating that his teacher cared about every student and always made himself available to speak outside of class.

Barry Mahmoud (CHS 2021), who had Henry in his sophomore and junior years, saw that same generosity and said so when he was the senior Mustang of the Month in November of 2020.

"What I was able to take away from his class every day was so much more than just a simple history lesson. They were lessons in life," said Mahmoud. "I could not wait to enter his class each afternoon, because I knew the second that I entered that I would have a [new] idea by the time I walked out."

That type of effect moves Henry; he felt it as a teacher and student. Some of his former students that he has stayed in touch with include Youssef Gaber, Renata Chyshkevych, Carlos Polanco, and BOE Commissioner Alias Ragsdale.

Kudos to Colleagues

When asked whose class he would take if he could, he mentioned John Lesler's "excellent" walk-through on the Kennedy Assassination, Michael Rogers' Senior Seminar class, John O'Reilly's Government and Politics class, Art with Cynthia Sauchelli, and a Women's History class. "Those are all terrific," said Henry. "I'm really lucky. It's quite like a small college."

As a student, Henry became friends with the late Alan Deaett, who taught Contemporary Society in his senior year, after he graduated from high school. Henry assisted Deaett with building an AP Government class and traveled with him to Philadelphia for an AP conference.

"He's in the Coaches Hall of Fame in Glen Rock with the field named after him," said Henry. "He was a learned guy with a remarkable story, growing up dirt poor in Providence (RI) but went to Amherst College on a track scholarship. He was remarkably hardworking and thrilled by history."

But Henry is the first to acknowledge that times are different from when he took notes in class.

"I grew up during the Cold War. We only had to worry about nuclear weapons," said Henry. "It's not comparable to what [students] have to worry about today. We have to give them as many tools as possible to deal with the pressures that they have, and those pressures are profound."

A Welcoming Classroom

Listening to students is just as important as making sure that they hear him. Students have evaluated Henry's class since he started teaching and one particular note influenced Henry's teaching style and helped it evolve.

"[At the start of my career], I probably should've listened to the kids more and talked less," said Henry. "Consistently, students [would give] a fairly lower middling score of two or three out of seven for: 'The teacher respected my views.' ... There's an old saying: 'Don't pay attention to the accolades, pay attention to the criticism' and, for teaching, that is very important, because I'm the only adult in the room."

And he doesn't want the students or their perspectives to feel overlooked. Not when diverse viewpoints are the cornerstone of what he teaches and how he sees the country as a whole. "I am incredibly lucky to teach kids who are very often first or second generation in this country," said Henry. "Very often, they are the first generation [going to] college. That is what this nation's about. This nation is built on immigration ... and on being welcoming."



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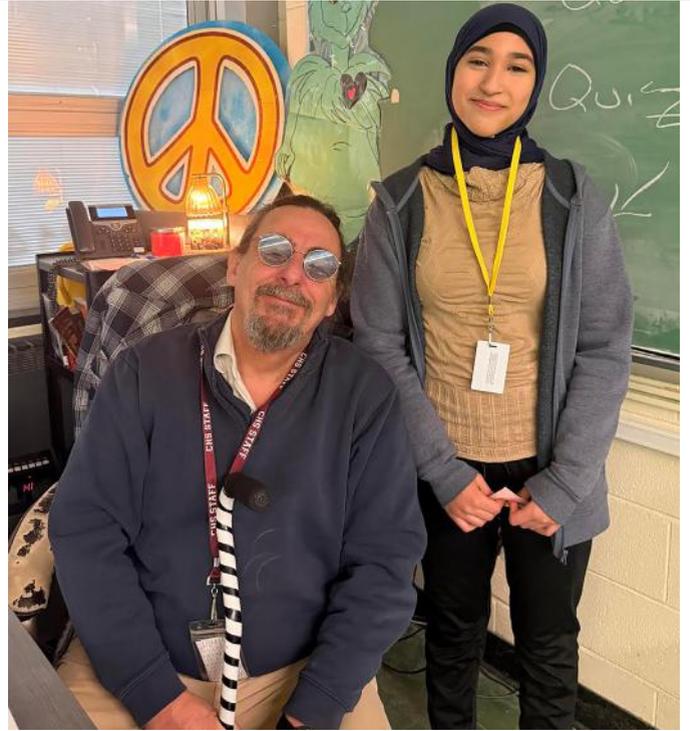
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The March Mustangs of the Month were posed different questions. The freshman and sophomore were asked: Which teacher has been the most influential to you? Who inspires you most in life? Which other teacher helped prepare you most for high school? How have you grown as a student this year?



Mustangs of the Month from left Bosko Durdic with Stas Lembryk; above right Retag Elsayed with Kevin Ashworth; below Alexia Leon-Herrera with Ivana Massa. On the facing page Nicholas Cresencio Dong with Jessica Ondeck.

