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The Life Journey of
Michael Napurano



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EVERY Veteran's Journey is Unique

By Ariana Puzzo



Nearly 25 years ago, from atop Garret Mountain, Joslin Joseph watched as smoke billowed into what started the day as a cloudless, blue sky. Before the second tower fell, Joseph walked away. He knew what was coming, and he didn't want to see anymore.

What he never could've imagined at the age of 21 is the influence that one Tuesday morning could have on his life. Beyond the worldwide scope of the Sept. 11, 2001 tragedy, it would impact his decision to continue college, enlist in the military, and lead him to a new career.

For instance, how landing a freelance writing job for We Are The Mighty, a veteran-led military multi-media company, during the coronavirus pandemic inspired him to further pursue writing. Other degrees followed, including a Masters in Creative Writing and Literature from Harvard Extension School in May 2025. Then on Oct. 14, his series of commentary in The Hill—a top US political website—was named Best Commentary/Opinion by Military Reporters and Editors.

But let's go back further in his veteran's journey.

"I wish I could tell you I went straight to the recruiting

office and signed up," he wrote when he reflected on his 9/11 experience for We Are The Mighty in 2023. "But I went back to Ohio State a few days later and struggled. School didn't make sense and people pissed me off."

Now 45, he looks back to the 9/11 era and remembers walking on the Columbus, Ohio campus as a young Indian man while others threw bottles and insults at him from passing cars, or even almost attacked him.

He recalls, too, the unthinkable loss others faced, and knowing that he and fellow Mustang Rich Doremus had plans to visit the World Trade Center that morning. A decision to sleep in and take a later bus perhaps saved them from being among the 2,977 who perished that day.

That tragedy caused Joseph (CHS 1997) to drop out of college and consider joining the military. "My family, my girlfriend, or [my] friends would talk me out of it," he said. "But the desire was still there. Eventually, in 2003, I enlisted in the Marines." Joseph was a Corporal in the 1st Marine Division. He served from March 2004 to June 2008, extending his contract to deploy to Iraq, and received seven service medals.

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Every Veteran's Journey is Unique

As a Marine then and a veteran today, his journey home was unique. Such is the case for any veteran, including vets in the Global War on Terror or those from Vietnam.

These are a few of the stories that you'll read as you turn our pages. But first, Joseph had more to share when we connected about a week before going to press ...

What Can We Do?

Joseph is the son of Xavier, a retired nuclear medicine tech at St. James Hospital in Newark, and Mary, a retired ICU RN at Passaic General. Although he lives in Anaheim, CA, and his sister, Ancy is in Jersey City with her husband, Benny, and son Max, his parents remain in Clifton and are parishioners at St. Paul's Church.

Joseph attended St. Paul School, School 16, WWMS and played baritone three years in the Marching Mustangs. In 2004, he left Ohio State and was in USMC boot camp at Parris Island. The next station was Camp Pendleton, CA, in the Commanding General's staff. In 2007, he was assigned to the 1st Marine Division in Iraq. "I was stationed on the Syrian border and later at Camp Korean Village," he recounted, "which was outside the city of Ar-Rutba, from September 2007 to April 2008."

Joseph returned to Ohio State in 2008 to complete his BA in History and worked in the athletic department. That led to five years with the San Diego Padres' front office while he got a Masters in Management from the University of Redlands, thanks to the GI Bill. A career in sports management beckoned, but there was another calling.

While attending Harvard, he began submitting opinion pieces to the Pittsburgh Post Gazette and the San Francisco Chronicle. That turned into a weekly opinion column for The Hill, a Washington, D.C. newspaper and digital media company that focuses on US politics and policy. Among his many gigs today, he remains as a Senior Contributor for We Are The Mighty.

He also volunteers as a copywriter for the Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization, raising awareness about veterans nationally, and is writing a book about his time in the Marines, having just retained an editor and publisher.

He doesn't hide his conflicted feelings about his service. "When people asked why I had joined," wrote Joseph in 2023, "I would give them some answer about wanting adventure or wanting to travel. I felt stupid saying I joined because of 9/11 only to join years later and spend seven months on the Syrian border."



His family in 2000: father Xavier, mom Mary, sister Ancy, CHS 1995, and Joslin, CHS 1997, and today.

It didn't get easier reading headlines in the years to follow.

Joseph recalled celebrating US forces killing al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden by smoking a Cuban cigar but feeling like "I had no part in that at all." He felt angry and disenchanted when ISIS rolled through the border and when Afghanistan fell, respectively.

But he's also had to adjust to non-military perspectives.

"There are a lot of people in this country that call themselves patriots. A lot of military-aged, able-bodied men like to pronounce their zeal for America and devotion to our country," said Joseph in 2023.

"And there is this new thing where a lot of these guys like to label themselves as 'alpha males.' I guess that's nice, but for me I wonder, 'Why didn't they join?' They are military-aged, in good shape, and claim to love America," he said. "But they sat around the last 20 years and sang that weird Toby Keith song and got mad at different people for perceived breaches of patriotism."

Joseph made another significant observation.

Veterans, like himself, "have to understand our place, too. Are we all heroes? No," he wrote. "But when our country needed us, we showed up. Men and women from different states, ethnic groups, religions, sexual orientations, economic backgrounds, and other diverse categories. When America asked, we responded, 'What can we do for our country?'"



Joined by family and community leaders, Assad and Mehja-been Mujtaba on October 8 opened their second clinic at 624 Main St. in Paterson, near St. Joseph's Hospital. Pictured in front are their children, Eliza and Leviza, as well as our father, Dr. Gholan Mujtaba. We were joined by other community health professionals and greeted by former Clifton Mayor Jim Anzaldi and Paterson Mayor André Sayegh, as well as other politicians.



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“My hope is that one day, it will be the least interesting thing about me.”

By Ariana Puzzo



Julia and her partner Adam. And at left on our Nov. 2015 cover.

Life goes on for many of us but, in the decade since we last spoke with her, Julia Young hasn't taken all she has and what she almost lost for granted.

On March 14, 2009, Young's life changed forever at the age of 15 when a bonfire accident led to her sustaining third-degree burns on over 75% of her body, plus additional second-degree burns on about 5%. Young later appeared on our November 2015 edition's cover, discussing gratitude and her journey to recovery in those first six years.

Now 16 years out of her recovery, last year marked a major milestone.

“Last year, I celebrated now having spent more time in this body than in my original unburned, no-disability body. It's a new sense of normality,” said Young.

Young, now 32, said that she is now at an age where she feels like “I understand my body.” She knows the limits that keep her safe and healthy, but she is also even more in tune with all that is possible and eagerly pushes beyond what others might expect from her.

The coronavirus pandemic was challenging, particularly as someone who must remain vigilant about the risk

of contracting any infection, but she has started to do new things this past year. Now she travels into the city, which she never did before, and spends more time in the heat.

Young also has a part-time job as a cashier at Michaels in Styertowne Shopping Center and was encouraged by her partner, Adam, to learn how to drive.

“I have a really nice amount of independence. Going to estate sales is my new favorite thing,” she laughed in early October. “On Mondays in the summer, I'd go to New York and sit in the shade in a huge park and be around so many people.”

Visibility is what Young has striven for, for over a decade, but it's also more than that. She will meet people who have never met a burn survivor or physically disabled person and would like her simple existence to remind them that everyone has passions and shutting yourself away to hide your scars is the quickest way to start “a tumbleweed of depression.”

“I just enjoy being here,” said Young. “There is still so much beauty in life.” It's easy for Young to forget that she is simply herself.

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What's even harder to reconcile is the reality that some people see others with facial injuries as disfigured or "less than human."

"That shocks me out of forgetting, because I'm just me," said Young. "It's not that I can forget I'm a burn survivor, but I forget there is reason to react."

Before anyone felt that they had a reason to react, the Bloomfield resident grew up in our city. She was raised by her parents, Gerald and Michele, and went to School 9 on Brighton Rd. The family moved after elementary school and Young attended Monroe-Woodbury High School in Central Valley, New York.

In March of 2009, it was supposed to be an informal end-of-winter celebration for Young and four of her friends. She had already used a can of gasoline to bolster their flagging fire once without incident. As the fire died down again, she repeated the process on the embers, with catastrophic results.

Falling to her knees made matters worse. Young had unknowingly landed on a gas-saturated surface that exacerbated the flames until her friends could douse the flames to save her.



Julia at right in Clifton School 9 on Brighton Rd.

The shock kicked in shortly after Gerald arrived, before looking pale rather than burned, and Young was ultimately intubated and airlifted by helicopter to Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, New York. The staff induced a coma to circumvent the pain that she would endure once awake and, after two months, Young was transferred again.

That time she went to Shriners Burn Treatment Center in Boston to undergo over six months of extensive physical therapy, including regaining the ability to walk. Yet, despite feeling immense gratitude that she is alive and retained all of her body parts, there are still people who are cruel or skeptical about her appearance.

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Some people will ask why Young doesn't "fix" facial scarring or get more surgeries. One person asked why she didn't consider "getting a face transplant."

"The first reality is, one: I don't want to," she said. "I find myself attractive, I think I'm pretty cute." As far as getting more substantive surgery, there is also a clear medical reason: There is always an associated risk of developing an infection or the procedure not going as planned.

"They neglected the reality that, beyond major surgery, there would be lifetime medications just so I would appear more suitable or palatable to the public," said Young.

It's a spectrum of interactions and reactions from people that don't know her. Some people are respectful or don't look twice, but the month of October can be uniquely difficult, because there will be a few instances with people mistaking her face for a mask or Halloween prosthetics.

Laughing off those encounters comes down to Young embracing humor as part of her journey that she hasn't lost over the past decade. The real test of her grace is when well-intentioned people hear her story and say they would've ended their own life if they were in her position.

"I get that they're trying to say I'm strong but ... that's not a compliment. That's not nice," said Young. "If I had \$10 for every time that's been said, I'd have \$400."

So Young takes matters into her own hands. She dresses bolder now and dresses for comfort. She noted that feeling comfortable "in our own skin is something all of us struggle with."

"Being visibly disabled is tricky, but I say to rude people, 'You don't have to look at me. There's a million other things that you can fix your eyes on,'" said Young. "I won't upset myself because of someone else's discomfort."

