

# CLIFTON

Free, Please Take One

The Mayor and Council are up for election on November 3.

# WHAT ARE THEY



# THINKING?

**Seven seats to fill... and a growing list of candidates.**

Turn the page and learn more about some of those running.



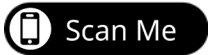
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# WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

From the Editor,  
Tom Hawrylko, Sr.



The Council election is Nov. 3, but we are expecting too many candidates to fit into one edition. The dozen on our cover are among the early risers. We spoke with 10 of them between April 17-25 to hear their opinions. Of those pictured, Avraham Eisenman said a friend filed his petition and he may not run. Councilwoman Mary Sadrakula asked me to email her with dates and times for a phone interview. So I did. But none of the options worked into her schedule. Here is what the others had to say...

**Former Zoning Board member Gerard Scorziello** was the first we connected with. While he says he is still “not 100% yet if he is running,” he offered a salient comment: “The candidate’s platform is almost secondary. What residents want is for these people to stop fighting and stop suing one another. People are really getting angry about this nonsense. They see the Council busy on all the wrong things. The voters want integrity and common sense.”

Indecisiveness and pandering to popular opinion has created an unsteady future. “How many times the last few years have you heard Council members abstain on a vote?” asked Scorziello, who served 16 years on the Zoning Board. “When they realize they can’t take a popular decision, they don’t take a stand, they take the easy way out; they abstain.”

His 16 years on Zoning taught him that decision-makers have to dig below the surface: “Our Board would often face pressure from the public. But our job was to approach a case with an open mind, interpret the facts, apply the law and cast our votes without emotion,” said Scorziello. “This Council too often votes based on emotion and public opinion. Our city can’t grow with that type of leadership.”

**Meeting with Assad Mujtaba** on a Friday afternoon in his medical office across from city hall, he focused on the recent vote regarding ON3. “Time is moving; Clifton is not,” was his synopsis.

“Being a safe voter is not what Clifton needs right now. Progress starts with debates and discussion. This Council shouts and digs into positions and takes sides on ye or nay. It seems they avoid compromise.”

“ON3 as proposed is good,” he continued. He said rather than following the state-suggested recommendation on the 20% affordable housing on the proposed high-rise apartments, he thinks the revenue would be better managed in CHIP, the fund established that offers grants to homeowners whose homes are in need of repair.

“It seems the Council doesn’t want to discuss ways to find a solution that is doable. Our city needs more innovation and to experiment more. Everybody hates a new idea and until it works. Not all new ideas work. But experiment. And if an idea doesn’t work, admit the problem, change paths and move on. Instead, what happens is they pile on problems rather than addressing them.”

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

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# WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

When he ran in 2022, Tony Latona said it might just be one and done. But now retired as a US Air Force Senior Master Chief, he has more time to focus on his hometown.

Latona, a retired Clifton Firefighter, acknowledged that personal conflicts on the dais have been a bad look for the city. Nonetheless, he stated: “Through all the chaos, sabotage and stall tactics, this Council has accomplished more in the last three years than the previous councils did over the past 30.”

He continued: “The proof is in the last 12 months of having administrators and vendors working with us and not against us.” Grants are coming in from both the federal, state and county levels, as well as incentives and grants from utilities such as PSEG.

And he said the Council has passed laws to take the burden off homeowners when trees are buckling sidewalks in front of their homes and in need of repairs.

City employees, he said he hears, talk about how it is more positive and productive to work in an environment “when you have administrators solving issues in conversations and meetings versus grievances and lawsuits.”

Getting back to the functionality of the seven elected officials, he said: “Our Tuesday nights need more decorum and rules of order.” That’s why he and Councilman Chris

D’Amato proposed for the April 21 agenda an item that public comments be shortened and meetings end at 11 pm.

“In the City Council world,” Latona said, “it gets bad early but it gets really ugly after 11. If we consolidate our time and end meetings at 11, I expect our colleagues will do less grandstanding to make room to get the people’s work done.”

The bad look that comes from City Hall is often amplified on Facebook and social media. “It’s the same 10 or 12 people making the chaos and noise,” he stated. “Because when you get off Facebook and leave the Jerry Springer drama, people I meet are less worried about us and more concerned with their families, Scouts and Little League. So I don’t agree that the town isn’t happy.”

**Tom Whittles had a decades-long front row seat** to city government thanks to his role as chair of Clifton Against Substance Abuse (CASA). And what he sees is not making him happy. The seven members are caught in an endless spiral of fighting in which compromise is seldom reached and solutions are far from found, he said.

On top of that, the income and expenses of the city are unbalanced and taxes are inevitably increasing. “The fighting and bickering on the dais is sophomoric and a bad look for a city of nearly 100,000,” said Whittles, a security industry executive.

So what is the solution?

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Tarek Alnatur, Iris Reyes, Joe Kolodziej.

“Elect people who are ready to listen, those who can find a middle path, those ready to create consensus on budget priorities,” said Whittles. “We need to look at every program we have outside of what is mandatory and see if it is financially feasible to continue or is it costing services and resources,” he said. “We need to capture the costs and make decisions from there.”

Events offered by nonprofits serving our community—the St. Peter’s Haven run, Little League parades, for example—often face big city services bills which diminish their profit. “We need to support these groups and work with them to find solutions. They serve and address needs in our community, which the government does not,” said Whittles. “We need to do better at teaming up with them so they can continue their good work.”

Code enforcement should be invested in. Hire experienced and aggressive staff, said Whittles, and aggressively enforce existing laws to grow income and keep the neighborhoods neighborly, said Whittles. Other revenue streams should include parking meters while parking enforcement should be increased. “I think ON3 was good as proposed,” he commented. “It is not in the center of town like the project at Paulison and Clifton. The problem is no one is looking out long term. I see knee-jerk reactions to issues.”

**When Iris Reyes was growing up in Paterson,** she often heard that Clifton was a great town. Parks, schools, neighborhoods ... the good life, just down the road.

After attending PCTI, service in the National Guard and college, she began a career with the Somerset County Prosecutor’s office. So when she was searching for a home, the road led to Clifton. “I know I made it when I moved to Clifton 16 years ago,” said Reyes, who lives in Albion. “I moved to the land of opportunity. Now I want to help and figure out how to preserve this great melting pot.”

Since that move, Reyes has retired from the prosecutor’s office and works at Woodrow Wilson Middle School as a security specialist, while raising her 19-year-old son.

With her campaign for Council, Reyes said her investigative skills will come in handy.

“My expertise is listening. I have to process information and then I have to come up with creative ideas to meet my end goal.” She added this: “I have a saying: when emotions are high, rationality is low. That is what is happening on this Council. They are not thinking logically. Rationale is low. Emotional solutions do not work.”

She said the air is thick in City Hall chambers as it is charged with emotion from both the seven members on the dais and the residents. “Council members do not know the reaction they will get from residents and residents don’t know if their voices will be heard or if they will get answers to their issues,” Reyes observed. “What they do realize is that there is a big, big chance decisions will get tabled.”

“Everyone is struggling, taxes are rising, the education system is struggling, everyone is nervous, both locally and nationally,” said Reyes, adding she is among the leaders who can “listen, create calm and come to consensus.”

Communication is part of the solution: “Residents need closure. Council needs to deliver good news and bad news. Residents will appreciate the truth. And we’ll all appreciate it if the infighting on Council and administration [concludes].”

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## WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

**Tarek Alnatur** has been “watching Clifton crumble” and hearing from his Lakeview neighbors, who have lived here 50 or 60 years, that the future is bleak and morale is the lowest it has ever been. These are among the things that have motivated him to run for Council.

He is a father of four, owns and operates a martial arts school and is the director of the John Maxwell Leadership Forum. That firm offers training in leadership and communication to help evolve an organization’s culture. So why take on another 30-hour-a-week job?

“I’ve been taught you have to be part of the solution,” said Alnatur. “If you don’t like something, come up with a solution, a better way of doing things. It’s my time to step in.” His better way of doing things is to build a strong seven-member team among the Council — essentially, to evolve the culture.

“There has to be a connection and shared purpose among members. That is not there now,” he said. “I see personal vendettas and fighting. As leaders, you can disagree, but do it with respect. And work stuff out in private instead of in front of the residents.”

He sees a lack of leadership, poor management and hostility among the council; that spiral has resulted in a city without a plan or direction. Alnatur can help elected leaders to connect and find areas of agreement. “We need a vision for creating revenue, establishing a surplus and planning for immediate needs and the future,” said Alnatur, who worked in finance in corporate America. “Right now, they are Scotch taping this stuff together.”

He cited as flawed the vote to mandate 20% affordable units on housing of 10 or more units, which impacted ON3’s proposed plans for 1,078 apartments on the former Roche campus. Alnatur said the vote was passed without a true review. And that “Scotch tape” reaction sends a bad message to investors looking to invest in Clifton.

“The solution would be better to get the Council and our experts, and meet with the developer and his team. Find benefits for both parties and negotiate. There was no due diligence. Transparency and consistency is what builds accountability and trust,” he said. “We can make an educated vote for the best interests of our constituents. Communication should be much better. Why not have a small committee and include people that understand so we can come to a positive negotiation?”

This Council needs to get creative, concluded Alnatur. “But they can’t, because they can’t work together.”



*Mary Sadrakula, Avraham Eisenman, Tony Latona.*

**It cost nothing to be nice is the way Ray Grabowski** runs his life and how he handles being the 23rd mayor of Clifton. It is a job that pays just \$4,500 per year (council members get \$4,000 annually) and if he or his colleagues punched in, it seems easy to clock a 30-hour workweek.

For some observers, he has been too nice. In the first years of his term, they say he did not swing the gavel enough and bring order when meetings got out of control.

Beyond running meetings and making appointments to the Planning and Library Board, the mayor and his six colleagues have about the same power — a single vote to create laws. The problem is that many of the votes over four years have come down to 4-3 decisions.

“It’s not been a good look for our city,” said Grabowski, who volunteers as chair of the Athenia Business Association. He, his sister Chris, and a few others run Clifton’s Sept. 21 Street Fair along Van Houten Ave. He also leads his band, Swingman and the Misfit Mutts.

“I like it when people get together,” said Grabowski, who also owns a landscaping company. “That is what makes Clifton Clifton.”

Issues like the development of ON3, rising taxes and the building of the mosque in Richfield have dominated the community vibe. Grabowski said an investment in quality-of-life staff and stronger laws for enforcement are needed now.

Part-time parking enforcement staff are writing tickets and generating about \$1 million per year in revenue, he said. Clifton can generate more revenue by investing in more housing and zoning officers, he said, adding: “People want to live in peace, but dump trucks in driveways, illegal apartments and noisy neighbors don’t allow that.”

While much noise has been made about the rising taxes in Clifton, Grabowski said a home assessed at \$180,000 will pay about \$118 more per year, for municipal levies. He said the value is seen in various ways in our community. “So a homeowner will pay much less than \$20 per month to have the luxury of a paid fire and ambulance service. We have the best health department in the



Tom Whittles, Ray Grabowski, Assad Mutjaba.

state. And our police, fire and DPW will stay staffed,” said Grabowski. “It’s worth it. Plus there will be no furlough or layoffs. That is important for the city employees to know.”

Grabowski readily admitted that there is a bad look from Council infighting, but it is a topic not worth discussing. He’s not one to share an ill word toward his adversaries or Council colleagues. “I am ready to work with people that want to move this city forward,” he said. “I love my town and my neighborhood. This is my hometown, the community I want to serve.”

**Joe Kolodziej has got government chops.** Joe Kolodziej has got government chops. He served seven years on the Board of Education and is in his third term, now in his 12th year, on the City Council.

Beyond his elected role, he is a Certified Municipal CFO with a Master’s Degree in Public Management from Penn State. Currently the Chief Financial Officer of Mt. Olive Twp., he’s spent 16 years working for municipalities in roles dealing with finance and management.

Asked if he is in the race for a fourth term, he confirmed: “I’d love not to run, but I can’t leave things this way.”

“This way” in Clifton politics has been well documented: Lawsuits. Public bickering. Personal fights. Seat changing. Time-outs from meetings to restore decorum. The list goes on. Not exactly an agenda of progress.

Often at meetings Kolodziej tells the public: “Don’t pay attention to what they say, pay attention to how they vote.”

Accomplishments of this Council are few, he stated. “This Council is currently talking like we achieved something, but the truth is we have squandered over \$10 million in emergency reserves,” said Kolodziej, adding in past years that the surplus fund was raided and used to keep taxes artificially low. “We have had four years of budgets that are deficit spending,” he emphasized: “Those are not accomplishments.”

Pressed to find accomplishments, Kolodziej piled on: “We all got elected on transparency and open communications. Then we hired a communications person and one year later got rid of the position because it was vacant.”

Reminded that he had championed increasing

## WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

the number of police officers in our city he conceded: “Yes. The silver lining. They didn’t lay off the 14 police officers we hired last year so that is an accomplishment. Of course we need another 30 but ...”

Quality of life enforcement is an issue Kolodziej and most all running for the seven seats agree upon. How to get increased compliance in areas such as illegal living quarters, property overuse and sub-standard renovations can be a costly investment.

He explained: “We have four part-time people covering 24,000 properties. So those four part-timers will never get ahead. We need to hire full-time people that will generate more revenue to offset their salaries. Isn’t it worth the investment?”

He said his colleagues are touting a bevy of grants that sound like they are shovel-ready, but Kolodziej said the reality is: “When we hear we got \$5 million to build a parking garage, the truth is that application is sitting in the federal government bullpen for consideration along with hundreds of other applications.”

Regarding the 4-3 vote to impose 20% affordable housing on the proposed ON3 high-rise of over 1,000 apartments, Kolodziej said it makes “great talking points: fight the developers.” The project’s contribution would more effectively serve homeowners if it went into the existing CHIP program. Council members talk a tough game, he said, but “it goes back to ‘don’t pay attention to what they say, pay attention to how they vote.’” He concluded: “Our job [as council members] is not to run the city. Our job is to make sure the city is run well.”

**Rosie Pino said the turmoil people see** at the City Council is because the old Clifton and the new Clifton are trying to figure out a way to make a better Clifton.

Now in her second term on the Council, Pino also served two terms on the Board of Education. In 2018, her last year on the BOE, she resigned to take her Council seat.

Since then, and after her Council re-election in 2022, Pino has grown in stature and controversy. In 2023, she switched parties and ran for County Clerk on the Passaic County Republican ticket.

She lost but said: “Even when we lose, we win. It was meant for us to test the machine. We got 46% of the vote [when] a Republican typically gets 38%. That shows we can cross party lines, and there are many voters who believe in change.”



*Rosemary Pino, Gerard Scorziello, Richard Mejia.*

Now Pino is crossing county lines. She is running in the June 2 Republican Primary for Congress against fellow Republican Tiffany Burress. The 9th District has 35 towns in Bergen, Passaic and Hudson Counties. If she prevails, Pino will run in the Nov. 3 General Election versus Congresswoman Nellie Pou, a Democrat, now in her first term, a seat that she was appointed to — and then won in 2024 — after the legendary Bill Pascrell died on Aug. 21, 2024.