Freshman Bosko Durdic: Mr. Stanley Lembryk motivates me in sports and he is very good to talk to and gives out very good advice. [In life], God [inspires me], because without Him, there would be no me. My middle school teacher, Mr. Jeff Labriola, gave me advice on what to do in high school and was always positive. He always offered good advice to students and was very nice. This year, I learned how to make more time for myself and more time to do ... everything that I need to do in a day. The teachers who helped make it happen were the ones who were patient with me.

Sophomore Retag Elsayed: Mr. Kevin Ashworth and Mrs. Figueroa pushed me to believe in my abilities and think more confidently. They created a classroom environment where I felt supported and encouraged to grow, both academically and personally. [In life], my family inspires me, because they constantly support and motivate me to work hard and never give up. Their sacrifices and encouragement push me to be the best version of myself. I had Mr. Michael Richter in 7th grade at Woodrow, and he was nice to me and helped me become a better version of myself. Mr. Erik Oxenbridge was nice in 8th grade, too, but his

work and class was what made me understand how high school would be. This year, I learned how to manage my time better and not give up when schoolwork got difficult.



The junior and senior were asked: Which teacher has been most influential to you? What have you learned recently in school that will help you in the future?

Junior Alexia Leon-Herrera: Ms. Ivana Massa is always in a cheerful mood. She's a bright person and extremely intelligent, helping out students who are struggling. She's given me lectures and lessons that I need for the future, and she's helped me prepare for the upcoming school years. I hope to make great accomplishments just like her ... and I always keep in touch with her. She made Biology class more understandable and interesting than it already was! Mrs. Andrea Miller-Hamilton's AP Lang writing assignments are extremely important [and] help me grow as a writer. It's practice to be able to pass the college board exam. The tips and help that she has provided to everyone in the class ... will definitely help me in the future.

Senior Nicholas Cresencio Dong: At the beginning of the year, I was shocked to see that my schedule was switched to Ms. Jessica Ondeck's English class. It turned out to be the most unexpected and best outcome possible. Ms. Ondeck makes the class fun, filled with laughter and genuine joy each day. [These are] emotions that I often struggle to experience at school. I learned in Ms. Ondeck's class how to col-



lect ideas and analyze them by breaking them into smaller parts, writing about each piece individually. Her methods helped me grow into a more confident writer and critical thinker, which will benefit me in the field of Computer Science. Communication is essential in all careers; being a strong writer is important for expressing ideas clearly.



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Here's what happens after 3, thanks to The Club

By Ariana Puzzo

Where would Clifton kids go after 3 pm if there was no Boys & Girls Club? That's a question with no good answer, and we're just as happy not to need one.

For nearly 80 years, the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton has opened its doors to kids and striven to inspire future leaders across many fields and areas of interest. The desire to have safe, active, and educational activities for children at the end of the school day isn't uncommon.

But as we've seen in Clifton, there are extraordinary supporters of The Club who volunteer their time, resources, or financial contributions to ensure that the doors of the Main Clubhouse at 181 Colfax Ave. remain open for at least another eight decades. The Club is honoring the Clifton Board of Education and Corradino & Papa at the Annual Great Futures Gala on April 16. 6 pm.



The gala is at The Valley Regency, and tickets are \$125 or \$1,250 for a table of 12. Black tie optional. The night will include dinner, a cash bar, dancing, plus sponsorship and advertisement opportunities. RSVP by April 7 at bgcclifton.org/gala or write or call Maureen Cameron at mcameron@bgcclifton.org or call 973-773-0966 ext. 144.

The Club is recognizing both the Board of Ed and Corradino & Papa, 955 Allwood Rd., for their ongoing and significant support of The Club's mission. Speaking about their decision to honor the Board of Ed, it was described as being in lockstep with The Club's commitment to investing in young people to help them see their potential as productive, responsible, and caring adults.



Recreational Sports

“We’re honoring the Clifton Board of Education, because this partnership represents the very best of what a community can be,” said Gabriel Blau, the CEO of The Club. “It shows what happens when institutions move beyond simply working alongside each other and instead truly work with each other.”

“Together, we’re not just running programs,” he continued, “we’re helping shape a city where every young person feels supported, valued, and full of possibility.”

The Club and Board of Ed have collaborated for decades in an effort to prioritize the interests of our children and teens. Thanks to their partnership, they have provided enrichment programs to our youth before and after school, and recently The Club expanded their relationship to provide wrap-around services for our city’s youngest students at Clifton Early Learner Academy (CELA).

“Generations of families have benefited from this collaboration,” stated The Club, “and we look forward to serving families and the young people of Clifton for another 80 years.” To support its mission, donate online at bgcclifton.org/donate.

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After 3, At The Club

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Danny Robertozzi has witnessed The Club's shared belief with Clifton Public Schools that "learning, support, and opportunity should not end when the school day does."

He added that the district has witnessed how their partnership is strengthened every afternoon, five days per week, after 3 pm. The Club currently hosts approximately 1,000 kids in its flagship afterschool enrichment program at its main Club House and at 13 school sites in the city.

