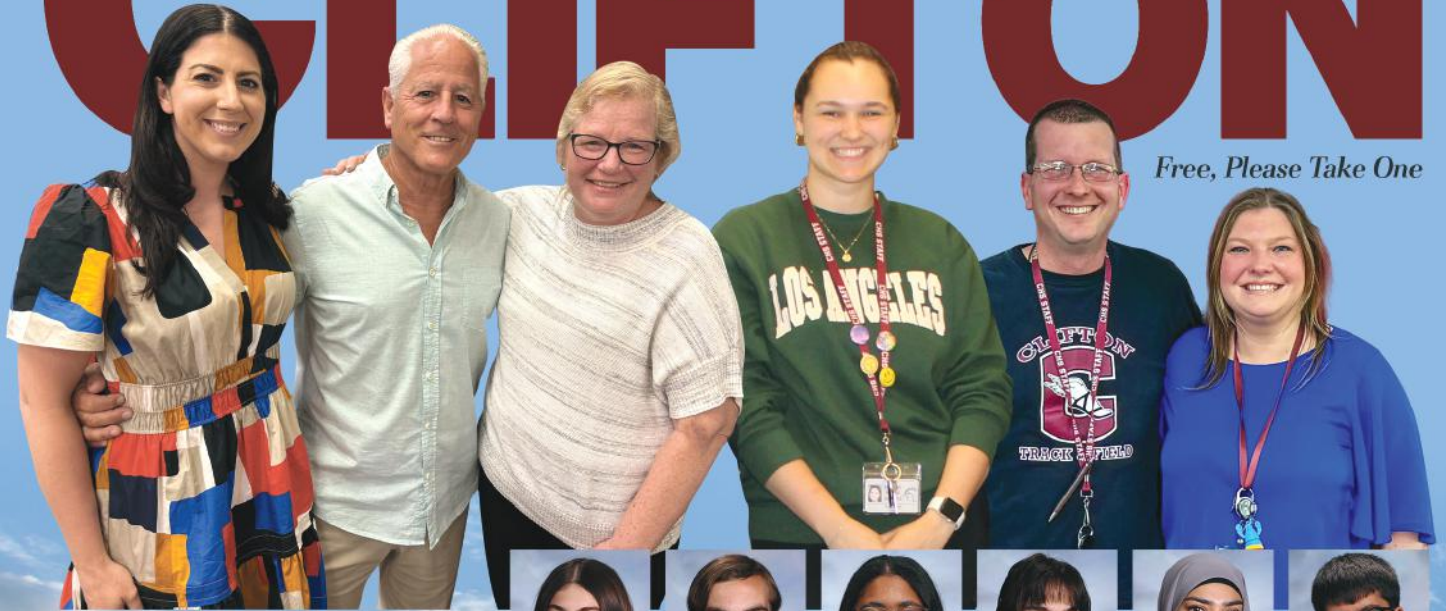


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## Meet The Class Of 2025



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## Meet The Class Of 2025

## AND SOME OF THE FOLKS THAT GOT THEM THERE.

*On the cover from left: CHS psychologist Lisa (Orlando) Baldini who is the daughter of retired principal Tony Orlando. Next is the late School 2 principal Jennifer Lucas who inspired generations of Mustangs. Also find CHS Fashion Design teacher Hannah Coward, CHS History teacher Michael Rogers, pictured with his sister and School 14 teacher Kathryn Morrison.*

**It take a village to raise a child** is an African proverb often shared across continents, cultures and countries. The essence of this message is simple: beyond parents and family, many of us have had the good fortune to meet one or more mentors or advocates who helped us on our journey from childhood to and beyond the high school years.

They can be coaches, colleagues, peers, employers or community elders. But very often, they are the teachers who helped the grads become the true and perfect human they have become, right now in 2025, as they take the stage.

Over the 30 years as editor and publisher of this magazine—and specifically in the June edition in which we cel-

ebate the high school grads—we often hear of teachers who have filled that role. For some, it is a shop teacher or coach who told you to smarten up, take life seriously. You know, the person who gave that much-needed wake up call.

For some kids, it was the director or camp counselor at the Boys & Girls Club who did the right thing when they thought no one was watching. Another guide in the new world of high school is the Community Police Officer who simply explained what's acceptable and what's not.

Perhaps it was the secretary in the VP's office, the nurse or counselor, or the clergy person who listened with a kind ear and responded with a smile and some advice.

### Clifton Merchant Magazine

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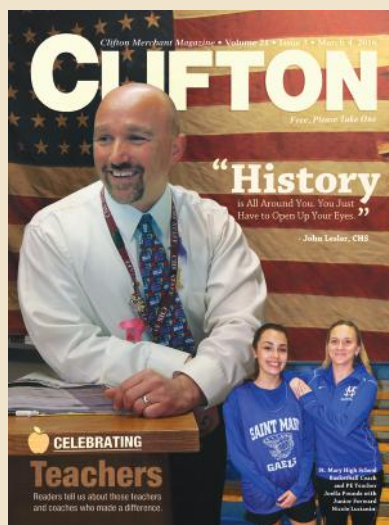
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So to pay it back, we gave a shout-out on our cover to the teachers, guides and friends who helped the Class of 2025 “get them there.” As the above photos illustrate, this is not the first teacher feature we offered to our readers.

From left is CHS Sign Language Teacher Lori Lesler in April 2024, after being named *Teacher of the Year*. Her husband John, a CHS History teacher, was featured in March 2016 as his courses are often celebrated for the passion he imbues for history. The third is Sr. Yosephata Litvinczuk, my first grade teacher in 1963 at Ukrainian Assumption School, Perth Amboy. She’s 90, still going strong and still who I look to for guidance and inspiration.

On the following pages, read stories about the Class of 2025 from Clifton High, Paramus Catholic, PCTI and Mary Help of Christians Academy. They often mentioned educators who supported them during their high school journeys.

So the Class of 2025 wanted to say thanks. At CHS, where we received the most feedback, Mustangs most often cited: Jessica Ondeck (English IV Honors), Leonid Weismantel (Music), Beth Slanina (Graphic Design II), Denise Talmadge (Environmental Science), John Lesler (History), Michael O’Connor (Senior Seminar), Alexis Russo-Henick (History), and Matthew Goodman (AP Statistics).

On behalf of the Class of 2025, thank you teachers!





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*Who is the unsung hero for the Class of 2025?*



*Francesca Schiavone, above and far right, with Julianna Ruiz-Michel and Alexa Miller, above center.*



**Antonio Morales:** If not for Kevin Cachro (above right), I wouldn't have met so many new people. He is a man of great honor and pride. He helps those around who need it and listens and helps with people's issues. He gets little credit for how he is, but he is the man that I strive to be in my life. A man who should be seen more often for all the good that he does.

**Benjamin Santana:** Brayan Ruiz. He is one of the most chill people that I have ever met. A very relatable person who tries his best in class.

**Alexa Miller:** Definitely Francesca Schiavone. This girl does it all — managing Boys Lacrosse and Hockey, being a majorette, and being the nicest human anyone has ever met. You should be very lucky if you have her as a friend. She deserves everything good in life, and I know she will go on and do great things.

**Josephine O'Connell:** Ava Acuna. She has been on Cheer since sophomore year with me and she leads like no other. She is so smart and multitasked by going to BGCC, high school and AP classes, and sports.

**Fabio Amati:** Samuel Simpson, because he buys lunch for me and other friends when we don't have money.

**Dalky Shephard Bernard:** My mother, Karina B., for teaching me the importance of perseverance. Since I was little, she taught me to read and write correctly even though she was not specialized in literacy. My father, Jose S., taught me that things change and that intelligence and respect cannot be bought. He taught me that if I want to fulfill my dreams, I have to follow them.



**Inspirational figures are not in short supply for Francesca Schiavone**, but finding that in her long-time friendship with Alexa Miller has made all the difference.

Her classmate and unsung hero, who Schiavone described as both friendly and open-minded, inspires her to “be a better person.” Miller participated in Cheer and Dance in the fall, “bringing her positive energy to the student section during football games.” Miller led her team to victory during the winter Competition Cheer season as well.

But Miller’s personality shines even further than her list of achievements.

“[Alexa] has a very kind heart and is easy-going,” said Schiavone. “If you’re ever having a bad day, she knows how to cheer you up and make you laugh.”

Schiavone also admires how Miller balanced her high school classes as well as getting a head start on her college education by participating in the early college program with Montclair State. That, plus participating in extracurricular activities and working a part-time job, made her a role model to other students like Schiavone.

“Alexa is an extremely talented dancer and has been dancing since she was 3 years old,” said Schiavone. “She has continued her practice [all throughout] high school and shines in all of her performances.”

Striving-by-example also worked out for Schiavone.

“Traveling to New Orleans [for Mardi Gras] with the Marching Band was an unforgettable experience,” she said. “The crowds made it feel like we were part of something really special.”



**Bisan Husain:** Alicia Soriano, Soulaf-Islam Abouzia, and Miley Carrera (all pictured from top left). I have gotten through all my years of high school with them being there for me and supporting me by being there for my ups and downs. They made high school so memorable and they will be the reason why I’ll miss everything about it. I am so honored and blessed to have them with me.

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**CONGRATS GRADS!**



These three senior Mustangs may be unsung, but they're not unnoticed.

## Yahya Ibrahim

High school may have felt like a scene out of *The Walking Dead* at times, but Yahya Ibrahim still enjoyed the things that make those four years feel like a coming-of-age movie.

"The energy and excitement that everyone brought [to the football games] made the experience unforgettable and was unmatched to anything else," said Ibrahim.

Ibrahim will attend Rutgers University, where he will major in Finance. His future plans include law school with the ambition of becoming a corporate lawyer and possibly opening his own firm.

He's grateful to his past-self for stepping out of his comfort zone. "I was never much of a people person and thought I'd always be that way," he said. "But pushing myself to do things that made me uncomfortable ... prepared me for bigger challenges ahead."



Yahya Ibrahim, Declan Eineker, Kelly Franco. Also recognized by the VPs is Francesca Schiavone who is profiled on the previous page.

## Declan Eineker

Discovering your identity is the cornerstone of high school, so Declan Eineker using *Rango* as a description of those four years is apt. After all, who among us hasn't once wished they could be a chameleon?

Eineker credits four years of Track & Field and Cross Country, plus having amazing teachers, as making him a better person both physically and mentally.

He'll work at a summer camp for kids with Type 1 Diabetes this summer before attending MSU in the fall. Working in the animation or comic industry is Eineker's long-term goal.

Eineker enjoyed his classes with Mr. John O'Reilly and Mr. Michael Rogers. But what he'll miss the most after he graduates are his peers. "I have teammates and friends who I've made that are underclassmen," said Eineker. "Leaving them [makes graduating] feel harder."

## Kelly Franco

Living in the moment and balancing school with life is how Kelly Franco got the most out of high school. So, how would she describe her overall experience in a movie title?

"*Some Kind of Wonderful*," she said. "High school is a roller coaster filled with different adventures, but it is [also] filled with sweet, successful endings."

Franco will miss most the friendships and connections that she made with peers and teachers. She plans to major in Nursing at Rowan University, striving to become a nurse practitioner. "When I transferred to CHS as a freshman, it was a huge transition," she said. "I came out of my comfort zone and started talking with new people, who later became my friends. I learned how to adapt to a new community."

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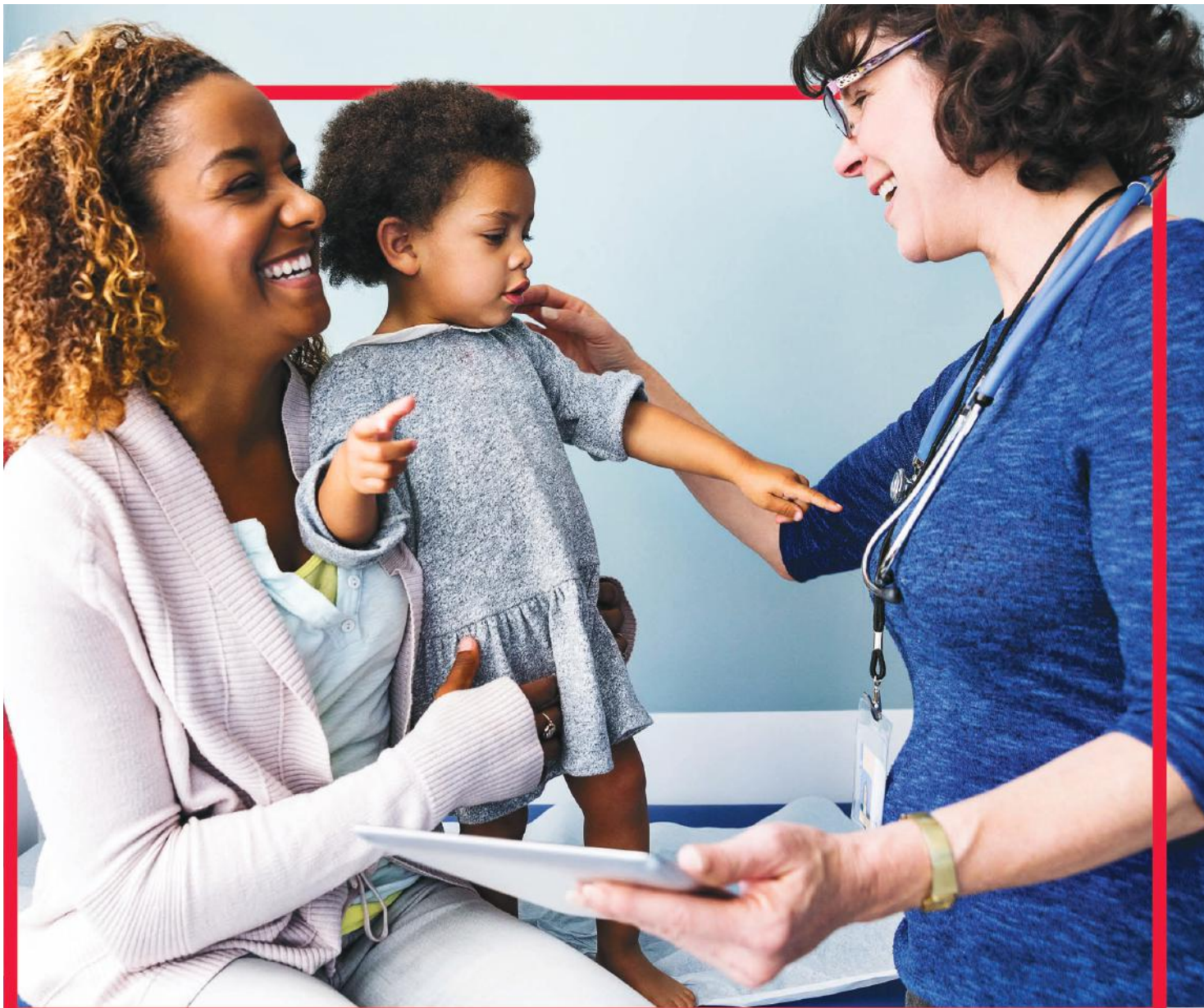
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# TAKING THE ROBOTICS WORLD by Storm



*In the pit, seniors Angel Herrera, Lamarr Olive, Erol Aguirre.*

**Clifton Mustangs have always known what it means** to engineer promising futures. The students behind Team 3314, the Mechanical Mustangs, are no exception.