More Than Her Story

Young won't be anyone's "inspiration porn" either. The term, coined by late Australian disability activist Stella Young, highlights the objectification of disabled people. It ultimately critiques using someone else's disability to promote the notion that others have it worse than able-bodied individuals and that all people living with disabilities constantly suffer and struggle through life.

It is part of the reason why Young waited to get into public speaking. She has returned to speak at her high school and on the Montclair Center's Strong Women's Empowerment panel in 2018, but she received requests as soon as she finished high school years later in Massachusetts.



Julia at age 14 with her dad Gerald and mom Michele.

Young wanted to attend college and live her life, which is what she did. She got an associate's degree in English Language and Literature from Bergen Community College in 2018. Then her bachelor's in Rhetoric and Composition/ Writing Studies from Montclair State University in 2021.

Our city played a role in making that dream possible. Young, who simultaneously expressed appreciation for checking back in all these years later, said that it is thanks to our community raising funds that she was able to pursue her goal of receiving a higher education.

"I would not have that opportunity otherwise," said Young. "Amazing things can happen when we work together." If her past can show people one thing, Young wouldn't mind it being that all of us are more than being defined by one thing or one shocking event. As she prepared for college, she knew that it would be her chance to become more than her story as a burn survivor.

"My hope is that one day, it will be the least interesting thing about me," said Young. "I try to use [speaking events] as opportunities to be very real. People come up afterwards and are clearly having a hard time, I reassure them by saying, 'You woke up today, and I think that is a huge step.'"

Meeting herself where she is emotionally each day isn't unusual for Young. She explained how the reality of aging is starting to set in for her, particularly how the stresses and medical issues from being on fire mean her body is more like that of someone in their fifties than thirties.

One example that she gave is how her left foot doesn't go flat, so she has worn chunky heels for the past 16 years to compensate for balance.

"I haven't had too many issues, but this year I have started to get hip pain," she said. "It is likely that I am experiencing arthritis, which is a scary reality of how I'm finally feeling in tune with this body that now is changing again."

But she troubleshoots with things like ice packs that construction workers use and she also now has a tracking watch to monitor herself and make sure she doesn't have a heat stroke since she does not have sweat glands.

And, if all else fails, that dark humor and quick wit is always on standby. "I like not giving the answer that people expect," laughed Young. "People have asked, 'What happened?' and I told them, 'It was a tanning booth accident' with a straight face or, 'I was a witch burned at the stake, but they couldn't kill me.'"

Protecting Peace Through Kindness

Speaking by chance during Fire Prevention Week, Young admitted that words of encouragement or advice to burn survivors doesn't have a one-size-fits-all approach. Everyone is unique — and what makes her most grateful is the support of "amazing doctors, friends, and family."

"The advice I give to everyone, in general, is that time does heal wounds. Not all wounds and not all of them all the time, but you'd be surprised what you can adapt to,"

said Young. "There were days in hospital where I absolutely wanted nothing more than to die."

"It's a logical response to being in agonizing pain and not being sure what your life will be like, but I'm very glad to be here," she added. "You're not a bad person if you don't have constant strength. I think the illusion is that people will grit their teeth and bear it from the beginning. Learning coping mechanisms is what will help you get through it."

Often it's the pockets of optimism. Young has encountered some of those volunteering at Delaney Hall Detention Facility in Newark. She, Adam and friends provide food and clothing for people waiting to see their loved ones.

"Seeing the sweetheart children just playing, not realizing their parent is possibly being deported but just trying to have a childhood, gives me optimism that life persists," said Young, choking up. "As a society, as a people, and as a race of humanity, we can adapt to horrible things for better or worse. There still is beauty and childlike joy."

Young doesn't want children of her own, but she emphasized that these children don't need to share her DNA or look like her for her to care about them. Young has separately seen the way some people look at her, not seeing the value in her life or viewing her as a leach on society.

"What a sad life that must be for them to have that much immediate hate for another person," said Young. "The kindest thing that we can do is preserve childlike joy by letting these kids have a childhood while being kind to each other."



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By Ariana Puzzo

“It doesn’t take a lot of time to be kind.” That is Margaret Curreri’s motto, and it’s at the heart of all she does as Director of The Clifton Unhoused Initiative. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit strives to support the unhoused members of our community with dignity, compassion, and urgency.

And that means always being ready. “We got a call last night that someone in Little Ferry had 200 pairs of socks,” said Curreri, 73. “It was when my husband and I normally do our food shopping, but we have to go when they call.”



Beyond the refurbished bicycle, donated cots and blankets, that's George standing with Greg Iwanicki and Margaret. In front is Nate King and the late Lauren Murphy is inset.

Visit cliftonunhousedinitiative.org or “Clifton Unhoused Initiative” on Facebook to get involved.

It's never a question, and there is no sign of weariness for the 24/7 commitment. Curreri knows that the need is tremendous and is hopeful more people will realize it and give back in whatever way possible.

It's all the more essential as we enter the colder months and our city's Code Blue warming center opens its doors to those in need.

“People think that they don't have time to volunteer ... but they don't realize that it can be what we call ‘one and done,’” said Curreri. “You can help someone one day, and then that is the end of it. It is not a commitment and can be done at your leisure.”

On April 14, Curreri and her husband, George, founded The Clifton Unhoused Initiative. It was with encouragement from George, who is the vice president, and their trustee, Clifton Board of Education Commissioner Judith Bassford, that Curreri felt it was all possible.

That feeling doesn't need to be limited to one specific area of giving back. “Everybody can do something and, if everybody did, it would make them realize how good it makes them feel to do something [for] somebody else,” said Curreri. “The Recreation Center always looks for volunteers, and there are a lot of nonprofits in Clifton.”

Rising Numbers and Concerns

Curreri isn't new to community volunteering. The Middle Village resident has lived in our city for 54 years, since she and George wed, and has regularly helped at events for the Recreation Department or by delivering meals with Kim Castellano's Power of One Christian Coaching and Outreach Ministries, Inc. at the COVID-19 pandemic's height.

She was also a Court-Appointed Special Advocate with Passaic County CASA and successfully advocated for 30 children for roughly five years. She received training and the judge for a case would appoint her to act as an “extra set of eyes” on a child who was removed from their home and placed into foster care.

“I've always wanted to be busy and give back,” said Curreri. “I enjoy doing that.”

Curreri was later invited to join the staff after she retired. She went from volunteer to Outreach Coordinator, trying to bring on more volunteers. It involved her holding information sessions at schools and libraries, plus putting out press releases.

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JK Realty's Joe Siano and Rickey Di Maria hosted a clothing drive in October. Also pictured are George and Margaret Curreri, Nate King and John Biegel of the Clifton Health Department with Greg Iwanicki of St. Peter's Haven.

Today, when she isn't advocating for the unhoused, the mother of two sons is also a "full-time grandma." Curreri noted that it was while she held one of her many positions that she became "somewhat disabled", which made getting into volunteer-work all the more essential.

"When I couldn't work, I could volunteer. It works both ways," she said. "I'm helping someone, and I'm feeling good about helping them."

The Unhoused Initiative was born out of a desire to do more. Curreri got involved more with the Lauren Murphy Warming Center, getting invited by the Health Department last January and helping serve breakfast there in February.

Before the Unhoused Initiative received its nonprofit status in June, the organization donated all sorts of clothing and essential items, plus blankets, to the center. Curreri got the opportunity "to learn a lot about people who were unhoused from them, themselves" as well.

"I learned how the city and the Health Department can help them and how the warming center operated," said Curreri. "I started going down and volunteering at night-time, which was when I learned that there was ... more to be done and they just needed more."

Nathaniel King, who has worked in the Social Services Division of the Health Department since 2022, echoed how great the need is and how it's grown since his arrival. From Nov. 1 to March 31, the warming center is meant to be actively open when the temperature drops to 32 degrees or lower.

He added that the state mandates if there are 10 or more unhoused individuals in a city, opening a warming center is required. There are currently 20-plus unhoused people, with a population of approximately 90,000 Cliftonites.

As for Passaic County, the annual findings show an uptick. The New Jersey 2022 Point-In-Time Count showed 374 reported as unhoused in our county, accounting for 4% of total homeless persons in the state.

Passaic County's 2024 Count found that, as of Jan. 23, 2024, a total of 710 persons in 451 households were experiencing homelessness. Our city had the second highest count of 57 after Paterson's reported total of 411 homeless persons. Learn more at monarchhousing.org.

"We get a percentage [of funding] from the county every year. Every year, it's never enough," said King. "It's typically within \$40-to-50,000, but we were open for 30 or 31 days in January."

"The staff was not only exhausted physically and mentally," he added, "but the monies that we're getting to run it is a fraction of what it takes [to run an active warming center]."

King went on to say that it takes anywhere from \$150-160,000 to run "a good warming center", which he clarified isn't a shelter and doesn't operate 24/7. It ran for five months and two extra days in April this past year, but King shared there's financial skepticism about what's to come.

"We're lucky to have a great community and organizations that help us out a lot," said King.

Lauren's Legacy of Kindness

The need is greater than Curreri imagined. There were days when, after consistently opening its doors, the warming center ran out of items or other items would get low. That's when Curreri went to her husband, George, and said there's more that needed to be done to "support our Health Department and the warming center."

You might say she picked up where the late Councilwoman Lauren Murphy left off. "I adored Lauren Murphy," said Curreri. "She really laid the groundwork, with other people, for the Recreation Department to become the warming center during Code Blue."

The two women were friends and had many conversations, which is how Curreri knew that the councilwoman "helped everyone." One major contribution was an annual blanket drive, which Curreri realized one year after Murphy's passing in January no one held this past year. So she made it a point to bring blankets to King.

"I talked to someone about how people really didn't know her," said Curreri. "They knew Lauren had a good heart and soul, but she'd drive blankets around and deliver them to the unhoused in person."

"When it came to pets, she was no different," Curreri continued. "She carried dog treats with her so if there was a stray dog, she could coax it into her car. She'd drive around and look for one if there was a post on Facebook."

A touching moment at the warming center came when she saw Murphy's photograph on display during Code Blue and one woman laid flowers by it.

"It just gave me a lump in my throat," said Curreri. "She really cared about everyone. Of course, people had their differences and people disagreed with her, but as a person? I didn't know of a kinder person than Lauren Murphy."

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The state-mandated Code Blue began Nov. 1 and is addressed by a team of Clifton services, from Health & Human Services, to police and recreation and St. Peter's Haven. The Code Blue center is open behind the Clifton Rec building at Washington and Main.