That is where students are welcomed and receive homework help, recreation, and mentoring.

"Together, we are building more than afterschool programs. We are building confidence, connection, and brighter futures for the young people of our community," said Robertozzi. "We are deeply grateful to the Boys & Girls Club for its ongoing commitment, partnership, and dedication to the students and families we proudly serve in Clifton."



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Every \$1 that is invested into Boys & Girls Clubs returns \$10.32 in social and economic benefits to the community. It's also not just one type of program for children. Academics and sports are a sizable part of it, but The Club has evolved from a place to play soccer or basketball.

In 2024, The Club built a STEM Lab and hired a STEM coordinator. The program was included in last year's BGCA national study on STEM in youth development afterschool programs. There is also The Club's Teen Program, the Keystone Club, that renewed its Charter.

"Our schools do extraordinary work educating Clifton's children. The Club's role is to pick up where the school day ends and keep that momentum going with a

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After 3, At The Club

safe place, caring mentors, and opportunities for young people to grow, explore, and simply be kids,” said Blau. “Together, we’re able to support youth from morning through evening, strengthening community and stability that families feel every single day.”

Teens are learning financial skills first-hand by managing new vending machines and the Kids Café. The Keystone Kids also volunteer throughout the Main Clubhouse and middle school kids have formed several new clubs of their own, including a Fashion Club and a DIY Club.

“Our School 1 Boys and Girls Club fills a well-needed role in our school community. One which allows parents the peace of mind in knowing that their child is safe and cared for while they are out working hard for their families,” said School 1 Principal Maria Romeo. “Students develop lasting friendships across grades through the fun activities provided by the Boys & Girls Club, [and] their staff is professional, kind, and caring.”

Enriching Opportunities

Sports do have a place at the Main Clubhouse if that’s of interest to a Club kid or parent. The Nicholas Martini Aquatics Center offers affordable, high-quality swim lessons by well-trained instructors.

“While my sons were not members of The Club, they did learn to swim there,” said Board of Ed Vice President and Commissioner Anthony Santiago. “It is a wonderful partner and resource for our school and community.”

The aquatics program delivers roughly 370 swim lessons during weekdays and on Saturdays — or about 4,400 annual lessons. The nationally ranked swim team, The Seahawks, continues to break records and has over 100 members. In 2025, The Club formed a noncompetitive swim team with 20 members that’s growing as well.

The Club’s Winter Indoor Soccer League has 250 kids on 26 teams, from U7 to U13, and the basketball program had 100 kids participating in clinics or on teams. As for the kids drawn to the gridiron, the youngest members of the Junior Mustang Football program, kids ages 4 to 6, transitioned to Flag Football this year. The Mustangs have 100 members, and there are 100 kids in the Cheer program.



Sunshine or Rain...

“We are incredibly grateful for our partnership with the Boys & Girls Club. They provide daily bussing for our students who attend both before- and after-school care, ensuring a safe and reliable transition at the start and end of each school day,” said School 16 Principal Joanna Juarbe. “In addition, the Boys & Girls Club generously supports our summer programs by welcoming our staff and students into their space and graciously offering assistance from their staff whenever needed.”

Valuing our youth remains central to Club leadership. Past executive directors Dolores Healey (1986-2006) and Bob Foster (2006-2023) saw the importance of integration with schools. Blau, who stepped onto the scene in early 2024, pushes that mission onward.

One of Blau’s early efforts was working with The Club’s team of staff, volunteers, and Board members to figure out what teens need from their services on a daily basis.

“Without this partnership, Clifton would feel smaller and harder for families. There would be fewer places for kids to go after school and less connection between what happens during the school day and what happens afterward,” said Blau. “Instead of a coordinated network supporting young people, we’d each be trying to do more on our own and collectively accomplish less.”

“Ask any family whose children grow up as Clifton Students and Club Kids; they’ll tell you how special the sense of connection is,” he added. “This is why Clifton is such a strong community for raising children.”

That is what Principal Steven Anderson, along with School 5’s children and families, have witnessed. School 2’s community echoed a similar sentiment.

“The Boys & Girls Club staff are familiar faces in our school community,” said School 2 Principal Magdalena Wojtylo, “and truly feel like an extension of our School 2 family.”

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Scholarships

3 Mustang Sculptures

2 Big Buses

1,000s of Turkeys



By Ariana Puzzo

It started with a couple of turkeys. Next came scholarships and yellow school buses. Today, Corradino & Papa, LLC is proud to watch as their support of the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton provides new generations of Club kids with the wheels beneath their feet to help them reach their future destinations.

But their legacy with The Club started long before the law firm, located at 955 Allwood Rd., first showed its philanthropic support. The brother-sister duos of Jack Corradino and Gina Corradino and RC Papa and Laurie Papa were

Club kids and saw its great influence. “Our dads [Gandolfo ‘Dolph’ Corradino and Robert ‘Bob’ Papa (CHS 1960)] knew each other from high school,” said Gina Corradino (CHS 1985). “RC, Jack, Laurie, and myself — we all grew up together.”