If Pino wins the primary, will she also be on the ballot for Clifton Council? “Win or lose the primary, I’m running for both seats,” she stated and further explained: “We have non-partisan elections in Clifton, so I am able to be on the ballot in both places.”

Her decision to run in both races should engender Clifton pride, not cause pause. “When I tell people I can run for both offices, peoples’ faces light up. This is an opportunity to get Clifton representation on the national level. Obviously it would be one of 35 communities but, when I go to Congress, I represent Clifton. People want to see me succeed,” said Pino, adding that she has been elected in races over the past 15 years and “the majority of my constituents like me. I am the woman I am because of Clifton.”

Her work on the Council has been productive, adding that the “Council as a whole” has implemented a sidewalk reimbursement fund so homeowners can be reimbursed when walkways lift and have to be repaired due to city trees. She cited the 300-unit apartment building on Paulison and Clifton Aves. is another project the majority of the Council should be proud of. “We are anticipating about \$1 million in tax ratables from that,” she said.

We interviewed Pino on the first night of her second Great Spring Carnival at Main Memorial Park. It is run and funded by her nonprofit PINO — Providing Individuals New Opportunities — which she counts among her personal achievements.

She added: “On the personal level, under my leadership the Fourth of July community traditions at Clifton Stadium continues, and the event is now a revenue generator, run at no burden to taxpayers,” she said. Events like carnivals and fairs help expand Clifton’s quality of life. Another pro-

gram of pride is the twice-monthly tours of City Hall that she implemented and is now offered in three languages. The goal she said is to help individuals, nonprofit members and business owners understand the services that the city government offers. “It comes down to communicating and bringing the city to the people,” said Pino. “Clifton, you trained me. Pascrell was known as the son of Paterson. I want to be remembered as the daughter of Clifton.”

**Richie Mejia was door-knocking**, trying to meet resident and get the 100 voter signatures candidates need to qualify to run, when the unexpected happened. “This person came to the door angry, telling me they hate Clifton and they hate the Council,” said Mejia.

Maybe it was his patience. Perhaps it was his youthful smile. But Mejia politely kept talking and the voter cooled and they conversed, finding common ground. He turned the voter from antagonist to supporter.

“I love my city so much, those were not the words I wanted to hear,” said Mejia, who was elected in 2023 to the Board of Education at age 23. Now 26, he came in second in the 2024 special election to complete the term of Lauren Murphy, who died while in office.

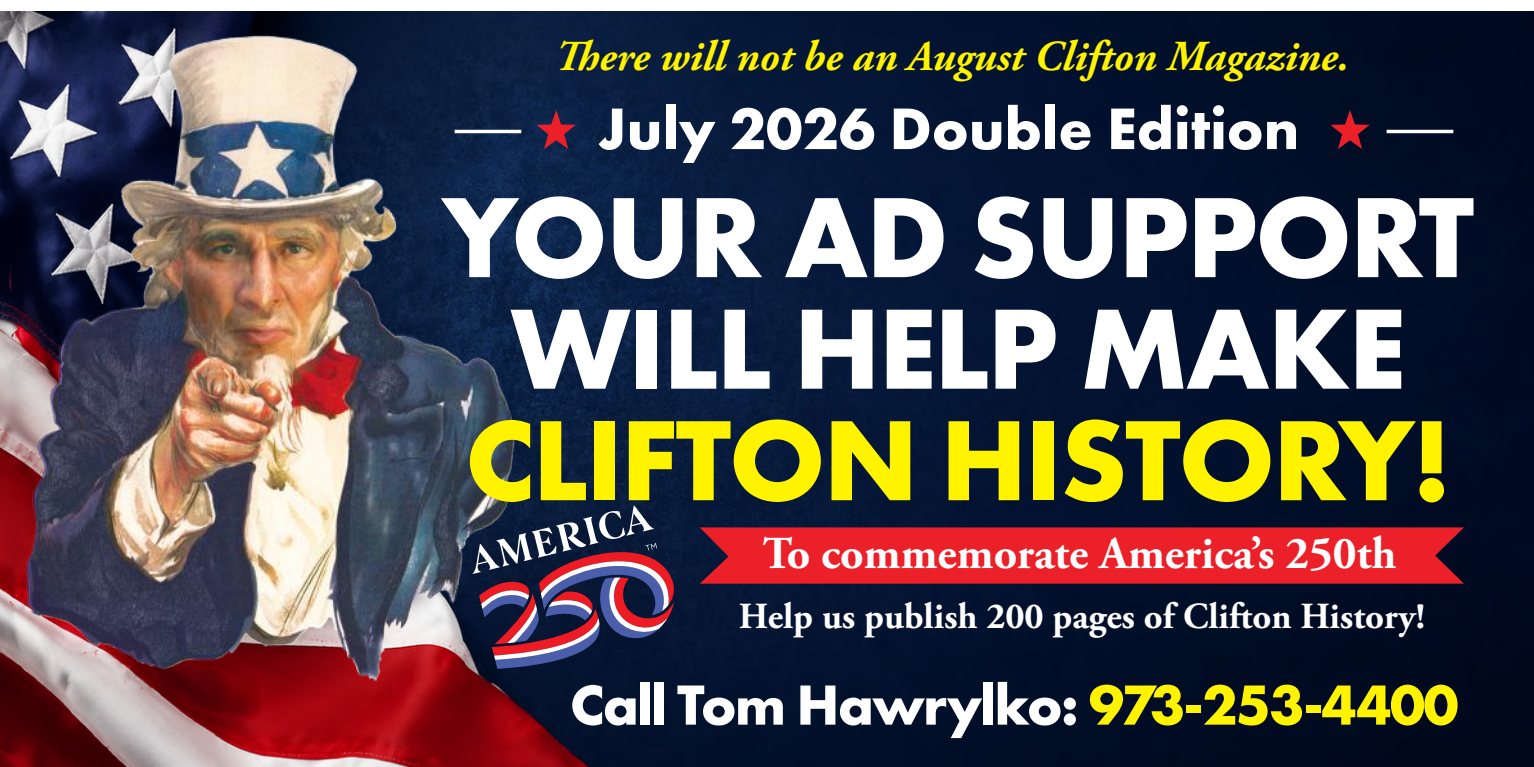
Mejia (CHS 2018) went to Felician University, earned a BA in business administration in three years, then in 2023 added an MBA, focused on innovation and leadership. At Felician, he was student body president and played Div. 2 lacrosse.

“I have been leading since I was a kid in sports and school. That’s important for the younger generation to see that a 20-something guy from Botany can run for office and succeed,” said Mejia, a project manager of grants and budgets for student achievement at St. Peter’s, the Jesuit University in Jersey City. He also is an adjunct there.

“Clifton isn’t just where I live; this is where I built my commitment to community service.” Raised in Botany, he is a Trustee of the Clifton Historic Botany District. He also worked with AmeriCorps in the area of community development, real estate and “seeing how affordable housing can be done right.” Commenting on the ON3 vote that mandates a 20% affordable housing component, Mejia said he thinks the vote was rushed. “I was hoping that there could have been a more direct benefit for veterans and seniors, but that is not the case.”

As one of seven, how would he approach decision making? “I’d start with listening. Answers come from the community, not top-down. When they were elected in 2022, this Council sold us a dream that they would be working together,” said Mejia. “Watch the Council; you rarely see collaboration. What many of us see is gotcha politics.”

With at least two of the seven incumbents not running, Mejia said this election will no doubt offer new perspectives. “No matter who gets elected, we need to start with a clean slate,” said Mejia. And why vote for him? “Don’t judge me on the years that I’ve lived but on the experience I have gained over these years.”



*There will not be an August Clifton Magazine.*

— ★ July 2026 Double Edition ★ —

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# PUTTING FRIENDS FIRST

By Ariana Puzzo

**Vivian Semeraro loves making new friends**, which made her the perfect person to rebuild the FRIENDS of the Clifton Public Library over a decade ago.

“That’s why the word ‘friends’ is all in caps,” said Semeraro. “I was able to corral some friends and, within two years, we had an organization.”

On June 14, Semeraro will mark 50 years living in Clifton. She’s made the most of those years by volunteering around the city, and it hasn’t gone unnoticed. On March 17, Semeraro was one of eight recognized for Women’s History month. Other local women honored were: Lizz Gagnon, Judith Bassford, Kathleen Kellaigh, Maryann Irizarry, Dana Williams, Robin Gibson, and Maura Coleman.

Semeraro’s honor came from Mayor Raymond Grabowski, who she got to know through the Clifton Beautification Committee. Semeraro serves as Grabowski’s alternate on the Library’s Board of Trustees if he is unable to attend.

“I was pleased to receive [the honor], but I was shocked. I never saw it coming,” said Semeraro. “What pleased me most of all was when I shared the news with my friends. The ones I told said, ‘This is great’ and showed up at the meeting.”


That included several friends from Holy Face Monastery, 1697 NJ-3; others from her St. Andrew church group, and two from Kim Castellano’s exercise class at the Senior Center.

“[She’s a] very, very good friend of mine,” Grabowski said at the meeting. “And obviously, she’s brought a lot of supporters. ... Half the audience is here for her.”

Grabowski discussed Semeraro’s volunteer work with Clifton Recreation, but especially all that she’s done to revitalize the FRIENDS. Although they were active now, he acknowledged, there was a time when the FRIENDS were a defunct group.

“Vivian took it upon herself to resurrect this at a great cost and a lot of time. And a lot of effort was put in, but she brought it back and now we have a lot of events at the library,” Grabowski highlighted. “Art exhibits, music exhibits. ... That’s because of Vivian and her hard work.”

The FRIENDS, a 501(c)3 organization, supports and highlights library resources and services. The organization is committed to fund raising, as well as encouraging gifts and bequests to the library. Semi-annual meetings are held in the spring and fall. Officers meetings are monthly and open to the public, 292 Piaget Ave., at 7 pm on Wednesdays in the community room or second floor conference room.

Download a membership form: [cliftonpl.org/friends-of-the-library](http://cliftonpl.org/friends-of-the-library). Questions or want to make a donation? 

# Happy Mother's Day

From...

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*In November 2025, FRIENDS Board Officers, from left, members-at-large Faye Levine, Jacqueline Wooten-Rose, Joan Sanford; President Joyce Frommer, Corresponding Secretary Krysa Salvetta, former Recording Secretary Patricia Bednar, members-at-large Dana Williams, Joanne Krudys.*



Write President Joyce Frommer at [Membershipfriendsof-CPL@gmail.com](mailto:Membershipfriendsof-CPL@gmail.com).

“Membership is over 100 now,” said Semeraro. “[When the organization returned], we were really flowing, because I have a wonderful circle of loyal friends. It’s alive and well.”

### Starting From Scratch

Libraries change lives. That was a sentiment expressed by the late broadcast journalist Walter Cronkite in the mid-90’s.

“Whatever the cost of our libraries,” said Cronkite, “the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation.”

Supporting the FRIENDS allows the library to provide Museum passes, supplies and presenters for children’s programs, musical concerts, guest speakers and lecturers, and littleBits coding kits for STEM programs.

The library’s display case was possible thanks to a donation by the family of Florence Huth and a train and LEGO table came from a grant by investorsBank. People can also purchase items from the Main Branch’s volunteer-run Gift Gallery or volunteer at events.

And time is what Semeraro had to offer once she retired

in 1994. Semeraro, a 1960 graduate of William Paterson, taught 34 years in the Wood-Ridge School District as a seventh grade Social Studies and English teacher.

“The first thing that I started doing was jail ministry in Passaic County for six years and became a daily visitor to Holy Face Monastery,” said Semeraro. “I [took] care of the altar flowers.”

“I also joined the FRIENDS, but it was not a very active organization,” she continued. “We would meet once a year for our annual meeting, and nobody contacted us throughout the year. Then it became defunct.”

No one was prepared to take it over, but there were some people who suggested that she step into a leadership role. She declined at first, already committed to her other philanthropic efforts, but then she started doing some inquiring around 2013.

The past president wasn’t interested in rebuilding the organization. The former treasurer had relocated to South Jersey.

“I asked if she could send up whatever [past resources that] she had and she said, ‘Oh, they got lost in the



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we give thanks, pay tribute and remember  
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**Mayor Ray Grabowski**

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move,” said Semeraro. “There was no paperwork. Zilch.”

Semeraro knew they needed to be registered as a 501(c)3, but she was informed that she had

made a mistake and incorrectly filled out the form.

“I said to the woman, ‘No, you’re my second mistake. My first mistake was taking this on,’” laughed Semeraro. “She cracked up and, after that, we leveled off. She was very helpful.”

There were still hurdles. Semeraro ended up as the self-appointed president and the interim treasurer for a time. But enthusiasm from the CPL and its director Candice Brown helped her keep pushing. Next, Semeraro contacted an Art Department professor at William Paterson to discuss a logo.

“[The professor said], ‘You can become our pseudo-client and this will be good practice for my students,’” recalled Semeraro. “William Paterson took on the logo and then I had to approve it. They ... did a spectacular job.”

### Enduring Spirit

The students also created stationery, business cards, and posters.

“It was viable and valid to have a 30th anniversary [in 2015],” said Semeraro. “They made a beautiful banner.”

Now the president, treasurer, and running the Gift Gallery, it was time for Semeraro to find help. Semeraro stayed president for five years. She was succeeded by the FRIENDS Vice President Faye Levine for five years before Joyce Frommer assumed the role in 2025.

When she considers the FRIENDS’ greatest contributions, Semeraro is proud of establishing the Museum Passes and other events like a series of opera programs.

“[Faye] and I were in constant contact, and the FRIENDS remained alive and well,” she said. “Then Joyce took over. She is ... taking off and doing everything up-to-date with QR codes. People can reach the FRIENDS of the Library by any means.”

Semeraro is still active in a different way today. She is part of the committee that is focused on connecting with corporate sponsors. One sponsor that continues to grow in their support is JK Realty, 270 Colfax Ave. Making sure that the CPL is equipped to provide services is a big goal, but Semeraro is able to boil down why she cares even further.

“I want to see every child with a book in his or her hand,” said Semeraro.

The CPL also delivers books to individuals who are

homebound. The service is managed by Joel at the Main Library and Matt at the Allwood Branch.

“I was happy to hear [some friends are] still interested in having a book in their hand,” she said. “Our library supplies that service, which I think is amazing. You can call the library, and they will deliver the books to you.”

### Pieces of Her Heart

Semeraro’s father, Angelo, grew up in our city. Angelo and his wife, Minnie, took their daughter as a child to visit her grandparents twice per week. Louis and Vera Semeraro, who lived across from School 12 at 9 Van Cleve Ave., gave Semeraro her first exposure to our city.

“Mom being the mom that she was always felt her husband should have some private time with his mom,” said Semeraro. “She and I would take my grandpa’s dog Brownie for a walk down to Hird Park [on Lexington Ave.]”

“Mom did shopping in Botany Village. I knew of Damiano’s Pharmacy. I was quite familiar with Clifton,” she continued. “When it was time for me to invest in a home, one of the places that I came to first was Clifton. I found my little dream house in Montclair Heights.”

And, from there, she paid it forward. One of Semeraro’s volunteer efforts was as a member of the Centennial Committee alongside Chairman Keith Oakley and former Mayor James Anzaldi. As they prepared for the 2017 parade, Semeraro made an unexpected proposal.