CHS' FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) team meets in a nondescript warehouse across from the high school. Meeting anywhere from three-to-four days per week, or daily depending on the time of year, innovation and dedication meet discipline and youthful industriousness.

But the team isn't new. As CHS advisors Monique Dituri and Denise Fanelli tell it — far from it. Dituri, who teaches Engineering and Robotics, transferred from Montclair High School, where she also taught Robotics, for the 2011-2012 academic year.

There was already a club in existence for two years that she helped with from afar. It was with help from alumnus and robotics mentor Jim Hobin (CHS 1975) that Dituri

“pushed getting the club to where it is today.”

Hobin, whose son Kyle is an alumnus of Dituri's Montclair robotics team, owns the warehouse that the Mechanical Mustangs work in today and donates the space to CHS.

“[Mr. Hobin is] incredibly important to this program,” said Dituri. “If he did not exist, we would not have this program. All of our machinery is over there, he has helped us recruit the engineers we have that work with the team. He went to the Board of Ed originally to get it started.”

Rounding out the advisory leadership is Fanelli, a chemistry teacher who's known Dituri since 2008. Her involvement came once they needed another physical CHS teacher there. As Dituri explained it: “Coaches have assistant coaches for a reason.”

Fanelli was more than willing to join her colleague on what was unfamiliar turf.



“Honestly, I agreed mostly because I’m friends with Monique and wanted something extra to do,” said Fanelli (CHS 2002). “She’s my friend and does robotics, which seemed super fun and cool, and needed an assistant. It’s come full circle.”

Team 3314 is always looking for community partners, sponsors, and students ready to take on the challenge of FIRST Robotics. Attend one of their STEM outreach events or email Dituri at [mdituri@cliftonschoools.net](mailto:mdituri@cliftonschoools.net).

### A Rebuilding Year

The 24-member student team wrapped up one of its most successful seasons yet.

The guidance of advisors and network of industry professionals and alumni mentors saw them earn a slew of awards, competing on the world stage and proving that Clifton remains a hub of future-ready talent.

One such talent is graduating senior and fourth-in-his-class Lamarr Olive. The Mustang joined the team in his freshman year. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic interrupting the end of middle school for him, it gave him more free time than usual to explore computer programming.

Olive, 18, entered CHS’ STEM Academy and took Dituri’s Intro to Engineering class.

“She suggested joining Robotics,” recalled Olive. “I was hesitant at first, as I thought that in my freshman year that I could learn more about coding on my own. I’m glad I

didn’t let this fleeting thought stop me, because I could not have been further from the truth.”

Fast-forward to the present, Team 3314 is unstoppable. At the FIRST World Championship in Houston, they placed 13th in their division and finished third in elimination rounds.

A full rundown of their stats is: #2 in New Jersey (of 93 teams), #3 in the Mid-Atlantic Region (of 139), #49 in the United States (of 2,927), and #66 in the world (of 3,690). The team also earned the Rising All Star Award in Maine, the Dean’s List Finalist Award at Mid-Atlantic Champs, and three separate awards for engineering and autonomous performance across various events.

What’s even more impressive? It was a rebuilding year.

“A lot of seniors graduated last summer, so there were only five students at the beginning of the year,” said Dituri. “It’s cyclical, with both big classes and small classes, but we brought in a lot of freshmen and sophomores. We basically started from scratch.”

One team member that Olive enjoyed working with this year was junior Ethan Osoro. Osoro is a programmer for the team and is interested in the wiring, which Olive detailed as helping them “to avoid the ‘spaghetti cabling.’”

“He is extremely passionate about helping the team and is there essentially every day, devoting his energy to making our robot run,” said Olive. “We... developed a special bond this year.”



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“It was a blast going into work every day and knowing that, because Ethan was there, I not only had a partner to bounce ideas off of but also someone to share a laugh with,” Olive continued. “Ethan is an amazing student and an amazing asset to the Robotics team.”

So is junior Kristia Nahas, who the advisors described as Clifton’s rising STEM star. Nahas is a recipient of the prestigious FIRST Dean’s List Award, which is awarded annually to 10 students out of more than 10,000 FRC participants.

“Kristia is amazing,” said Fanelli, 41. “She’s the nicest girl, is very smart, and she works hard to help her classmates learn.”

The advisors added that outside her own ambitions to publish a book, Nahas’ long-term vision includes returning as an adult mentor to bring her journey full circle.

“Kristia’s journey began with curiosity and blossomed into leadership,” said Dituri, 49. “Now as the mechanical lead, she’s the first to arrive, the last to leave, and a passionate student-mentor to younger teammates.”

Nahas trains new students on Solidworks, CNC routers, mills, and lathes.

“She promotes inclusivity in STEM,” Dituri continued, “making 3314 a welcoming space for girls and newcomers alike.”

## Looking Ahead

They’re not just building robots. They’re investing in futures. The statistics speak for themselves. The advisors reported that 100% of students have post-secondary plans, with 95% attending college and the remainder pursuing trades or entering the military.

Ninety-two percent of alumni work in STEM or STEM-adjacent fields. The companies include Boeing, Johnson & Johnson, Stryker, PSEG, and Atlassian.

Olive’s own goals for the future see him becoming a firmware engineer.

“I knew coding fundamentals and excelled in school, so picking up information came easier to me than my peers,” said Olive. “But the most valuable lesson did not come from learning new coding languages. It came from learning how to be a successful engineer.”

The pandemic resulted in a noticeable void on the Robotics team. There were no lead student programmers to guide the newcomers like Olive.

“Someone needed to step up,” he said. “As a freshman, I committed myself entirely to robotics, always volunteering to code in front of the team and studying the controls so that I eventually became their operator.”

It wasn’t always easy. Whether he was developing his public speaking skills by explaining the robot to judges or going through the trial-and-error nature of engineering, he began accepting that he won’t always know the right answer.

“But robotics taught me to love this uncertainty,” said Olive. “When you fearlessly apply yourself to a project, you may come out the other end devastated, but at least you found one way not to do it.”

This summer, the team will build a second robot from a retired chassis. It will provide younger students with more hands-on experience and give the team a chance to put both robots to the test at off-season competitions this fall.

“But more importantly,” said Dituri, “they’ll keep doing what they do best: fostering innovation, inclusion, and inspiration. One student, one bolt, and one climb at a time.”



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# Mooki Bloom

By Ariana Puzzo

If the earth laughs in flowers, then perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem was foreshadowing for the joy that Mukhammad Jumaboev spreads throughout our city.

The CHS senior created his side-hustle Mooki Bloom to sell his origami bouquets and flowers. Jumaboev's paper origami flowers are available by sending him a private, direct message on Instagram @mooki.bloom.

Jumaboev's earliest exposure to origami began as a way to entertain himself since there was a sizable age gap between himself and his older siblings.

"I've always been into origami since I was really young," said Jumaboev, 17. "It was a way to entertain myself and play when I was little."

"Over the years, I branched out with what origami could do," he continued. "I taught myself and would say that the best teacher is YouTube, because you can learn so much. Watching tutorials is how I got into origami and how I make these flowers."

## Personal Touch

Jumaboev didn't become a pro overnight. It took practice and still takes a great deal of patience, but now he is encouraging his classmates to embrace the art craft. Jumaboev founded the CHS Origami Club in September of 2024 and there are about 40 people in the Google Classroom.

The goal is to raise more awareness of the club's existence by getting it on CHS' Morning News. There are bi-weekly meetings and the club is welcome to any CHS student.

*Mukhammad Jumaboev with his floral origami at the Brazilian Festival in Newark to help fundraise for Brazil Flood Relief. Bottom right: He's sustainable, too! Pictured is the recycled book bouquet that he hopes to launch soon.*





“It’s been so much fun and is by far my favorite club,” said Jumaboev. “We made origami jumping frogs, flowers, and snowmen, which are also really cute.”

Jumaboev would like to see the club give back more to the community in the future. Students made origami hearts with an American flag and thank-you notes last Veterans Day.

The entrepreneur has given back in other ways. Jumaboev helped raise \$350 by going door-to-door for Brazil Flood Relief. He has also partnered with the CHS Key Club to help raise \$322 with flowers for Oasis, a resource that provides food to women and children in Paterson. Another great turnout involved him fundraising for Gaza.

Jumaboev will also participate in CHS Academic Decathlon’s “Spring Pop-Up Shop” on May 4 from 10 am to 2 pm in CHS’ lower gym. More details @chs\_acadeca on Instagram. December was when he officially opened Mooki Bloom after years spent making origami gifts for friends. Then, inspiration struck.

“I saw online origami bouquets and thought that they were so cute and personal. That is something that I really value,” he said. “So in junior year when I made an origami bouquet for my friend ... and she loved it, I thought, ‘A lot of people will like this’ and began selling it.”

### Engaging Young Minds

Roses are Jumaboev’s favorite flower to make and are especially intricate when it comes to him making each petal and tying it all together. Mooki Bloom sells four bouquet sizes and individual flowers. He gave a special shout-out to his older sister, Khadicha.




*Willow Loor, Joseph Lopez, Maria Luiza Vaz, Ana Laura Vaz and Mooki.*

“She has given me so much helpful advice for how much I should value my own work and time,” he said. “She even drove three hours to help me deliver a bouquet. She is so helpful, and I love her so much.”

Jumaboev will attend college this fall at either the University of Michigan or The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is interested in Environmental Science and Environmental Engineering.


One of his projects until then is recycling old and damaged books into origami bouquets as a “beautiful and great way to recycle and reuse old materials.” The work is never done.

“I’m interested in researching sustainable toys for children and would love to create a plastic alternative for toys,” said Jumaboev. “Perhaps origami toys that engage children’s minds. I’d love to create something like that. That’s my dream.”



# 2025 Smiles

# To The Grads!



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# Caring Every Day

**Jade Tables is no longer a student** when she walks into the classroom at KinderCare — she’s a teacher responsible for her students. The CHS senior may be 17, but she has grown in her capacity as an assistant teacher since her sophomore year of high school. She’s experienced even more growth in the current school year because of CHS’ Cooperative Education program.

The Co-Op program combines classroom-based education with practical paid work experience. Tables finishes her school day now at 11 am, gets ready for work and has some lunch, then she goes into work from 1-6 pm. Before this year, she worked at KinderCare from 3-6 pm.

“Before this year, I didn’t [develop] the connection that I have with the kids now, because I’m here [earlier in the day],” said Tables.



*Jade Tables with KinderCare supervisor Urvi Ray.*

Self-described as the “family babysitter”, Tables knew that she always wanted to work with kids. She began working at KinderCare Elmwood Park after she applied at age 15 and has since moved to the 879 Clifton Ave. location.

Assisting the lead teacher has come with different responsibilities when she was in the toddler room versus now in the infant room. Some of her responsibilities include meal prep, going over songs for their lesson plans, assigning “tummy time” to kids, and diaper changing.

“It’s really fun,” said Tables. “I enjoy watching them learn and grow. I’ve seen the kids move up in their grade level.” Tables is also fascinated by the way that the young children communicate with adults.

“People assume that kids might not be able to articulate themselves clearly,” she continued. “But even with the ones that don’t fully speak yet, how they move their body and their body language tells everything. If they’re uncomfortable or want to go outside or are tired from outside time, you can tell and adjust with them.”

Tables attended School 12 and CCMS before high school and will begin studying Secondary Education at Felician University this September. This past summer she was selected to go to Atlantic City for the New Jersey Education Association’s Aspiring Educators program, earning college credits through William Paterson.

Her more immediate ambition is to earn her teaching certifications. But Tables also has an eye toward bringing her career full-circle. “As I work here, I see the things that I would do and wouldn’t do with my own business on the employee side,” said Tables. “I really do see myself having my own daycare [someday].”

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# Full Circle on Van Houten

Volunteering in her old elementary school is a full-circle moment for Josephine O'Connell.

After sixth period at CHS, the graduating senior volunteers just up the road in the second grade at School 2 on Van Houten Ave. She helps in three classrooms, totaling about 60 students, and each student has made a lasting impression.

Both on a personal level and as an aspiring teacher.

"I really wanted to teach, but I didn't know what grade level," said O'Connell, 17. "Being in the second grade really brought me to the realization that this is the grade that I want to teach."

O'Connell will attend the University of Southern Indiana to major in Elementary Education. She appreciates the first-hand glimpse at how teachers plan and prep their lessons. She is grateful as well that she has witnessed caring administrators up close.



*Josephine O'Connell and childhood best friend Hailey Casserly on her first day at School 2. At right, Josephine today.*

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"My principal, Ms. Jennifer Lucas, who was there when I was younger, was still the principal when I started," said O'Connell.

Lucas, who passed away unexpectedly last October, worked in Clifton Schools for 29 years. Despite the deeply felt loss by the School 2 community, O'Connell believes the transition in leadership "has been relatively good."

"I love the new principal [Ms. Magdalena Wojtylo]," she said. "While it would've been nice to end the year with Ms. Lucas, full circle, I am glad they still have a principal that is caring for kids."

O'Connell has learned how to be more patient during her time in the school and has improved her communication skills. That, in some instances, has meant simplifying her message so that the students understand it.

Two things excite her most about teaching in the future. "Decorating my classroom is definitely going to be one of them," she said, "but getting to know my students. Each student has a different story, and they're all unique."





*Michael, Kevin, Stacey and Stephen.*



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# Rooted In Her Faith

**Possessing a deep faith has guided Bridget Cronrath** and it is what continues to enable her to achieve her ambitions.

It began with her attending The Academy At Saint Mary in Rutherford through eighth grade. She will graduate later this month from Mary Help of Christians Academy in North Haledon. Cronrath sees her education background as instrumental in developing her faith.

“I don’t consider myself a very religious person, but I rely on my faith a lot. Catholic school has helped me to grow in my faith,” said Cronrath, 17. “It has helped me realize that there is a God out there who is helping me if I feel alone ... and will help me in struggling times.”

“If I don’t want to do something or keep going,” she continued, “I know that everything happens for a reason and there is a power giving me strength to keep going.”

## Combining Passions

Cronrath has found ways to pay that forward to her Clifton community. She has volunteered for the Power of One backpack drive and with the John Samra Memorial 5K run. Cronrath has also worked as a camp counselor for Camp Mary Help, a summer camp run by her school.

She has volunteered at the Community Food Bank of New Jersey and held donation drives at her high school. Her greatest achievement was receiving the Gold Presidential Service Award.

“I enjoy partaking in charitable works,” she said, “and receiving an award for my hours of service recognizes how much I have helped my community.”

Cronrath was also involved in her own sports-related extracurriculars. She started Varsity on the Lacrosse team in her freshman year and tried out for Cheerleading, becoming captain this year.



When she is decompressing, she still finds time to go outside and go on walks with her Black Labrador named Ollie.

“[Walking is a] great way to calm down,” she said, “and I have always loved animals, especially my dog.”

Cronrath will attend Michigan State University this fall for their Athletic Training program. She is interested in becoming an athletic trainer for an NHL team. Her career pursuit was inspired by New Jersey Devils forward Jack Hughes’ injury in October of 2021.

“My love for sports has created a calling for me to a career path that I didn’t know existed until a couple of years ago,” said Cronrath. “I’m very passionate about sports ... and didn’t want to give it up for my future job, but I knew I wanted to do something in the medical field ... so I combined my passions.”