“We then went our separate ways [for college], but then [Jack and RC] ended up becoming law partners,” she continued. “It’s just so crazy how our families are intertwined.”

The Club is honoring Corradino & Papa and the Clifton Board of Education at the Great Futures Gala on April 16.



Top: the firm gave the first Mustang sculpture in Sept. 2021. Above Club kids at the donation of the first bus in June 2018.

For tickets, RSVP by April 7 at bgcclifton.org/gala. Write or call The Club’s Maureen Cameron at mcameron@bgcclifton.org or 973-773-0966 ext. 144. “Corradino & Papa is always there for us,” said Cameron, The Club’s Chief Development Officer. “We will celebrate Jack. RC and the members of the firm, so well-known to the community for generously supporting the police and fire departments and other first responders not just in our fair city, but across the state.”

The Club currently hosts over 1,000 kids in its after-

school enrichment program at The Club, 181 Colfax Ave., and at 13 school sites in the city. It requires supervision, communication and, in no small part, transportation.

That’s when Corradino & Papa heard of the need and donated its first school bus to The Club on June 21, 2018. A year later, on June 20, 2019, they did it again with a second big yellow bus. That is along with three Mustang sculptures that they’ve donated to Clifton schools, scholarships for New Jersey high schoolers, thousands of turkeys, and a legacy of financial support to The Club.

After 3, At The Club

“Corradino & Papa’s financial support of our Club has made opportunity possible, opening doors for the young people we serve every single day,” said Cameron. “Because of their leadership and belief in our mission, our Club continues to be a place of growth and a foundation for brighter futures.”

Humbled and Honored

The siblings and colleagues see the great work that The Club does, but they also experienced it as Club kids and parents. As BGCC alumni, Jack Corradino and RC Papa both credit The Club in helping shape who they have become today, said Cameron, adding: “...and we couldn’t be prouder of their leadership in giving back to the Clifton community.”

Gina also attended The Club for its after-school program and later sent her children, twins Brielle and Anthony Hanley, to the Summer Camp. Today, Brielle runs her own marketing business and Anthony attends Penn State after serving in the Marine Corps.

“I was able to see [The Club] from the kids’ perspectives. The security and safety of kids, plus what could be done better and what they needed more of,” said Gina. “It was an education for all of us.”

Gina emphasizes that The Club’s kids are “our future” and the law firm will do all that they can in support of them. As leading philanthropists in their hometown, Corradino & Papa, LLC does it all — or, at least, comes incredibly close.

The law firm’s annual Scholarship Contest awards several \$2,500 scholarships to high school seniors who are entering a New Jersey college. They also donate vests to the Passaic County Sheriff Department’s K-9 Unit, support St. Peter’s Haven, sponsor The John Samra Memorial 5K Run & 1 Mile Family Fun Run/Walk, and sponsor The Club’s Taste of Clifton event.

“As far as what the future holds,” said Gina, “it’s about what they need and, if we can give it, we will. We’re here.”

Fighting for Clients—and Mustangs

On Oct. 3, 2023, Jack Corradino (CHS 1986) and RC Papa were joined by school and city officials to commemorate a donation of the second- and third-sculptured Fighting Mustang to Clifton.

The first Mustang stands at the entrance to the CHS gym, a project Corradino & Papa dedicated on Aug. 31,



C&P in 2019 recognized the need and ponied up for another B&G Club bus.

2021. The two subsequent sculptures were at Clifton Stadium and at Woodrow Wilson Middle School.

Like their co-honoree at the gala, Corradino & Papa understands the strength of partnering with its community to achieve The Club’s mission. And The Club is appreciative of that knowledge. The principals were inducted into The Club’s 2018 Hall of Fame, a reminder that they’re the first to show up when needed.

“The firm’s involvement in The Club goes way beyond sponsoring The Club’s events. They have always been there when we needed them — from purchasing buses and an electronic upgrade in the Bingo Hall, to volunteering their time on our Board of Trustees and fundraising events,” said Cameron. “We are profoundly grateful for this enduring generosity and steadfast commitment to our mission.”

Yet, as big as it is, Corradino & Papa is first and foremost a family business. Siblings Jack, the firm’s founder and partner, and Gina, the Marketing Director, maintain their deep roots to their hometown. And RC Papa’s dad, Robert ‘Bob’ Papa, was an All-State player for the 1950s Fighting Mustangs and a near-unanimous choice by Clifton Merchant’s voters for the All-Century team.

Getting spotlighted by The Club may be different from those Friday night lights that came before their time, but it’s no less special or energizing for the law firm.

“We were completely humbled and honored,” said Gina. “It’s nice to feel recognized for everything that we do, but it’s just a blessing that we can give back. We’re honored.”