“I suggested that we have the Santa float as the grande finale,” said Semeraro. “The mayor said, ‘I don’t think we should have Santa; what would the children think?’ My response was, ‘Mayor, I’m a schoolteacher. They’re going to love it.’”

Oakley was also skeptical but told her that the idea was hers to run with, which didn’t concern Semeraro. She contacted Robert DeVito, Sr., who owns Bond Parade Floats, 111 Clifton Blvd., and he agreed to make a float. Semeraro called Patrick Doremus next and introduced herself, requesting the presence of Saint Nick.

“The float was in the parade, and the children loved it,” said Semeraro. “I was absolved by the mayor and Keith Oakley. I made sure my friend and I were Santa’s helpers. The two of us were waving with Santa.”

“I love telling that story. Bob DeVito and I are still friends. When it was all over, I thanked him so much and brought him a huge centennial cup for his coffee,” she continued. “Patrick Doremus and I are really good friends because of that time.”

Next, there is the Beautification Committee. Semeraro was drawn into it by the late Fran Warren who lived

across the street from Semeraro and was “involved in everything. She said, ‘Viv, we’re really short-handed and need to plant bulbs.’”

So Semeraro goes to plant the bulbs, and then she joins the committee. From there, they start up a Tribute Garden at City Hall. On Nov. 16, 2024, the first commemorative plaques to honor volunteers were installed. Learn about the committee and how to honor a Clifton volunteer at [cliftonnjbeautification.org](http://cliftonnjbeautification.org).

Clifton Cares is also near and dear to her. The nonprofit celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2025, but Semeraro’s involvement began before it got its name thanks to the revitalizing efforts of Lizz Gagnon and Dona Crum.

In its early days, Semeraro was part of a small group of women who gathered in one of the barns on the Municipal Complex. The women, including the late Gloria Kolodziej, prepared multiple care packages for Clifton service members like they still do today. To support Clifton Cares, tax deductible donations can be made payable to: Clifton Cares Inc., Clifton City Hall, 900 Clifton Ave., Clifton, NJ 07013. Questions? Email Chris at [grandmachrissy99@aol.com](mailto:grandmachrissy99@aol.com).

Most recently, Semeraro works closely with the Recreation Department and Supervisor Debbie Oliver. She is involved in programming like the Family Campout, “A Knight for a Princess”, and the Bunny Bash at Nash Park. But despite the enjoyment that Semeraro gets from volunteering around the city, libraries are where she feels most at home.

It’s a simple reason for the Carlstadt native and ties back to her own childhood.

“I was an avid reader and probably advanced, because they kept feeding me books,” said Semeraro. “Every Saturday, I was there religiously. They would have books ready for me. I really give those librarians a great deal of credit. They nurtured me [and] were wonderful.”



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# THIS MEMORIAL DAY

REMEMBER ★ HONOR ★ FOREVER GRATEFUL

## Two Hills. Two Marines. *By Richard De Lotto*

**Their names were Alfred Pino and Bob Kruger.** Two good kids who liked sports and had a lot of friends, they were born 20 months apart and grew up only seven blocks from each other.

Their neighborhood was Hazel St., where it crosses the parkway. And they both graduated from CHS in 1965 and 1966 when, like millions of Baby Boomers, they started to make adult decisions, like planning for their futures.

But of course, first there was Vietnam and the draft.

They both enlisted in the Marines and it was January and July of 1966 that Alfred and Bob left for basic training, respectively. Just as quickly, they arrived for 13-month tours in South Vietnam with the 3rd Marine Division.

During this time, US Army Gen. William Westmoreland had ordered the 3rd Division to move north into Quảng Trị province to stop and eliminate enemy units that were moving south. The place was called Khe Sanh, and its surrounding battle grounds were referred to by numbers — hills 861 and 881, north and south.

Historians call this part of the Vietnam war “The Hill Fights”, and it was between January and June of 1967 that US Marines would run into numerous firefights with elements of the 325th NVA division.

Over 2,000 American casualties would occur, and two of those casualties would be from Clifton. On March 16, 1967, a Marine unit was attacked and pinned down near Hill 861. That was where Corporal Alfred Pino’s squad was ordered to go. As the squad approached the hill, they were hit by a mortar barrage that decimated the platoon.



*Bobby Kruger and Alfred Pino.*

The tragedy led to Alfred Pino becoming the first man from Clifton to be Killed in Action in Vietnam. Seven weeks later, PFC Bob Kruger, along with 31 members from his company, were ordered to hold the northern face of Hill 881 against enemy attack. Kruger and another marine moved forward to a listening post, standard military procedure.

On May 2-3, 1967, steady rain on a foggy and moonless night enveloped the hill. According to military records, at 1 am, an enemy force estimated at between 150 and 200 attacked 881N. The Marines fought valiantly, but they were soon over-run. Marine units would reclaim the hill five hours later. Sergeant Fred Monahan of Altoona, PA was there. It was his recollection that he and seven other Marines were the only survivors.

Monahan specifically remembers recovering the remains of Kruger, who was just two months short of his 19th birthday on the night that he lost his life on some long-forgotten hill. Monahan also recalls the three enemy bodies surrounding Bob Kruger. It was obvious what happened.

Sixty years ago, two men from Clifton were sworn in to defend their country as US Marines. The two men did so to the best of their abilities. It is the greatest of tragedies to read and know about heroic human beings, but a sad realization that you will never know them personally.

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation, remember it would not have happened without the sacrifice of millions of veterans like Alfred Pino, Bob Kruger and the hundreds of Cliftonites listed on the following pages, who fought and died serving America during war.

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arrangements, embalm or conduct funerals)

*The Fallen.* Organized by the war in which they served, we have again published the name of every Cliftonite who died while in service to our nation.

World War I  
Louis Ablezer  
Andrew Blahut  
Timothy Condon  
John Crozier  
Orrie De Groot  
Olivo De Luca  
Italo De Mattia  
August De Rose  
Jurgen Dykstra

★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★

Seraphin Fiori  
Ralph Gallasso  
Otto Geipel  
Mayo Giustina  
Peter Horoschak  
Emilio Lazzerin  
Joseph Liechty  
Jacob Morf, Jr.  
William Morf  
Edwin C. Peterson

★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★  
★

Robert H. Roat  
Alfred Sifferlen  
James R. Stone  
Carmelo Uricchio  
Angelo Varetoni  
Michael Vernarec  
Cornelius Visbeck  
Ignatius Wusching  
Bertie Zanetti  
Otto B. Zanetti

## The memory will live forever.

*Over the past year, we have had the privilege of serving the families of many veterans. In recognition of the service these veterans rendered to their country, we would like to show our appreciation this Memorial Day. In memory of their lives and their service, we recall...*



### Memorial Weekend

#### Sunday, May 24 Flag Set-Up

**6 am:** Volunteers needed to help set up 2,310 flags at Avenue of Flags, in and around City Hall, weather permitting

#### Monday, May 26 Parade

**8:15 am:** Assemble Jubilee Park

**9 am:** Parade from St. Andrew's Blvd. down Clifton Ave. and into City Hall campus to the Avenue of Flags Barn.

**11 am:** Main Memorial Park Service

**2 pm:** Athenia Veterans, Huron Ave.

**6 pm:** Avenue of Flags Take Down

**Questions?** Visit Avenue of Flags barn near City Hall or call Joe Tuzzolino at 973-365-2630 to volunteer, or for info.

John Alfieri  
Tavish McDougale Baker  
Louis John Centi  
Richard Raymond De Roos  
Danko Paul Demenjuk  
William A. DUBY Sr.  
Alvaro Vladimir Duran Garcia  
John S. Farley  
Vincent Anthony Frega

Herta Olga Grau  
Ronald David Hendrickson  
Arthur L. Huff Jr.  
Paul Kurtz  
Gerald P. Lewis  
Gaetano C. Megale  
Gregory C. Miles  
Thomas Stephen Monfried  
Jerome S. Morici

Anthony Rodriguez  
Adelchi Camillo Rold  
John W. Sadvary  
Aldo William Sala Jr.  
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As we recall the service of Clifton's Veterans, we also honor the late Joseph M. Shook, Sr., founder of Shook Funeral Home, Inc., and father of our President, Nancy Shook Garretson, and Thomas F. Garretson, father of our Manager, Roy B. Garretson.



**Joseph M. Shook, Sr. 1924-2008**  
US Marine Corps, Sept. 1942 - Dec. 1945



Joe was stationed at the Commandant's Headquarters in Washington, D.C. for a short time. He then proudly served his country as an Armored Amphibian Crewman and saw action on both Peleliu and Okinawa during WW II.

**Thomas F. Garretson 1924-2012**  
US Navy, Jan. 1943 - Feb. 1946



Tom served with the 121st Naval Construction Battalion, attached to the 4th Marines Division, in the Battle of Kwajalein and Roi-Namur. Known as the SeaBees, the 121st went ashore with the Marines as they invaded Saipan in WWII. The 121st NCB helped build the airstrips on Tinian from where B-29 bombers took off to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.



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World War II	★	Thaddeus Bukowski	★	David Ward
Joseph Sperling	★	Leo Grossman	★	Edward Rembisz
Charles Peterson	★	Michael Kashey	★	Lawrence Zanetti
Thomas Donnellan	★	Stephen Messineo	★	Alfred Jones
Jerry Toth	★	John Janek	★	Stephen Blondek
Frank Lennon	★	John Yanick	★	John Bulyn
Joseph Carboy	★	Herbert Gibb	★	Gerhard Kaden
Julius Weisfeld	★	William Nalesnik	★	William Lawrence
Edward Ladwik	★	Joseph Sowma	★	Robert Doherty
Israel Rabkin	★	Bronislaus Pitak	★	Samuel Guglielmo
Peter Pagnillo	★	Harry Tamboer	★	Robert Parker
Harold Weeks	★	John Olear	★	Joseph Molson
William Weeks	★	John Koropchak	★	Stephen Kucha
Salvatore Favata	★	Joseph Nugent	★	James De Biase
Herman Adams	★	Steven Gombocs	★	Dominick Gianni
Edward Kostecki	★	Thomas Gula	★	Manuel Marcos
Charles Hooyman, Jr.	★	Raymond Curley	★	Nicholas Palko
Salvatore Michelli	★	Harry Earnshaw	★	William Slyboom
Richard Novak	★	James Henry	★	Herman Teubner
James Potter	★	John Layton	★	Thomas Commiciotto
Adam Liptak	★	Charles Messineo	★	Stephen Surgent
John Van Kirk	★	Joseph Petruska	★	Albert Bertneskie
Carlyle Malmstrom	★	Bogert Terpstra	★	Charles Gash
Francis Gormley	★	John Kotulick	★	Peter Jacklin
Charles Stanchak	★	Peter Vroeginday	★	Peter Shraga, Jr.
Joseph Ladwik	★	Michael Sobol	★	John Aspesi
Karl Germelmann	★	Donald Sang	★	Micheal Ladyczka
Robert Stevens	★	Andrew Sanko	★	Edward Marchese
Albert Tau	★	George Zeim, Jr.	★	Robert Stephan
William Scott	★	Robert Van Liere	★	Roelof Holster, Jr.
Benjamin Puzio	★	Vernon Broseman	★	Alex Hossack
James Van Ness	★	Harold O'Keefe	★	Siber Speer
Gregory Jahn	★	Edward Palffy	★	Frank Klimock
Nicholas Stanchak	★	Dennis Szabaday	★	Salvatore Procopio
Frank Smith, Jr	★	Lewis Cosmano	★	Harry Breen
Carl Bredahl	★	Stanley Scott, Jr.	★	Gordon Tomea, Jr.
Donald Yahn	★	Charles Hulyo, Jr.	★	Douglas Gleeson
Joseph Belli	★	Arnold Hutton	★	Fred Hazekamp
Edwin Kalinka	★	Frank Barth	★	Harold Roy
Stanley Swift	★	John Kanyo	★	Andrew Servas, Jr.
Charles Lotz	★	Bryce Leighty	★	Francis Alesso
Joseph Prebol	★	Joseph Bertneskie	★	Walter Bobzin
Walter Nazar	★	Samuel Bychek	★	Vincent Lazzaro
Benedict Vital	★	Louis Netto	★	John Op't Hof



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*A look back to circa 2000 when scouts, organizers of the Avenue of Flags and other decorated the Main Memorial Monument.*

- |                       |   |                    |   |                          |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------|---|--------------------------|
| World War II          | ★ | Carl Anderson      | ★ | Paul Domino              |
| Joseph Sondey         | ★ | George Holmes      | ★ | John Fusiak              |
| John Zier             | ★ | Edward Stadtmauer  | ★ | Louis Ritz               |
| Peter Hellrigel       | ★ | Kermit Goss        | ★ | William Niader           |
| Steve Luka            | ★ | George Huemmer     | ★ | Alfred Aiple             |
| Arthur Vanden Bree    | ★ | Alexander Yewko    | ★ | Mario Taverna            |
| Harold Baker          | ★ | Emil Chaplin       | ★ | Sebastian De Lotto       |
| Hans Fester           | ★ | John Hushler       | ★ | Matthew Bartnowski       |
| Patrick Conklin       | ★ | Edgar Coury        | ★ | John Bogert              |
| John Thompson         | ★ | Robert Hubinger    | ★ | Joseph Collura           |
| Thomas Dutton, Jr.    | ★ | Wilbur Lee         | ★ | Matthew Daniels          |
| Harold Ferris, Jr.    | ★ | Vito Venezia       | ★ | James Doland, Jr.        |
| Donald Freda          | ★ | Joseph Russin      | ★ | Walter Dolginko          |
| Joseph Guerra         | ★ | Ernest Yedlick     | ★ | Peter Konapaka           |
| Edward Hornbeck       | ★ | Charles Cannizzo   | ★ | Alfred Masseroni         |
| William Hromniak      | ★ | Michael Barbero    | ★ | Charles Merlo            |
| Stephen Petrilak      | ★ | Joseph Palagano    | ★ | Stephen Miskevich        |
| Wayne Wells           | ★ | William Hadrys     | ★ | John Ptasinski           |
| Vincent Montalbano    | ★ | Joseph Hoffer, Jr. | ★ | Leo Schmidt              |
| James Miles           | ★ | Joseph Piccolo     | ★ | Robert Teichman          |
| Louis Kloss           | ★ | John Robinson      | ★ | Louis Vuoncino           |
| Andrew Kacmarcik      | ★ | Frank Torkos       | ★ | Richard Vecellio         |
| John Hallam           | ★ | Arthur Mayer       | ★ | Robert Hegmann           |
| Anthony Leanza        | ★ | Edward Jaskot      | ★ | Ernest Triemer           |
| William Sieper        | ★ | George Russell     | ★ | John Peterson            |
| Sylvester Cancellieri | ★ | Frank Groseibl     | ★ | Richard Vander Laan, Jr. |
| George Worschak       | ★ | Richard Van Vliet  | ★ | Stephan Kucha            |
| Frank Urrichio        | ★ | Benjamin Boyko     | ★ | 'Gigito' Netto           |
| Andrew Marchincak     | ★ | Harry Carline      | ★ | Michael Columbus         |

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- William Kuller ★
- Joseph Amato ★
- Herbert Demarest ★
- George Fornelius ★
- Edward Luisser ★
- Reynold Campbell ★
- Louis Le Ster ★
- Dennis Dyt ★
- Raymond Halendwany ★
- John Crawbuck ★
- Ernest Hagbery ★
- William Gould ★
- Edward Flanagan ★
- William Snyder ★
- Allen Hiller ★
- Arthur Grundman ★
- Donald Brannon ★



Memorial Day, 2025, at the Athenia Veterans Post on Huron Ave. That is the Clifton High Jr. ROTC color guard at the 2 pm solemn tribute to those who died in service.