## A Deeper Connection

One piece of advice Cronrath has to rising seniors is remembering to “live in the moment.”

Cronrath will miss her friends and playing sports the most. She’ll also miss driving to school. Despite getting accepted by PCTI, Cronrath is glad she chose the small Catholic school.

“I think it [allowed for] a deeper connection with both classmates and teachers. People know you by name and you’re not just another face in the crowd.”

She explained there’s a special bond shared by attending an all-girls school. A “sisterhood, where everyone is willing to help those around them.”

It’s what she wants for her own children. “I think that it does help when younger kids grow up in religion, because it gives them structure and it helps them to know that they are not alone,” said Cronrath. “I also learned that there are [many] ways to be connected to God.”



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# Top ★ Mustangs

**The Top 10 Mustangs of 2025** earned their rankings academically, but there is more to the remarkable group. They have big plans for the future, including careers in STEM or taking on the business world. We look forward to hearing about these Mustangs' achievements for years to come.

The metaphorical lightbulb above Alexander Jakimowicz's head is not just because he's interested in electricity. Jakimowicz is also ranked at the top of his class.

The Class of 2025's valedictorian is most likely off to Rutgers – New Brunswick this fall to study Electrical and Computer Engineering. As we connected with him last month, he was preparing for his Electricity & Magnetism AP exam.

But this Mustang is a well-rounded individual. He's loved drawing for longer than he can recall and uses it as a pastime to decompress. He's also played guitar since middle school.

"Only in high school did I gain the confidence necessary to start playing live at local open mics," said Jakimowicz, 17. "I'd never really considered myself much of a performer, but I'm glad I put myself out there and found something I love doing."

Jakimowicz was in Study Hall when he learned about his rank placement. He admitted that it "did freak me out for a little bit" seeing the number one with his name, but it came down to a combination of studying and having supportive friends.

As he prepares to work with semiconductors in the future, Jakimowicz's advice for his past freshman-year self is to get more involved. "How many people can say they did beekeeping in high school?"

**Salutatorian Chelsea Hoang** owes who she is and her future career in nursing to her hard work and the two people who've stood by her every step of the way.

"My parents, Cuc Dang and Tom Hoang, have always supported me unconditionally while also setting high expectations that have pushed me to grow," said Hoang, 18. "Their strong work ethic, sense of responsibility, and constant drive for self-improvement have shaped my values."

Hoang enjoys skiing, swimming, fishing, and hiking



*Alexander Jakimowicz and Chelsea Hoang.*

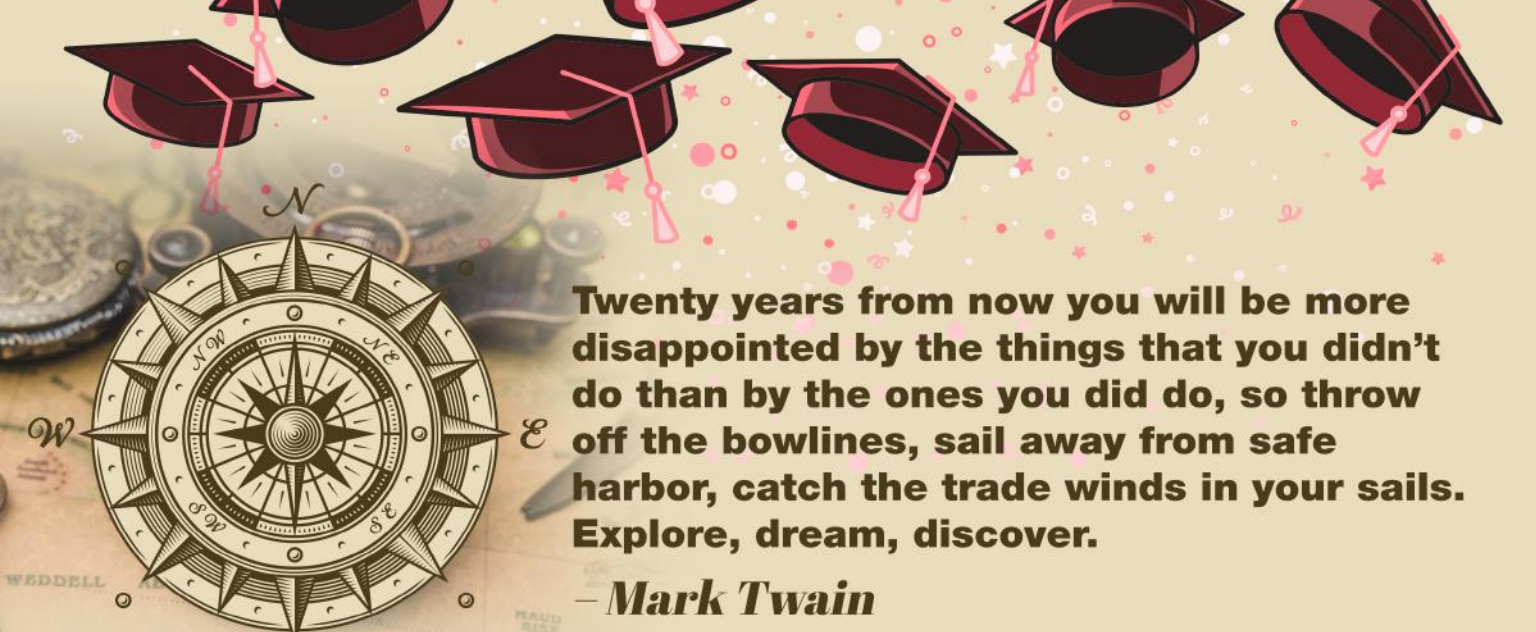
outdoors. Every summer, her family travels to new places and explores different cities. She is currently most passionate about learning to cook and bake, which she views as "lifelong skills that support a healthy lifestyle and promote greater independence."

Hoang will attend Rutgers University in the fall to become an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner or Nurse Anesthetist. She learned that she is ranked second in her class while in AP Biology. The senior has taken advanced classes throughout high school.

"It took a lot of late nights finishing homework and teaching myself through YouTube videos," she said. "Thank you, Organic Chemistry Tutor, Khan Academy, and Physics Burns."

"I felt happy that all the effort had paid off," Hoang continued, "and [was] honored to stand alongside some of the smartest and most dedicated people I know."





Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, dream, discover.

— Mark Twain

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## Top ★ Mustangs

**Third-in-her-class Caroline Mozo** knows it's not just about the grades. It's about the connections that you make throughout your life.

"Now that my high school years are officially over," said Mozo, 17, "I know that I have plenty of friends to rely on and care about as we all move forward on our individual paths."

"These past 12 years have allowed me to interact with a range of people from all over the world and create meaningful relationships that I hope to never lose," she added. "It is this comfortable community of friends that I've built for myself that is my greatest achievement."

Mozo's career path began taking shape, figuratively and literally, from an early age. Her favorite afternoon activity was sculpting with clay and creating mini figures for her bedroom. It's a hobby that she keeps up with today.

It's good preparation for Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, where Mozo will take her first steps toward becoming



*Caroline Mozo.*

a successful business owner in the art industry. She appreciates the school's "tight-knit community" and "small-college feeling."

"Art provides an outlet for creativity that can lead to wonderful works with beautiful meanings that can spark joy in people," she said. "I want [to have a career in art] to be part of a process that makes so many others smile."

**Lamarr Olive makes every step count** along the way. Ranked fourth in his class, his next stop is Harvey Mudd College in California.

Olive, 18, initially had his sights set on Stanford and Caltech through middle and early high school. But the STEM whiz gained a new perspective while conducting astrophysics in New Mexico last year.

"[Harvey Mudd] is a prestigious institution with around 900 students and offers one of the best undergraduate engineering programs in the coun-

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## Top ★ Mustangs

try,” said Olive. “I hope to become a firmware engineer, writing low-level code for computers.”

Olive was accepted to his first-choice school in an Early Decision and was named a presidential scholarship recipient, earning him full tuition coverage.

His childhood was spent tinkering with all sorts of things around the house. He also still has his invention book that he started in elementary school. It is filled with prototypes of inventions that he has conceptualized through the years.

Olive’s older sister, Victoria (CHS 2022) and ninth in her class, is his greatest influence.

“Her success [at Johns Hopkins University] pushes me to be better,” he said. “Not only because I now have the bar raised to be the ‘favorite child’, but also because I want to make her proud in the same way that she makes me proud.”

**Ranked fifth in her class, Yasmine Mills** would let her freshman-year self know one simple truth: “The grind never stops.”

She took that to heart throughout all four years of high school. Mills, 17, volunteered through the Key Club and the Mustang Marching Band. She helped at different events like the HarvestFest, Easter Bunny Bash, and school fairs.



*Lamarr Olive and Yasmine Mills.*

Mills additionally played softball for years before joining CHS’ Softball team.

“It keeps me active,” she said, “and I love meeting new people and making new friends with the teams that I’ve played on.”

Her sociability will serve her well at Cornell University this September and in life. She applied to Cornell due to its STEM program and aspires to become a cardiologist.

“I’m passionate about helping others,” said Mills.

But she is also successful when it comes to achieving a balanced life of academic success and following her passions. One of the ways that Mills surprised herself at CHS was by participating in events that fell outside of her usual interests.

For instance, Stage Crew for the “Sweeney Todd” musical production and joining the swim team as manager. “I had a lot of fun in both. I was able to meet new people and form closer connections with people I already knew.”



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# Top ★ Mustangs

**Virali Jariwala worked hard** throughout high school but never imagined that she'd rank sixth in her class.

Staying organized and finishing her assignments on time helped make it possible. But so did making that extra effort.

"I always asked for help when I needed it and pushed myself to always keep trying, even when I felt burnt out," said Jariwala, 18. "When I saw that I got [ranked sixth], I was so shocked and felt very happy. I felt very proud of myself for achieving this."

Numbers will follow Jariwala to college in a different way. She plans to major in Accounting and reached that decision after taking different classes and participating in activities to see what most interests her. Jariwala's goal is to become a certified accountant.

But artistic creativity is never far away. She enjoyed taking Ceramics class, where she learned about "patience, technique, and expression through each piece I made." She is also learning to ice skate, which has inspired her to persevere and keep going even when things are difficult.

Her advice to her 14-year-old self would be to try new things and step out of her comfort zone.

"I spent a lot of time worrying about little things," she said, "and that held me back from a lot of opportunities."

**Om Rana loves a good puzzle**, but there's no confusion about why he's ranked seventh in his class.

"You name it — jigsaws galore, brain teasers, just about anything that made me think twice," said Rana, 17. "From tricky math questions to chess to NYT games, I've always been drawn to the thrill of problem-solving and finding clever tricks to crack challenges."

Rana now stretches his mind by coding. It's a field he described as "one giant, ever-changing puzzle." Rana will double-major in Computer Science and Mathematical Sci-



*Virali Jariwala, Om Rana and Aidan Reilly.*

ences at NJIT. He was accepted into the Honors College and has received a full-tuition scholarship.

"I was drawn to NJIT's strong career opportunities in an oversaturated field," he said. "I knew [it] was the right choice for me. I hope to gain the skills and experience needed to contribute to the future of AI technologies."

It was Rana's father who inspired him to work hard from a young age. That work ethic led to his greatest achievement, which was awarding the Teens Teach Brighter Future scholarship to the CHS Class of 2024.

"[It was] a milestone that embodied the mission my friends and I set to fulfill when we founded our nonprofit. We created

Teens Teach to spark educational curiosity and provide accessible learning opportunities for students like us."

**Aidan Reilly knows how to lead.** The eighth ranked student in the graduating class was Section Leader for the Mustang Marching Band since his junior year.

Reilly, 18, said the experience taught him a great deal about "caring for others before yourself" and how that facilitates a "successful work environment." He participated for about a decade in Boy Scouts and Altar Serving, and he was an assistant teacher in Clifton's I.S.E.E. program.



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## Top ★ Mustangs

“I served my community and helped strive others to do the same,” he said. “In I.S.E.E., I helped young musicians find their way into the drumming world.”

There are two teachers who’ve influenced the course of Reilly’s future. One is Band Director Mr. Bryan Stepneski, who he had for all four years of high school. The second is his AP Psychology teacher Mr. John O’Reilly.

The Mustang will attend The College of New Jersey for the Clinical and Counseling Psychology program in the fall. “[This decision] was brought by a newfound love and appreciation for psychology after taking Mr. O’Reilly’s [course],” said Reilly.

Reilly’s future ambitions include becoming a counselor so that he can help others. “I am passionate about psychology,” he said, “and the implications of using it to help others get through struggles in their life.”

**Ryan Budhu, like his previous Top 10** neighbor, is interested in getting into people’s heads. The ninth in his class plans to make it happen by pursuing a degree in Neuroscience at Rutgers. Budhu made that decision after numerous discussions with his sister, Sabrina (CHS 2020), and hours spent researching the best schools for him. He credited Sabrina as his greatest influence.

“She was constantly supportive of me and guided me whenever an issue arose,” said Budhu. “Even though I am the first person in my family to study neuroscience, she still helps me with my classes and how I should prepare for the future.”

Budhu volunteered for about two months at Trinity Rehab and Hackensack University Medical Center. Budhu shadowed the head physical therapist at Trinity and volunteered in the cardiac rehabilitation unit at Hackensack.

“I would try to help patients and make them as comfortable as possible.”

Budhu expressed gratitude for his teachers’ ongoing support, which led to him developing a love for the biological sciences. Outside of academics, he considers his most significant achievement as making the Ice Hockey team. “Leading up to tryouts, I had never played organized hockey. I was shocked I made the team,” he said. “It was



*Ryan Budhu and Angie Eljerou.*

worth it, as I had many great experiences with my friends and coaches.”

**Rounding out the Class of 2025’s Top 10** students is philanthropist Angie Eljerou. The senior has displayed a passion for giving back throughout high school.

Whether it’s packing food for unhoused individuals or assembling care boxes for mothers and their babies, Eljerou makes helping others a priority.

“It’s taught me the value of service and humility,” said Eljerou, 17. “I’ve learned how impactful the smallest acts of kindness can be. I hope to carry those values with me and find ways to make a positive impact.”

Eljerou is committed to Montclair State and plans to major in Business Administration. MSU allows her to stay close to home and rooted in her community while pursuing a career that’s capable of opening up “a lot of different opportunities for me.”

What she considers her top achievement is adjusting to immigrating to a new country at a young age. Eljerou was born in New Jersey while her family visited to attend a relative’s wedding. They returned to Damascus, Syria but ultimately left when conditions worsened five years later.

“Adjusting to a new language, culture, and education system wasn’t easy but, through hard work and perseverance, I was able to adjust,” she said. “It wasn’t easy, but I pushed through and was able to do well in school and find my place.”



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Where will you be in Sept. 2025? How did you reach that decision? What is your career goal?

PCTT's shops/majors are as widespread and diverse as the students taking them. What senior Matthew Mendoza found was the art that he brought to the big screen for Video Production 3 and 4 helped him determine what's next.

And how he'll continue using his hands and mind to pursue it. "I see myself learning welding in trade school in September," said Mendoza. "I originally wanted to go to college but, at the last second, I decided that college wasn't for me. I didn't want to deal with college classes and all the stress from the work that it brings."

Mendoza, 18, is keeping his career goals open-ended. What he enjoyed about Video Production Instructor Jody Lazarski's class was that he got the chance to connect with others.