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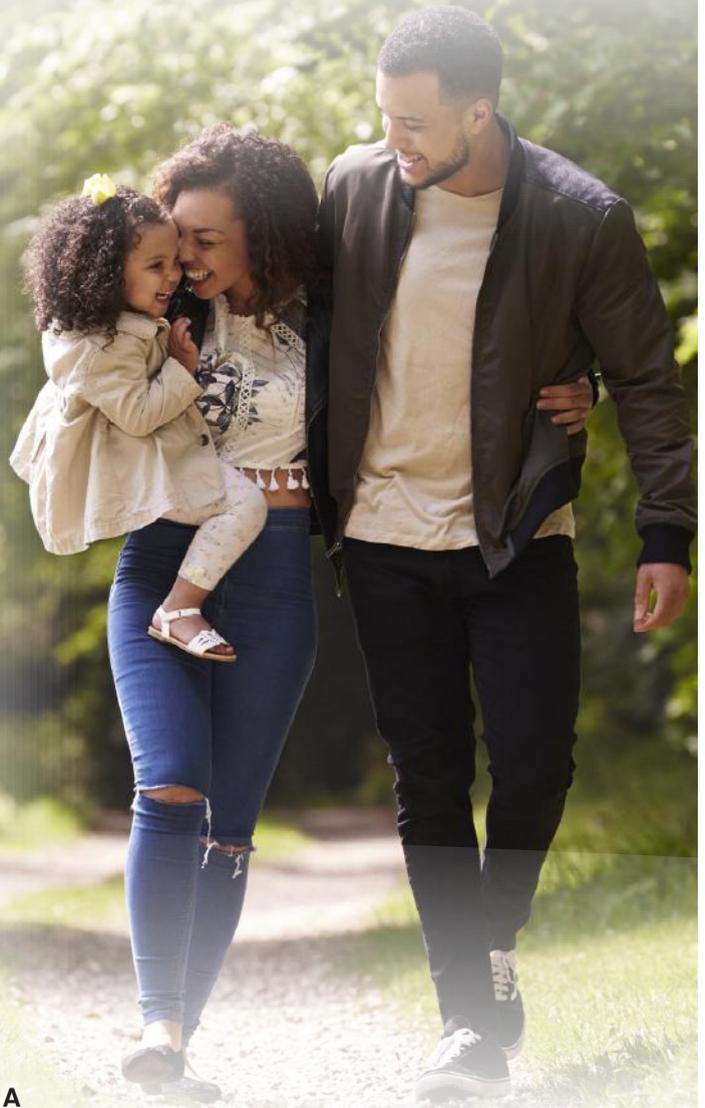
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Clifton guys 60 or so often recall the good times of growing up in and around the Boys Club of Clifton.

Take Tom Eckert at left and Alan Paris, both of whom were in the Glee Club under the direction of Mrs. Marietta Marchese. That's Tom third from left front with the same mischievous smile he has today. They shared a fond memory for Marietta Marchese, the director of the Glee Club.

"Mrs. Marchese was a talented and dedicated music teacher and pianist and professional voice instructor," said Alan Paris, pictured at right. Somehow, they both recalled, she got this gang of kids to sing so well they "sang all around town in our red suit jackets and even performed at NYC's famous Waldorf Astoria," said Paris (top row fourth from left), who today is in his second term as a Clifton Board of Education Commissioner.

Both men recall The Club for its variety of programs.

"Pool, ping pong, knock hockey, swim, basketball, box-

ing, you name it they had it thanks to the many club workers and contributors," said Tom Eckert who spent a career with The Record. "Hot dog night were a gas," he continued. "We ate way too many hot dogs, chips, orange drink, watched Abbott & Costello movies and I remember a live performance by the famous roller-skating chimp Mr. Jiggs."

Mr. Jiggs was a 190-lb. chimpanzee who lived in Hillsdale with his trainer, Ron Winter. The chimp smoked cigarettes, rode a mini bike and had a lot of human-like abilities, which kids often recall. While the pair appeared in movies and larger stage shows, they also made the rounds of North Jersey Boys Clubs during the 1960s and 1970s and are often mentioned by kids of that era.

Another memory: The Penny Carnival held in the gym with sawdust on the floor and youth games of skill and chance including a record smash. "We'd throw baseballs at old 45's which people donated and every kid left with

a goldfish, a razzberry maker (a kazoo) and memories,” said Eckert, noting the goldfish never made it beyond a few days. “There was never a shortage of things to do at The Club,” he continued, “and as with many of my fellow members back then, we remember it an oasis.”

Alan Paris shared Tom’s memories but added this: “I was also a member of the Jr. Optimist Club and represented Clifton and Passaic County at the 1973 state finals in Atlantic City of the Optimist International Oratorical contest. Former Mayor Gerald Zecker was my mentor and coach.” His first winning spoken word was about racism entitled “This I believe.” In Atlantic City, his theme was “Listen America: Problems and Solutions.” He was 12 years old and he recalled he spoke with no notes to over 500 people. “I didn’t win but I sure learned confidence.”