## US Army/Special Forces Captain Michael Tarlavsky



was killed in Najaf, Iraq on Aug. 12, 2004 and buried with honors in Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 24. Tarlavsky, CHS Class of '92, was captain of the Swim Team and enlisted in the Army in 1996. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan and was awarded the Bronze Star.

He is survived by his wife Tricia, son Joseph, his parents Yury and Rimma and a sister, Elina. The Veterans Alliance engraved his name on the Downtown Clifton Main Avenue War Memorial in 2004—the first name added in 34 years.

- ★ Vietnam War ★
- ★ Alfred Pino ★
- ★ Thomas Dando ★
- ★ William Sipos ★
- ★ Bohdan Kowal ★
- ★ Robert Kruger, Jr. ★
- ★ Bruce McFadyen ★
- ★ Carrol Wilke ★
- ★ Keith Perrelli ★
- ★ William Zalewski ★
- ★ Louis Grove ★
- ★ Clifford Jones, Jr. ★
- ★ George McClelland ★
- ★ Richard Corcoran ★
- ★ John Bilenski ★
- ★ Donald Campbell ★
- ★ James Strangeway, Jr. ★
- ★ Donald Scott ★
- ★ Howard Van Vliet ★
- ★ Frank Moorman ★
- ★ Robert Prete ★
- ★ Guyler Tulp ★
- ★ Nicholas Cerrato ★
- ★ Edward Deitman ★
- ★ Richard Cyran ★
- ★ Leszek Kulaczkowski ★
- ★ William Malcolm ★
- ★ Leonard Bird ★
- ★ John France ★
- ★ Stephen Stefaniak Jr. ★
- ★ Nov. 8, 1961 ★
- ★ Plane Crash ★
- ★ Robert De Vogel ★
- ★ Vernon Griggs ★
- ★ Robert Marositz ★
- ★ Robert Rinaldi ★
- ★ Raymond Shamberger ★
- ★ Harold Skoglund ★
- ★ Willis Van Ess, Jr. ★
- ★ Gulf War ★
- ★ Michael Tarlavsky ★

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# *The* **ADELHELMS:** A FAMILY OF SERVICE

★

*By Ariana Puzzo*

**Blue-collar families, like the Adelhels,** often felt a sense of belonging in 1950s-era Clifton. Like their neighbors, they were hard workers, raised several sons, and they prioritized giving back to the community.

The late William “Bill” Jr. and Mildred Adelmhelm moved to our city in 1956 with three young boys. Robert, Bill, George, and, later, Steve graduated from CHS and each had distinguished careers in the military and law enforcement.

Robert served for 22 years in the United States Marine Corps, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before retiring to Jacksonville. Bill is a retired Belleville Deputy Police Chief who now resides in Georgia.

George served for two years with the USMC Silent Drill Platoon and retired as a detective after 26 years with the Clifton Police Department. He worked for the Passaic County Sheriff’s Office as a civilian for over another de-

cade. Steve is a retired Lieutenant for the Port Authority, acting as a first responder during the World Trade Center attack on Sept. 11, 2001.

Their desire to give back was every bit as hereditary as their athleticism.

“Most of those guys from the Greatest Generation were very patriotic. There was pride in your service,” said Robert (CHS 1968). “My father had a lot of pride for being in the Navy and what he did during [World War II]. He was involved in some heavy stuff.”

At age 18, Bill Jr. was part of the Philippines campaign and the Battle of Okinawa. He served as a Fireman 2nd Class (F2c) and was situated four decks down on the ships.

“They were getting hit hard by Japanese kamikazes. The likelihood of anyone getting up from four decks down is probably nil,” said Robert, 76. “Looking back as



Above Clifton Western Division circa 1963 on the Al Slack Insurance team. George is the bat boy center, brother Bill on left, dad Bill and Bob are also pictured. At right, the Adelhelm family 1958, Bob and Bill front with George and Mildred and Bill. On facing page, that's a proud dad, Bill Adelhelm with his boys in 1986, from left: George, Bob, Bill and Steve.

a veteran ... he was in a major battle realizing that, if his ship was hit, he was going to die there. If not suddenly, he'd probably drown."

"The sailors back then were warriors," he added. "I was exposed to a lot of World War II guys in the American Legion — that rubs off on you and makes a difference in your life. A good number of fathers in our neighborhood were veterans."

When Bill Jr. and Mildred relocated from Belleville, they found a house in our city for \$14,500. It was a good place to grow up by all accounts. Robert and Bill (CHS 1969) attended St. Philip's and WWJH. George (CHS 1974) and Steve went through Clifton Public Schools.

Robert, the captain of the undefeated 1968 Wrestling team, enjoyed playing baseball in Maple Valley. He played in Clinic League, Little League, Babe Ruth, and American Legion Baseball.

"There were a lot of parks ... and sometimes we had baseball games together," said Robert. "It wasn't unusual to have 18 of us playing baseball in Maple Valley. Sometimes a double-header."

But there's a time for play and a time when everyone is called to serve something bigger than themselves. For Robert and George, the call came from the Marines Corps.

"[Our] family's values made it so I always had a strong work ethic, and [so did my brothers] with what

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they achieved,” said George, 70. “This was all a trickle-down effect from my father.”

### Lifelong Clifton Ties

Described by son George as a “self-made man”, Bill Jr. entered the military out of high school and entered boot camp in 1944. He served in the South Pacific and later was the President of the City Employees Union during City Manager Bill Holster’s tenure.

“Dad negotiated the contracts with a high school education,” said George. “On top of him and my mother providing for us ... he gave back to the community by being involved with youth.”

Prior to his passing in 2003, Bill Jr. was President of Western Division Little League and State Chairman of American Legion Baseball. He was also active in the American Legion veterans association and was the Commander of Post 8 and Post 347.

“Even though my father passed away, I’ve kept my name on the membership rolls [of Post 347]. I take a lot of pride in that,” said Robert. “I could be a member of a post down here, but I tell people [that I’m a member] in Clifton, New Jersey.”

The origin of his pride started when he was a boy. Before the Adelhelms moved to Clifton, there was a neighbor who lived down the street from Bill Jr. and Mildred in Belleville. Although Robert never met Harry Nygaard, he regards him as a mentor.

“He was a [Private First Class] killed on Saipan in the South Pacific and got the Silver Star,” said Robert. “Being decorated in the Marine Corps is damn hard.”

“Joining the Marines was a ‘calling’ for sure but, as strange as it sounds, Harry Nygaard was with me,” he continued. “He stayed with me for my whole career. I could feel his spirit.”

Robert graduated from William Paterson College in 1973 with a Bachelor of Science in Public Administration. Despite his interest in joining the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, which preceded the DEA, he instead opted to enter the Officer Program at Quantico in 1973.

Robert retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1995. His service included assignments in Command, Staff and Instructor billets with 8th Marines, 4th Marines, 2d Reconnaissance Battalion, and Blount Island Command in Jacksonville. He is a graduate of Amphibious Warfare School, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, US



*Bill Adelhelm during World War II and his sons, Robert and George.*

Navy Dive School, Naval Aerial Observer School, and US Army Airborne School. While serving with the 2nd Battalion 8th Marines, Robert was involved in operations in Beirut, Lebanon.

It was the early 80’s when the U.S., France, Italy, and Great Britain tried to stabilize Lebanon by ending the fighting between Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Israel. “When the bombing took place and we [supervised the removal of] the PLO,” said Robert, “we occupied the Port of Beirut.”

Following the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, and the assassination of Lebanon’s president, he was called to return. Robert was assigned as a liaison officer to work with the Italians, where he was part of overseeing the evacuation of Syrian forces occupying Beirut.

Robert is the recipient of the Meritorious Service Medal with three Stars, Navy Achievement Medal, Marine Expeditionary Medal, and the Combat Action Ribbon. Robert is also the 2021 Florida Veterans Hall of Fame inductee, the 2024 Recipient of the Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Humanitarian Award, and the Pritzker Military Museum & Library 2025 Citizen Soldier Award Recipient.

He is also founder and past president of the Jacksonville Semper Fidelis Society and founder and senior advisor of the Vets 4 Vets Movement. To find out more, visit [semperfidelissociety.org](http://semperfidelissociety.org) and [v4vflorida.org](http://v4vflorida.org).

“I didn’t ask my Marines to do anything I wouldn’t do myself,” said Robert. “If they were doing something, like when we were in Beirut filling sandbags, and I had time, I’d go out there and work with them and not stand there and watch them do it.”

“I was firm but fair. I learned that from my training with my special platoon commander Captain Jay Craig,” he continued. “He [was a Comanche] and was hard on himself physically to prepare ... for whatever you have to deal with. [He was also] firm and fair, and I saw the benefits of that.”



**Quentin Roosevelt (Nov. 19, 1897 – July 14, 1918)** was the youngest son of President Theodore Roosevelt. Family and friends agreed that Quentin, at left, had many of his father's positive qualities and few of the negative ones. Encouraged by his father, he joined the United States Army Air Service where he became a fighter pilot during World War I. Extremely popular with his fellow pilots and known for his daring, he was killed in aerial combat over France.

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On Oct. 23, 1983, two truck bombs were detonated at buildings in Beirut, Lebanon killing 307. Clifton's Robert Adelhelm was the USMC officer in charge of managing the clean up.

### Path to Redemption

Today, Robert lives in Jacksonville with his wife, Brenda, and acts as a Veteran Advisor to the incarcerated Vietnam Veterans Ernest C. Brace Chapter 1080 in Raiford Prison.

Helping incarcerated veterans sometimes means preparing them for their release by pointing them toward VA claims, discharge information, and places to live and work. He also started a project with veterans in Raiford Prison where they make cremation urns.

"Prison, in part, is to be punished and rehabilitated, but I felt the other part of it is redemption," said Robert. "There are a few who will be getting out that have been in for 15 to 20 years, but most are lifers and will die there."

Making the urns for veterans on the outside allows them to have a "dignified burial", even if they do not have family to claim their remains.

"Vets take care of vets. That is what we're working on," said Robert. "It really helps the morale of veterans. They feel like they're doing something instead of just existing and taking up space."

Robert also works with inmates on death row and with Duval County Veterans Treatment Court. The first has involved him meeting with a master sergeant of 21 years. The man was honorably discharged with seven combat deployments and five years as a contractor in Afghanistan.

"He unfortunately shot two cops," said Robert. "He's going to be executed, but I told the warden that I'd like to meet him."

Robert saw in him the type of staff NCO that motivated



him as a young lieutenant. When Robert asked him what happened, he said, "Son, I don't remember. They had to tell me what I did." As Adelhelm tries to get him spiritual guidance, he emphasized the importance of showing up for a fellow Marine while still recognizing that he did something horrific.

"I have three brothers who are cops," said Robert. "It could've been my brother that he killed, but I can relate to him as a combat Marine. That has to have a negative impact on you."

Which is why his work with the Veterans Court is equally, if not even more, essential. That work gives him and others the opportunity to intervene for veterans with service-related issues, such as PTSD, TBI, or substance abuse before it escalates to violent offenses.

"It's a year-long type of program where their record can be expunged and they can live a normal life," said Robert. "It's not Scared Straight, but I bring them down to prison and he can talk to an older veteran who can say, 'You don't want to end up in here.' It makes a big difference for those younger veterans. For some of them, it changes their lives."

### New Horizons

Although they both enlisted in the USMC, George took a different path from his older brother when he joined the Silent Drill Platoon.

Military service was something that he grew up respecting as a member of the Sons of the American Legion. Yet George also regarded it as an opportunity.

"I was leaving home, and I guess it was a clas-

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sic case of: ‘I’m getting out of this town,’” he said. “I was number 3 and my mom died young, so I was left to my own devices, if you will, while my father was dealing with her illness.”

“I wanted to see the world and experience something other than what Clifton had to offer,” said George, candidly. “I realized that I wasn’t going to graduate from high school and go to college, so it appealed to me.” George went to Parris Island at age 18 for boot camp and was stationed with the 8th & I Marines in Washington, D.C. during his two years of active duty.

Joining the 24-man rifle platoon, led by a Captain and Platoon Sergeant of the USMC, was a prestigious honor. George recalled traveling around the country during the summer of his first year with the Marching Twenty-Four, performing a silent precision exhibition drill without any cadence or verbal coordination. In his second



George and his son Luke.

year, the Corporal served at Camp David during the Ford Administration. As he reflected on both the easy and hard aspects of adjusting to his military duties, George said it helped that he went into it open-minded.

“I was ready, willing, and able,” said George. “We’re all naturally athletic in our family with wrestling, football, and baseball, so I was physically prepared for the rigors of military life.”

But he did acknowledge that the mental rigors were entirely unique. Traveling with the Silent Drill Platoon meant that they consistently had a tight schedule.

One of the ways that George decompressed when he was off-duty

was by visiting music venues, like the Cellar Door. “That was where I saw Tom Waits. That’s one I’m very happy about,” said George. “Neil Young used to play there and I saw The Eagles. It was like the Grand Saloon.”

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Although his brother's service exceeded his own by two decades, George has met people from all types of backgrounds, which prepared him for his career in law enforcement. He's also felt a firsthand respect for veterans.

"I was spinning a rifle in the NFL half-time show. We did two [half-time shows]," he said. "And even with two years in the Marine Corps, and the fact that I was on the Silent Drill team, I get immediate respect."

### Multigenerational Pride

After his service concluded in 1976, George "bounced around quite a bit, from California back to New Jersey" as he tried to find his way in life. George walked down a few career paths in those years but did not find the direction until his father advised him to take the police test in his hometown. "Which I did," said George. "Then my number came up, and the rest is history."

As a rookie, George walked the beat in Botany but spent the bulk of his time managing the Clifton Police Evidence Unit. He retired as a detective on Dec. 1, 2011.

Fast-forward one month and a day after his retirement, he began working as a civilian at the Passaic County Sheriff's Department.

His work ethic and background suited him well for the new role in the county, which he retired from in the past year. Now he watches with pride and shares stories of how the third generation of Adelhelms makes his mark by doing for others in service to our country.

His son, Luke, has spent six years on active duty in the US Air Force. Luke is an investigator in New Mexico, having graduated from college and received additional training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

"I was very supportive [of him joining the military]," said George. "He got a degree in Criminal Justice, which has contributed to where he is now in the Air Force."

What George hopes more people recognize, whether they're thinking about joining the military or not, is that service is an essential part of any society.

It can be military service, volunteering, helping with philanthropic support, or working hard to provide for your family like he saw Mildred do when she worked the midnight shift at Dunkin Donuts on Main Ave. and the lunch counter at Grants department store.