"I'll miss talking and doing things with the people in that class the most," he said. "Whether it was working on



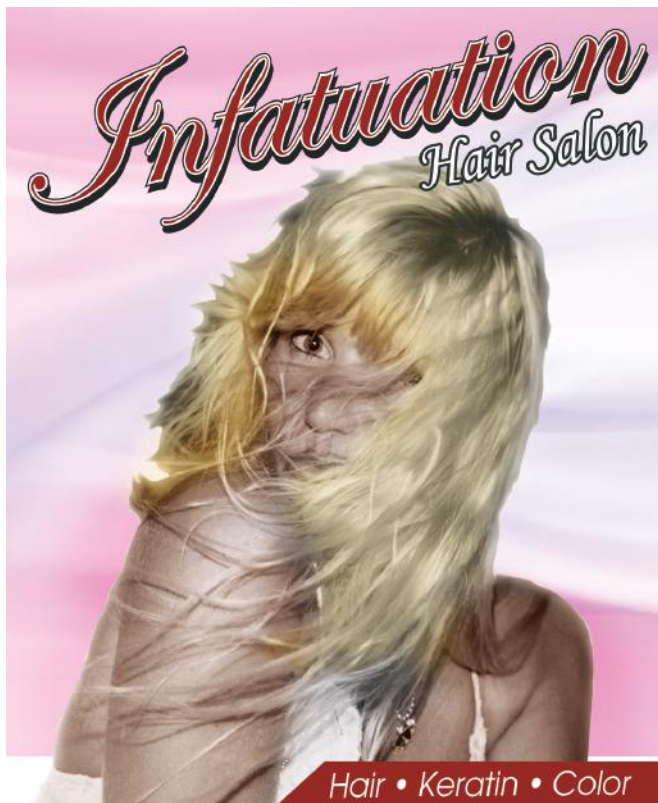
making films with them or just playing games, I always had fun."

Last year, Mendoza produced a Documentary for Passaic County and Garden State Film Festival "Official Selection" entitled *Clifton: My Hometown*. He edited a film from the Video Club's film shoot this year entitled *Wreaths Across America*.

The film was selected for 3rd Place in Documentary from Passaic County Film Festival and was an "Official Selection" of the Garden State Film Festival in the Hometown Short Film Category.

"My major/shop Video Production has influenced my life the most. Not in terms of choosing a future

career, but it made me appreciate films more and gave me an interest in photography," said Mendoza. "Ms. Lazarski helped me in deciding what I want to do in the future."



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**Alexa Miller:** Old Dominion University to major in Psychology with plans of becoming a Clinical Psychologist. ODU was never a top choice for me, but my father graduated from there and told me to apply. We visited for Oyster Bowl Weekend in November and I went on a tour of the college. I fell in love with the campus and the atmosphere.

**Dalky Shephard Bernard:** I will start college and will strive and fight for what I want to achieve. My goal is becoming a great doctor who will save lives.

**Fabio Amati:** At Rutgers studying computer science.

**Antonio Morales:** Possibly at PCCC or MSU studying to become a nurse. I just want to help people, and I thank Special Education Language and Learning Disabilities teacher Mr. Joseph Adessa.

**Bisan Husain:** Studying Radiography at Bergen Community College as I realized that this is the only thing that I would look forward to learning more about in the future.

**Benjamin Santana:** Montclair State University is close to home and I would save money compared to a further university. My career goal is to become an IT Specialist.



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**Josephine O'Connell:** The University of Southern Indiana. I applied to a multitude of colleges. USI was the one that will give me the least amount of debt, and it met my standards. While I got into pretty low-percent acceptance rate schools, they didn't give me much, so it was out of the question. My goal is to be an elementary school teacher.

**Jacob Barahona:** I'm not too sure. All I know is I'll be studying Music at PCCC for a bit.

**Justin Leach wants to go pro.** And you can trust that he's ready to put in the hard work to make it happen.

It's a combination of his work ethic and support that he received from teachers. He played three years of Varsity Soccer helping achieve a team record of 48-7-4. Add to that three league titles, two counties, and three state finals.

As for influential teachers who nurtured that dedication, he described Mr. John Lesler, who he had for junior year History class, as a facilitator of the "best conversations that actually taught me things that I will use in life."

Leach will play soccer for an academy in Spain this September. He's all in on the move across the Atlantic. "I made this decision based on it being my best chance to play professionally," said Leach.



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# Life Skills Beyond Colfax



*Life skills classes take these students beyond Colfax Ave. Top: Savier Valverde at Bowler City. From left, Isabel Cristina Perez-Ospina, Thapanga Figueroa, and Stephanie Castro Carranza.*



**There are all kinds of life** skills that prepare us for the future — and many of those skills are being taught in Jessica Farrell’s classroom.

Farrell, who has taught in the school district as a special education teacher for 24 years, was approached in the winter of 2024 by two of her colleagues. Supervisor Amanda Hempel and Transition Coordinator Lynn Tuorto had developed an idea to start a new program for some seniors.

The “Life Skills” program would diverge from the traditional curriculum and allow students, like Stephanie Castro Carranza and Savier Valverde, to spend time out of the classroom. Students from the Class of 2025 accessed different opportunities through community-based instruction.

“[Our trips] helped me learn how to pay with money or a card and how to talk to people in the real world,” said Carranza. “It also helped me learn how to save money and know about the change when you pay at the store.”

Carranza will attend Bergen Community College in

September with the ambition of becoming a nurse. Her career goals are to “help people and care about them.”

Farrell’s class taught her how to be kind to others, work hard, and always try her best. The teacher admires Carranza’s patience and caring nature, expressing confidence in Carranza’s future in the healthcare field.

“Stephanie is a sweet young woman who is always helpful to those around her,” said Farrell. “She is family-oriented, and she cares for and enjoys spending time with her family.”

The classroom of seniors took multiple trips throughout the school year. They went to ShopRite and prepared in advance by deciding on a recipe, making their shopping list, and utilizing digital coupons and a weekly circular to find the best prices.

Students purchased the ingredients and then got first-hand lessons on food safety and sanitation, measuring, and learning to share a meal with others.

“These skills taught me to be helpful to other people,” said Valverde.

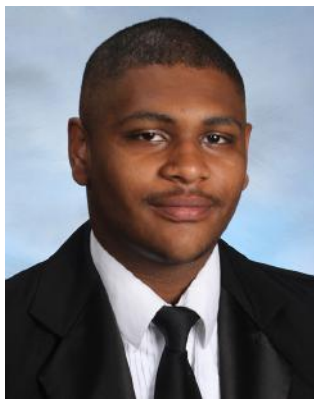


The group sponsored the “Clifton Little Food Pantry” on City Hall property during the month of November and went over several times per week to fill the pantry. Valverde credited these trips as showing him how to “help others in my community.”

Other trips throughout the year were taken to Demarest Farms, Stew Leonards, Wil- lowbrook Mall, Bowler City, Dollar Tree, Dunkin Donuts, and local bagel stores. The year will conclude with a cel- ebration at the Allwood Diner.

As for Valverde, a lesson that stood out for him was how to do “everything with a smile and to have self-con- trol.” Valverde wants to pursue higher education by study- ing Psychology and is interested in that path, because he is “passionate about helping others.”

“Savier is an excellent student who has maintained Honor Roll status throughout his high school career,” said Farrell. “Savier is also employed by QuickChek, and he has been able to hold a job and maintain a wonderful aca- demic record.”



*Steven Paulino and Jose Flores-Masias.*

The highlight of Valverde’s high school experience was making food with his peers.

“That’s been the best thing for the whole year and meant a lot to a lot of great people,” he said. “I will miss all the peo- ple who were kind to me. My classmates were cool people [and so were] Ms. Farrell ... and Mr. Frederick Hemsey.”

The seniors didn’t gate- keep their life skills either. They regularly took trips with

self-contained classes from CHS and the middle schools, which gave seniors an opportunity to mentor their younger peers. The program also visited local preschools and the Sports Domain Academy, 1075 US-46, for job experience.

“This new program and experience has been one of the best of my career,” said Farrell. “I hope that the program will continue to grow and be around long after my retire- ment. The Class of 2025, especially these students, will always hold a very special place in my heart.”

Other seniors in the Life Skills program are Steven Paulino, Eri Spears, Erick Carino, Jonathan Silverman and Jose Flores-Masias.



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# Kelsey in the Sky

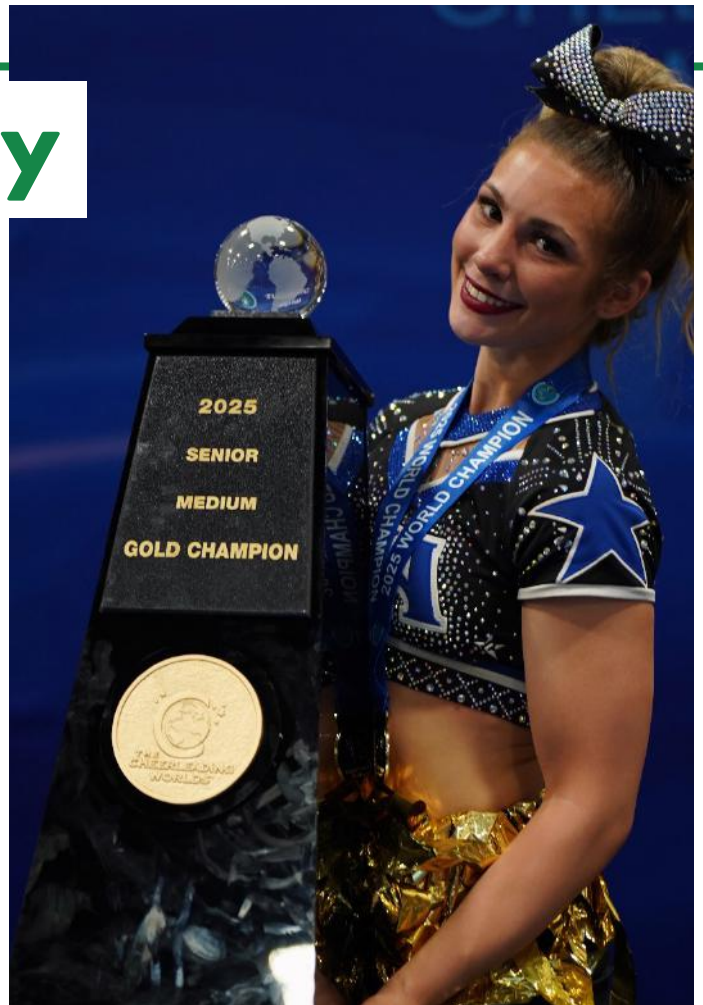
**Kelsey Dubravsky had her eyes on the prize** — and her family couldn't be prouder.

Her grandfather, former Clifton Fire Chief John Dubravsky, made sure that we knew it when he informed us of the senior's final cheer competition with the Central Jersey Allstars, a traveling competition cheer team. The team name? Bombshells.

Dubravsky, who competed in the Elite Level 6 Senior Division, received the Gold Medal at the World Championships 2025 for Cheerleading. The competition was held at the ESPN center in Orlando, Florida, April 24-27. The international event is "the most prestigious cheer event in the world."

On April 27, Dubravsky and her team performed against seven other teams in their division. The judges awarded the team with the Gold Medal for a 1st Place Finish. All team members will also receive a World Championships Ring.

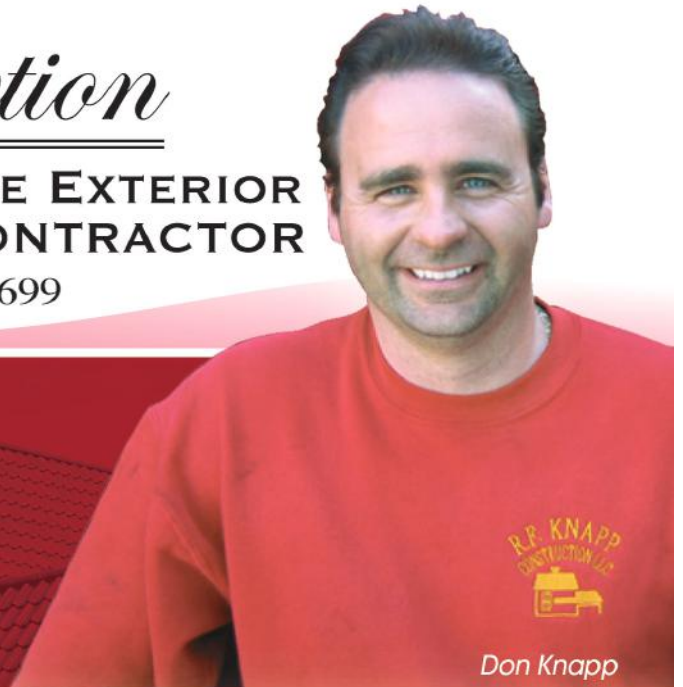
Dubravsky cheered for CHS in her first two years of high school. She has trained and competed in cheer for about eight years. Dubravsky will continue her education this fall at the University of Alabama.



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# The Comeback



Emilia Wilk and her Clifton girls lacrosse teammates thought 2024 was going to be their year. Then came the team's first scrimmage.

Just ten minutes into play, the then-junior midfielder looked for the shot she wanted, and made a cut. Disaster struck. Wilk suffered a torn ACL that robbed her of her junior lacrosse and flag football seasons, as well as her senior soccer campaign—a difficult pill to swallow for an individual who had played team sports since third grade.

“All I wanted was to play something again,” Wilk said of her mindset in the aftermath of her injury. “I took it for granted. I was playing lacrosse for fun and then I really started to take it seriously because it had become my favorite sport.”

Wilk began playing soccer in third-grade and on the club circuit a year later. As a freshman, she began playing lacrosse—a sport in which she quickly became a standout and which she plans to play at Montclair State University. It became her “first sport,” so-to-speak, making it all the more painful to suffer a season-ending injury.

She was determined to make it back for her senior year and began a rigorous rehab under Alliance Orthopedics. The road back was grueling, though Wilk eventually got there.

Wilk returned to the field this spring, leading the Mustangs in goals and points on the lacrosse field. She contributed at wide receiver in flag football, as well, providing both athleticism and leadership to a squad that rebounded from a 1-3 start to go 4-4-1.

It was a happy ending to an outstanding athletic career. Wilk says it wouldn't have been possible without the encouragement of her parents, Tom and Dorota, and the dedication of her physical therapist, Sabrina Estevez. She also credited Lindsey Cinque, Clifton's head flag football coach and an assistant in lacrosse and soccer, with keeping Wilk close to her teams even when she couldn't compete. “Even when I wasn't there, Coach Cinque kept me involved and it didn't even feel like I wasn't playing,” Wilk said. “The girls did, too. I went to every single game.”

Wilk will major in Elementary Education at Montclair State.

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# Future Nurse is a Mentor & Advocate

*By Tom Szieber*

If you called David Alvarez a mama's boy, he'd likely take it as a compliment. The 18-year-old is on the verge of some big things, and Alvarez will quickly state he couldn't have done it without the woman who raised him.

"I learned discipline and resilience from my mom," said Alvarez, a football and lacrosse star for the Mustangs. "She taught me to never give up on something that is important to you, as well, no matter what happens."