But this was never going to be efficient or effective in the hands of one person or one couple — namely, the Curreri — or even one organization. They've collected and stored in their house everything from gently-used clothing and luggage to bikes and six cots donated by a veteran.

They've also reached out to houses of worship, who put notices in their bulletins, and hope that other nonprofits will connect with them.

"We're not in competition with anyone," Curreri stressed. "We're all working in the community to help different groups of people."

The community is a true resource and Curreri has found that there are Facebook groups where people advertise free items, which is how she collected small batches of clothes that she would process, wash, and distribute. Curreri has repeated the process with wardrobes donated from loved ones of the recently deceased or with CHS' lost-and-found items that weren't claimed at the end of the school year.

"We had everything spread out on the lawn, because we wouldn't bring just anything into our home, but there ended up being 42 loads of laundry that took me three weeks," said Curreri. "Hoodies and sweatpants and, since the high school children are the size of adults, it worked out for us. We're so grateful and hope to be getting it next year."

It's ultimately about finding untapped resources. Now, with nonprofit status, they can accept monetary donations that go to the warming center to assist them with clothing, food, or whatever else is needed during a Code Blue.

Curreri has spent quite a bit of time working closely with King and the Health Department, plus Greg Iwanicki, who

is the Assistant Pantry Manager and Street Outreach Coordinator through St. Peter's Haven. She spoke highly of them and emphasized the importance of making the work that they each do possible now and in the future.

"I have learned a lot from [Nate] and I'm still learning. He's an amazing young man and is right there with the folks. Greg is also there working one-on-one with people," said Curreri. "Clifton's Health Department does an amazing job with the center, and they deserve all the support that we can give them."

Support Encourages Success

The success stories are real. They're also impactful for the next group of people walking into the warming center like they were for those who lived it.

Curreri has witnessed someone that they helped return to volunteer on shower day. King has also had great success connecting people to housing, counseling, and addiction resources. "Our goal is to benefit anyone we come into contact with, especially people going through the thick of it," said King, 41. "It could be someone at the lowest point of their life or navigating a change that they were not prepared for. It's letting people know that this could happen to any one of us."

It was King's reality at age 13. He was living with his family in San Bernardino, California when they were kicked out of their house, because they couldn't afford to pay the interest.

He spent the end of junior high and first half of high school with his mother and sister sleeping in shel-

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ters, cars, churches, and lived in a garage for about a year. At age 15, aunts in New Jersey were able to help and bought him a plane ticket to come live out east.

Support from his aunt and uncle gave him the structure that he needed to enlist at 17 in the US Army. King joined the military in late 2003 and was a Signal Support Specialist, concluding his service as an E-5 in November of 2011.

King moved to our city that same year. He graduated from Fairleigh Dickinson in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Video Game Design and Graphic Design, plus a minor in Marketing. He worked as an underwriter for American Financial Resources and became a Whole Health and Wellness Coach with East Orange Veterans Affairs.

The second position is where he saw the help that he can provide to veterans struggling, like he did, to readjust in civilian life and how best to help individuals who were unhoused.

"I'm doing what I wish someone else had done for me when I was going through the thick of it [in California]," he said, candidly.

His military background lays the groundwork for a tactical approach. It means prioritizing what a person needs the most when they are living on the streets. A basic hygiene kit, underwear and socks, and canned foods with pop tops are at the top of the list.

"These are the things that you don't think about [until you're] in a pinch," he said. "MREs [Meal, Ready-to-Eat]."

His work at the warming center sees him assisting people with medical needs, psychological support, and career-building techniques. Roughly 156 unique individuals visited the warming center last season.

King said the team of volunteers helped about 35 people get off the street and into housing. They also helped over 30 people enter detox programs.

"There's always something to do," said King. "[But Health Officer] John Biegel says to us, 'As long as you help one person every day, you've done something to impact someone's life, and that's a beautiful thing to do.' We go



Thanks to grants and fund raising by Clifton Health and St. Peter's Haven, a mobile shower center is offered to provide the essentials of warm showers, clean towels and other basic toiletries.

beyond that in the department, and I'm glad we have that mentorship in our leadership."

King additionally expressed his gratitude for the community in helping "advocate for us to stay doing what we're doing." He noted how Health Department workers technically lost their jobs twice this year due to financial murmurings in Washington, D.C.

In early April, there were discussions at a City Council meeting about a \$207,000 shortfall in the Health Department due to President Donald Trump's \$11 billion cuts to public health grants. A stop work order, issued by the federal government, was expected to affect six employees in the Health Department's Satellite Office and in the Code Blue warming center.

A Council vote to fully fund the Health Department resulted in six yeases and one abstention from Councilwoman Mary Sadrakula, who asked to hold the vote until the next budget meeting.

"The community really came together to say, 'Don't you dare; [losing these jobs] would be doing the city an injustice' ... and came up with the emergency funding to get the jobs back. D.C. did change its mind, but our money was negative and they expected us to send back cash."

One of the best ways for people to show their support for the warming center is to volunteer as much as possible if they are 18 years or older.

"We're never not in need of volunteers," said King. "Every agency needs volunteers."

The center is also expanding its relationship with local universities and their medical students, such as William Paterson, Seton Hall, MSU, and Hackensack Meridian. Students gaining new experiences and compassion that they can bring to their future patients gives King hope.

So does seeing individuals like Curreri gaining first-hand insight live on the minute. “I love that Margaret’s logo is ‘Because We Care.’ That’s the theme that we try to let people know at the warming center,” said King. “It’s a program that we’re creating. A culture. We’re trying to educate people on every level that we can about what’s going on in our society and what we can do better.”

“Margaret is a trailblazer in that realm,” he added. “She volunteered every night at the warming center last year from December [onward]. It’s a beautiful thing that she’s doing. I’ve never seen someone care as much as her.”

Ending Stigmas

“Homelessness” as a stigma persists, but Curreri encourages more than compassion. She wants discussion. Despite the understanding by many people that anyone can be one life-altering circumstance away from ending up unhoused, there is also often less empathy when becoming unhoused intersects with drug use or mental illness.

In mid-September, longtime Fox News host Brian Kilmeade issued an apology for comments that he made on a previous broadcast, proposing the killing of mentally ill homeless people by “involuntary lethal injection.” His comments on “Fox & Friends” sparked heavy criticism, made during a discussion about the deadly stabbing in Charlotte, North Carolina of a 23-year-old woman who was a refugee from Ukraine.

Curreri was asked how she thinks adults can have meaningful discussions with children and teens so there’s an understanding about the complexities of becoming unhoused.

“[The comment] sent chills down [my spine],” said Curreri. “Today, Oct. 10, is World Homeless Day. If people were to just read some of the articles out there ... they could learn about how to talk to children about homelessness and how not to have children fear these folks.”

Curreri emphasized that these topics are “real life”, and shunning individuals with mental health issues isn’t the solution. We should help others, she said, and that includes people who have a substance use or addiction problem.

“We’re one or two paychecks away from being them; standing out in the streets and looking for someone to feed us or give us some clothing,” said Curreri. “One major illness can take away our homes or everything we have. None of us are safe. Nobody knows what tomorrow brings.”

The Unhoused Initiative will work with any organization toward a better, more secure future. Although their primary focus is helping the unhoused, they do give extra donations to St. Peter’s Haven or any other organization.

Curreri added that they are considering running an additional coat drive for veterans and are open to all partnerships. “Clifton is a big community and city. There is a lot of need in the city for a lot of different things,” said Curreri. “All of the organizations are supplying something.”

♥ The Holidays are a time of ♥ Togetherness and Gratitude



Having the privilege of serving Clifton for nearly two decades, I want to wish all a wonderful holiday season.

From veterans and seniors, to youth and those in need, to city leaders and volunteers, Clifton is a city that comes together to make things better.

To all those who keep Clifton moving forward, thank you!

- Thomas P. Giblin, NJ Assemblyman, 2006-2023

Feed The Hungry House The Homeless



A team of volunteers helped unload a truck of donated canned goods on a recent Friday morning at St. Peter's Haven.

Teamwork inspires Greg Iwanicki, and there's plenty of it in different areas of his work. When he isn't helping head up the Code Blue warming center, he works as the Assistant Pantry Manager and Street Outreach Coordinator at St. Peter's Haven.

But first and foremost? Iwanicki is a volunteer.

Iwanicki, 27, got involved at The Haven when he was a high school freshman. The PCTI Class of 2017 grad helped in the Food Pantry and at the flea markets. Fast-forward to 2021, he was hired as assistant manager and he now does social work with Health Department's Nathaniel King. Get involved at saintpetershaven.org.

"I help with the homeless and with running the warming center in the winter," said Iwanicki. "This will be our fourth year."

Working closely with King, and with Margaret Curreri from The Clifton Unhoused Initiative, feels "very empowering."

"It's unstoppable," Iwanicki said about working as a unit. "So much can be and already is getting accomplished. There's more to be done, and more resources means there can be more help."

"A lot of people, regardless of their psyche, create excuses for getting help or not receiving help. Why they want it or don't want it," he added. "Or, maybe, why they feel that they don't deserve it. [We remind them that] others like them have gotten it."

A Warm Welcome

Iwanicki's family emigrated from Poland when he was just eight years old.

Iwanicki attended School 13 on Van Houten Ave. and Classical Academy Charter School. He earned a bachelor's in Earth and Environmental Studies at MSU and his master's in Geology and Earth Science.

It's no surprise that caring for his environment is natural to him. Another way that he's given back to his community, with his family, is by acting as sextons, or caretakers, for St. Peter's Church. That role involves looking after the church and churchyard.

In other words, the parish's environment. "We're on call 24/7. Anytime there are issues, we're there," said Iwanicki. "If there's stuff to be done, we're there. There's food constantly coming. The pantry always receives donations."

There are also multiple Sunday schools and it's up to Iwanicki, along with parents Marcin and Dominika, to make sure that the property is safe and secure. His father, Marcin, works as the groundskeeper and, although she isn't employed by the church, Dominika helps everyone.

"We take it personally. We consider the whole facility our home, and that reflects on us," he said. "I take my pride in the work that I do, personally, considering I live there and have been there for so long."

It is the same for his work at The Haven and the warming center. Iwanicki builds a rapport with the people who walk through the center's doors. It starts with knowing what mood to go into a conversation with and is helped by not "throwing information" at anyone.