Speaking on behalf of three generations, George said: "We've served the community. We've served the country. It would be nice to see more of that. I'm proud of being a part of that [with my brothers] and am proud of my son."



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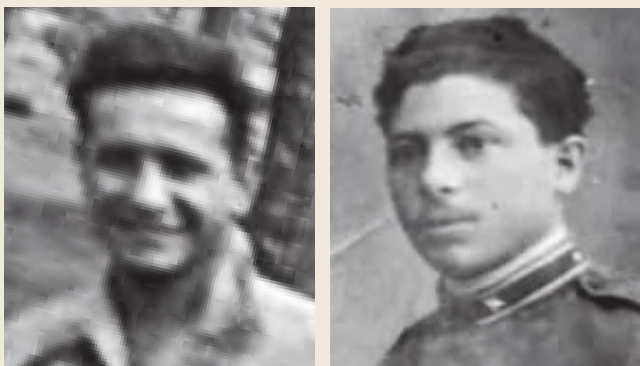
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# FOLLOWING THEIR FATHERS' LEADS

By Ariana Puzzo



The relationship between fathers and sons is already unique. So when it comes to Ron and Dominick Marrone's bond and how they relate to one another, the call to serve their country required no explanation.

"I understood. I feel like it's a good thing for a young person to do," said Ron, 70, when he was told of his son's contract. "It's like your little club. When you see someone in service, you can always carry some sort of conversation, [even by asking]: 'Where were you stationed?'"

There is a lineage of military service in their family that dates back to Ron's grandfather, Luigi DiMauro, above right, serving with the Comando Truppe Alpine for Italy during World War I. Ron's father, John, left, served in the US Army during World War II in the Pacific Theater.

The third and fourth generations are Ron, who was a US Navy Aircrew Survival Equipmentmen during the tail-end of the Vietnam War, and Dominick, who served with the Military Police in the US Army and was deployed twice to serve as a guard at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

Father and son had similar experiences at age 17 when they each enlisted. Their parents were supportive, though

neither of their mothers were thrilled to sign the papers since their sons had to get written permission. But they took the same approach.

"I told my dad, 'You can sign off for me to join, or I could wait a couple months and I'll be 18 and join myself,'" said Dominick, 33. "He was fine with it. Mom was not as happy, of course, but she understood."

And Ron's mother came around as well once he issued an identical ultimatum. Both boys had their own reasons for joining, as well as aspects of their life that prepared them for the lessons and hardships that they would encounter during and after their years serving.

"The Boy Scouts didn't mould me, per se," said Dominick. "But [Clifton's Troop 22] had a sense of authority and order that did help me during my time in the Army."

## Taking the Leap

Before moving with his family to Paramus in eighth grade, Ron grew up as an altar boy in the Bronx. Which meant by the time he arrived at boot camp, he knew how to run.

“It was a rough neighborhood and hard living there, running home at night as an altar boy so I didn’t get jumped,” said Ron. “It was nerve wracking at that time. [But my father] worked hard, and we got out of there.”

During those early years, it wasn’t just Ron with his parents, John and Nancy, and brother John. Describing himself as belonging to a “typical Italian family”, his grandparents, aunts, and uncles lived down the street from them.

“As time went on, the neighborhood changed ... but we stayed close,” said Ron. “My parents had a split-level and set up the basement for my grandparents to live in. It was a loving family. There were no problems. Everybody was happy.”

Although John didn’t speak about his service, Ron was aware that he served in 1942 and was later sent to Burma, New Guinea, India, and China during WWII.

“He had a rough time; I know that,” said Ron. Adding that John’s service influenced his own: “I wanted to make him proud. ... When I joined, the Vietnam War was still on, but it was different. My father was fine with [me enlisting], the only thing he said was, ‘If this is what you really want to do, that’s fine. Then I’m for it.’”

Ron considered joining the Army, but after speaking with a few guys who said he’d end up in either Vietnam or Germany, he opted for a path that would let him “trav-



*No matter which branch of service back in the 1970s, every recruit went through inoculations with a worried look, like Ron Marrone in US Navy Boot Camp in 1973.*

el around and see the world”, which is exactly what the Navy gave him. Ron was sent off the coasts of Vietnam and Iran, as well as to Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Hawaii, mainland China, and Pakistan. Ron’s stateside bases were in California, Nevada, and Florida, but his home port was United States Fleet Activities Yokosuka in Japan.

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## FOLLOWING THEIR FATHERS' LEADS

"I went to so many places that I would never go to," said Ron.

And he did things that most 18 year olds would never imagine writing home about. Ron's active duty was from 1973 to 1977, and then he was in the Active Reserves until 1979. During training, he underwent aircrew survival training and learned how to pack his own parachute.

"I had to sign a voucher form and, for some reason, I remember signing that stupid paper and getting pushed out the door," said Ron. "it was not a static line. You just held onto the cord and jumped out one by one."

"I pulled the damn thing and ran out," he recalled. "Once I got down to the bottom, someone said, 'You can go again.' I said, 'What, are you out of your mind? Once was enough for me.'"

It was the only time that he jumped, but his handiwork saved others' lives, including a pilot from Scotch Plains who ejected from a malfunctioning F-4 with one of Ron's packed parachutes.

"I actually had a parachute that I was throwing out a long time ago, but instead I donated it to the Intrepid Museum ... and they're using that as a display," said Ron. "[I also] had a helmet from the F-4 pilot. I refurbished it and donated it to the museum."

### Finding His Place

After two years serving on the USS Midway and another year on the USS Coral Sea, Ron spent the tail-end of the Vietnam War in the throes of evacuating refugees.

They sent him to an island in the Philippines for a week as part of a combat mission. When Ron wasn't packing parachutes or inspecting ejection seats, he repaired and distributed any survival equipment like G-suits, oxygen masks, or helmets for pilots and air crews.

"I'd say, being in the military back then, people's lives depended on my job," said Ron. "If you did something wrong, somebody's gonna die. Not many things bother me nowadays when I'm running a business. I can take it or leave it, so to speak. [Serving] builds you to take pressure."



*Ron Marrone directed jets and choppers landing and taking off the deck of aircraft carriers.*

But it doesn't quite prepare you for returning to civilian life and seeing how everything kept going without you there. Even though he wasn't in the jungles, he was on a ship with many people and dangers. There were also different kinds of dangers and uncertainties when he returned home.

"People hated people in the military. [They] wanted to grow their hair long and when you came home with short hair, they'd say, 'What are you, a cop?'" said Ron. "My friends liked me, but all of them were married or had girlfriends."

"I was gone from 17 to 21, in the prime of your life, and they

were set up. You were kind of taken out of the loop," he continued. "It was a difficult time. I remember going out by myself, drinking, and trying to get back in the scheme of things because I was out of it for so long."

Ron acknowledged that you eventually find a way to reconcile those four years that many would never experience in their lifetime. Part of it was him using the G.I. Bill to attend William Paterson while doing odd jobs to earn money. Later he worked for DPWs in different towns and eventually became a technician for Western Pest Control and Orkin.

Today, he's a business owner and president of Marrone Pest Management Services in Fairfield. They've worked for the city in municipal buildings and the Recreation Department. He's married to wife Conya for over 30 years and is father to Anthony (CHS 2006) and Dominick.

As he reflected on his service, he was candid that there were times during it that he "couldn't wait to get out" despite the pride that he feels today.

"Now when I'm selling poppies with Dominick, I feel proud of that," said Ron. "When someone says, 'Thank you for your service', it's a nice thing. Back then it was like, 'Go to hell.'"

For some time, Ron didn't want any part of the VA or to join a VFW. Now he's grateful for the resources that they provide, whether medically or through friendships.

"As you get older, and Dominick is the youngest guy at [VFW Post 7165] right now," said Ron, "you learn that it's a great thing to do."

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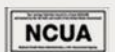


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## FOLLOWING THEIR FATHERS' LEADS

### Self-Help and Service

That camaraderie at VFW Post 7165 followed Dominick from his years serving in the Army. And that bonding and support are important, because he's witnessed how serving in the military and deployments can affect a person.

"It was better [for me] than a lot of others," said Dominick. "I know guys who've been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, saw combat, and were pretty messed up from it. I'd like to think I have a good sense of mental health."

He's also seen a gap in mental health resources for vets, particularly how it can go unchecked when service members "want to say, 'Sure, I'm fine'" so they can get home.

"That was kind of upsetting to see and demoralizing [once I was out]," said Dominick. "Because a lot of times, they'll give the individual the opportunity to reach out and say if they're OK or not, but there are not a lot of things in place, at least not 10 years ago, to push for that self-help."

Dominick grew up in our city with his parents, Ron and Conya, and older brother Anthony.



*Dominick Marrone in the Army and in CHS in 2010.*

He was involved with the Boy Scouts and spent a lot of time camping and hiking outdoors. As an Allwood native, he attended School 9 and Christopher Columbus Middle School.

The CHS 2010 grad lives in the Albion section today with his wife, Maeve, who he

was dating during his second deployment. His first tour at Guantanamo Bay was in 2013 and the second tour was in 2016.

"We survived it, and I tried to communicate with her almost every day," said Dominick. "There were still ways to communicate, whether by using phone cards or going to the recreation tent that had computers, but the internet was slow."

"I would try to [send her emails or text] as often as possible but, for her, it was much harder," he continued. "At least I was focusing on a lot of different things, so I was a bit more preoccupied. Whereas she was still here in New Jersey and had to pass my exit every time she went to one of her field works, so it was pretty rough."



*From left, Mike Garbera, Michele Mischini, Mike Donetz, Mike Decker, Dennis Suto, Shirley Gage, Rick Haas and Steve Caruso.*

## Remembering All Veterans

Dominick signed up for eight years with the Reserves when he joined the Army in May of 2010. He did basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. When he wasn't deployed, he was with the 812th Military Police Company in Orangeburg, New York.

As for his deployments, they differed slightly each time. The first tour had him on general guard duties to ensure the welfare of the detainees and the facility.

Dominick was a sergeant the next time, which was during the U.S. Military Commission hearings for five Middle Eastern men who faced death penalty charges related to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Although Dominick's time stationed there wasn't what he expected, he noted that his overall service was made easier by his ability to navigate different people's personalities.

"I met people from all over the country from different walks and ways of life," said Dominick. "But growing up in Clifton and New Jersey, you're exposed to a lot more cultures. That did help a lot."

Once he returned home, he completed his bachelor's degree at MSU, where he studied Earth and Environmental Sustainability, in the summer of 2019. He previously worked in Clifton's Parks & Recreation Department, then for Spectrum360 in West Orange as the Lead School Custodian.

Today, Dominick works as a Relay Technician for PSE&G.

Like his father, Dominick enjoys being present and "showing people that we still exist" when they sell the poppies outside of Stop & Shop on Broad St.

"Veterans are what this country is built on," said Dominick. "They served with their lives and time to make sure that we're safe." Seeing how his hometown shows up for active service members and veterans

also means a lot. Whether it's the annual Veterans Day Parade, groups like Clifton Cares sending care packages to troops, or volunteers helping throughout the year with the Avenue of Flags, it's all meaningful.

"I feel pretty overjoyed about it," said Dominick. "[How veterans are treated is] a complete 180 from when my father got out of the Navy. Now people seem to respect and honor most military veterans. It's a nice sense of camaraderie for the men and women that I've served with, and in the community of veterans."

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By Ariana Puzzo



The USS Andrew Jackson 619, which Joe Imperato served on, granddaughter Serena Carmen, and Joe with wife Beverly.

Seeing the dedication that Clifton has toward its veteran citizens matters to Joe Imperato, both as a Navy veteran and as a long-time advocate within the community.

And there’s no cause that is too big or too small. After all, he learned early on how to fit into all kinds of spaces when he spent months thousands of feet under water and in cramped quarters as a submariner.

“There were a lot of surprises [when I joined], but I was prepared for them,” said Imperato, 63. “Having been a Sea Cadet for a number of years, boot camp was the easiest part of my time in the service. I knew the basics: how to stand, how to salute, and how to fold the uniforms.”

Imperato enlisted with the Naval Reserves at age 17, just months after his graduation in 1979. His first stop was San Diego for boot camp and then submarine school. Imperato was initially stationed on the USS Harold J. Ellison DD8-64, a destroyer, for a 10-month stint.

In 1980, now on active duty, the Navy assigned him

to the USS Francis Scott Key, a nuclear submarine. Imperato was a non-designated seaman during his first patrol and often handled whatever tasks were assigned.

He eventually took and passed the test that was required to become a radioman and spent 12 years in the service. In total, he served aboard six submarines, mostly as a radioman and then retired in 1991.

“On a submarine, we don’t have 24-hour days; we have 18-hour days. Six-on, 12-off,” Imperato explained. “That was probably something that I was not expecting. It took a little getting used to, having four meals a day that were separated by six hours each when a shift change happens.”

### Called to the Sea

The Sea Cadets were more than a precursor to life in a submarine — they were a lifeline.

Imperato was born in Manhattan before moving to South Paterson at age 3 with his parents, Peter and Helen,

and older sister Lydia. When he joined the Sea Cadets in grammar school, Imperato took to it well.

He realized how crucial that was when his father passed away when Imperato was only 13.

“They were an extended part of my family,” he said. “The Sea Cadets helped with that trauma.”

When the time came, Imperato went to the old postal building on Ward St. in Paterson to meet with a recruiter, Eugene Pooler. He was the one who spoke with Helen at Imperato’s house so she would agree to sign the paperwork.

“My mother was not happy about it at all, but what was there in Paterson?” Imperato explained. “Everybody in my family served before me. My father was in the Army during World War II. My uncles Walter, Joseph, and John were in the Army and Army Air Force. Dad also had an older brother, Frank, who died in the Pacific during the war.”

His cadet experience is partly what led him toward the Navy, but he was also fascinated by the sleek, technology-laden war vessels. That interest had developed while he attended Paterson Catholic High School and worked doing technical tasks to help pay for tuition.

“Other than being an astronaut, being a submariner was the most advanced and interesting subject area that I could think of,” said Imperato.

The longest amount of time that he spent submerged was 104 days; much longer than the average 70 days. He spent off-duty time reading and taking correspondence courses, and Imperato also created a few lifelong bonds.

“The funny thing about being in service is, if you go in and do one enlistment, you make lifelong friends. If you do a number of years, like I did 12, not so much,” he said. “You’ll move or they will move about every two to three years, so the friendships were not as strong.”

“But a very close friend of mine, Joe also, lives in New York and was an usher at my wedding,” said Imperato. “He was on my first submarine with me. We were both the new kids and became radiomen. He’s a lifelong friend out of the service.”

### Bigger Than Himself

Those 12 years in the service included time spent overseas at a communications center in the Carib-

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bean. When he concluded his time in the Navy, it was as an acting chief petty officer.

The timing was right, primarily because it was his choice.

“I had been injured,” said Imperato. “When the Berlin Wall came down, I thought, ‘Let me get out now while I am still young enough to get a good job and before the Navy turns around and says, ‘Because of your leg, you have to leave.’”

Returning to civilian life didn’t involve much of an adjustment period for a clear reason.