After suffering a torn ACL playing football as a junior, the Mustang running back/linebacker was planning to quit the sport. His mother, Dolkilisa Rojas, wasn't having it, imploring him not to let the injury take him out of the game permanently. It was emblematic of the motivation she has provided her son throughout his life.

Along with pushing Alvarez to overcome setbacks, Rojas insisted he learn responsibility by having a job. He got his first one at 16 selling snacks and tickets at the British Swim School on Scoles Ave. His mom's encouragement produced a young man who has excelled in sports, school and—most importantly—brotherhood.

The Mustang senior has been instrumental in the growth of his 12-year-old brother, Daniel, who has autism. Daniel often accompanies his older brother to practices, friends' houses and activities. Previously Daniel was uncomfortable in social settings but he has made significant gains socially and come out of his shell.

"David is very mature for his age," Dolkilisa said. "And I think having my younger one around has helped him mature. I try not to miss David's games and practices, and it is kind of hard for kids with autism to be around a lot of people. But being around David's activities has helped Daniel grow. It has been helpful for both of them, I believe."

This fall, Alvarez will be at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pa. He will continue on the gridiron as a safety/outside linebacker and study both nursing and business administration—yes, nursing and business administration.



That may seem like an odd combination of academic pursuits, but his reason for the unique academic focus is consistent with his wise, rational disposition.

"I want to make sure I have a fallback option," Alvarez said. "Nursing is my first choice."

He continued: "Junior year was the most depressing year of my life. I was angry [over my injury]. But I went to physical therapy at Alliance Orthopedics and met some of the greatest people. They put me through everything, and psychologically, I felt determined. That was when I realized I wanted to play football again. My PT tested my love for the game, because if I didn't give it my all in PT, I wouldn't be going to Muhlenberg to play football."

Of course, plans can change, and Alvarez says he believes a background in business will give him the credibility needed to pursue a career in a different space—like real estate, for example—if that is the turn his life takes.

"David is one of those guys, he brightens the room when he walks into it," said Clifton football offensive coordinator Anthony Giordano. "He is always really positive, and I think whatever profession, whatever path he chooses, he will be successful because he has that personality and is that sort of hard worker."



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## Summer Art Camp

For kids ages 7 thru 12

**August 11th thru 15th**

9am until 12 pm

Residents **\$200** for all 5 days

Non-Residents **\$225**



# From Ukraine & Feeling American

**Marharyta “Margo” Holchuk embraces and celebrates** the two cultures that shape her daily life.

Born in Novovolynsk, a city located in north-west Ukraine, Holchuk was nine years old in April of 2016 when her family immigrated to the U.S. It was a new opportunity for Holchuk and younger brother Oleksii, Jr., now age 12 and in sixth grade at WWMS. It was also a way for her parents, Father Oleksii and Nataliia, to keep their family safe.

As she prepares for freshman year at Seton Hall University, Holchuk reflects on what she views as her greatest achievements: learning a new language and adapting to a new country. She has also received several honors awards, as well as receiving her Seal of Biliteracy.

“It has been a challenging and rewarding journey,” said Holchuk, 18. “My identity as an immigrant allows me to see the world from two different perspectives.”

Holchuk acknowledged that those early days were hard. She “often struggled with my identity, trying hard to fit in and to feel more American.” Now, she feels no shame. Holchuk has found a balance between her American environments at school or while working at Colonial Pharmacy and where she feels most connected to her native country.

“My family and church are what help me stay connected to my Ukrainian roots,” she said. “I often volunteer at my church, helping organize and participating in different events.”

That church is Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Ascension Cathedral, 635 Broad St., and is led by the spiritual guidance of her dad, Father Oleksii. Holchuk credited her dad’s position in the church as greatly influencing her life in more than one way.

“If not for his job, we wouldn’t have come to the U.S.,” she said. “It has given me a lot of opportunities to meet a lot of different people [and has] strengthened my faith.”

Holchuk’s interests lie in studying Communications at Seton Hall. She is undecided on a specific career path, but she enjoys writing, connecting with people, being creative, and traveling.

“I’m looking forward to finding the right career that will fulfill my passions,” she said.

Her interests do, in some way, inform how she views the coverage of the war in Ukraine and the broader repre-



sentation of Ukrainian people and culture. A lot of it is disheartening, but she has a steadfast desire for people to see beyond the rhetoric to the reality.

“In the beginning, there was a lot of news regarding [the war]. But recently, there has not been too much media coverage,” said Holchuk. “Some people ask me if the war is still going on.”

When she does see news, she is often met with negativity toward Ukrainians that is “very political” and “not focused on people, themselves, but more on politics and the president.”

“It just makes me feel very sad for my country,” said Holchuk. “It is being destroyed every day and our culture is being erased. I want more people to see what’s actually happening.”





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# A Cut Above

The clarinet is a versatile instrument, but so is clarinetist Tristan Rivera. The graduating senior had already developed his skills before his four years with the Marching Band and Wind Ensemble. Rivera, 18, dedicated “countless hours of practice and dedication.”

“If you don’t [develop those fundamental skills] when you begin, it’s really hard to break those bad habits,” said Rivera. “There are so many styles you can play with. It’s just a very fun instrument.”

Music is Rivera’s passion, but he is deeply inspired by his mother, Mercedes Rodriguez, and sister Zariah (CHS 2019). Rivera admires his mother for confronting her stage fright and followed in his sister’s footsteps. “She did musicals and played the clarinet when she was little,” he said. “Seeing that growing up really pushed me in that direction to get the most out of what I was doing.”

Rivera’s dream role became a reality when he starred in CHS’ production of “Sweeney Todd” in March. Taking the stage as the Demon Barber of Fleet Street gave him an opportunity to lead. “They had me running rehearsals in the beginning when the directors were absent,” said Rivera. “It felt like a new experience compared to the last four years performing in the Spring Musical.”

Rivera’s high school performances have included Lumière in “Beauty and the Beast”, Billy Flynn in “Chicago”, and Horace Vandergelder in “Hello, Dolly!” His a-ha moment about Sweeney Todd happened during a school trip to see the Broadway production last year.

“I was in awe the whole time. The music was just a masterpiece,” he said. “I can really appreciate good music when I hear it.” The alum of School 11 and WWMS will study Music Education at the University of South Carolina.



He chose the School of Music after his clarinet audition. “It stood out to me compared to the other colleges that I’d seen. I felt that I really belonged there,” said Rivera. “I felt like I could go far and achieve [my goals].”

Rivera is interested in becoming a music educator or a high school band director. He would also like to continue performing when possible, particularly in Broadway pits.

The senior expressed gratitude for Clifton’s music opportunities. He played in the Brass Band, Community Band, and Orchestra. He was secretary of Tri-M Music Honor Society and president of the National Honor Society.

He volunteered at Clifton’s Summer 2024 ISEE program as the band teacher assistant for Mr. Anthony Lanzerotti, Jr. Other influential teachers included Band Director Bryan Stepneski and music teacher Leonid Weismantel. “Having their trust in me whether it was to star in a musical or play solo in concert has meant a lot,” said Rivera.

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## Exploring Life Through Art... then Architecture



**Karen Medrano is the artist of her family.** And that's a title that's stuck with her since childhood.

"I remember when we would go to the doctor, my mom [Raquel Mejia Rojo] would be tired, because she had been working the whole day. I would sit there coloring and drawing," said Medrano, 18. "Other times, I would go to work with my mom and that's what I'd be doing."

"After a while," she continued, "I thought, 'Oh. I guess this is what I'm going to be doing for the rest of my life.'"

Medrano entered our city's school district by attending WWMS. Once she got to CHS, she took four years of Studio Art — from Studio Art I to AP Studio Art. Medrano also took Cartooning & Illustration, Ceramics, and Stage Craft this year.

All of her teachers have pushed her and she's grateful to her teacher Angela Carrozza for pointing things out to her and giving her ideas in her Cartooning & Illustration class.

"Karen is such an amazing student. She is such a creative thinker," said Carrozza. "Her self-confidence is a great trait to have in class."

"She actively engages with the subject matter and demonstrates strong work ethics," Carrozza added. "She has such a desire to learn, grow, and develop a variety of ideas that demonstrate exemplary characteristics of an amazing artist and her true passion for the arts."

Medrano has experienced memorable moments. One that makes her proud is when they were doing a point perspective drawing in Studio Art and her teacher, Shannon



Anderson, asked Medrano if she could put her piece in the art show.

"Usually the only people who get to see my art are my family. My mom and my aunt, mostly," said Medrano. "Apart from that, just me. It was very exciting."

She tries to challenge herself by exploring different mediums. Medrano is learning how to draw people and got the chance to work with charcoal in her sophomore year.

"My brother, Jacob Santos Mejia, was born in my sophomore year of high school," she said. "I think that was the first time that I got to draw a person. I drew my little brother the day after he was born."

Outside of her art, Medrano has volunteered with the Key Club since her sophomore year and works at a commercial laundry service in Paterson. She will attend NJIT in the fall, where she will study Architecture.

She encourages her fellow Mustangs to try all different areas of the Art Department and to not be afraid of reaching out to the teachers. And, you never know — it may be an unrelated class that helps you figure out your passion.

"I was really struggling, trying to decide what to do, and then I ... took AP Spanish class last year," said Medrano. "We did a whole chapter on famous architects. I really fell in love with it and thought, 'I want to do that someday.'"





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# Boys & Girls Club Scholarship Recipients

**Club Kids care about their community** — and the Boys & Girls Club’s Class of 2025 scholarship recipients are no exception.

On April 9, Club members and community leaders gathered to mark the Youth of the Year and Scholarship Awards Night, which honored leadership, service, and achievement at The Club.

Kaylie Trinidad (CHS 2025) received the \$4,000 Carol & Angelo Crudele STEM Scholarship, Anthony Bells (CHS 2025) received the \$1,500 President’s Scholarship, and PCTVS senior Elise Ragsdale received the \$1,000 MaryJo Anzaldi-Foster & Patricia Lavender Scholarship.

The 2025 Youth of the Year recipient was Paramus Catholic senior Gian Uy. Uy does not live in our city, but he is in his 10th year as a Club member and volunteers at Saint Peter’s Haven. He has also worked at The Club since August of 2023.

Swim team captain at Paramus Catholic, Uy uses his experience to teach swim lessons and occasionally lifeguard for The Club. The water and the Clifton Seahawks is where Uy got his own start when he was aged 11.

“The Clifton Seahawks ... welcomed me with open arms,” said Uy. “Starting in the pre-swim team, I learned the basics. [I overcame] belly flops and failed dives with the patience and the support of my coaches.”

Swim meets were his next challenge. Uy recalled feeling genuine fear as he stood behind the blocks.

“However,” he acknowledged, “hearing my team’s supportive cheers gave me the confidence to dive in. Through each race, my confidence grew, and the team became a second family.”

Teaching young swimmers who, like him, might be afraid of a new environment matters to Uy.

“I’m proud to be part of a community that supports everyone who walks through its doors.”

## Kaylie Trinidad

Trinidad cares about helping people of all ages. As a Youth Development Leader at The Club, Trinidad works with second graders by helping them with homework and running knowledge-building activities. Organizing and leading Key Club events has developed her communication skills.




*Angelo and Carol Crudele with Kaylie Trinidad.*

As far as other community involvement, she volunteered at a hospice to help feed, entertain, and care for the elders while running daily games, social hours, and activities.

The Carol & Angelo Crudele STEM Scholarship will follow her to Dartmouth, where she plans to major in Psychology or Biology. The \$4,000 scholarship provides \$1,000 in a student’s first year of school and then in subsequent years if the recipient maintains a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

“The Club has been an incredibly stable support system throughout my life. One that allowed me to become the person that I am today,” said Trinidad, 18. “There’s no single point in my life where I can say that the Boys & Girls Club hasn’t had an impact.”

Trinidad became a member 13 years ago when she entered KinderCare. The Club is where she learned her communication skills and what a supportive network looks like. It is also where she met her best friend, Kaytlin, who she still sees every morning before classes.

“Our friendship has lasted over 12 years,” she said, “and it is a bond that only formed because of The Club.” 





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*Anthony Bells shaking hands with Katrine Hyde. Elise Ragsdale, center, with MaryJo Anzaldi-Foster and Patricia Lavender.*

### Anthony Bells

Even as an introverted child, Anthony Bells' world and how he saw himself fitting in it expanded thanks to his local Boys & Girls Club.

He became a member of our city's BGCC four years ago and is the recipient of the President's Scholarship. The \$1,500 award was open to members in their senior year with a GPA of 3.0 or better. He was co-founder of CHS' Chess Club and a member of the Pre-Med Club. Bells also volunteered at St. Joseph's for over 90 hours.

Bells will attend Rutgers – New Brunswick this fall, majoring in Exercise Science on a pre-med track. And, if there is one thing that he got plenty of at the Boys & Girls Club, it was mental and physical stimulation.

"Boys and Girls Clubs offered me a great deal of activities that I had never been offered before," said Bells, 17. "At the daycare, we would do all sorts of activities, such as making gingerbread houses for Christmas."

Bells recalled working on numerous arts and crafts, and how they bolstered his craftsmanship skills. The kids also played different games, including "Duck, Duck, Goose" and Tag.

"These activities benefitted me in the long-run," he said, "as they helped to improve my social skills, craftsmanship, and motor skills."

Every child, by his assessment, should experience a Boys & Girls Club environment.

"This club has always had my back," he said, "whether it was making new friends or having the time of my life."

### Elise Ragsdale

The Early Childhood Center became a home-away-from-home for many Club Kids. For Elise Ragsdale, it laid the groundwork for her future calling.

"Attending the Boys & Girls Club has taught me real-life experiences and ways to evolve as a person," said Ragsdale, 17. "Never would four-year-old Elise have thought she would touch the many lives that she did once she started volunteering at age 13, but it was an experience that would be unforgettable."

Volunteering with young children at The Club is what inspired Ragsdale to pursue a career as an educator. She will attend Bergen Community College in the fall, majoring in Education and then transferring to a university.

The MaryJo Anzaldi-Foster & Patricia Lavender Scholarship, of which she is the 2025 recipient, is \$1,000 and was open to Club members pursuing a degree in Early Childhood Education. She has volunteered in The Club's Early Childhood Center and as an assistant teacher at the Clifton Little School, 391 Broad St.

Ragsdale is involved at PCTVS with the Future Education Association and Leaders Emerging Among Peers. She described receiving academic assistance at The Club as a big reason why she excelled in the classroom, repeatedly earning Honor Roll.

"The Boys & Girls Club to me was not only a place for me to be free and express my interests," she said, "but a place that felt like home."

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# High Fashion, Higher Dreams

**“I’m worth something.”** These are the words that Ash Romero repeats when asked how they have surprised or impressed themselves while in high school.

Romero, who identifies using they/them pronouns, spoke about their mental health and how it required a tremendous amount of strength to return to school when they were at their lowest.

“I did not think that I’d be able to return to the outside world and be able to function normally,” said Romero, 17. “I thought that my life was worthless, but I’ve proven to myself that I am not and I can do things in this world.”

Fashion design is one of those things. As a child, Romero attended Schools 3 and 5, then WWMS before entering high school. They recalled watching the show, “Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir”, where the main character Marinette is a fashion designer.

Romero’s interest was piqued. Sewing classes and specifically wanting to design hats came next. Romero eventually became interested in doing anything with fashion. When Romero aged out of the kid fashion classes that Clifton Rec offered, CHS provided the perfect opportunity.