"First, we try to break the ice. We get to know them, their names, and a little bit about them," said Iwanicki. "Then, we ask what they need as far as help."

Sometimes it's something that they can do at the warming center. Other times, it involves accessing resources that require a call to specific agencies, VAs, shelters, or embassies.

"We do résumés, renew passports, reconnect people with families, help them access a proper psychiatrist or a diagnosis if there are any mental instabilities," Iwanicki detailed. "We also help with medication, whether they need to get on or off it, and help with access to rehabs. It's all of that and more."

The warming center's hours, he explained, are dictated by the county. If the temperature hits 32 degrees or lower, the warming center might be open for hours, days, or weeks non-stop.

"If it's that active," said Iwanicki, "we'll be there 24/7 on rotating shifts."

Your Help Is Needed

Raising awareness about The Haven is another one of Iwanicki's priorities and includes encouraging volunteerism at any age and/or donations.

"Anything is useful and everything always has a purpose. Someone always finds a treasure and a use for anything," said Iwanicki. "But, as far as food, it's usually seasonal. Winter is coming up, which means holiday festive items can be donated, like toys or cans of spinach."

Human appreciation and acknowledgment is highly valued, and so is an awareness of the current realities. The drying up of federal funding and grants has had a major effect on the quantity and quality of food donations.

That has meant fewer distributions and less inventory based on what they get from food banks.

"We're also receiving less produce and more canned goods and non-perishable goods," he said.

It's about stepping outside of our own lives, Iwanicki said, and becoming aware of what others might be going through.



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“What [a lot of people] envision the world to be is where they live,” he said. “People are not seeing other parts of the country or the world to have an educated opinion on anything.”

Which is why Iwanicki is grateful for the people that he works with, including King and Curreri. He described King as the role model that everyone looks up to — from the workers to those in need of assistance to their bosses.

“We put him on a pedestal, because he deserves it,” said Iwanicki. “All that we’ve been able to do, I feel, has been through Nate.”

Once the Curreris — both Margaret and her husband, George — joined the effort, Iwanicki saw an improvement to the facility’s environment for workers and guests. She lifts noticeable stress off Iwanicki so that he can focus on additional tasks.

“Margaret is an extra pair of hands and really clicks with people. She knows how to talk with people and meet them with their emotions,” said Iwanicki. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say she’s been doing this her whole life.”

Who Else is Helping?

Team members on Clifton’s Unhoused Task Force each have a purpose on the city’s chessboard and a dedication to strategically pitching in, in their own unique capacities. Their roles are all volunteer-based. Here’s how they move.

Stroble Outreach for Kingdom Kids is dedicated to providing a permanent, loving home and life-changing support for children and youth in need. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit serves those who were abused, neglected, or abandoned, as well as those aging out of foster care who may not have a stable support system.

Stroble Outreach is securing a permanent home that will serve children in need of long-term care and youth aging out of foster care, starting with ages 17 to 21 in the first stage. The home will provide trauma-informed counseling, tutoring, mentorship, and faith-based guidance.



Michelle Stroble and her family are the founders of Kingdom Kids.

“Our goal is not temporary shelter,” said Founder and Executive Director Michelle Stroble, “but a lifelong foundation that helps children grow up with love and gives aging-out youth a place to learn independence while still feeling supported and connected.”

Stroble, a Boys & Girls Club and CHS Class of 1984 alumna, invites neighbors, churches, businesses, and “anyone with a heart for children” to partner with them and help open the doors to the home. Questions? Visit stroblesoutreachforkingdomkids.com, call 973-495-1433, or email info@MOFKK.com.

Power of One Christian Coaching and Outreach Ministries, Inc. changes peoples’ lives with a message of hope. The nonprofit strives to alleviate poverty by offering personal development, wellness workshops, and resources to assist families and individuals in gaining independence. Power of One has provided over 4,000 school essential kits and backpacks to kids and more than 4,000 food care packages and emergency kits to unhoused individuals. Mission Director Kim Castellano and her team serve thousands of families, seniors, disabled individuals, and veterans on a monthly basis. To volunteer or support the programs, visit powerofoneccom.org or contact: 862-239-5905 or info@powerofoneccom.org.

Clifton Public Library is a portal to new thoughts and perspectives for people of all ages. There is the Main Library, 292 Piaget Ave., with Director Justine Tomczak at the helm and the Allwood Branch, 44 Lyall Rd, overseen by Branch Manager Barbara Altilio. The Library offers:

Museum passes, research databases, computer use, homebound services, and more. Beyond printing services, members can check out hotspots if they don't have Wi-Fi or if they don't want to use up their phone data.

The two branches host free, public events and welcome community groups to use their spaces for meetings. The Library also has two monthly book discussion groups (the first Tuesday of the month at 7 pm in the Allwood Branch and the third Tuesday at 7 pm in the Main Library), plus weekly groups for bridge, mah-jong, and knitting. More details are at cliftonpl.org. Call 973-772-5500 or Allwood at 973-471-0555.

The City of Clifton and Clifton Board of Education provide liaisons to the Unhoused Task Force. The members include: City Manager Gary DeMarzo, Councilman William Gibson, and Supervisor of Counseling and Student Services Pre-K-8 Jessica Tremble. Contact: DeMarzo at city-manager@cliftonnj.org or 973-470-5854, Gibson at wgibson@cliftonnj.org, or Tremble at JTremble@Cliftonschoools.net or 973-470-5697.

Clifton Recreation provides recreation, health, and fitness services for the community. Along with providing areas of play at Clifton's 40 parks, programs range in availability for preschool through senior citizens, promoting: educational, cultural, social, leadership, athletic, fitness, citizenship, and volunteer opportunities.

Clifton Rec offers programs such as a Salute to Veterans and music series to the Halloween Parade and Harvestfest as well as indoor activities for people of all ages. Learn about facilities and how to get involved at cliftonnj.myrec.com or call 973-470-5956 or cliftonrec@clifton-nj.org.

Clifton Health rolls out public health how it is intended: preventing disease while promoting and protecting the well-being of all residents. Unhoused Task Force members include: Health Officer John Biegel III, Health Projects Coordinator Jennifer Kidd, and Social Services Assistants Nathaniel King and Erika Shyroky. The nationally accredited department serves our city and the Township of Little Falls with seven divisions: Environmental Health, Lead Poisoning Prevention, Public Health Nursing, Health Education, Social Services, Administration, and Animal Control. Clifton Health is the go-to agency in city government when you need

some direction. For public health or an environmental health emergency, or to report a notifiable disease during off-hours, the Health Officer or staff are on-call 24/7 through the non-emergency Clifton Police Department at 973-470-5911.

The Clifton Unhoused Initiative is always in need of donations and support. Learn how to be a part of giving back by visiting cliftonunhousedinitiative.org or by contacting Margaret Curreri at clifton.unhoused.initiative@gmail.com or 973-317-8722. You can also follow "Clifton Unhoused Initiative" on Facebook for the latest updates.



Clifton Health Department

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The Clifton Health Department is a contractual health agency serving the Township of Little Falls.



St. Peter's Haven on Clifton Ave. strives to close the hunger gap with every donation that comes its way. But did you know that nearly 1.1 million New Jerseyans are food insecure? The Haven was established in 1986 as a ministry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church and serves over 1,400 households per month. Federal cuts to programs like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) have had far-reaching effects. More than 75% of households receiving SNAP have at least one child, senior, and/or disabled person living there. That's why The Haven's Executive Director Pam Fueshko, above left, long-time advocate Liz Loden, plus staff, trustees, and volunteers are active in their search for foundations, corporations, or individuals willing to support The Haven's mission. Contact Fueshko at pam@saintpetershaven.org or Loden at lizloden@irainmakers.com. To donate or get involved, visit saintpetershaven.org.

The Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine students are another voice for the unhoused. Medical students currently doing their residencies and others volunteer at the Code Blue Warming Center and assist with intaking guests. "It is an opportunity to have them build a relationship and try to hear their story," said Nathaniel King of the Health Department. "I don't want to say that they're meeting someone at their lowest point, but it might feel like that and they just want to be heard and talk to someone." King added that even the people who don't want to talk, they may need something else that the medical students can help them access. "That's why I want to get the medical students to listen, because they'll run into [people in this situation] for the rest of their lives and in ERs," said King. "We're trying to create a program to teach these ideas."



Dan Shackil knows the community can surpass his expectations every time. That's exactly what it has done since the "Cans for Dan" Fall Food Drive first began in 2019. The November drive was created by Registered Dietitian Heather Shasa and Shackil, now the assistant general manager of ShopRite of Little Falls, to meet an ongoing need. Last year, Cans for Dan hit a new record when it topped 2,800 non-perishable items, including a whole pallet of turkeys. Donations are accepted until Nov. 30. Non-perishable donations can be dropped off in the bin at the front of the store or Venmo Shackil at [dan-shackil](https://www.venmo.com/dan-shackil) to do the shopping. "We are looking to break the record again," said Shackil (CHS 2008), "and we need your help."

The Clifton Little Free Pantry Program's #FeedClifton initiative runs until Nov. 15. Drop-off locations to donate non-perishable food for residents experiencing food insecurity include the Allwood Library, City Hall, JK Realty, and 57 Dalewood Rd. Take it a step further and hold a food drive at your place of work, department, house of worship, or even your neighborhood for the Little Free Pantry. Volunteers can pick up donations from a collection location. Email: CliftonLittleFreePanttries@gmail.com.

Looking for other ways to give back? Sponsor one pantry for a month in honor of a loved one or to promote your business. Email the Little Free Pantry for information. On Nov. 15, join them as well at JK Realty on Colfax Ave. for their wrap-up celebration from 11 am to 3 pm. Donations go a long way. The Clifton Little Free Pantry has Amazon wish lists (search under Clifton Little Free Pantries) and Target wish lists (search under Donna Popowich).



Pam Fueshko noted that St. Peter's Haven also offers pet food as part of the distribution. Dan Shackil began his "Can for Dan" program with the help of ShopRite of Little Falls where Dan is the assistant store manager. Clifton Health was recently cited for its overall excellence by the New Jersey Public Health Association. Accepting the award on behalf of the team are Kim Finkler, John Biegel, and Jenn Kidd for achieving National Public Health Accreditation.