“I was already married with three children. I didn’t have time to think about the adjustment,” said Imperato. “I had to hit the deck to start working and putting food on the table.”

Imperato is married to his wife, Beverly, of 43 years. All three of their children are Clifton grads: Erica, Cheryl, and Peter. Last July, they welcomed their first grandchild, Serena Carmen.



Imperato put some of his veterans benefits toward earning a Master’s of Applied Science and Technology at Villanova University. For 35 years, he has worked as a Service Specialist at the biomedical and medical technology company STERIS. He’s also a Field Trainer and Educator.

Still residing three blocks from Lakeview’s School 4, Imperato has also remained active in local and regional veteran af-

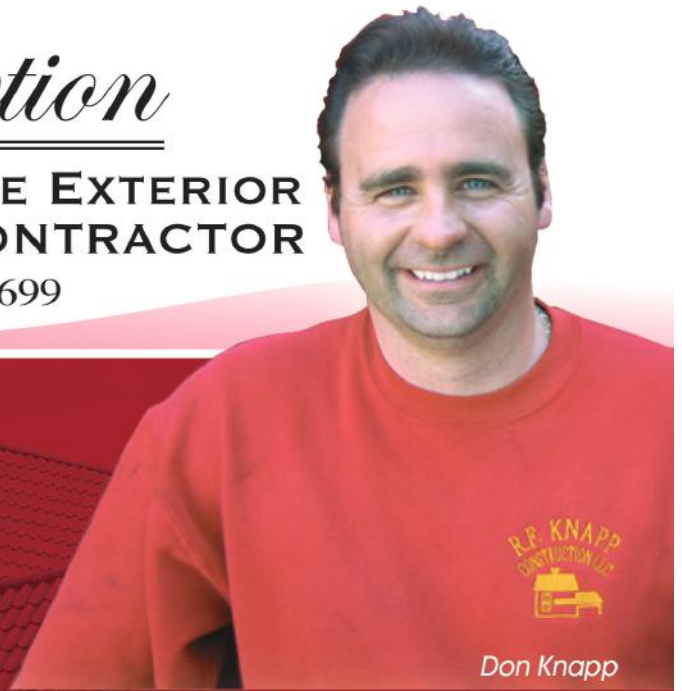
fairs groups. He has served as the Commander of Post 8 in Clifton and as the Passaic County Commander for the American Legion. Imperato is an officer at Disabled American Veterans – Chapter 2 on Hazel St. and is on the Clifton Veterans Advisory Committee.

“To be part of the world, you have to belong to something bigger than yourself. I found that out after my father passed, but it was reinforced through most of my points in life,” said Imperato. “The veteran community and their organizations are still a vital supporter of citizens and the communities that they live in.”

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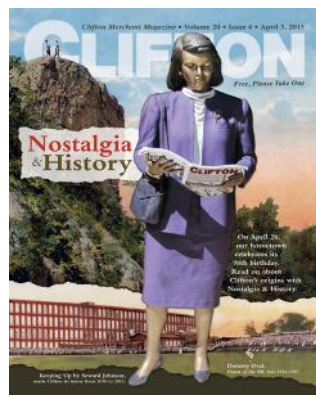
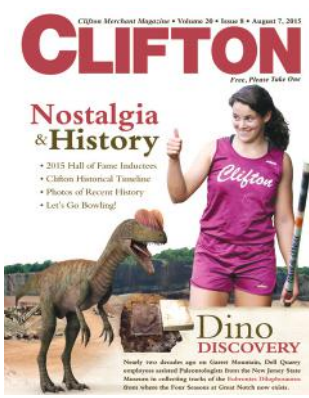
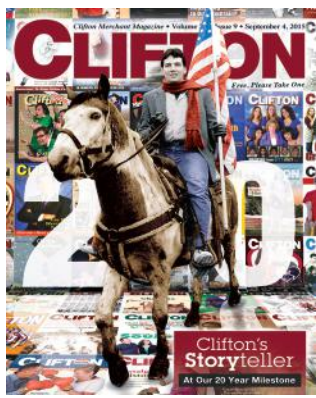
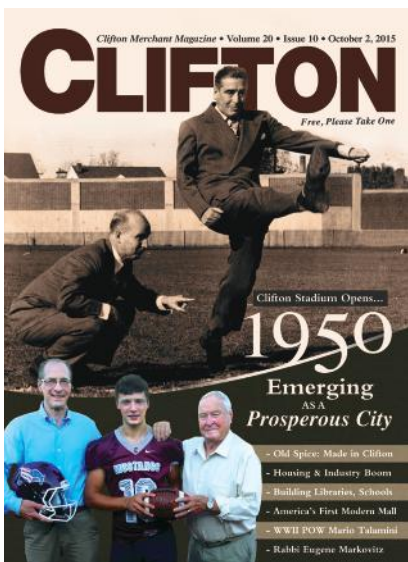


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# From 2024 Mustang

## to 3rd Class Boatswain

By Robert Niessen

Some grads leave high school searching for direction—Abraham Ochoa Dominguez walked off the CHS graduation field in June 2024 and figuratively onto the gangplank of the USS Kearsarge (LHD-3).

Today, as a US Navy 3rd Class Petty Officer Boatswain's Mate, the 19-year-old Mustang works on the deck and in the wells of this amphibious assault ship. The Kearsarge can deploy 2,000 Marines, helicopters, and V/STOL jets in rapid response to war, or in humanitarian relief efforts.

Homeported in the sprawling Norfolk, VA naval base, Dominguez said the experience—from boot camp to living aboard the ship and deploying across the Atlantic Ocean—has surpassed his expectations.

“My experience, it’s great. It has given me far more than I ever anticipated when I signed up. I like being here,” he shared. “I’ve made a lot of friends and all of us are ready to give our all to defend the country.”

Since beginning his four-year contract in July 2025, Dominguez has adapted to the demands of military life. Before ship board life, he was in boot camp at Great Lakes in Illinois in October, 2025 where structure and discipline taught him how to adapt to being in service to Uncle Sam.

Two years into his US Navy journey, he explained that the spit and polish of boot camp was only part of his preparation. Aboard ship, it’s more like real life on-the-job training. “We need to be ready for anything.”

Dominguez’s role centers on ship operations, seamanship, equipment maintenance, and deck duties—a position that is 24/7 and can change in a moment.

As a Boatswain, he works the deck and makes sure it is ready for any action. “We do maintenance on the



*Abraham Ochoa Dominguez graduated CHS in 2024. A year later he is seen with his dad Erwin at US Navy Boot Camp graduation in Great Lakes on Oct. 2, 2025.*

small boats. We have 7-meter and 11-meter boats,” he explained. “We do special ops with the Marines and LCAC (Landing Craft Air Cushion), and other small ships. We bring them inside on the well deck. I like what I do.”

Though the work can be demanding, Dominguez said it is deeply rewarding. “It’s a very good job and interesting,” he said. “A lot of work, but we learn a lot.”

The pace of ship life is relentless, but he has learned to adapt—like a cog within a vast, coordinated system, each part essential to keeping everything in motion.

One of Dominguez’s favorite aspects of Navy life has been the opportunity to travel. When we did this interview, he was in Houston for Fleet Week, and prior to that he spent time in South America.

For a 19-year-old, the chance to see the world has become the most enriching and eye-opening dimension of his service. “I travel a lot and I like it,” he said, adding that he enjoys to “explore new countries and cities.”

Regarding the skills he has picked up, Dominguez looks beyond the uniform. “I hope to carry a lot from this experience to the civilian world, maybe as a New Jersey State Trooper,” he said. The lessons he is acquiring now—discipline, teamwork, responsibility—will serve as a foundation in the next chapter of his life’s journey.

## Two more Clifton Mustangs reflect on veterans and military service:

**CHS Sophomore Natalia Villamarin** reflects on what veterans mean to her, as a 15-year-old sophomore: “My second-oldest brother served in the Army [in the] early 2000s right after he graduated. He served for four years. Veterans like my brother gave up time, comfort, safety, and being with their families so others can have freedom, stability, and an everyday normal life. That sacrifice means a lot to me personally because it reminds me that the life I live every day isn’t something to take for granted. It makes me more aware of how important it is to appreciate what I have and to try to make the most of it.”

**Johnny Martinez, an 18-year-old senior at CHS**, signed his contract with the US Navy in October 2025 and ships out for boot camp a few days after graduation, on July 23.

“I wanted to join the Navy to make a future for my life after high school,” he said, a decision that reflects both ambition and determination. After boot camp, he will take on the role of an engineer (EN) in the Navy, where he hopes to gain hands-on experience and technical knowledge that will serve him well long after his years of service.

Martinez has always looked ahead, imagining not just his next step, but the life he wants to create. “I want to build skills for, God willing, my own home in Texas,” he shared. And why Texas? “Just ‘cause,” he shared—as if that alone is reason enough.

For him, the Navy is more than a commitment—it’s the first beam in



*Natalia Villamarin and Johnny Martinez.*

a structure he’s determined to build.

Martinez said each lesson learned and every skill gained will become another piece of that framework, steadily shaping the life he envisions for himself in the years ahead. His goals are simple but meaningful: to develop real-world skills, create stability, and eventually own a large home of his own.



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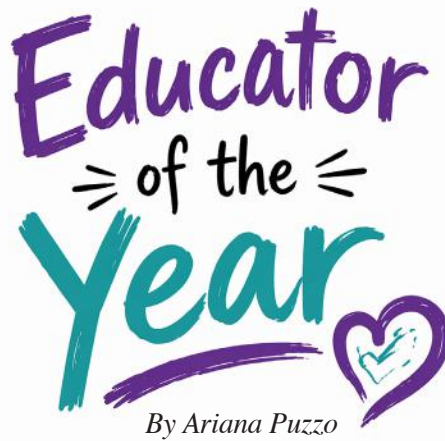


**Respect, humor, and communication** are all qualities that Rafat Ewais has brought into his CHS classroom on a daily basis for the past 28 years.

That doesn't mean that the 2026 Clifton Educator of the Year anticipated his recent recognition when colleague Jacqueline Turk brought him down to the Media Center last month. As a matter of fact, he was led to believe that he was going somewhere else when they took an unexpected detour.

"Halfway down, [Ms. Turk] said, 'Let's pass by the media center.' When we arrived, I said, 'The door is closed', and she said that was only for the students," Ewais recounted. "They had called my wife and sister, and my wife took our daughter from school. I had to sit down for a minute; it was a good surprise."

Ewais and his wife, Faten, will celebrate 30 years of marriage on July 7. They have two children, Mohammad, 13, and Maryam, 11. Ewais, who was born and raised in Palestine, initially came to the U.S. with his parents as an infant.



When he was six months old and his parents divorced, he returned to Palestine with his mother, Nasab Ewais, and grew up in Ramallah, which is located in the central West Bank.

"My mother taught me everything," said Ewais, 56. "She did a lot of things for me, [like sewing] dresses to earn some money so that I would have the [same things] as other kids. She worked hard to buy whatever I needed and so I never felt like anything was missing."

"She's living with me now, actually," he added. "She's 79, and she still watches [out] the window as I leave for work."

There was someone else who greatly influenced him. As a ninth grader, Ewais' Art teacher was Nader Zacharia. Ewais recalled how he broke his watch while playing basketball with friends on one occasion and worrying about the reaction that he would receive at home since it was new.

"He took it, fixed it, brought it back, and I brought it home as if nothing happened," said Ewais.



*Rafat Ewais with colleague and friend Jacqueline Turk and on facing page with his Geometry Honors students.*

like little kids at all. If they ask for something, I'm not the strict person who'll tell them, 'No, no, no.' Just be honest with me. If you really don't feel well during a test, tell me that you can't take it or any problem."

And his students remember. Ewais is connected to one of his earlier students, Gina (Barbone) Azzi (CHS 2005), who lives in Canada and appeared on Clifton Merchant's April 2023 cover to discuss her career as an author.

Ewais has also run into former students in unexpected places like the American Dream Mall, or even when his wife was delivering their son in the hospital.

"One of the nurses said, 'You don't recognize me? I was one of your students,'" Ewais laughed. "I said, 'I hope you passed my class!'" Those interactions

### Decades of Respect

That sort of presence and kindness for his students never left Ewais. As a young man, Ewais returned to the U.S. in 1988 around the age of 19. After earning degrees in Mathematics and Math Education from Jersey City University, Ewais has gone on to spend nearly three decades teaching courses from Math Skills to Pre-Calculus.

Connecting with his students is, in part, accomplished by relating his Math lessons to real-world applications, whether it's construction projects or architectural design. But those connections do not simply fade away once his students leave the classroom for the day.

"I get to know the kids," said Ewais. "Sometimes I have some jokes, and sometimes you will say something in class that makes them laugh. ... Even with clubs, if I come late, I'll walk in and ask, 'Who's late?'"

Sometimes they'll ask about a topic outside of what they're learning, or they'll ask him to share what his hobbies are, and Ewais doesn't shy away from answering when appropriate.

"I'm not the one who says, 'That's not your business', and they like that," said Ewais. "I say, 'I'll respect you, and you just need to respect me.' I don't treat them

An advertisement for AREF Accounting &amp; Taxes. The background is a warm yellow-orange gradient. At the top, the word "AREF" is written in large, bold, black letters, followed by a logo consisting of four squares with mathematical symbols: a plus sign, a minus sign, a division sign, and a multiplication sign. Below the logo, the words "ACCOUNTING &amp; TAXES" are written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. A list of services is presented in bold, black text: "Income &amp; Corporate Tax", "Corporation &amp; LLC Formation", "Payroll Services", "Financial Planning", "Bookkeeping", and "+ Senior Citizen Discounts!". On the right side of the ad is a portrait of a man in a dark blue suit, white shirt, and blue tie. At the bottom left, the address "1232 Van Houten Ave, Clifton, NJ 07013" and phone number "862 - 591 - 1581" are listed. At the bottom right, the text "Said Aref, EA CHS Class of '96" is written in a white, italicized font.

with students make him the happiest when he considers the longevity of his career, particularly in a single school district. Now, there are mothers of students that he taught years back when he was getting started.

When Ewais is outside of the classroom, he's still actively involved in the CHS community. He has mentored new teachers, supported curriculum development in the Math Department, and he has led initiatives like Geometry Field Day. Ewais also helps bridge language gaps with his own bilingual skills to support students and families.

Ewais' after-school commitments include tutoring, SAT programs, and advising the CHS Muslim Student Association and Key Club. Outside of our city, he is additionally the co-founder of Rising Star Academy, which serves North Hudson and its surrounding areas.

Since 2009, the school has grown from about 14 teachers and 60 kids to 38 teachers and this year about 232 students across grades K-12. The academy strives to honor heritage by using the Arabic language and embracing Islamic studies education. Ewais, who is the Treasurer on the Board of Directors, expressed pride in the academy's achievements.

"I took my experience from [CHS], and that helped me the most," he said. Gaining that experience took time, but it also required an understanding of what he needed to do to succeed when he was a new teacher. His advice to



*Rafat and wife Faten with Mohammad and Maryam.*

fellow educators who are acclimating to a new school or classroom is simple: Be patient.