Fashion Design I and II have given Romero the opportunity to develop an evolving skillset. They noted that the classes were not only exciting, but “the teacher [Hannah Coward] was absolutely amazing.” In Fashion Design I, it was all about learning the basics of hand and machine sewing.

Fashion Design II, which mostly consisted of seniors, gave students the opportunity to create concept boards and portfolios. The upper level explored the details of clothing, like making a zipper, and students could learn how to make an extravagant dress or shirt.

Creating sketches and concept boards are among Romero’s favorite aspects of the class. They also enjoy making the actual clothes once the vision is fully realized.

“[Creating mood boards and concept boards] help me get inspired to make articles of clothing into reality from what I drew and from what inspired me to make them.”



## In Service of Others

Before taking the masterclasses in fashion, Romero’s earliest inspiration was drawn directly from their mother, Lauren Musson.

Romero described Musson as an inspirational figure who works hard and supports them in “who I am and who I’m turning out to be.”

“She continues to inspire me by ... being herself in a world where [that] can be difficult,” said Romero. “She continues to prove that you can absolutely be yourself ... and there will still be people to love you

no matter what.”

Romero hopes to bring a similar compassion to their future career path. They will matriculate at William Paterson this fall, where they will study Social Services. Romero volunteered previously at Rainbow Montessori School, 22 Varettoni Pl., for two summers.

They knew the teacher path wasn’t for them, but that they “wanted to help people and make a difference in this world.” The specific career plans are open-ended, but they do know that they want to work with children.

That’s not the end of fashion for Romero either. The designer is interested in pursuing fashion as a side-hustle in the future, whether it involves making more doll clothes since that is easier size-wise or making their own clothes when an outfit they want doesn’t exist.

Romero is candid about the ongoing challenges, including their ADHD and anxiety disorder. They have learned “how to cope with them” and have derived inspiration from being able to work with them being present.

“I think it proves that, even if you have a disorder or a mental illness or anything of the such, you can still do something in this world,” said Romero. “Although there’s a lot against you, something like that shouldn’t stop you from pursuing what you want to do and what you love.”

“Also, the fact that I’m also black,” they continued. “There are going to be a lot of people who could be against me, but it’s not going to stop me from doing what I want to do.”





*From creating designs for the Prom Fashion Show to other inspirations, Hannah Coward's Fashion Class is versatile.*



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# Clifton's Teacher of the Year

By Ariana Puzzo



**When he looks around at his fellow teachers,** Michael Rogers is that much more appreciative of his recent recognition as Clifton's Teacher of the Year.

"It's beyond humbling," said Rogers, 43. "I look at my colleagues, and the teachers that I know on the middle and elementary school levels, and I feel undeserving."

Rogers has taught Social Studies for 20 years at CHS and spent roughly 12 of those years as a Cross Country and Track & Field coach. Specific topics that he has taught have ranged from AP classes, U.S. History, Government, European History, World History, and a Senior Seminar.

"I enjoy teaching a variety of things," said Rogers. "I tend to get bored, so I research new topics and subjects and that keeps me fresh. I enjoy that."

## Reinventing and Reimagining

Rogers' interest in the past and how it informs the present began in another man's classroom. It was his own history teacher and track coach, Mr. Saganiec at Garfield High, who got him started on his current career path.

"I can't remember a particular lesson [that stood out], but I do remember him having a passion for the subject. There was a discipline involved there," said Rogers. "That

passion is what all of us feel with great teachers. ... I think that he was critical in awakening me to this vocation."

Rogers admitted with a laugh that he was the type of student that "I wouldn't like", but it might be what led him toward his career. He recalled being a successful student and an athletic one, but he didn't have an appreciation for learning.

He strives to show his students today that good grades don't necessarily "tell the full story."

"I didn't know that when I was 16 or 17 years old. I thought that I knew everything because my grades were there," said Rogers. "As you go on in life, the paradox is that you actually knew a lot less and that you have a lot more to learn. It really drives the way that I do things."

Teaching his students the importance of humility and the responsibility of "bringing gifts to others and not just keeping them for yourself" is something that remains steadfast. But he also believes that he turns into a different type of teacher each year.

One thing that Rogers prides himself on is not teaching the same lesson, even if his class is focusing on the same document of material. A student taking his class five years ago would have different notes than one from 15 years ago.

“Most of my lessons start with personal experiences and big questions that all humans have asked themselves, regardless of where they’re from,” said Rogers. “I like to make history more philosophical. To be a good historian, you have to have a big imagination and be very creative. It’s not just a list of battles and events.”

### More Relational, Less Transactional

Rogers expressed gratitude for his mentors and colleagues. One mentor is Clifton legend John Pontes, whom he credited as helping him as a coach, because “a coach and educator to me is one and the same.” Rogers appreciates a bond that he’s formed with colleagues John O’Reilly, Christopher Henry, and Michael O’Connor.

And there’s also his family. Rogers is married to CHS Vice Principal Victoria Rogers and his sister Kathryn Morrison teaches third grade at School 14.

What Rogers believes is missing from society nowadays is “good storytelling.” To those who are interested in becoming teachers, he reminds them that “hope is discipline.”

“I think sometimes, when you look at the current state of affairs, it’s easy to give up. But hope and courage kind of go together,” said Rogers. “I think it’s important for teachers going into the profession to realize that we are



*Michael Rogers with wife Victoria and kids Jackson and Amelia.*

not just here to give people skills to make a living but to help individuals find a good life. Whatever that is for them.”

“Education has become too transactional. It’s important to realize that proper education is relational. Actually, that’s all of life,” he added. “When we live a relational life, we’re happier ... and it’s incredible how much comes back to you.”

# CLIFTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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- Select Pre-Register a Student
- Select 2025-2026 for the Pre-Registration School Year





# Clifton's Paraprofessional of the Year

**Maria Peña is grateful every day** that she became a paraprofessional.

"It's the best thing that has ever happened to me, because I love my job," said Peña, 66. "I love being in the classroom with students, teaching and helping. That's the best."

Peña is Clifton's Paraprofessional of the Year and works out of School 12. The Garfield resident immigrated from the Dominican Republic in 1987. She began working for Clifton's school district in 2013 when she was a paraprofessional for several months at School 14.

After the students that she worked one-on-one with graduated, she was sent in September to School 12 on Clifton Ave. Peña went where she



*From left, Edwina Suarez, Maria Peña, Rosmunda Kenning, Karenn Vega.*

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was needed in the school and she supported special education students who needed one-on-one assistance.

Peña has worked as a paraprofessional in the third grade since around 2016. She now assists bilingual students in Bilingual Teacher Mary Callirgos' classroom. There are 17 total students in the classroom and four of those students require Peña's support.

"Some students start school here in kindergarten so they understand English," said Peña. "But in third grade, there are a few students who have come from Spanish countries and don't know a single word in English. I translate and I help them when they take a test."

Peña started working in schools in 2004. She worked in Passaic and then at North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency (then Passaic County Elks Cerebral Palsy Treatment Center) on Main Ave. for six years.

Her recent recognition came as a surprise to her, but Peña expressed gratitude for all of the administrative support, including that of Principal Rosmunda Kenning and School Counselor Angel Castro. She's also grateful for the youngest members of School 12's community.

"I love the students," said Peña. "I love it when they succeed."

58 June 2025 • Cliftonmagazine.com

# 30 Years in Clifton

**Retiring after 30 years of teaching** has given Ann Marie Sheridan the opportunity to reflect not only on her legacy as an educator, but the legacy of educators everywhere.

It starts by realizing the lasting influence that a teacher can have on a student's life.

"Sometimes I don't think the kids even realize it until later," said Sheridan, 65, pictured at right with one of her classes. "More importantly, I think that society needs to pay [more respect to] educators. It is so important to have good teachers."

Sheridan decided to make a career change in 1995 after working for 13 years in New York City. She loved her job in the corporate world, but it wasn't a conducive schedule with commuting.

"I thought about what would be a rewarding career that is also conducive to raising a family," said Sheridan. "I was drawn toward teaching."

The Rutherford native's major when she attended Montclair State was English. She later went back to school at night for her teaching certification from William Paterson. She acknowledged how, at the time, you didn't need to be certified and could become a probationary teacher.

"But I started thinking of my own children," she said. "I wouldn't want someone to go into their classroom as a trial and error. ... It was important to get the proper training before getting into the classroom."

Over the past three decades, Sheridan has also earned two master's degrees. One from New Jersey City University as a Certified Reading Specialist and another in Teaching English in a Secondary School from a satellite program through The College of New Jersey.

Sheridan is most proud to call Woodrow Wilson Middle School her home throughout her teaching career.

"I will miss the kids. The kids are funny and make me laugh every single day," said Sheridan, fondly. "I will also miss my circle of friends here, because we are like a family. I have worked with most of them for over 20 years, and we have plans to do lunches or get-togethers."



## Creating a Spark

Transitioning from advertising to teaching meant Sheridan came equipped with certain tools. That corporate background enabled her to create visions and goals for what she wanted her students to achieve each year.

Having a supportive first principal in Bill Hahn also helped her. Sheridan recalled coming up with new ideas and asking him if she could incorporate them into her classroom.

"He gave me that creative license and let me run with it as long as it was academically sound," said Sheridan. "He would even find money in the budget so that I could take a new approach to a unit. It meant a lot knowing I had that kind of support."

Staying in our city also came down to the creative colleagues that Sheridan has known through the years. She noted that money tends to be the reason why people transfer out of districts, but these "top notch" individuals kept her enthusiastic about going into work each day.

"Sometimes it's the intangibles that make something worth it," she said. "It's challenging yet rewarding work, and sometimes that's more important than money."

Sheridan spent 25 years as an 8th Grade English Language Arts teacher. She taught three general classes and one accelerated program. She additionally taught Social Studies for 15 years, alongside English Language



Arts. Her first five years were spent in the sixth grade. In October 2023, the New Jersey Department of Education recognized her as the Exemplary Educator of the Year.

But choosing a single memorable career moment is impossible.

“It means a great deal when you find a way to reach out to the kid that is struggling, or doesn’t want or like to read, to put a spark in them and see them turn that corner,” she said. “All of a sudden, school becomes a priority to them.”

“They’re raising their hand and want to do better,” Sheridan continued. “To be able to instill a desire to learn is really, really important.”

Sheridan’s students have gone on to enter many fields. Among them are engineering, medicine, and becoming CEOs of companies. Many of them keep in touch with her. Others who are on the brink of graduation send her emails about the college they’ll attend or the career path that they have chosen for themselves.

“It means so much that they take the time to reach back and oftentimes say, ‘Thank you,’” said Sheridan. “They’re grateful for something that I taught them. Not always a Language Arts skill, but giving them confidence and helping them step outside of their comfort zone.”

“If they think that I played a role in their success, it’s so flattering,” she added. “It brings tears to your eyes. It really does.”

## The Root of Humanity

The teaching landscape has changed, but so has Clifton.

Sheridan reminisced on the early days of lesson planning. Everything, from lesson plans to tests, was generated by the teacher.

“There was no internet,” emphasized Sheridan. “Whereas today, I could google a lesson on the Harlem Renaissance and 75 different lesson plans would come up.”

“It was so important to go that extra mile,” she added. “I never worked harder than in my first five years as a teacher.” Getting to teach a changing demographic and “such a diverse group of students” allowed for students to teach Sheridan about their own backgrounds.



*The Sheridan family in May 2024 at Rutgers Law School’s graduation. From left, Ann Marie, Christine, Brielle, husband Michael, and son-in-law Patrick Norton.*

“[Clifton is] a microcosm of the world,” she said. “There are kids from all different backgrounds and cultures, but they come into the classroom and there’s true unity. It gives you hope for the future.”

For the rising sixth graders, she knows not everything that they teach in middle school will be relevant to their lives. But core tenets like being accountable and meeting deadlines are “life skills that will make a difference.”

Eighth graders preparing for high school require a different reality check. Sheridan stressed that developing strong work habits and organizational skills now is essential.

“I always say to [them] that the next four years are so vital for your future,” said Sheridan. “What you do will either open up doors of opportunity for you or close them in your face. . . . School is a ticket to a better life, and education levels the playing field for all kids.”

It is unfortunate that fewer people major in Education in college “like they used to.” Sheridan hopes there is more encouragement so that people realize that they can make a positive difference in a child’s life at every age level.

“[These kids are] the voters and policy makers of the future,” said Sheridan. “Building strong characters and a sense of community for the greater good is what we teach in school. It’s not just about where to put a comma and who Edgar Allan Poe is,” she continued. “It’s about compassion and humanity for others.”



# HELLO Summer



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**Tucked in the foothills of the Pyrenees mountains,** Linda McGinnis walks amongst the pilgrims who are in search of a miracle. Perhaps their last chance at experiencing one.

It's why more than three million pilgrims make the journey to Lourdes, France each year. Some in search of a cure for their ailment while others seek an opportunity to pray and reflect. There's a not-so-secret third reason for McGinnis' annual visits.

She wants to help others. "This will be my third year going, but my second time going as a nurse," said McGinnis, 71. "My first year, I went as a layperson to see what [the pilgrimage was] about."

It wasn't on purpose.

McGinnis, who was brought up Catholic, was familiar with the story behind Our Lady of Lourdes. Of how the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette Soubirous, (turn page to see her photo) aged 14, in a cave above the banks of the Gave River near Lourdes.

Described as a virtuous girl, Saint Bernadette was in poor health and suffered from asthma from an early age. On Feb. 11, 1858, Saint Bernadette is said to have heard a noise similar to a gust of wind. She looked toward the grotto, which is where she saw what appeared to be a young girl, age 16 or 17. The girl asked Saint Bernadette to say her rosary.

Saint Bernadette, who was canonized in 1933, witnessed 18 total appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although her earliest reported sightings drew skepticism, her daily visions of "the Lady" drew tremendous crowds and still do in the present day.

Which is partly how McGinnis found herself hopping on a train to explore Lourdes during one of her annual birthday trips to Paris.

"When I was there, I was so moved by the experience that I googled on my way home how to volunteer as a nurse," said McGinnis. "I got connected with a woman who is the head nurse of the UK Catholic Association ... and now I'm hoping to spark some interest."

# Healing Through Helping Hands

*By Ariana Puzzo*



*Linda McGinnis, second from right, is an RN who volunteers at Lourdes, France.*

McGinnis' upcoming pilgrimage with the organization is Aug. 22-29. The pilgrimage season runs from Easter until the end of October. Although McGinnis noted that many individuals travel with churches, there are different options. To join or donate, visit: [catholicassociation.co.uk](http://catholicassociation.co.uk).

The UK Catholic Association generally travels with a few hundred people. McGinnis said that particular group is who she and her cohort of healthcare workers tend to when needed.



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“They range from babies to adults to geriatrics, because the idea is to bathe or to touch the water at the grotto where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared,” said McGinnis of the pilgrims. “People come to be healed. Whatever medical assistance or support they need — that’s what we’re there for.”

### Miracles in the Making

Much in life goes unexplained, but faith is examined when the “unexplained” occurs in Lourdes.

Since the apparitions, there are more than 7,000 cases of unexplained cures in Lourdes. Since 2018, there are 70 unexplained cures recognized as miraculous by the Catholic Church. Sister Bernadette Moriau from Beauvais, France is the latest example — a nun with debilitating back pain for decades.