The Food Brigade Inc. operates free community markets on Colfax Ave. in Clifton and in Bergen and Hudson counties. Qualified and registered customers shop by appointment. The Food Brigade also offers meal distribution for unhoused families in need due to disaster, diaper distribution (infants and adults), a supermarket gift card program and a Thanksgiving turkey drive and distribution. Learn how to get involved or receive support at foodbrigade.org or by contacting 201-614-4414 or HQ@FoodBrigade.org.



Clifton Firefighters Cody Bleaken and Paul Wendling remind readers that each fire station is a collection point for contributions of cat and dog foods. The UPC code here explains more.



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Gobble Up DESSERT

Neighborhood Policing

By Ariana Puzzo

with Community Kindness



Balancing Quality of Life with Enforcement

The Community Policing Division's purpose is simple, even if the needs of the community aren't.

"We serve the community as a whole," said Sergeant Robert Domski, 47. "The [re-formation] of the division was to really get out to the public more and ... get a chance to connect not only to the citizens but to the community."

It isn't a new endeavor.

There are six detectives and Domski who work out of the Botany Village Satellite Office, 207 Parker Ave., but Community Policing was a larger division roughly 20 years ago with 20 officers stationed across five substations around the city.

The unit was disbanded, with members rotated back into patrol or to regular detective bureaus, and was the consequence of budget cuts, reduced manpower, and general expenses.

Many Community Police Officers also rode in the Police Unity Tour, as this 2014 photo shows. Among them are: Daniel Ishak, Andrew Alvarez, Patricia Katz, Robert Bais, Randy Colondres, Richard DiBello, Brian Fopma, Tom Hawrylko, John Kavakich, David Kishbaugh, Michael Adamo, Michael Davey, Jose Padilla, Kristofer Elias, Joseph Klein, Christopher Kelly, Gerald Wyhopen, Gabriel Zirpolo, Vincent LaRosa, William Bais, Derek Fogg, Darren Brodie, Robert Bielsten, Gary Giardina and Tara Berberich.

Bringing back the new division was possible during the coronavirus pandemic with the support of Chief Thomas Rinaldi, who was sworn in as Chief in June of 2020.

Domski's predecessor Sergeant Gary V. Giardina, now Lieutenant, was also instrumental when it came to making sure Community Policing adopted a "boots on the ground approach" to close some of the disconnect that is sometimes felt between the public and patrol officers.

We spoke with Domski during an interview late last month, where he was joined by three of his colleagues: Detectives George Figueroa, Sam Rodriguez, and Lance Gardner. Others are Detectives Kevin Collucci, Jaime Kincherlow and Malek Badeer.

Domski, who had just entered into his third week leading Community Policing after Giardina's promotion, was already witnessing the connections and relationships that the detectives have formed with businesses, organizations, residents, unhoused individuals, and the schools.

"I was very happy to be extended the opportunity to come work with these guys," said Domski. "Not that I thought they wouldn't be, but I was pleasantly surprised by just how involved these detectives are in the community. It's something that I hope to continue moving forward." To contact the Community Policing Division with quality-of-life or non-emergency concerns, call 973-803-5716 or email communitypolicing@cliftonpolice.org.



Detectives Kevin Collucci, Sam Rodriguez, Sgt. Rob Domski and Lance Gardner.

A Neighborhood in Need

Addressing quality-of-life concerns is at the forefront of the division's daily role. Handling issues that can range from complaints about panhandling to public intoxication helps to guarantee that more patrol cars and detectives are available for immediate crises. But there is a big mix of old-school policing that goes into their approach.

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Community Policing



Clifton Community Policing was formed in April 1995 by Chief Frank J. LoGioco and first stationed and deployed in Lakeview. The division was originally led by Lt. Gary F. Giardina with officers Roger Schneider and David Kishbaugh on bike patrol and Crime Prevention Officer Bill Hernandez.

Celebrated by residents and business owners for the “cop in the neighborhood” approach, the division grew with bike officers at 217 Lakeview Ave., 209 Parker Ave., and 653 Van Houten Ave.

Called Yellow Jackets because of their bright yellow jerseys, the bike cops were visible in Botany, Lakeview, Main Ave., Athenia and Market St.

When this photo was taken in 1998, with Giardina, Hernandez, Schneider and Kishbaugh, (a certified master mountain bike instructor and mechanic), also pictured are Sgt. Gerald Wyhopen, Thomas Campbell, Philip Cibiniak, James Flanagan, Thomas Lanzalotto, Joseph Klein, Jon Michal, Mark Centurione, Esly Panduro, John Cusack, Randy Colondres and Carmine Petrone.

“I’ll go to stores daily and see what’s going on, what kind of issues they are having, and if there are any problems with people hanging out in front of the store,” said Rodriguez, who’s been on the job for about 24 years. “The [old Community Policing] office on Lakeview Ave. did the same thing back then when dealing with community issues.”

Rodriguez and Gardner both joined the revived division a year and a half ago, but Rodriguez was also involved in Community Policing about 15 years ago.

“We were on bicycles back then,” said Rodriguez, met with some laughter. “I’ve come full circle.”

The detective is also engaged with the School 9 community, creating a police ride-along raffle last year to help the Brighton Rd. school to raise some funds. Raffle winners are driven to the school in June while students are waiting outside “almost like a School 9 parade for them.”

“The school makes out [well], because every year they make more than they expected to by selling tickets for the event,” said Rodriguez, 55. “They’ve done it for two years now. It’s very successful.”

Domski, who’s in his 20th year working in law enforcement, pointed to other ways that they’re an active presence in the schools.

The detectives visited Saint Philip the Apostle Preparatory School to speak to Kindergarten and first graders about Halloween safety. Detective Kevin Collucci has also spoken to eighth graders at Christopher Columbus Middle School about the dangers of experimenting with opioids.

Community Policing has also handed out blue envelopes at career fairs, done outreach for the city’s senior citizens at the senior centers, and visited the Clifton Public Library branches.

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Community Policing

“They serve the community, especially where the people are actually needing to be served the most,” said Nathaniel King, who works with the detectives in his own capacity with Clifton Health. “When you think of Clifton, you may think of Main Ave. or Clifton Ave., not Botany. It’s an area where there are a lot of issues, and a lot of people wanted to make sure that voices were being heard.”

Reaching Out

Whether it’s working out of the Botany Hub or at headquarters, the Community Policing effort is dedicated in its support for the Unhoused Task Force.

“We work hand-in-hand with them to identify [issues] and we’re typically the first ones to get a call if there is someone unhoused,” said Domski. “Maybe it’s a panhandling or where someone is sleeping behind a building.”

Patrol division is the first to get a call and then Community Policing gets involved. When Rodriguez responds to a call, he said he’ll speak with the individual to see whether they need assistance from the Health Department.

“Most are compliant ... [and are] seeking help and assistance. We offer guidance,” said Rodriguez. “I’ve given countless rides to the warming center or to a doctor’s office if they need to get to one. Wherever they need to go.”

Having a conversation and identifying needs goes a lot further than simply ordering people not to congregate or sleep in a public space. Soon those in need start to recognize the detectives’ faces.

Gardner will mark 30 years in 2026 and believes that Community Policing serves “a good purpose”, especially when working in tandem. “We are reachable to the people who are afraid of the ‘black-and-whites,’” said Gardner, 63. “We have more access, and that is what has been helping the community as a whole. I’d like to see more of that.”



Detectives George Figueroa and Jaime Kincherlow in Botany.

Figueroa has his own hopes for meeting the needs of the unhoused in 2026. Now in his 20th year, he’s been in Community Policing for nearly three years, coming to Clifton in 2011 after layoffs in the Paterson PD.

His hope for the new year includes seeing more people take advantage of the resources that are available to them.

“Some do, believe it or not. They’ll contact me and get help,” said Figueroa, 50. “But some don’t want help. They had us drive around one year, because it was so cold and we picked up people living on the street to bring to the warming center, because they would’ve frozen to death.”

Resources, he continued, go a long way for people suffering from diseases like alcoholism. In some cases, Community Policing even successfully crosses borders. Or countries.

“One guy was homeless and had contact with his family in Mexico,” said Figueroa. “He was alright, but can you believe that we were able to gather money, get him to the airport, and reunite him with his family?”

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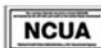
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Seeking Positivity

By Robbie Niessen

Giving thanks and finding common ground are important values year-round, but they have a profound meaning during the holiday season. From Clifton students to community members, we listened as they told us how we can better connect and what they appreciate most during this time of year.

CHS senior Maura Coleman has noticed that some of the biggest divides among students don't come from open conflict — they come from misunderstanding.

"Some students feel left out or judged for how they look, dress, or who they hang out with," said the Allwood resident. She's seen how those small judgments can cause people to feel isolated, even by accident.

Rather than letting those feelings linger, Coleman believes the school community can take small but meaningful steps to bring people together.

"I think a very healthy solution ... [could be] awareness events and more grade-wide activities," said Coleman, 17. "It would help people connect outside their usual circles." Her goal? Creating a space where everyone feels accepted and included. "Bringing people together is something that would make the school feel more united and welcoming for incoming freshmen," Coleman added.

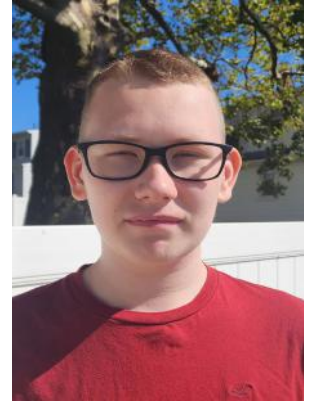
Some disagreements at CHS come from misunderstandings between students, but junior John Buell sees how others stem from school rules or policies.

"I always hear about the struggles of having a lot of homework that teachers give to their students," he said. "I have one teacher who gives homework every day, and it becomes stressful when multiple teachers give you work that can last for hours."

His resolution is simple: Unfinished classwork should become homework instead of adding entirely new assignments on top of unfinished work.

"After school should give kids time to relax," said Buell, 16. "It helps the teachers, too, by giving them less work to grade. It makes everyone happy."

Buell also pointed to the school's cell phone policy as another source of tension. Students must place their phones in a pouch at the start of each class.



Maura Coleman and John Buell.

"There are people who always follow the rules. They shouldn't have to put their phone in the pouch if they didn't do anything wrong."