The sleepaway Camp Clifton in Jefferson Township is another shared memory: “I was a camper then as a teen worked in the camp’s kitchen, my first paying job, a whopping \$150 for eight weeks of work and I loved every minute of it,” said Paris. When he entered 10th grade (CHS was grades 10-12 then), Paris joined the Mustang Marching Band and music became his focus. He is still a musician and member of the Clifton Community Band.

Nonetheless: “The experiences I gained growing up at The Club helped me develop skills I’ve used my entire life,



In July 1970, Alan Paris and Tom Eckertt both age 11, helped explain The Club’s activities to James E. Dean, the Chair of the Passaic Valley United Fund.

lessons of teamwork, competition, discipline and dedication,” said Paris. “I am so fortunate to be a commissioner on the Clifton BOE and be able to support the many ways the club continues to support our students and the community at large.”

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The Green Team of JK Realty relaunched their brand with a party on Feb. 25 at their real estate office at 270 Colfax Ave. Principals Rickey Di Maria and Joe Siano welcomed over 100 friends and associates for drinks, food and conversation. Here are some photos from the reception.





Mouse and the Shoemaker is a puppet show (above) on March 28 from 3 pm at the Clifton Arts Center, 900 Clifton Ave. Free; no reservations required. Produced by Mandi Bevando of Dabbling Brook, the show is a fresh twist on the classic tale *The Elves and the Shoemaker*. Call the CAC at 973-472-5499.

Tradition to Imagination: Pisanki—Polish Paper-Cut Art is a Clifton Arts Center workshop for kids ages 9-15 on March 14 from noon to 2 pm. Fee for supplies is \$30 for residents or \$35 for non residents. Participants will create their own paper-cut Łowicz-style pisanka, a distinctive form of Polish Easter egg decoration, plus a mini collage on a canvas panel inspired by traditional beeswax pisanki by the artist Aneta Pierod-Sudol of Rustic Square Art Studio in Botany Village. To register, call the Arts Center at 973-472-5499 to pay by cash or check. Register online at www.allpaid.com. The workshop coincides with the exhibition “Little Hands, Big History: Celebrating America at 250,” featuring art by preschool kids.

Clifton Rec’s Bunny Bash is March 28 at Nash Park, 9:30-11:30 am, rain or shine, and includes a Bunny Hop, Easter Bonnet Parade, Mrs. Bunny’s Playstation, a visit with Mr. Bunny, and breakfast. For full event details go to cliftonrec.com or call 973-470-5956.



From top left: the Mouse and the Shoemaker come alive in Clifton Arts Center on March 28; top: traditional Pisanki art by Aneta Pierod-Sudol. And 2021 Easter Bonnet winners Loreal Castro and Brianna Toro.

Clifton’s Code Blue Warming Center, a lifeline for the unhoused, opens its doors through March 31 whenever the temperature hits 32 degrees or lower and Code Blue is activated. Support is essential. Food was donated last winter by the Love of Grub, the Allwood Diner, Power of One, St. Peter’s Haven, and Food Brigade. You can help, too. To donate essential items, visit the City Hall lobby, 900 Clifton Ave., with body wipes, toothbrushes, mouthwash, toilet paper, hairbrushes, body wash, deodorant, body/hand lotion, vaseline, or shampoo. Interested in volunteering? Call Nate King at 973-470-5780.

St. Michael's Chapel Friday Fish Fry is March 27 at 415 Lackawanna Ave, Woodland Park. Prepared by Big Mark's Fresh Fish and More, the portions are hearty and the cost is \$25. Bring friends and stop in; doors opens at 4:30 pm.

CHS '76 Mustangs 50th reunion is June 15 in East Hanover. Email John George at georgesservice@gmail.com.

CHS Key Club Caring Food Pantry recognizes that families face many challenges, and the pantry is one way to alleviate some concerns. Students may access the pantry in S307 up to twice per month, while supplies last. To request a bag of food, or to contribute, write Ms. Jacqueline Turk: jturk@cliftonschools.net.

Holster Park on Grove St. is getting rehabbed thanks to a \$850,000 grant secured by Congresswoman Nellie Pou. Look for new landscaping, an inclusive playground, walking paths, tennis courts resurfacing, a picnic pavilion and parking lot. Another \$200,000 grant goes to City Green, also on Grove St., to support a meal delivery program, with vehicles and equipment. Pou has so far secured funding this year for 26 separate community projects in North Jersey, totaling over \$24 million for the Ninth District.



VFW Post 7165 presents the Steely Dan Tribute band Good Stuff on March 21, at 491 Valley Rd. Doors open at 5, dinner served from 5:30-7 and Good Stuff follows. Tickets are \$75 for the dinner and show. Cash bar. For tickets, call Ron Marrone at 201-304-4982 or write jdambrozio1@live.com. Pay by check, cash, or Venmo. Find out more about the band, visit goodstuffband.net.