Sister Bernadette, days after returning from Lourdes in July of 2008, stood up and removed her brace. She straightened a gnarled foot — that was twisted sideways for years — and began to walk normally. Her unexplained cure was declared a miracle by the Church on Feb. 11, 2018 — 160 years to the day since the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette.

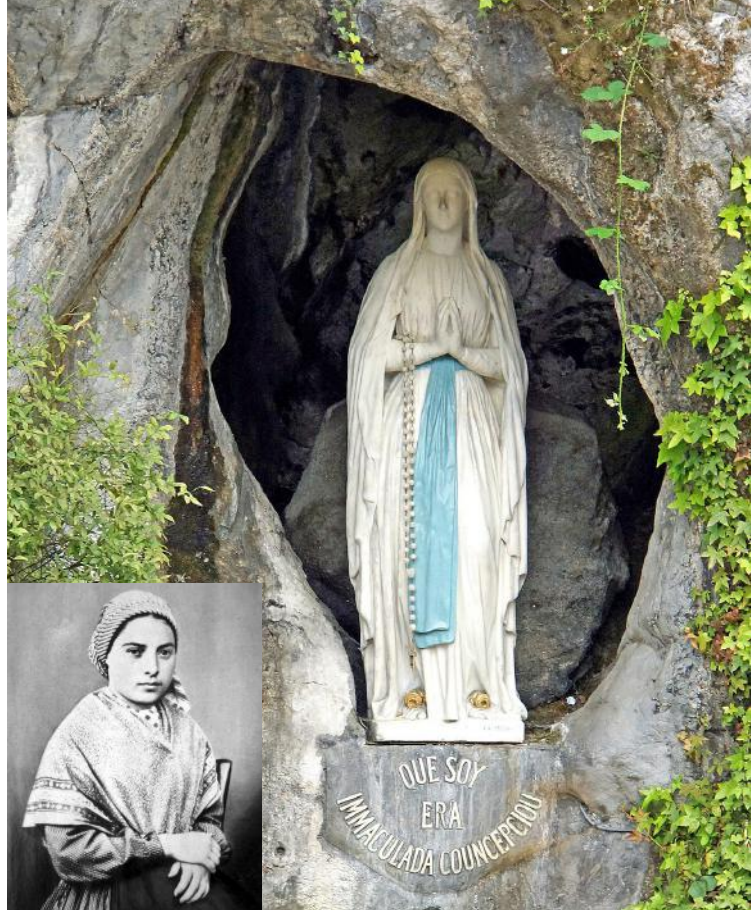
McGinnis has her own journey to get to Lourdes. First she flies into London and meets with her group to travel from Stansted directly into Lourdes. There are three assignments for healthcare workers upon arrival: treating pilgrims at the hotel, in a hospital-like setting, or in an emergency clinic.

Given her own ICU nursing background, McGinnis is always assigned to the hospital. But she is ultimately helping pilgrims in whatever way is needed. That can be in terms of helping someone with their medication or changing a colostomy bag. Other conditions range from having diabetic reactions and suffering from seizures to children with cerebral palsy or adults with cancer.

There are three shifts like in any other hospital: 7 am to 3 pm, 3-11 pm, and 11 pm to 7 am. The volunteer days can look like waking up, going to Mass and eating breakfast, volunteering, then eating dinner or perhaps attending an event.

“We get two days off in the week and, on those days, we can go into town,” said McGinnis. “There are tours and a lot to do, but ... there are a lot of occurrences going on at grotto and [many] pilgrims, so you have to go there in case something needs to be done.”

McGinnis, a lifelong resident of our city, graduated from



Paul VI in 1972. She was a Licensed Practical Nurse for 10 years before attending Passaic Community College in Paterson, where she became a Registered Nurse.

McGinnis went on to earn her degree in Nursing from Jersey City University in 1994 and her master’s in Nursing Administration from New York University in 1998. Her work and teaching résumé is extensive.

Her most recent positions are as a part-time Administrative Nursing Supervisor since 2009 at Saint Joseph’s Regional Medical Center and as an adjunct assistant professor at Jersey City University and Passaic County Community College.

One of the best aspects of accompanying the pilgrims to Lourdes is all the people that she meets from different walks of life. She recalled speaking to one volunteer, who helps lift the pilgrims from their beds or pushes the wheelchairs, who’s an opera singer based in London.

“Another gentleman is a barrister — a judge in London — when he is not doing this,” she said. “I’ve met so many interesting people. It’s so unbelievable. They come from all walks of life and are so dedicated to service.”

It hasn’t ended there. McGinnis saw a familiar face recently while watching television.

“I was looking at the conclave for the new Pope and suddenly said, ‘Oh, my gosh. I had dinner with that one cardinal in Lourdes,’” she laughed.





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### Shining A Light

Going to Church is not unusual for McGinnis. The nursing supervisor typically works on weekends and attends Mass at St. Joseph's Hospital every Saturday at 5 pm. She also occasionally attends St. Philip the Apostle Parish, 797 Valley Rd., which is also where she went to grammar school.

McGinnis is transparent about the role that religion has played in her life. "I haven't been that religious, so [the pilgrimages are] bringing me closer, I believe, to whatever higher power there is," she said. "I say, God."

"As I get older, I think more about the afterlife and my spirituality. I'm more of a spiritual person," McGinnis



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added. "I am not going to lie and say I'm a devout, practicing Catholic, but something occurred that made it so I will [volunteer at these pilgrimages] for the rest of my life, as long as I am physically able to do it."

Traveling from the U.S. requires a few extra steps when applying online to become a healthcare worker or helper. It requires FBI clearance, including fingerprinting, that can be done through an additional application online at [fr.usembassy.gov](http://fr.usembassy.gov).

McGinnis emphasized how rewarding the experience is and how she is always encouraging the people in her own life to consider getting involved. A lot of that ties into the work, itself, and how important nursing is in her own life.

Her daughter, Caitlin (CHS 2008), just graduated with a nursing degree from Berkeley College.

"I'm very proud of her," said McGinnis. "She's working [in] homecare taking care of children. She is the light of my life."

And now it's time to help shine that line on others' lives. "I'm looking forward to being a [form of] support wherever I'm needed," said McGinnis. "It's an extremely gratifying experience and very selfless. It's a good feeling when you give to others."



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CLIFTON



2025

# MURDER AT THE BANQUET

By Robert LaVohn

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Producers: Prashant Arora  
Mark Peterson

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(Dietary restrictions must be made at the time of reservation. Menu on website)

[www.theaterleagueofclifton.com](http://www.theaterleagueofclifton.com)

With permission by Pioneer Drama Service





Clifton School 5 participated in Project ACES (All Children Exercise Simultaneously), a global event on May 2 to promote lifelong fitness. Kids, staff and families gathered on the Valley Rd. playground for fun and fitness. The day also concluded Kids Heart Challenge in which 150 students and staff raised \$13,804.82 for research, education, and to help children with heart conditions. Third-grade student Kyra Rios was once again the school's top fundraiser, raising \$5,101.96. The community also enjoyed seeing teacher Katie Harris and vice-principal Melissa Fieldhouse get slimed, volunteering to be slimed if students met their goal. They did, by far, reported Health and Fitness teacher John Silva..

**Historic Botany's Summer Concert Series** begins June 6 with Swingman and the Misfit Mutts performing swing rock in Sullivan Square, 270 Parker Ave. Other shows are The Retrocasters (June 13), The Jersey Swamp Cats (June 20), and The Frostkings (June 27). July shows are 11, 18, and 25, and Aug. 1. Music begins at 6:30 and are subject to weather. Questions? Call Joe Waninger at 856-900-2200. Bring chairs and enjoy an evening of music under the stars.

**Clifton Community Band's 3rd outdoor concert** on June 7 starts at 4 pm on the great lawn behind City Hall. This event is free. Bring your blankets or lawn chairs. The event is sponsored by Clifton Rec and the Mustang Band Alumni Association.

**The Friends of the Clifton Public Library** present Maestro Robert W. Butts on June 12 from 1-3 pm at the Main Memorial Branch, 292 Piaget Ave. Butts — who is an educator, conductor, and composer — will share a musical presentation on the life and music of Giacomo Puccini. There will be time for Q&A. Free admission. Visit [cliftonpl.org/FRIENDS-of-the-library](http://cliftonpl.org/FRIENDS-of-the-library) or call 973-772-5500.



**Up-Cycling Adventures with Clifton Rec & Recycling** will get kids thinking and creating about the planet. Drop in the Recycling Center behind City Hall at 10 am on June 28 with your family to create a one-of-a-kind up-cycled art creation. Other dates are July 19, Aug. 9, and Sept. 6. Program runs 10 am to noon and is free. No registration is required. Visit [cliftonrec.com](http://cliftonrec.com) or call 973-470-5956.

**Celebrate the 127th Independence of The Philippines** on June 14 at 11am at the flag pole in front of city hall.

**The Dutch Hill Residents Association's Flea Market** is June 7 from 9 am to 4 pm in Weasel Brook Park, along Paulison Ave. Vendors are assigned an 18-ft space. No pre-registration. Spaces cost \$40 each and are collected in cash at the flea market. Set up begins at 6:30 am.



On May 15, Dunkin' on Valley Rd. and Fenner Ave. celebrated its renovation by having a community day. Dunkin' franchisee Mohamed Ahmed provided a \$3,000 donation to St. Peter's Haven, helping to spread joy and feed those in need.





*This team of CHS ROTC cadets completed Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training at the Public Safety Academy in Wayne. For four Saturdays in April, they learned essential emergency preparedness and response skills. Pictured in rear, from left, Amilcar Raymundo, Cesar Neyra, Kali Mendez, Kevin Lima, Emanuel Negrete. Front from left, Dayana Pastor, Ashley Cuachoca, Yumi Sosa, Naysha Moya, Brian Berthelsen.*



**Clifton Rec's Garage Sale & Scavenger Hunt** is June 6-8, from 9 am to 6 pm, with some 80 sales in every neighborhood. Proceeds help fund parades on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. A categorized list of participating homes are available at [cliftonrec.com](http://cliftonrec.com). Another way to take part is to join the 2025 Photo Scavenger Hunt on June 7. Registered participants will stop at garage sales throughout the city to snap photos of specific items. Prizes will be awarded to the winning teams. No purchase necessary — but shopping is encouraged! To register, call Clifton Rec at 973-470-5956. Both events made possible by the sponsorship of Gild Realty.

**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.



## **Passaic County Board of County Commissioners** **Division of Home Energy & Weatherization**

**Lead-Based Paint is the most common cause of LEAD POISONING. We can Help!**

**If you live in a home built before 1978, you may qualify for a FREE Home Inspection and FREE Lead Remediation**



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**Lead-Safe Services include:** Repairing, Repainting or Replacing Windows, Doors, Walls, Ceilings and other lead-containing surfaces.

Applicants must be residents of Passaic County, meet income guidelines, and live in a 1 - 4 unit property built before 1978. You may qualify whether you own or rent.

<u>Paterson Office</u>	<u>Totowa Office</u>	<u>Passaic Office</u>
Center City Mall—U Level 301 Main Street Paterson, NJ 07505	Totowa Business Center 930 Riverview Drive, Suite 250 Totowa, NJ 07512	Passaic City Hall 330 Passaic Street Passaic, NJ 07055
Phone: 973-569-4715	Email: <a href="mailto:PamelaC@passaiccountynj.org">PamelaC@passaiccountynj.org</a>	Fax: 973-812-3160
Walk-In Hours: 9:00 am - 3:30 pm Monday -Thursday * Friday: Drop-Offs Only <a href="http://www.passaiccountynj.org">www.passaiccountynj.org</a>		







**True Colors Independent Indoor Color Guard** is recruiting for its 2026 competition season. Practices begin Monday nights in September from 6-8 pm at School 3, at 365 Washington Ave.

The schedule changes in November to Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights. The competing performance team is open to students ages 12 through 22 in and around the Passaic, Bergen, and Essex County areas. No experience necessary. No tryouts or auditions.

Founded in 2005, True Colors provides kids a chance to grow, learn, and express themselves through the captivating art of Indoor Color Guard. The group trains in all aspects of the activity — flag, rifle, saber, and dance. Just bring your determination and your desire to be the best. Competitions are held Saturdays, beginning in February and finishing with a Chapter Championship at the end of April, throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The TIA Atlantic Coast Championships are held the first weekend of May at the Convention Center in Wildwood. Questions? Visit [truecolorswg.org](http://truecolorswg.org) or contact Tony Pagnozzi at 973-941-3797 or by email: [acp0709@optimum.net](mailto:acp0709@optimum.net).

**We Knew That!** Clifton Public Schools, for the seventh consecutive year, was named among the Best Communities for Music Education from the NAMM Foundation. The national designation demonstrates outstanding achievement for providing music access and education. Over 1,000 public, private, charter, and parochial districts were recognized for exceptional music programs.

**207 Mustang multi-lingual students** received the New Jersey Seal of Bilit-eracy, celebrating their demonstrated proficiency in English and one or more additional languages. Recipients spoke English and at least Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Ukrainian, Albanian, Gujarati, Hungarian, Macedonian, French, Russian or Polish. Advanced-level proficiency in all four domains—reading, writing, listening and speaking—was achieved by 49 students. Seven more earned recognition as trilingual communicators.

**Clifton PRAISE's CML/CJAL Bam-bino Buddy Ball 2025 Spring Baseball** season continues June 8 and 14. Home games are at Albion Field 1, corner of Maplewood Ave. and Warren St. Questions about joining or volunteering? Email [cliftonpraise@gmail.com](mailto:cliftonpraise@gmail.com).

*The matriarch of motorcycle riders Gloria Struck is turning 100 on July 7. Struck was born on Lexington Ave. and grew up around two-wheeled machines in the legendary Tramontin family. On two wheels since 16, she would trek annually to Daytona, Sturgis, riding into her 90's on her beloved Harley. She counts over 700,000 miles of travel through the 48 contiguous U.S. states and Europe when Clifton Magazine profiled her (with daughter Lori and granddaughter Kathy) in April of 2018. She was inducted into the Sturgis Hall of Fame in 2011, the AMA Hall of Fame in 2016, and was honored with the Sturgis Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017. Celebrate the biker icon and send a birthday card to: Gloria Struck, PO Box 355, Clifton, NJ 07015.*







*Rickey Di Maria and Joseph Siano of JK Realty (with Friends President Joyce Frommer) became a 2025 Gold Sponsor of Friends of the Clifton Public Library with their donation of \$500. Tess Lazo-Iwachow is an employee of the library and a graphic artist who donated her creativity and time to create a new logo to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Friends. Businesses and individuals can join Friends and help bring extra programming to the public. Questions? Email: [membershipfriendsofcpl@gmail.com](mailto:membershipfriendsofcpl@gmail.com).*

**The Passaic County Fair** celebrates the geographic and cultural diversity of our 16 communities with food, displays, rides, livestock, green gardens and more. Presented on Garret Mountain Reservation, the fair opens Aug. 14 and runs through the weekend. Free admission, \$5 parking fee and pay to play on rides, food and refreshment.

**Passaic County MOVE** offers low-cost, on-demand rides to Clifton residents Monday to Friday, 8 am to 5 pm. Certain guidelines apply so find out more. Download the app (in the Google Play and App Store) and set up an account. Rides are free through June 20 and \$1.80 thereafter. Visit: [city.ridewithvia.com/passaic-county](http://city.ridewithvia.com/passaic-county).