Not mandating the pouches but punishing those who break the rules is his solution.

"They should have to put their phones away," he said.

Buell added phones aren't about entertainment but about safety, giving students quick access to stay connected with family or get help in emergencies.

"If you don't have it on you and are scrambling to get it out of the cell phone pouch," said Buell, "those precious seconds will be lost, and that can be the difference in those cases."

These changes, he said, aren't about breaking rules but about fairness and respect. Re-thinking homework and cell phone policies could reduce stress, build trust, and give students more time to focus on learning, living, and building lasting friendships each day.

Montclair Heights resident David Shepley has spent enough time following our local government to notice a pattern that concerns him. Too much talk, not enough progress.

"It is frustrating to often read about the lack of progress from the City Council," said Shepley, who grew up in Bridgewater. He believes that the issue isn't disagreement itself, but the unwillingness to face challenging decisions and meet in the middle.

"The Council lacks the ability to face difficult decisions and use compromise to come to a solution," explained Shepley, 53.



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For Shepley, the best way forward is through genuine listening and compassion. “I would urge both sides of any issue to listen to the other closely and use empathy to reach a compromise.”

Compromise isn’t about winning or losing. It is about making sure Clifton moves ahead. “Often, the solution won’t fully please both parties,” said Shepley, “but at least there will be progress in that both sides get some improvement.”

Without that spirit of cooperation, Shepley said gridlock becomes the default. “If there is no compromise, often the decision is avoided and there is no benefit to the town. Or worse, the issue is pushed into future years,” he said.

When it comes to how disagreements play out in Clifton, from the City Council to disagreements between neighbors, Barbara Babula (CHS 1999) sums it up with one word: frustration.

The Athenia resident sees Clifton as a city full of passionate voices, yet too often there are not enough people listening.

“Many people have an idea or thought in their mind, and they try to convince others that their way is the right way,” said Babula, 44.

She has noticed this pattern not only in leadership circles, like the Council, but also in everyday conversations among neighbors and coworkers. The core issue is a lack of genuine listening.

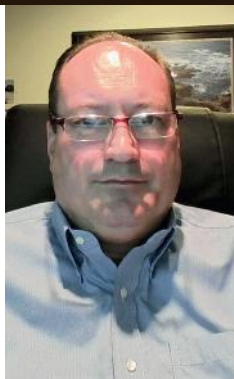
“Nowadays, people don’t take the time to actually listen or attempt to understand the points of view of people around them,” she explained.

Babula said that too often, once someone hears something they don’t like, they become defensive. It results in shutting down what could have become a meaningful exchange.

“That defensive response leads to arguments instead of insightful conversations,” said Babula.

She believes that Clifton could benefit from a cultural shift toward patience and empathy.

“If people took time to listen to each other and be more open to others’ feelings and ideas, it would open a more friendly and educational dialogue,” said Babula.



David Shepley and Barbara Babula.

Progress, in local government or among neighbors, depends on the willingness to pause, listen, and learn from one another. It’s not about winning an argument, she added, but building understanding that is strong enough to move our city forward.

Life in Albion is filled with reminders of the person who shaped Nicole Rossi the most — her late mother, Mary Rossi. Although Mary passed away 15 years ago, Rossi said her mother’s presence is felt every day.

“She was a woman of incredible patience, kindness, and generosity,” said Rossi (CHS 2001). “Through both her words and her actions, she showed me what it means to live with compassion and grace.”

Mary was a teacher, and her professional dedication mirrored the way that she lived outside of the classroom. Rossi continues that legacy as a gym teacher at School 13 and strives to inspire her students, not only in athletics but also through kindness and encouragement.

The lessons that Mary passed down are especially present during the holidays.

“Her warmth and spirit are strongest then,” Rossi explained. “I do my best to keep her traditions alive, so her love and memory can still be a part of those moments.”

Rossi, 42, often reflects on the gratitude that she feels for her mother’s lasting influence. It is, she believes, the foundation of how she approaches family, friendship, and community. “I am forever grateful for everything she gave me, and for the love that still guides me.”

Leashley Oldfield finds it is easy to overlook the people who mean the most. Living in the Maple Valley neighborhood, the CHS junior admits that gratitude doesn’t always come from grand moments, but from everyday life.

“I see my family every day, so I don’t always think about it,” said Oldfield, 16. “But just having them around, making me laugh or supporting me, makes a big difference in my life.”

Those simple moments — a shared joke or someone to lean on after a hard day — are what stand out the most. Oldfield said it’s easy to take family for granted when they’re part of daily life, but Thanksgiving is a good reminder to stop and appreciate them. “I’m really grateful for everything they do for me.”

For this teen, the importance of family stretches beyond the holiday table. It is a quiet, constant source of love, laughter, and support that carries her through the year, often unseen but always felt.

Thanksgiving in the Masri household doesn't officially start until the first floats make their way down Manhattan. Watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade has become a beloved tradition for Firman Masri and his family.

"My kids get so excited seeing their favorite balloon characters," said Masri, 41, who lives in the Athenia neighborhood.

After the parade ends, the excitement moves from the TV to the table.

"In the evening, we sit down to an incredible turkey dinner with all the trimmings that my wife, Lauren, cooks for us," said Masri (CHS 2001).

Masri served in the United States Marine Corps and is now continuing his service to his country by serving on the police force in Bergenfield. Thanksgiving is more than a holiday routine for the veteran.



From top: Leashley Oldfield, Nicole Rossi, Firman and Lauren Masri with Aiden, Connor and Morgan.

"My work schedule throughout the year is unpredictable," he explained. "So spending quality time with [family] during Thanksgiving is very meaningful to me."

The true gift of Thanksgiving for Masri isn't the parade or the food, but the chance to be fully present with the people that he loves most.

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Finding the diamond in the rough isn't exactly what Brandon Rivera set out to do as a teenager, but his eye for jewelry is something that he's grateful he could design into his own career.

Rivera, 25, is the founder of Icebybriv, an online luxury jewelry store that established its brand in 2021. Icebybriv offers its customers a collection that includes Italian silver and gold, VVS natural diamonds, and VVS lab diamond/gemstone jewelry. Shop the collections at icebybriv.com.

Rivera is a lifelong resident, growing up with parents Milly and Hector and older brother Bryan (CHS 2013). The Maple Valley native attended School 2 and WWMS before graduating from CHS in 2018. He's extremely appreciative of the community's support.

"I got a lot of support from my graduating class and also from fitness influencers in New Jersey," said Rivera. "I was once [in that world], but I don't do it anymore."

"Some of them would promote [my pieces] and I would sometimes give them free items," he continued, "plus a discount code that [people who followed them] could use for their order."

Rivera is also grateful for the lessons that he learned as a Fighting Mustang. He played Varsity for all four years as a guard and defensive end. "My coach Ralph Cinque was definitely one of the most motivating people in my early teen and high school years," said Rivera. "That determination to never give up always stuck with me."

Finding His Niche

Marketplace apps, eBay, and Facebook were the digital rabbit holes that helped a 15-year-old Rivera get his earliest start figuring out the value of scrap jewelry.

"I rode my bike all the time to Passaic's Main Ave. or to Clifton Jewelers [on Route 3] to see what quotes I could get, to learn about gram weight, and to learn the values of gold, silver, diamonds, and gemstones," said Rivera. "Then I got interested in it."

Rivera made his burgeoning interest a part-time occupation alongside his education. Now it's what he does full time and he remembers the first piece that he received from a neighbor.

"I was a silver piece, and I went to different jewelry stores in Mexico and learned how much per gram other jewelers would charge," said Rivera. "It's also how I learned about target prices and that craftsmanship matters."



His first "good buy and resale purchase" was a 14K gold rope chain that he later brought to a pawn store. That's when he realized "maybe I can make something out of this."

Rivera graduated from Passaic County Community College's radiography program, but he truly started making waves in the jewelry industry when he created his Instagram @icebybriv, which has amassed over 11,000 followers since March of 2022.

It became Instagram verified in October of 2024 and he offers worldwide shipping, with Rivera completing his first international shipment last month to a customer in Germany.

"Once I started my Instagram, I got some recognition and actually became mutual friends online and partners basically with Apollo Jewelry or Avianne Jewelers in New York's Diamond District," he said. "I guess they saw one

of my reels that went a bit viral, and I've learned a lot from them. That's where I got connected to where to source materials from as well."

His craftsman, Eddie, owns a workshop in the Diamond District and handmakes the products. If Rivera needs to fill an order, make anything custom, or restocking, Eddie is "very reliable."

"He produces to other jewelry stores," said Rivera. "I'm lucky, because it's hard to find where to source materials for a good price and the right quality." Rivera is hands-on as well, creating designs with his 3D software that he sends over for the actual production process.

"Since I don't have a physical store, there isn't an extra charge since I don't have any overhead and I run everything," he said. "The website, logistics, and inventory. There are no employees to pay. So the pricing quality may be the same as anywhere, but it's not extra due to rent [or staff costs]. It's closer to wholesale."

Guiding Others

Rivera isn't limiting himself or the demand for his products. He receives orders from customers around the country, including Florida, Texas, and California. Shipping internationally was a big step and one that foreshadows a big goal. "I have plans to make it a franchise eventually and have other people around the country invest in it," said Rivera. "Maybe it will even go global one day."

He isn't rushing it and isn't sacrificing quality to get ahead. Rivera's main sellers are his Cuban links, specifically the ones that are fully diamond encrusted. His most widely requested items include his prong set Cubans that a lot of athletes wear.

These are his favorite designs, because there are different curves and prongs. Although it isn't unusual to sometimes get inspiration from other jewelers, Rivera likes changing the details.

"I don't like to replicate," he said. "But if someone requested an item and it's a custom product, I will make more of it and list it on the website due to the demand."

Rivera encourages others to "get the ball rolling" by utilizing different social media platforms as a marketplace. He's striven to pay the kindness that others have shown him forward as well.

He motivates and gives tips to other business owners, regardless of their industry, when it comes to marketing and how to grow their audience. Recognition, he said, is key. So is not comparing yourself to others.

"I wish someone had told me that," said Rivera. "Back in the early days when I was getting started, I would compare myself to other jewelry brand owners or other business owners. 'They have more followers', 'they look like they have more supporters,'" he recalled. "You've got to stay straight, focused, and stay in line. Everybody has their time, and your time is next."