"That's number one. And two is communication with the other teachers next to you," said Ewais. "Don't just be isolated by yourself, especially in Clifton. The diversity in Clifton is amazing. All of the languages [make] you feel like you're home. That's what kept me in Clifton."

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Clifton Recreation Presents:

# 2026 SUMMER SPECIALTY CAMPS



## July Camps

Baseball Pitchers/Catchers - July 6-9 Ages 7-17 \$125 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM (M-Th)  
Sun, Sand & Sea Art - July 6-10 Ages 5-10 \$215 R/NR 9 AM -12 PM  
Battle Robots Tanks - July 6-10 or July 13-17 Ages 8-12 \$215 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
City Green Farm Camp - Session 1: July 7-17 Ages -5-7 \$150 R/NR 9-11 AM (T/TH/F)  
Baseball Skills - July 13-16 Ages 7-17 \$125 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM (M-Th)  
Volleyball - July 13-16 Ages 8-15 \$60 R/\$70 NR 11 AM-12:30 PM (M-Th)  
Karate & Ninja Martial Arts - July 13-16 Ages 8-13 \$75 R/\$85 NR 3-5 PM (M-Th)  
Cheer Dance - July 13-17 Ages 5-8 \$245 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
K-Pop Demon Hunters - July 13-17 Ages 4-10 \$160 R/NR 10 AM - 1 PM  
Tennis - Session 1: July 20-24 Ages 7-17 \$215 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
Farm to Table Cooking - July 20-24 Ages 5-12 \$200 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
AI SmartCore 4 Robot - July 20-24 Ages 6-10 \$180 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
Labubu Camp - July 20-24 Ages 4-10 \$160 R/NR 10 AM - 1 PM  
Future Architects - July 20-24 Ages 6-10 \$180 R/NR 12:30 -3:30 PM  
City Green Farm Camp - Session 2: July 21-July 31 Ages -8-10 \$150 R/NR 9-11 AM (T/TH/F)  
Tennis - Session 2: July 27 - 31 Ages 7-17 \$215 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
S.T.E.A.M. Cooking - July 27-31 Ages 5-12 \$200 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
Outer Space & Physics Fun - July 27-31 Ages 7-11 \$180 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation - July 27-31 Ages 7-11 \$180 R/NR 12:30-3:30 PM



## August Camps

Artist's Passport-Travel the World Thru Art - August 3-7 Ages 5-11 \$215 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
Multi-Sports - August 3-7 Ages 5-11 \$215 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
Wild World-The Art of Conservation - August 3-7 Ages 5-11 \$215 R/NR 1-4 PM  
Puppet Theater - August 10-14 Ages 7-12 \$180 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
City Green Farm Camp- Session 3: August 4-14 Ages - 10-12 \$150 R/NR 9-11 AM (T/TH/F)  
Redbulls Soccer Skills Half-Day - August 10-14 Ages 4-14 \$335 R/NR 8:30 AM-12 PM  
Redbulls Soccer Skills Full-Day - August 10-14 Ages 7-14 \$430 R/NR 8:30 AM-3 PM  
Our Planet, Our World STEAM Art - August 10-14 Ages 5-10 \$215 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
Mad About Slime - August 24-28 Ages 6-12 \$215 R/NR 9 AM-12 PM  
Glow Lab Adventures - August 24-28 Ages 6-12 \$215 R/NR 1-4 PM  
Jewelry Design - August 17-21 Ages 8-13 \$155 R/NR 9 AM- 12 PM  
Amazing Athletes Multi-Sport - August 17-21 Ages 4-8 \$215 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM  
Intro to Sewing Machine - August 17-21 Ages 7-12 \$155 R/NR 1 - 4 PM  
Ninja Warriors - August 24 - 27 Ages 5-12 \$215 R/NR 9:30 AM-12 PM (M-Th)  
Kids Cooking Showdown - August 24-28 Ages 5-12 \$200 R/NR 9 AM - 12 PM



For full camp descriptions, locations and to register visit [www.cliftonrec.com](http://www.cliftonrec.com)  
For any additional information call the Recreation Department at (973) 470-5956.



# Mustangs of the Month



*Antony Boutros-Spariosu, Naelani Gooding, Daniel Nucera, Rosana Boge.*

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

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

### **Antony Boutros-Spariosu – Freshman**

Antony Boutros-Spariosu has big plans for the future, and it starts with following his dad's lead.

"I plan to attend college and get a nice job just like my dad did. I want to have a nice, stable family and travel the world with them," said Boutros-Spariosu (CHS 2029). "I want to have a job where I am able to spend time with my family while making a decent amount of income."

His greatest inspiration is his father, who has "multiple college degrees", a great job, and a loving family that he always takes care of.

"Me and him made a promise that, one day, I will spoil my children just as he has to me and my sister," said Boutros-Spariosu.

Boutros-Spariosu is an athlete. He played Mustangs Boys Soccer at the beginning of the school year and club soccer in the off season. He also enjoys playing ping pong and chess.

Social Studies teacher Paul Hlat has influenced Boutros-Spariosu the most by making his class interesting and the classroom into "a comfortable environment for everyone." Boutros-Spariosu's favorite subject is World History.

"I've always found it interesting how different people came to power, how wars started and ended, and how the world came to be how it is now," said Boutros-Spariosu.

### **Naelani Gooding – Sophomore**

Naelani Gooding finds inspiration from her parents' work ethic and sacrifices that have helped their daughter get to where she is today.

"Whether [they are] sitting at the table next to me while I study or attending my events, they are always there to support me, and I am always grateful for them having my back," said Gooding (CHS 2028).

Gooding is the President of the Clifton Key Club. She is also involved in the PBSIS Mustang Ambassadors Program, and she is a HOSA and Pre-Med Club member. Gooding has two internships outside of school, with one focusing on teaching Health Education and the other focusing on social advocacy.

Her goal is to become a gynecologist so that she can pursue medicine while caring for others in a meaningful way.

"Medicine gives me the opportunity to support others in numerous ways, and it challenges me," said Gooding. "I'm able to constantly learn and problem-solve, which aligns with my interest in science."

"I'd also love to improve the healthcare system and advocate for those who don't have access to adequate healthcare," she continued. "So while taking the path of medicine would be difficult, being able to make a difference through helping others makes it truly worth it in the end."

### Daniel Nucera – Junior

Math can be a dry subject in the wrong hands, but Daniel Nucera’s early experience learning the subject at WWMS made a big difference.

He looks back to middle school when he was inspired.

“My 7th grade Math teacher Mr. Todd Conklin [was the most influential], because he was able to thoroughly explain math to his classes while including humor to make it more interesting,” said Nucera (CHS 2027). “Math may be boring to some students, but he made it fun.”

Nucera’s pastimes include playing basketball with his friends, hiking with his family, and playing video games. His father is the one that he goes to for advice, knowing that he is “always there” for Nucera and his brother.

One major hurdle at CHS was adjusting to a new environment and “larger school with higher expectations.” Nucera admitted that he can be hard on himself at times.

“I stay motivated when things get tough by pushing through and never giving up no matter how difficult it is,” he said. “I make sure to focus on my goals and do one thing at a time so that I don’t get overwhelmed.”

Nucera’s aspirations include building “a successful career doing something I enjoy” and looking for new challenges. He’ll attend college to gain knowledge and “open up more opportunities.”

### Rosana Bogev – Senior

Transferring from PCTI to CHS as a sophomore wasn’t easy for Rosana Bogev. But making new friends became easier as she got more acclimated and opened up to her peers.

The senior runs Varsity Indoor and Outdoor Track. Bogev joined Key Club, Pre-Med Club, and HOSA, and she’s in the National Math Honor Society and National Science Honor Society. Her big source of inspiration are her parents.

“They [emigrated from] Macedonia, and they have built such a great life for us. Seeing them work so hard makes me want to work even harder,” said Bogev (CHS 2026). “They push me to become the best version of myself and, without them, I wouldn’t be the person that I am today.”

Bogev’s future plans include becoming a general dentist. She will attend Rutgers University — New Brunswick this fall to study Biology and complete the Pre-Dental track. Until then, Bogev’s favorite subject is Math, because it pushes her to “think more abstractly.” Even when things get tough for her, Bogev knows how to stay motivated.

“[I remind] myself of all of the goals that I have set,” she said. “I strive to push through any difficulties, even when I don’t want to, and I make sure to prioritize my well-being.”



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Thank you to all who participated in the race and walk this year to support St. Peter's Haven Food Pantry, Homeless Family Shelters and Unhoused Outreach program. This was our largest 5K/1Mile event to date. Thank you to our wonderful Sponsors and Supporters, the City of Clifton, the Police Department, DPW, the Clifton Road Runners Club, Elite Racing and our many Volunteers. Congratulations to our winners! We look forward to seeing you next year. Mark your calendars to join us on Sunday, April 25th, 2027.



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Jane Morgenland, Kim Nouhan, John George and Anthony Orlando would like to remind everyone that the CHS '76 Mustangs 50th reunion is June 15 in East Hanover. Email John George at [georgesservice@gmail.com](mailto:georgesservice@gmail.com).

**St. Philip Primetimers** have two bus trips to Resorts Casino in Atlantic City. Bus leaves St. Philip Drive at 9:30 am on May 26 and June 23. Purchase tickets in advance by calling Jean at 973-253-1619 and find out the details.

**The CEF's 3rd Annual Endless Summer** reunion for retired Board of Education employees is Sept. 15 from noon to 4 pm at Shannon Rose. \$40 admission. 50/50 drawing. Details on Instagram @cliftoneducationfoundation or write Kim Puzzo at [cefcommdirector@gmail.com](mailto:cefcommdirector@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@cliftonschoools.net](mailto:jturk@cliftonschoools.net).

**CELA Brighton's Family Fun Day** is June 13, 10 am at 290 Brighton Rd. Sponsored by the Clifton Early Learner Academy, Clifton Public Schools and Clifton Education Foundation, the day offers arts and crafts, entertainment, vendors and local businesses. Questions? Call 973-470-2066 or write Gina at [gpollaro@cliftonschoools.net](mailto:gpollaro@cliftonschoools.net).

**The Red Hat Angels**, a team walking in the Relay For Life of Clifton/Rutherford, host Mangia Day at Bruno's in the Clifton Plaza, on May 13. Mention Red Hats on dine in, take out and delivery orders between 11 am and 9 pm and Bruno's will donate a percentage to the cause. At Relay for Life, team members walk or run on the Clifton Stadium track on June 6 to raise hope, funds and awareness for the services provided by the American Cancer Society. Details: [cancer.org](http://cancer.org) or at [secure.acevents.org](http://secure.acevents.org).

**Power of One Christian Coaching and Outreach** Ministries walkers meet at Richardson Scale Park, 680 Van Houten Ave. on Mondays and Wednesdays at 8 am for an hour walk. The walk is free and so is parking.



Kindergartener Grace Labriola won top chef in the Pomptonian Food Service 7th Healthy School Lunch Challenge. Judges said 'Gracie's Grilled Blackberry Chicken and Risotto with Corn' recipe "stood out for its originality and nutritional value." Clifton Schools recreated her dish for students across the district last month. She is pictured with her dad Jeff, a CCMS teacher, and brother Jack.

**Homework help for first through fourth graders** is at the Main Library until June 17. More info: 973-772-5500.

**Clifton Community Band's 23rd Annual Lollipops & Roses Concert** is May 16 at 2 pm in the CHS Auditorium. Under the baton of Bob Morgan, tickets are \$7 for adults and kids over 12. Free admission for veterans and active military who can expect a stirring rendition of our National Anthem. The concert helps support the Clifton Education Foundation. In 2002, Morgan founded the Community Band. The group of musicians meets Tuesdays in the CHS Band Room, 333 Colfax Ave., from 7-9 pm. No fees or membership dues. No auditions are necessary and is open to all. The season runs September to July and is sponsored by the Clifton Mustang Band Alumni Association and the Recreation Department. For info, visit [mustangbandalumni.com/clifton-community-band](http://mustangbandalumni.com/clifton-community-band).



Clifton Arts Center and the New Jersey Symphony will celebrate America's 250th with a spirited string quartet performance of patriotic favorites on June 12, 7 pm at the CAC. Tickets are \$30; \$25 for groups of five or more or \$10 for kids 12 and under. Go to [cliftonartscenter.org](http://cliftonartscenter.org) or call 973-472-5499. Cash or check accepted.

The CAC's "Spirit of America" art exhibit is open May 13 – June 13 on Wednesdays through Saturdays, 1-4 pm. A reception is May 16 at 1 pm at the Clifton Arts Center, 900 Clifton Ave. 973-472-5499 or visit [cliftonartscenter.org](http://cliftonartscenter.org).

Center for Family Resources Head Start in Clifton is a federally funded early childhood program for eligible families. Kids receive education, health, nutrition, mental health, and family support services. Head Start helps build strong foundations that promote school readiness. For info: 973-472-8880 or [Deannas@cffr.net](mailto:Deannas@cffr.net) or [Nildah@cffr.net](mailto:Nildah@cffr.net).

Clifton Rec's Drive-In Movie is Aug. 4, and features "Hoppers" at Main Memorial Park, Park Slope and Main Ave. So plan early!

Clifton Garden Club meets May 12, 6:30 pm at the Allwood Library, 44 Lyall Rd. An expert from City Green Farm Eco-Center will do a presentation on gardening and pest control tips. Guests are welcome. Questions? Call Karin Christiaens at 973-420-8212.

Clifton Behind the Scenes gives residents an inside look at how their city operates on May 21 from 4-5:30 pm (in English), 5:30-7 pm (in Arabic), and 7-8:30 pm (in Spanish). Led by Councilwoman Rosemary Pino, in collaboration with ECHO and community partners, the guided sessions at City Hall let residents learn about the roles and responsibilities of city departments. Future sessions: June 18, July 16, Aug. 20, Sept. 24, Oct. 15, Nov. 19, Dec. 17. Learn more: [echonj.org](http://echonj.org).

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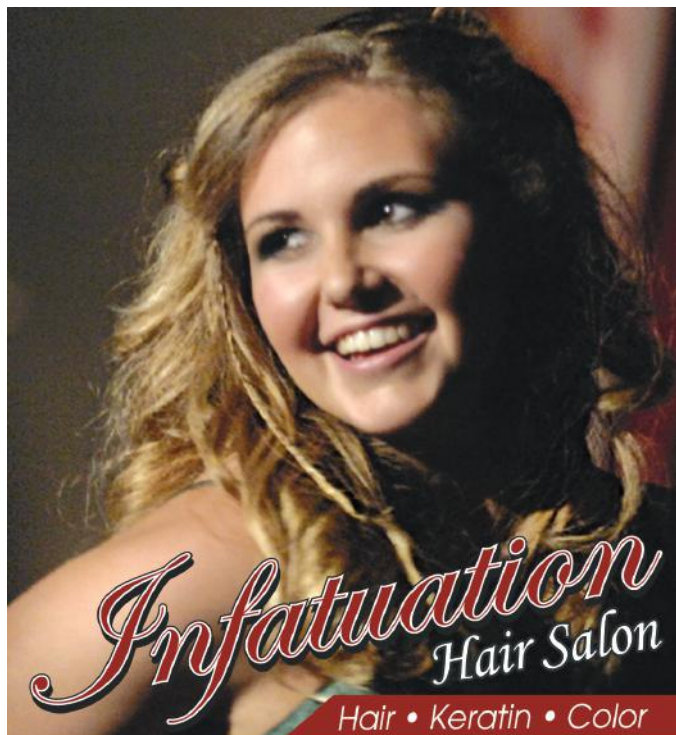
When Gina Fersini was hired in 2021, she expected to serve as an assistant coach on the Clifton cheerleading staff. But shortly before the fall season began, then-head coach Ashley LaTrace stepped down.