Lead-Based Paint in Rental Dwellings



An important message from the Clifton Health Department:

Effective July 22, 2022, New Jersey P.L.2021, Chapter 182 requires all rental dwellings to be inspected for lead hazards. This law requires municipalities to perform inspections of single-family, two-family, and multiple rental dwelling units constructed before 1978 for lead-based paint hazards. This law allows an owner/landlord to directly hire either a certified lead evaluator contractor, or the City of Clifton Health Department (CHD).

Please contact the Clifton Health Department at leadsafe@cliftonnj.org to schedule an appointment or to advise if you will be contacting a third-party contractor.

If your rental dwelling unit already has a lead-safe certificate, you must forward a copy of the certificate to leadsafe@cliftonnj.org.

A list of approved Certified Lead Evaluation Contractors may be found at: https://www.nj.gov/dca/codes/publications/pdf_lead/ld_eval_contrs.pdf

The Clifton Health Department's fees will be based on number of bedrooms per dwelling unit along with the State fee for the Lead Hazard Assistance Fund.

Contact the Clifton Health Department for more information by visiting our website: <https://www.cliftonnj.org/>





Clifton Rec Summer Camp Counselors are being hired for July 6 to Aug. 14. Applicants must be 18 and high school grads as of June 2026. They must attend CPR/First Aid training in June and camp clean-up in August. To apply, email cliftonrec@cliftonnj.org.

St. John Kanty's Fish & Chips Dinner and Tricky Tray is March 20, 6 pm at the St. John Kanty parish auditorium 37 Speer Ave. Catered by Thistle, tickets are \$22 while kids under 12 are \$15. Call Margaret Drelich-Nysk at 973-930-4970 for tickets or to donate gifts.

CHS Competition Cheer on Feb. 8 were named Grand Champion at the "In the Valley" Competition at Wayne Valley High School. Outscoring 16 intermediate teams, the victory reinforced the Mustang's season record of 6-2 in the Big North Conference and 9-2 overall. They hope to

bring home their 4th consecutive state title at Nationals in Providence, RI on Feb. 26 to March 1.

The Mustang Academic Decathlon Team (above) won the Jan. 31 regional ADNJ—Academic Decathlon of New Jersey—and advanced to state finals on Feb. 28. The ADNJ is an interscholastic, high-school academic competition designed for students of all achievement levels. The Mustangs Captains Luana Aragon and Krupa Jariwala led the team in 10 academic disciplines, from Art and Literature to Science and Speech. Awards went to Vanessa Ramos-Avaredo, Daniela Olivares, Ivan Rodriguez, Krupa Jariwala, Dominique Joely, Uyen Nguyen, Kevin Diaz, Jay Mistry, Gabriela Tlamintzi and Captain Luana Aragon. The ADNJ also recognized Coach Matt Stuart (CHS 2001), who has taught CHS World History and ESL for a decade and is a mentor and coach to the Clifton team since 2016.

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Clifton United dropped its first round North, Public Co-Op playoff game to Morris Knolls, 6-2, on Feb. 26, but the tri-op team with Cedar Grove and Passaic Valley exits the 2025-26 season with plenty to be proud of.

“The goal is to compete with every team on our schedule,” said head coach Mike Santosuosso. “If we are doing that, it is a successful season. What these guys have done the last four years, we’ve become a team where certain teams didn’t want to play us anymore.”

United (12-12) made it to the Big North Silver Cup final, losing to Paramus, 3-2, on Feb. 13, and avenged an early-season loss to Fair Lawn three days later. The season was United’s third .500-or-above campaign in the last four years. United will lose several stars to graduation, including senior forwards Trevor Rascher (above, team leader in assists with 22) and Leo Marzullo of Clifton, and Ryan Montana of Cedar Grove (the squad’s leader in points (58) and goals (38)). Clifton sophomore defenseman Ryan Sisco had a breakout year and will return to the ice in 2026-27.

Mustangs Girls Basketball had a rebound winter, going 14-13, qualifying for the North I, Group IV playoffs, for the first time since the 2017-18 season. Senior guards Christina Briguglio, pictured top center, (12.1 ppg) and Stephanie Fiete led the way. The 4 wins were tied for its highest total (2017-18) since winning 15 games in 2015-16.

In indoor track, several Mustangs stood out at the North I, Group IV sectional meet on Feb. 5. Senior Volodymyr Kozliuk took home the high jump title with a top jump of 6’2.” Senior Alexis Smith finished fourth in the 3200m run, clocking in at 11:55.91, while sophomore Mallory Nicol

and junior Jaide Diaz each reached 7’6” in pole vault, finishing fifth and sixth, respectively.

District III wrestling competition began Feb. 28, and several Clifton grapplers reached the podium. Senior 120-pounder Ruth Lara (19-10) dominated, earning pins in the quarters and semis and downing Passaic junior Daraly Estavez via 17-0 tech fall in the third period to win her bracket. Freshman Nadine Millet (152 pounds, 27-3) and junior Kathalyn Tavarez (165 pounds, 16-10) each reached her respective final, while sophomores Lillianne Addabbo (114, 33-6), Jade Mayo (138, 24-13) and Nicole Romero (185, 13-10) all finished in third-place.