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Stopping to Smell the Roses

By Ariana Puzzo

One of the kindest things that a person can do is love our planet. Those aren't well-meaning words or a sanctimonious sentiment when they come from Barbara (Zabriskie) Watterston.

"[Being kinder to our environment] is very, very important," said Watterston, a grad of the June CHS 1952 class. "When you start seeing open spaces being taken away, object to it if you can."

The Allwood native and current resident has spent over 30 years as an active member of the Clifton Advisory Beautification Committee, furthering its mission with fellow Council-appointed members to seek out, initiate, and encourage civic beautification projects. Learn more or see how you can support the committee at cliftonnjbeautification.org.

But Watterston's love of nature and appreciation for the beauty of the outdoors can be traced back even further to her earliest upbringing. The School 9 alumna — and third child of Erwin and Gyneth Zabriskie — recalled her memories of when nature and the environment started truly mattering to her.

"On a deeper level, I guess it was when I was old enough to talk to my father," said Watterston. "He was a grower who grew prize-winning flowers. Trees, flowers; he liked everything."

Erwin was a significant influence on his second eldest daughter's adult life. Watterston not only went on to join the Beautification Committee, but she also had her own floral business that she operated out of her home.

"He just loved nature, and he loved animals. He taught me everything," said Watterston, "and I learned just by watching him work in the garden with roses or by watching him in greenhouses."

"My dad influenced me very much," she added. "My mother, who was a teacher but had retired when she got married, also always encouraged me with all the same things that my dad did."



Garden of Life

Loving her hometown is second-nature for Watterston — no pun intended.

The lifelong resident wed her husband, Ronald Watterston, after high school and the couple had two daughters, Joyce and Valeria. Ronald would go on to serve as a youth counselor and Elder at Allwood Community Church, 100 Chelsea Rd., and he was a Traffic Safety Commissioner.

Today, the couple's family's roots have spread to include five beloved grandchildren and more than half-a-dozen great-grandchildren. "It feels like there are many of them when they're all here," joked Watterston.

Watterston stayed home to raise their children after the birth of their first daughter but, once they got older, she began working in the flower business. For about 20 or so years, she was hired to provide the floral arrangements for hundreds of weddings.

It was all done out of her house and, although she eventually gave it up to spend more time with Ronald, she was able to work out of her house with all of the necessary equipment.

"I would go to the girl's house, which helped when I was delivering to know where that was," she explained. "Then I would take the orders and deliver them on the day of the wedding."

The job helped her bring a slice of beauty to others' lives on a special day, but it was also a call-back to her love of gardening that she nurtured since childhood.

"I always liked to garden and plant stuff. I don't think I would last too long outdoors," Watterston continued, "but my dad could spend all day in the garden."

Tomatoes were more of Erwin's thing than his daughter's, but Watterston never shied away from the flowers. She refused to choose a favorite, loving many of them, but said the ones that she is truly in awe of include carnations and roses.

"I was never too much for the exotic flowers that came from Hawaii or places like that," said Watterston, "but carnations and roses are prevalent in this area."

Community Fortitude

Although nature evolves, and so must her hometown, Watterston admitted that she isn't a big fan of change. It's partly why she stayed so close to where she was raised.

In fact, she and Ronald lived next door to her parents until the older couple retired to Florida. What Watterston loved then and loves now is how she's always had friends living locally and they still see each other often.

These are friends that she made over eight decades ago in Kindergarten. As a child growing up in our city throughout the 1940s, Watterston recalled all of the farm area and how there'd be dirt roads that no one drove on

unless they were headed to a specific farm.

"There was a stable that we'd walk up to and rent horses from," said Watterston, "and it was a dirt road from there up to the farm areas. I used to go up there and would go horseback riding every Saturday."

"If I was going horseback riding today, which I couldn't even get on one," Watterston added with a chuckle, "I'd go with the same girls."

It's a wonderful feeling for Watterston that "so many of the people I've known my entire life are still here." It's a changing community, but it's where her daughters grew up and where they still have friends as well who "feel the same as I do about the area."

"It's still a nice place to live as long as the green spaces [remain]," said Watterston.

And Watterston has long-since played a role in helping keep it that way for our community. That passion was truly ignited in the 1970s thanks to the Botany Urban Renewal Project, including in it a host of regulations and guidance on littering.

Among the regulations was: Littering in streets and public places is prohibited, litter was to be placed in receptacles, businesses must keep sidewalks free of litter, littering was prohibited in fountains and bodies of water, and littering in parks was prohibited.

"That was quite a project. The people who were involved stayed with it right until it was done," said

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That's Barbara with sunglasses and a red coat helping to plant a tree in Jubilee Park.

Watterston. “It was a committee that lasted for quite a while, and it was a success at the time.” Learn more by searching “Article IX Botany Urban Renewal Project” at ecode360.com.

Watterston also got involved with The Woman’s Club of Allwood, a non-profit, 501(c)(3), volunteer-based organization. It was only when Beautification Committee meetings and attending floral design classes in another town conflicted with meetings that she had to re-prioritize her philanthropic areas of focus.

She’s proud of the committee’s work for over three decades and is also proud that she joined at its inception. She pointed to the efforts made by Committee Chairperson George Held, who she believes joined shortly after her, when it came to designing as the landscape architect the small pocket-parks that are seen around the city.

The nine-member advisory committee, she added, has saved spaces and continues to act as a voice to “always get support from the City Council to do the things that we’ve planned.” In those early years, Watterston worked closely with the late Councilwoman and Mayor Gloria Kolodziej, whose daughter-in-law Amie is now also a member.

“Gloria always managed to find people who were interested in the environment, but we were unfunded [at the start],” said Watterston. “[The City Council] gave us permission to have a full committee and supported the things

that we did, but we ... had to find ways to earn the money to support a committee.”

They focused their first effort on trees since, at that time, many of the street trees were the same age and started needing to be removed. Between their fundraising efforts and the city’s ability to help once the trees needed replacing, plus grants from the state, it gradually picked up its pace.

“It was a lot of work for the DPW planting the trees,” Watterston acknowledged. “Most of the ... streets were lined with the same type of tree, so we started using different trees.”

City Green was another hot topic in more recent years. Before the city purchased the farm, they asked the Beautification Committee for their guidance and if something should be with the land.

“It’s a really wonderful asset to have for the city. It keeps children [engaged] and ... has been very successful,” said Watterston. “All we did was say, ‘Yes, it would be a good thing to do to buy it’, and it took a lot of different people to get involved and make it what it is.”

An Urgent Warning

Staying on as a committee member was instinctive for Watterston, but it served more than one single purpose.

As many members needed to be replaced, Wat-

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Stopping to Smell the Roses

terston became a resource and an asset for the committee's history. She is also encouraged by what the committee continues to look ahead to doing, including its focus on bringing pollination gardens to Clifton.

"We're losing so many bees," said Watterston. "Probably about half the bees that do pollinating and butterflies that do pollinating. If it continues at the rate that it is going ... we won't have any crops. We really do rely on that."

It's a reality that Watterston and Kolodziej were ahead of the curve on worrying about some 30-something years ago. The duo would go into Clifton Schools and talk to students, who'd quickly become interested in the topic.

"They were good little students," said Watterston. "They would draw the trees and flowers and they knew exactly the reason why they're very important for everyone on this earth."

"I hope it will always continue in the school system that children are taught the importance of [pollination] because once they know, they respect [the bees]," she continued.

Watterston also issued another warning.

A request that others in our city have made for a whole host of reasons, whether it is traffic-related or for the sake



Barbara and Ronald with Val (in red) and Joyce circa 1970.

of protecting beloved green spaces. "Not letting open spaces, like fields where games are held, be used for other purposes [needs to be a priority]," said Watterston. "In other words, don't sell open space to builders ... because our open spaces are very important."

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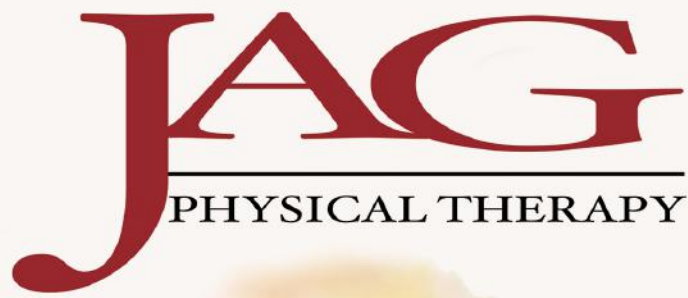
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Called to Serve

By Ariana Puzzo

Ryan Farnon graduated CHS in 2008 and joined the Air Force. That's him directing air craft and in his 2008 boot camp photo. He now serves as the commander of Clifton's DAV Chapter 2 on Hazel St.



Serving with honor was more than a decision made by Senior Airman Ryan Farnon. It was an expectation and calling for the U.S. Air Force veteran, passed down to him by his grandfather.

Now it's what he also strives to embody as the Commander of Chapter 2 – Disabled American Veterans on Hazel St.

"For as long as I can remember, service has been a part of who I am," said Farnon (CHS 2008). "I spent all four years in the Marine Corps JROTC program. The events of Sept. 11, 2001 only strengthened that calling, leaving me determined to one day wear the uniform of my country."

His grandfather, Robert Farnon, a U.S. Navy veteran, also inspired him to join the Air Force and led to his determination to "carry that torch forward."

"I remember being a Gun-Ho Marine ready recruit," said Farnon, 35. "My grandfather's grace and wisdom is what led me to ultimately enlist in the Air Force."

Three short weeks after graduation saw Farnon on a plane and a long bus ride to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. He turned 18 halfway through basic military training.

"[I knew] full well that I was leaving my childhood behind and [was] ready to take the next step of responsibility," said Farnon.

Immediate Bonds

Farnon served his technical training at Sheppard Air Force Base after BMT and perfected the craft of becoming a C-130 Crew Chief. Following graduation from technical training school, he was assigned to the 317th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas. That is where Farnon remained until the end of his enlistment.

In 2009, Farnon's squadron was the first one to introduce the C-130 Model J aircraft into its fleet, regarded as a new revelation of technology and engineering that "upgraded the oldest military aircraft in its fleet to one of the 21st century."

"In 2010, our unit was sent [temporary duty travel] to Haiti after it suffered a crippling blow from the Hurricane that hit Port-au-Prince," he said. "Our mission was one of humanitarian relief."