With a vacancy that needed to be filled, Mustangs athletic director Tom Mullahey offered Fersini the post. Despite being caught a bit off-guard by her near-instant promotion, she accepted.

“My assistant coaches and I kind of approached it like, ‘OK, we are going to figure this out,’” said Fersini, a 2012 Passaic Valley graduate. “In year two, we understood what we were doing, and said ‘Let’s kick butt.’”

Fersini may not have expected to lead the Clifton squad when she signed on, but the cheerleading program has flourished under her leadership, winning four consecutive New Jersey Cheerleading & Dance Coaches Association (NJCDCA) State Championships — including this winter’s intermediate small, all-girl division crown.

The Mustangs had previously competed in the intermediate small co-ed division (2022) and the intermediate medium, all-girl division (2023 and 2024) before this year’s title run. Clifton also competed in The Next Level Grand Nationals in Providence, Rhode Island, finishing first in its division and winning best choreography among all 21 competing teams.



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Competition cheerleading demands a level of dedication that rivals any sport, and under Fersini, the Mustangs have established themselves as one of the premier programs in the area. Main base/tumbler and captain Amilia Betances concluded her Clifton career with a fourth NJCDCA title this year, while backspot Lila DeVenio, flyer captain Brianna Thieu and main base/tumbler captain London Jenkins each earned their third.

While they will graduate, Clifton will return standouts tumbler/backspot Zoe Boddin and flyer Jaliyah Reyes, both of whom will graduate in 2027. “We want to continue on with our winning streak,” Fersini said. “But most of all, we want to improve every year. We want to win, but we just focus on our scores and being better than we were last year. It is goal-setting, just like any other sport.”

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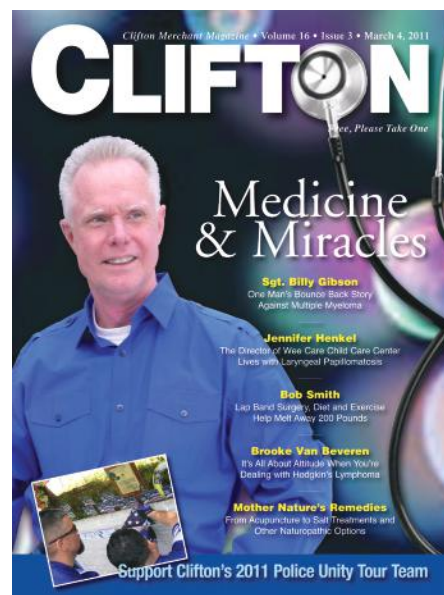
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**Councilman Bill Gibson** on April 21 was honored by his City Council colleagues with the dedication of the yet-to-be constructed William F. Gibson Splash Pad at Nash Park. Gibson (CHS 1971) has served for over 50 years, starting as an Animal Control Officer in 1974. His career with the Clifton Police began in 1982, retiring as Detective Sergeant and commander of anti-crime. The Richfield resident has served on the City Council since 2014. He was featured in our March, 2011 Medicine and Miracles edition.

The Clifton Firefighters Food Drive and the FMBA Local 21 members are collecting canned goods, dry foods, and non-perishables throughout May. Donations are accepted at any Clifton firehouse. If you cannot get to a local firehouse, contact: [foundation@cliftonfmba21.org](mailto:foundation@cliftonfmba21.org). Drop-off points: Fire Station 1 (69 1st St.), Fire Station 2 (7 Dumont Ave.), Fire Station 3 (180 Mahar Ave.), Fire Station 4 (144 Main Ave.), Fire Station 5 (51 Brighton Rd.), and Fire Station 6 (1202 Van Houten Ave.).



**JK Realty loves Clifton.** The firm is presenting the first-ever Clifton Day on July 11. It will be staged in their parking lot from 1 am to 4 pm at 270 Colfax Ave. Businesses, nonprofits and vendors interested to find out how to help out or participate, call JK's Joseph Siano at 973-563-1449.

**The 5th Annual VFW Day of Service is May 9 in Clifton,** but you can participate all month and worldwide. Here in Clifton, veterans and friends of VFW Post 7165 on Valley Rd. will gather on May 9 at noon in Albion Park. Vice Commander Steve Caruso said all are welcomed to join them as they tidy things up. To find out more call 973-523-9762 or write to Steve at [stevvec2462@gmail.com](mailto:stevvec2462@gmail.com).

**The Passaic County 200 Club Valor & Meritorious Awards Dinner** is May 19 at The Grand in Totowa. RSVP by May 8. The event honors men and women of Police, Fire and EMS who have shown extraordinary courage as they serve the citizens in the 16 communities of Passaic County. Cocktail hour: 5:30-6:30 pm, dinner: 6:30 pm. Tickets: \$100. Cash bar. Purchase online: [pc200club.org](http://pc200club.org). Limited seating.

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On April 24, sixth grader Maria Rossi and Maple Valley Middle School planted strong roots in the community with the school’s inaugural Arbor Day Tree Planting Ceremony. Maria was the student who proposed planting a maple tree to reflect her school’s identity after seeing that a large tree was marked for removal shortly after first seeing the campus.

The Clifton Beautification Committee started Arbor Day in Delawanna Park, above, where they planted a new tree. The committee went to MVMS and planted the maple tree and a dogwood flowering tree later that afternoon. Principal Robert Bertolini opened the ceremony, attended by students, staff, and community leaders, and discussed the school-wide recycling initiative that collected over 10,000 items.





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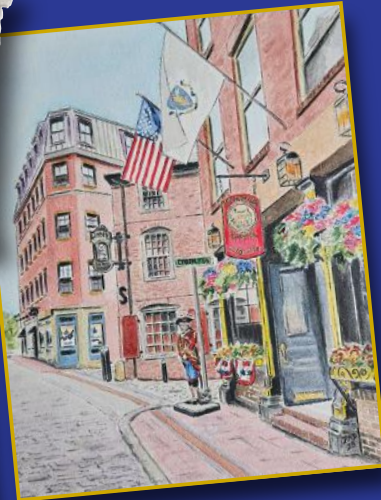
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Maria, a member of MVMS’ inaugural class, shared remarks: “Maple and flowering trees also symbolize change, just like the students were asked to go through a big change by attending this new school,” she said. “On Maple Valley’s first Arbor Day, we got to celebrate by planting trees in honor of how we have shown and will continue to show strength, resilience, and change, so when we are older we can come back to Maple Valley and look at our trees with pride.”

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**Clifton's Nick Velicky on April 27** launched his campaign for Passaic County Commissioner, running with incumbent Orlando Cruz. Velicky was selected by the Passaic County Democratic Party to run for the seat held by fellow Cliftonite Bruce James, who retired after 20 years on the board. They, along with Passaic County Surrogate Zoila Casanova, are running as a team in the June 2 Democratic Primary.

**Allwood Community Church's Fish & Chips Dinner** is May 31 at 100 Chelsea Rd. from 1-2:30 pm. Takeout orders only: \$20. Check payable to Allwood Community Church by May 28. Order in advance. Call 973-777-6360.

**Clifton Rec Summer Camp Counselors** are needed from July 6 to Aug. 14. To request an application, email [clifton-rec@cliftonnj.org](mailto:clifton-rec@cliftonnj.org). Interview to follow. Applicants must be 18+ and will have graduated high school as of June 2026. Additional required dates for CPR/First Aid staff training in June and camp supply clean-up in August. Candidates must be available all dates. The job runs weekdays from 8:45 am to 3:45 pm.

**Clifton Arts Center's Summer Art Camp** is Aug. 10-14 from 9 am to noon. Open to ages 7-12, cost is \$200 or \$225 (non-residents). Led by artist Beth Kearney, the program delves into painting, drawing, collage, and sculpture. All materials included. Visit [cliftonartscenter.com](http://cliftonartscenter.com).



*The Velicky family from left: Arnulfo Balbuena and wife Victoria, the daughter of Nick and Sharon, along with Nick Jr. and his wife Denise with Miles and Spencer.*



**The Palestinian American Community Center** presents the 5th Annual "Palestine Day on Palestine Way" on May 17 from 1-7 pm, along Main St., Paterson, between Gould Ave. and Dey St. Rain date is May 31. In May 2022, Main St. in South Paterson was renamed in honor of the city's large, historic Palestinian American community. The event will offer samples of Palestinian culture, live performances, music, bazaar, plenty of food vendors and more. Sign up to volunteer, or learn more: [paccusa.org/palestineday](http://paccusa.org/palestineday).



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# Great Futures Gala



On April 16, 2026, our **Great Futures Gala** brought the community together for an inspiring night celebrating Club youth and their achievements. We proudly honored the

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for their lasting impact. Thank you to everyone who attended and supported this special evening—together, we're creating brighter futures for our young people.

**Congratulations to our honorees:  
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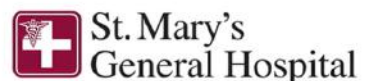
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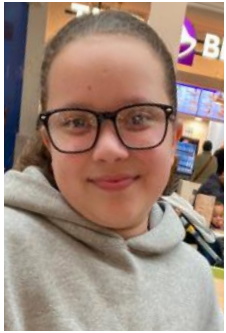
# Congratulations to our honorees: Clifton Board of Education



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# May 2026 Birthdays & Celebrations



**Mia Medina** is 12 on May 22. **Heaven Medina** is 24 on May 2. Their uncle **John Hand** turns 81 on May 11. Can it be? **Brittney Abell** will be 37 on May 25! **Cody Crawford** turns 6 on May 18.



**Ihor and Kristy Andruch** celebrate 24 years of marital bliss on May 4; the big news is **Ihor** is 50 on May 12. Happy Birthday to **Devan Simpson** turning 11 on May 7. **Jurij P. Dubas** turns 22 on May 3. **Frankie Bergen** will celebrate her 12th birthday on May 22. **Walter Hryckowian** turns 73 on May 18.

Richard Hango.....	5/1
Mike Szwec.....	5/1
Samantha Cruz.....	5/2
Lou DeStefano.....	5/2
Jessica Perez.....	5/2
Stefan Andruch.....	5/3
Jordan Lynn Bykowsky.....	5/3
Maria DeGraaf.....	5/3
Julia Komarczyk.....	5/3
Irene Kuruc.....	5/3
Margie Maloney.....	5/3
Thomas Zangara.....	5/3
John Anderson Jr.....	5/4
Spencer Flynn.....	5/4
Russell Courtney.....	5/6
Dolores Hatala.....	5/6
Jordan Kulesa.....	5/6
Vanessa Laine Montesano.....	5/6
Mary Domyon.....	5/7

Margie Hatala.....	5/7
Dorothy Alburo.....	5/8
Terry Capilli.....	5/8
Jim Findlay.....	5/8
Alexandra Homsany.....	5/8
Rory Houston.....	5/8
Ashley Kulesa.....	5/8
David Peter Mosciszko.....	5/8
Matthew Nagy.....	5/8
Christine Siluk.....	5/8
Thomas Steranko.....	5/8
Petey Pathos.....	5/9
Amelia Smith.....	5/9
Joe Gore.....	5/10
Rebecca DeChellis.....	5/11
Brandon Gorny.....	5/11
Jessica Camp.....	5/12
Michael Lonison.....	5/12
Jeff Reilly.....	5/13

Michael Zawicki.....	5/13
Yassin Aburomi.....	5/14
Chloe Landrith.....	5/14
Chuck Amucka.....	5/14
Alice De Liberto.....	5/14
Dorothy Brown.....	5/15
Earl Grosser Jr.....	5/15
Victoria Leja.....	5/15
Fred Gurtman.....	5/16
Mark McGuire.....	5/16
Rosemary Canavan.....	5/17
John Hawrylko.....	5/17
Vick Ascencio.....	5/18
Jamie Antal.....	5/18
Michele D'Amico.....	5/18
Walter Hryckowian.....	5/18
Mariana Pineda.....	5/18
Becky Kuter.....	5/19
Jennifer Mulick.....	5/20



**Josie Louise Bivaletz**  
turns 3 May 27.

- Julianna Smith ..... 5/20
- William J. Portocarrero III..... 5/21
- Ken Bender..... 5/21
- Joe Murolo ..... 5/21
- Matthew Palladino ..... 5/21
- Kage Lord..... 5/22
- Danica O'Brien..... 5/22
- Danah Alburo..... 5/23
- Jessica Bielen ..... 5/23
- MaryEllen Krattinger ..... 5/23
- Donald Lopuzzo ..... 5/24
- Michael Santosuosso ..... 5/24
- Andrea Schweid ..... 5/25
- Brittney Abell..... 5/25
- Olivia Hryckowian..... 5/25
- Connie Paladino ..... 5/25
- Derek Bykowsky..... 5/26
- Alyssa Dalbo ..... 5/26
- Danuta Dymora ..... 5/26
- Kaylee Pinter ..... 5/26
- Jonathan Rideg ..... 5/26
- Fred Antes..... 5/27



**Celia and Bong Bunagan**  
celebrate their 52nd wedding  
anniversary on May 11.

- Kyle J. Magaster .....5/27
- Steve Bielen..... 5/27
- David J. Ricca..... 5/28
- Anthony Alcalde ..... 5/29
- Valerie Gancarz ..... 5/29
- Anthony DeSomma..... 5/30
- Rachel Gergats ..... 5/31
- Christopher Ramirez ..... 5/31
- Zachary Sjosward ..... 5/31
- Christopher Smith..... 5/31
- Logan Thompson..... 5/31

*Send June dates & names...  
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**The Memorial Day Parade will conclude with a ceremony at the Avenue of Flags barn.**

**The Memorial Day Parade route has changed.** On Monday, May 25, participants should assemble at 8:15 am at Jubilee Park on the Clifton Ave. extension. The parade will step off at 9 am from St. Andrew’s Blvd. and continue on Clifton Ave., making a left on Van Houten and then a right into the City Hall campus. Grand Marshal Ken Kurnath, inset, a US Navy WWII veteran, will be on the reviewing stand, which will be in front of the Avenue of Flags barn. A ceremony will take place near the Purple Heart and KIA

memorial stones. Volunteers are needed on May 24 at 6 am to help set up the 2,310 flag tributes along the roads within the campus and in the Sculpture Park. To find specific locations for flag tributes, the barn has a book with color-coded sections. Volunteers are needed at 5 pm Monday evening to take down and store the flags. To sponsor a flag for a Clifton veteran, the cost is \$140. Find an order form at [cliftonnj.org/222/Avenue-of-Flags](http://cliftonnj.org/222/Avenue-of-Flags). For info, call the Flag Barn at 973-365-2630.

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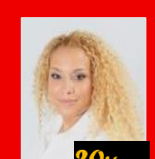
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