# WEEKLY SPECIALS

---

## MONDAY

**MARGARITA & TOSTADA**

\$8 Patron Silver Tequila Margarita  
\$5 Tostada

## TUESDAY

**BEER & BURGER**

\$6 16oz Draft Beers  
\$15 Classic Cheeseburger

## WEDNESDAY

**BOURBON & WINGS**

\$10 Bulleit Old Fashioned  
\$2 Off Featured Whiskey  
\$4 Wings 4 wings per order

## THURSDAY

**MARTINI & SIDE OF FRIES**

\$15 Grey Goose or Tanqueray 10

## FRIDAY

**WINE & CHEESE**

\$15 Off Bottle of Dos Zetas Wine  
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\$8 Mac & Cheese

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**Scout's Honor: the weather will be great.** The Clifton Street Fair on Sept. 21 will offer food, friends and fun along Van Houten Ave., 11 am to 5 pm. For over 20 years, community support has allowed street fair proceeds to go toward a music scholarship for a CHS senior and other Athenia Business Association events. Want to become a vendor or sponsor? Go to [atheniabusiness.com](http://atheniabusiness.com). Questions? Call Laurie at 973-202-8578 or Chris at 201-410-1686.

**Same weather promised for July 6:** America's Independence Celebration is July 6 at Clifton Stadium. Food trucks open at noon and the carnival kicks off at 3 pm with games, rides, and more. Fireworks ticket holders can enter the stadium at 6:30 pm for pre-show entertainment. Pre-sale tickets are available at City Hall for \$3 or \$5 at the door. Call 973-470-5854 and... just in case... rain date is July 7.

**Clifton Behind the Scenes with Echo Unity Series** invites all to learn about how Clifton's government functions and more about services offered. Programs are in English and Spanish, at 5:30-7 pm and 7-8:30 pm, respectively on June 12. The free series is hosted by Councilwoman Rosemary Pino and includes tours of City Hall, city's grounds, and landmarks. Learn about the roles of city departments. Visit @rosiepino04 on Instagram to RSVP.

**Volunteers of Clifton's Arts & Culture** are invited to a complimentary reception on June 14 at 3:30 pm at the Clifton Arts Center, 900 Clifton Ave. No reservations required. Enjoy light refreshments and explore the art exhibit and stroll the grounds to experience the Avenue of Flags.

**Clifton Early Learner Academy's Family Fun Day** is June 14 at CELA, 290 Brighton Rd., at 10 am. Thanks to support from Clifton Public Schools and the Clifton Education Foundation, features such as Touch A Truck, DJ Joe Canova and more are free. Register at [shorturl.at/MAq4c](http://shorturl.at/MAq4c). To vend, email [mpapamarkos@cliftonschoools.net](mailto:mpapamarkos@cliftonschoools.net).

**CHS Class of 1970's 55th reunion** is Oct. 11 at the Best Western Executive Plus Inn, Fairfield. Find out more: email [clifton1970reunion@gmail.com](mailto:clifton1970reunion@gmail.com).

**CHS Class of 1975's 50th reunion** is Nov. 15 at the Glen Ridge Country Club. For details join Facebook group "CHS Class of 1975" or email [CHS1975cliftonNJ@gmail.com](mailto:CHS1975cliftonNJ@gmail.com).

**CHS Class of 1985's 40th reunion** is June 21 at the Grand Saloon, 940 Van Houten Ave., at 7 pm. Just walk in!

**CHS Class of 2005's 20th reunion** is June 7 at Woodford Hall, Little Falls, at 7 pm. Tickets (\$130) on sale through Cheddar Up, or write [Paulboyko@gmail.com](mailto:Paulboyko@gmail.com).

**Johnny George likes to plan.** The CHS '76 Mustangs Bicentennial class will host its 50th reunion in June of 2026. Email Big John at [georgesservice@gmail.com](mailto:georgesservice@gmail.com).

**Creatures of Summer: Sea Life, Insects and Birds,** is a Clifton Arts Center workshop with Tonia Franzese using Crayola clay on July 17 and 18, 9-11 am. For students ages 6-9, cost is \$60, or \$63 for non-residents. To register, call the CAC at 973-472-5499 or pay online at [allpaid.com](http://allpaid.com).



# MUSTANG

SPORTS

By Tom Szieber



**The spring was a tough one for Clifton sports** across the board, but the Mustangs' track teams still managed to achieve quite a bit.

Wander Dilone continued his outstanding senior year, finishing second in the 100m in the North I, Group IV sectional meet at Livingston on May 16 and 17. His time of 11.30 seconds was behind only Livingston sophomore Abeel Paul's 10.99. He was one of three Clifton boys who nearly won a title in his respective event.

Junior Volodymyr Kozliuk was another, recording a 6-2 in the high jump, behind Memorial senior Joshua Sanchez's 6-4. Mustangs senior Aaron Hatcher gave his team two top ten jumpers in that event, placing seventh and jumping 6-0.

Senior Nathaniel Phillip finished second in triple jump (behind Passaic County Tech junior Ethan Justin) and third in the long jump. Among Clifton's other top performances were senior Lamarr Olive's tenth-place

finish in the 1600m and junior Aiden Romero's sixth-place finish in the discus.

Junior Mikaella Francisco had the most decorated day at track sectionals, racking up a tenth-place finish in the 200m, sixth in the long jump and fourth in the triple jump. Senior Mia DeVita was the other Clifton athlete to crack the top five with a fifth-place finish in the 400m.

Junior Alexis Smith finished tenth in the 1600m and 3200m, while sophomore Melissa Garth took eighth in the 400m hurdles. Sophomore Jaide Diaz took eighth in the pole vault, and freshman Mallory Nicol tied for ninth.

Clifton's 4x400m relay team, led by DeVita, finished seventh. Clifton's boys and girls finished 4-2 in dual meets this season. The boys finished in second place in the Big North Liberty Division, while the girls finished third. The Group IV meet took place the weekend of May 30th and 31st at Franklin High School.

## Flag Football salvages season after slow start

Clifton flag football had an unusual campaign but eked out a .500 record (4-4-1) despite an extremely sluggish start. The young Mustangs had difficulty scoring at times, with all four of their losses coming in shutouts. They showed that they could put up points in bunches, however, scoring 21+ in three of their four wins. They could easily have finished with a winning record, as three of their four losses (to Paterson Kennedy, Paterson Eastside and Passaic County Tech) came by scores of 7-0.

Clifton averaged 9.1 points per game and allowed 6.6.

Freshman Abby Rascher, pictured, emerged as a rising star at wide receiver and linebacker and figures to be a major contributor next season.

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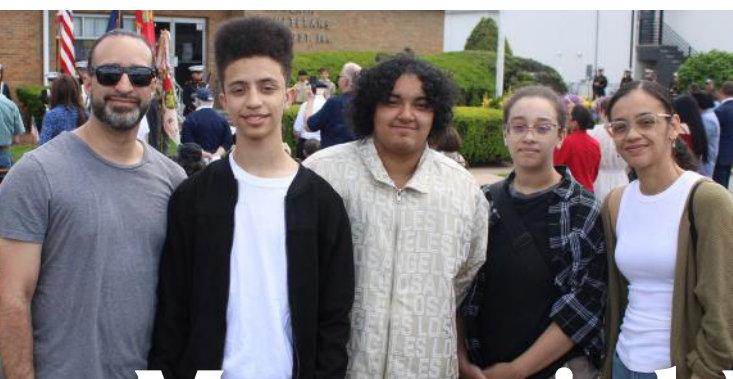


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Founder and Managing Partner,  
CHS Class of 2005  
@azizlawllc



**Thomas R. Szieber, Jr., Esq.,**  
Partner, Trusts & Estates,  
CHS Class of 2005  
@szieber\_wills\_trusts\_estates





# Memorial Day in Clifton



From VFW Post 7165 on Valley Rd. to Chelsea Park and Downtown Clifton, then to Athenia Veteran's Post, and along the Avenue of Flags, where nearly 3,000 flags flew, Clifton remembered and honored The Fallen on May 26. At solemn memorial services at cemeteries, as well as a parade, residents remembered over 300 Cliftonites who died while in service to our nation, from WWI to the Gulf War. Here are photos from the various events of the day.





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# We Remembered on Monday, May 26, 2025





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# We Remembered on Monday, May 26, 2025







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



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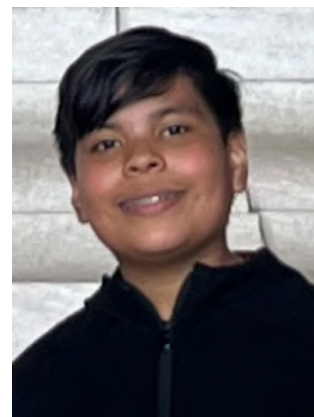
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## Birthdays & Celebrations - June 2025



**Bob & Alice DeLiberto** hit 38 years on June 27. **Jim Smith** celebrates on June 2. **Bob & Carol Van Der Linda's** 64th anniversary is June 10. **Daniel Sotamba** turns 12 on June 30. **Emma, Olivia & Victoria Green,** turn 19 on June 24.



**Jace Park** turns 1 on June 5! **Michael** and **Marisol McIninch** will celebrate their 35th anniversary on June 23. **Selene Mae Ortega** was born May 15 to **Christopher Ortega** and **Monica Mercado**, just three days before her dad's birthday!

Vinny Dalbo .....	6/1	Robert Ciallella .....	6/9	Jennifer Liddle .....	6/15
Holly Kocsis .....	6/1	Ava Nicole Genardi .....	6/9	Andrew Bandurski .....	6/16
Timmy Spears .....	6/1	Jaime Zapata-Rosas .....	6/9	Danielle Dvorak .....	6/16
Tatianna Ayoub .....	6/2	Larry Grasso .....	6/10	Derek Dvorak .....	6/16
Jonathan Borrajo .....	6/2	Javier Pachas-Nemoto .....	6/10	Stephanie Dvorak .....	6/16
Denise Magaster .....	6/2	Joey Randazzo .....	6/10	Jane Justin .....	6/16
John Traier .....	6/2	Nicole Carreno .....	6/11	Kristina Marchesani .....	6/16
Karl Aponte .....	6/3	Margaret Nysk .....	6/11	Joseph Peterson .....	6/16
Thomas Lesch .....	6/4	Adam Soder .....	6/11	Raymond Kuruc .....	6/18
Michael Musto .....	6/4	Monica Baquerizo .....	6/13	Rafelina Reyes .....	6/18
Emma Nysk .....	6/5	Cindy Brevic Goldstein .....	6/13	Tabitha Sosa .....	6/18
Brian Coleman .....	6/6	Anna Jurgowski .....	6/13	Jim Schubert Sr. ....	6/18
Rob Cone .....	6/6	Christopher Stetz .....	6/13	Aileen Haight .....	6/20
Samantha Malenchak .....	6/6	Christopher Zaccione .....	6/13	Alexander Conklin .....	6/22
Koreana Sabo .....	6/8	Alexandra Scerbak .....	6/14	Joseph Hrina .....	6/23





**Jill (Leonard)** and **Rich Meade** celebrate their first wedding anniversary on June 28. Jill is CHS '07 and Rich is '03.



**MaryAnn** and **Frank Duke**, both lifelong residents of Clifton, will be celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on June 26.

Nella Baquerizo .....	6/24	Marco Greco .....	6/28
Jack DeVries .....	6/24	Kristen Murcko .....	6/28
Mike Skurski .....	6/24	Mason Immersi.....	6/29
Brittany Martorella .....	6/25	Monica Szewczyk .....	6/29
Connie Musleh.....	6/26	Robert Conklin .....	6/30
Daniel Marriello.....	6/27	Christopher Lucas.....	6/30
Susan McDonald.....	6/27		
Walter Vladyka .....	6/27		

*Send your dates & names...  
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# VIETNAM WAR

## 50th Year Commemoration

In mid-May the kids I grew up with on Linden St. in Passaic were at Mario's on Van Houten Ave. for a casual reunion.

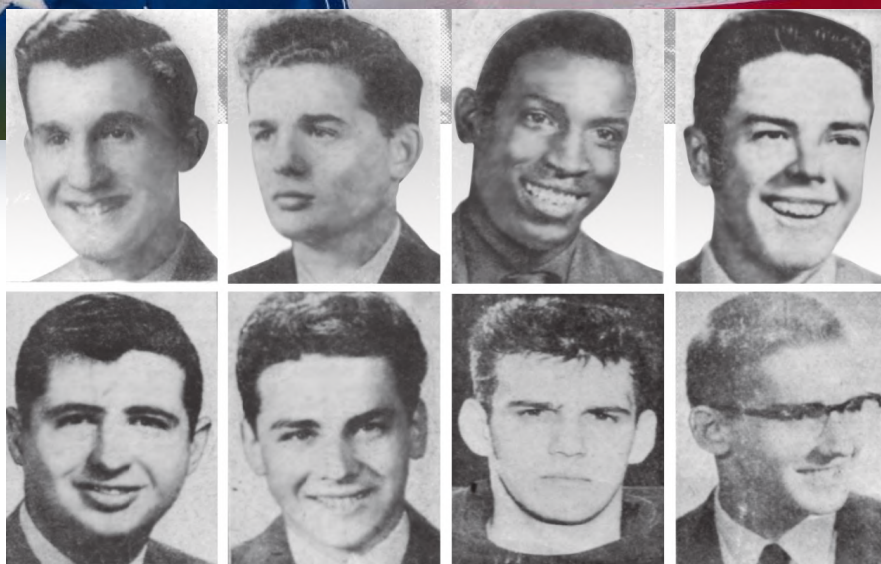
It is here that I picked up a copy of the May Clifton Magazine with the feature "Honoring and Thanking All who Served and Sacrificed".

What particularly caught my attention was the article on page 34, "Their Destination Doom" by Joe Hawrylko. Most, if not all the Passaic recruits, were in my Passaic HS Class of 1956.

Seeing their yearbook photos in the article gave me a pause to think of each man and of our time at PHS, as well as giving thanks as Army recruits to serve our country.

I wish to thank Joe Hawrylko for the effort and especially for locating the pictures of the men who died in this air disaster.

Thank you also for noting the rose garden and memorial in Third Ward Park across from the boathouse.



*These are just some of the 22 Passaic and Clifton recruits killed on their way to US Army Boot Camp on Nov. 8, 1961. From top left: Joseph Kandravv, Donald R. Kaplan, David N. Moore, Richard J. Vanderhoven, Bernard B. Olster, Donald N. Gurtman, Stephen P. Soltesz, Robert J. Marositz. In total, 74 recruits died that evening when the plane crashed at 9:24 EST, 30 miles from Richmond, VA.*

Our next Linden St. reunion will be at the boathouse and we will go across the street to the rose garden to pay our respects and give thanks for my classmates who died on their way to Ft. Jackson so many years ago.

**With thanks, The Reverend Michael Fill**

*Read the story at [cliftonmagazine.com](http://cliftonmagazine.com)*

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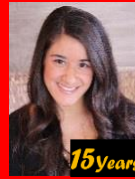
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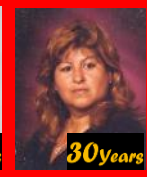
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