Sarah Zwiebel of Mustangs Bowling delivered an outstanding senior season, finishing 2025-26 with the top girls average in Passaic County with a 176.3. The 46th-best mark in New Jersey, the Mustang senior qualified for the NJSIAA Individual Bowling State Championships, where she placed 44th overall. Zwiebel was named First Team All-League in the Big North Conference, as well.

In a rare down year for a Dan Geleta-coached Mustangs Boys Wrestling, Clifton finished the year 9-15 and was bounced from the North I, Group V playoffs in the first round. The Mustangs had a rough February, losing eight of their last ten matches after sitting at 7-7 following a Feb. 4 road victory over Sparta.

Still, two Mustangs advanced to District VIII regionals with medal-earning performances. Junior 126-pounder Jarrett Rodriguez (36-2) beat West Essex senior standout Christian Bastante, 5-4, for the gold, while senior 157-pounder Joe Dumeng (24-10) took second in his bracket.



Photos by Alyssa Stepneski

Icicles on their clarinets did not stop the Marching Mustangs from performances in Quebec on Feb. 11 to 15. While the weather was *shall we say brisk?* the 87 band members offered two performances at the Carnaval de Quebec. Their repertoire included: Quebec-inspired selections—the French National DeFile March and Salut Bonhomme Carnaval; Contemporary favorites—Pink Pony Club and APT and some hot music for a cold gig—Disco Inferno, Hot Hot Hot. Since it was Valentine’s Day, the kids also played Burning Love and Build Me Up Buttercup. As tourists, and as students, they enjoyed walking tours of Old Quebec and excursions to Montmorency Falls, St. Anne’s Basilica, Ice Hotel, Valcartier Snow Park and historic sights. While the band did its own fundraising, the school district provided the bus transportation.





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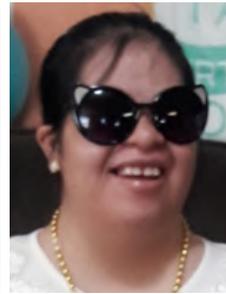


STAND WITH UKRAINE

Birthdays & Celebrations - March 2026



Doris Struyk is 93 on March 10 seen with great granddaughter **Mackenzie Peterson**. **Corey & Michelle Genardi**, celebrate their 34th anniversary on March 28. Their daughter **Bianca Eda Genardi** turns 20 on March 2. **Lynn Grosser's** is 24 on March 21, seen with her mom Mercedes. **Petro Wislocki** is 85 on March 7 and his bride **Julie** turns 71 on March 30.



Crystal Castro will be 18 on March 21. **Ruth Basta** daughter of **Medhat** and **Melba Basta** of Clifton celebrates her 25th birthday on March 27. **Elaine Sassine** will be 78 on March 15, the Ides of March. **Colleen Murray** turns 86 on March 20. **Stephany Naomi Bernales** is 32 on March 19. **Rosemary Trinkle Baran** turns 65 on March 30.

- Julie Generalli Dominick..... 3/1
- Kathleen Pocoek 3/1
- Meaghan Franko 3/1
- Kenzie Lord..... 3/3
- Amelia Lara 3/3
- Amanda Perez 3/3

- Amelia Ipenza..... 3/3
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- Carol Crudele 3/6
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- Pat Smith 3/8
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Casey Bivaletz is 36 on March 2 while **Lyla** turns 5 on March 21.



John Vatasin is 38 on March 23. **Alex Fadil** hits 26 on March 12. **Big Bobby Baels Salzback** is 74 on March 22. **Dana Aref** is 21 on March 10.

- Francis Salonga 3/31
- Paul McVeigh..... 3/31
- Chris Kolodziej..... 3/31

Send birthdays to tomhawrylkosr@gmail.com



Debra (Matano) and Robert Gentiluomo celebrate their 46th wedding anniversary on March 20.

- Nenad Vuckovic 3/20
- Monica Ahmed 3/21
- Big Bobby Bagels Salzback 3/22
- George Andrikanich..... 3/22
- Elisabel Reyes..... 3/24
- Carmen Rivera 3/24
- Kyle Hooyman 3/24
- Cheryl Stetz 3/26
- Suzanne Wachtler 3/26
- Michele Andrikanich 3/27
- Jennifer Mondelli 3/27
- Nicholas Surgent 3/27
- Aidan Tedesco 3/27
- Muriel Curtin 3/28

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27years
 Juana Torres
 Broker Associate



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 Bobby Persaud
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 Angelica Saenz
 Sales Associate



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 Maribel Feliz
 Sales Associate



10years
 Raquel Familia
 Sales Associate



7years
 Denny Cruz
 Sales Associate



32years
 Nina Robayo
 Sales Associate