Farnon's unit provided necessary supplies for survival and medical attention to those who were affected by the disaster. His service in Haiti earned the unit the Meritorious Unit Award and also gave him immense gratitude for "everything that we have in our country."

"I still talk to my wife about it to this day," said Farnon. "Once you see how other people live and their struggles and things they're going through, it kind of puts [your

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struggles] into perspective. ... It puts more [gratitude] in your heart for the things that we have in our country.”

His unit also played critical roles in operating Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The C-130 J Super Hercules unit handled tactical airlift, airdrop missions, and troop cargo movements. He rose to the rank of Senior Airman before he left the military in 2012 after four years of service.

It wasn’t an easy decision. Returning home was what he needed so that he could be closer to his family and not travel as much, but it was scary to leave that deep, daily bond with his fellow servicemembers. More so with the understanding that he lost contact with the friends he once had in high school.

“They become your world, your military brothers and sisters. It was tough leaving that and not knowing if those experiences you shared together, if you will ever have that same bond,” said Farnon. “It’s the same at DAV now.”

Farnon has remained in contact with some veterans from his unit who live in Upstate New York, Pennsylvania, and California. But that transition to civilian life wasn’t without complications. He shared getting into a fight with his family and ending up homeless for a few months.

“It was the vets at the Athenia Veterans Post, at the time, who helped me get back on my feet and figure things out,” said Farnon. “They helped me get some benefits that I was entitled to, which is how I finished schooling.”

Finding Strength Together

When his military service came to an end, Farnon’s dedication to others did not.

The lifelong resident focused his energy and efforts toward serving veterans in his hometown. As the DAV Chapter 2’s commander, he has become a driving force in rebuilding the veteran community. Part of that passion involves Farnon supporting his “brothers in arms.”

“No matter the age, time of service, or the branch of service,” said Farnon, “we heal and find strength together.”

That healing extends to making sure there is a place for them to gather. On Sept. 27, the DAV Chapter 2 held its grand re-opening after about three months of closure following a pedestrian crashing into the building and damaging its foundation.

ANT Global, led by Agostin Sokoli, repaired all of the structural damage, which was substantial. There was an estimated \$74,000 in damages, but Farnon credited ANT Global for taking on the job in a significantly pro bono



Ryan Farnon with his wife Laurie (Hallick) Farnon and daughter Amelia Farnon.

capacity. It included replacing the doors, re-doing the stucco, and re-doing part of the front steps.

“Given [our previous insurance] situation, they were a big help and took care of the work while making sure that it was done right — and did it at very little cost to us,” said Farnon. “It was a long three months. I’m glad we’re open now.”

Now reopened to disabled veterans and DAV members, there are noteworthy changes that any visitors will be able to see proudly displayed.

“We started a new tradition of stapling our military patches on the wall of our lounge,” said Farnon. “Among our group of special guests was Councilman Tony Latona, who also stapled a patch on the new wall of honor.”

The DAV strives to empower veterans to lead “high quality lives with respect and dignity” by providing free professional assistance to veterans and their families so that each veteran is capable of obtaining the benefits that they have earned.

“I know what it’s like to be going through that adjustment when you get out [of the military] and aren’t sure what to do,” said Farnon. “Being at the lowest of

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



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

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



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



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The new commander (at center standing with blue shirt) with members at the DAV on Hazel St. Below, that's Farnon at Iacono Architectural in Belleville and the steel skeleton he helped build. Look for it on New Year's Eve when it drops in Times Square.

lows and knowing there was a community and a group of people that I didn't know who still accepted me and helped me out, it's important for me to also be judgment-free."

Continuing the Story

Through his own service, Farnon was able to root his current career in his military background.

He first utilized his GI Bill benefits and pursued a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Community College of the Air Force, then he later developed a passion for working through complex problems and "applying my skills through hands-on challenges."

"[It's] a drive that continues to define my professional approach," said Farnon.

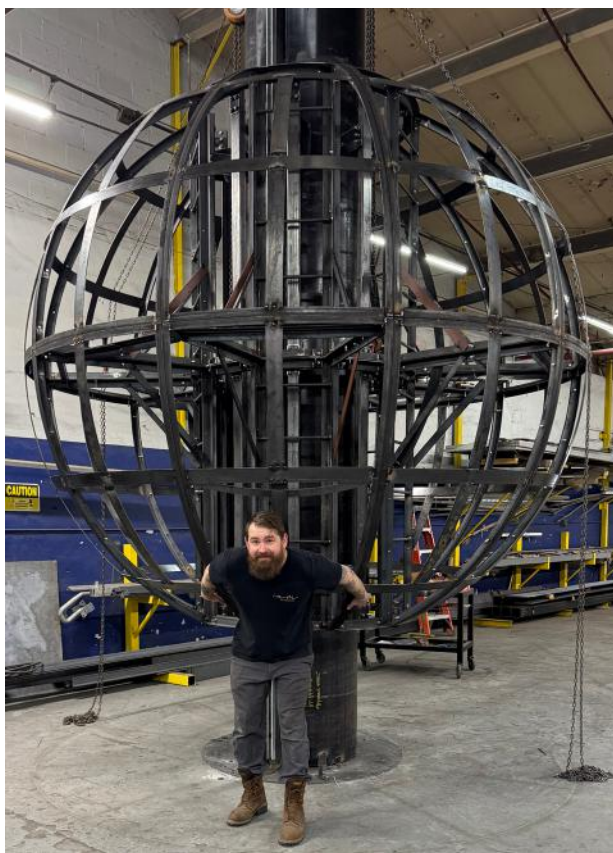
Farnon uses these skills daily as a Project Manager for Iacono Architectural Metals in Belleville. He combines design, fabrication, and installation to bring high-end

decorative metal concepts to life. Project contributions that Farnon has made have included a recent construction of the New Year's Eve Times Square Ball, a replacement for the 2006 version.

But the roles that have truly defined his life are that of husband and father. He married his high school sweetheart and fellow CHS 2008 grad Laurie (Hallick) Farnon in 2022. They are raising daughter Amelia, 2, in the same city where their story began.

"Service is not just something that I gave to my country," said Farnon. "It is a way of life, woven into my love for family and community."

"More than anything, I hope to share these lessons with Amelia: that courage and kindness matter, and that service to others is one of life's greatest privileges," he continued. "And," he went on to say, "that Clifton will always be more than just a hometown. It will be home."



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The Life Journey of Michael Napurano

By Jack DeVries



That's Mike Napurano, the shortest guy up front, with, from left, William Hackney, James Chernesky, Larry Jennings, Mike Martineau. The memory board above is in Nappy's home.



Mike “Nappy” Napurano raised his machete and slashed the vine in front of him. He was on point, about 50 meters out front of the others. Nappy, 19 and a U.S. Army sergeant, had just relieved one of his men, who was exhausted and dripping wet. Each man was carrying 70 pounds of equipment and the jungle air felt like 110 degrees.

The Mekong Delta floor was muddy and choked with vegetation. Guys worried about poisonous snakes, but the real threats were the red ants and the leeches that dropped from the plants and trees.

Leeches would nestle under a G.I.’s uniform and grow fat as a finger sucking a man’s blood – horrible creatures. Nappy and his men checked each other often to make sure the leeches weren’t feasting on their backs, legs and chests.

Their mission was always the same: search and destroy. It wasn’t easy. Viet Cong moved stealthily through the jungle, wearing only pajama garb and flip flops. To make matters worse, the VC had Russian or Chinese AK-47s that never jammed; Napurano and the Americans had M-16s, which always did.

Plus, Nappy knew, the VC had “the guts of a burglar.” But he wasn’t worried. In this thick jungle, he couldn’t imagine any VC being there.

“Stupid as I was,” Nappy said, “that was my first introduction to spider holes.”

Nappy was chopping with his right hand, his M-16 resting on his ammo belt. Suddenly, a VC popped out of the camouflaged spider hole and fired. Five rounds tore through his side.

“I must have flew 40 feet in the air,” he remembered. “Then the ambush opened up. The interesting part is the VC expected a much taller American. They’d shoot him in the legs and he’d fall forward, and then shoot over him. But here comes me, this short guy (Nappy was 5’7” and less than 140 pounds), and the rounds hit my side. I got behind a log and they started shooting the hell out of me.”

Bullets pinged off Nappy’s helmet. One cut through his ear. His rucksack – full of C4 blasting caps, trip flares and grenades – was sticking up in the line of fire. He waited for one of the VC bullets to hit an explosive inside.

The gunshots that hit Nappy saved his men. After the VC fired, the Americans hit the ground and radioed for artillery. Only one other soldier would be wounded in the firefight.

But for Nappy, things got worse. Bullets tore through his rucksack, exploding cans and staining the bag with fluid. Blood flowed from his ear and down his neck. Leeches began feasting around his bleeding wound. The VC in the spider hole just 20 feet away peppered him with bullets – rounds ricocheting around him.

Nappy pulled the trigger on his M-16 ... it jammed. He tried reaching for his pistol with no luck. Now the VC bullets were chopping apart the log he lay behind. "I yelled for a medic," he said, "but there's no medic coming. I called for my partner, Jimmy. No partner coming. Where the hell is everybody? I started calling for Jesus Christ. The last person I called for was my mother."

Nappy grabbed a baseball-type grenade, hesitating before pulling the pin. Could he throw it through the thick jungle or would it bounce back and kill him?

"Nobody's coming to get me," Nappy thought, "I thought, 'Was this it?'"



At his base in 'Nam, the helmets of Nappy's GI buddies killed that week.

Just then, a tall American soldier nicknamed "Red" crashed through the jungle and shot and killed the VC in the spider hole. Artillery rained down next and the remaining VC disappeared into the jungle. Soon, Nappy's partner and friend Jimmy Chernesky was by his side, as was a medic who stopped the bleeding. The rounds had passed clean through Nappy's side. They gave him a shot of morphine for the pain. He'd live.

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The Life Journey of Michael Napurano

Because it was near nightfall, a “dustoff” (helicopter evacuation) was too risky. Jimmy dug a foxhole, more like a grave, for Nappy to spend the night.

The next day, a helicopter lowered a basket through the jungle canopy and Nappy was placed inside. He went swinging through the air as the helicopter flew off, transporting him to a MASH unit.

This is a tale of an infantryman, a “ground-pounder,” and a “tunnel rat.”

It’s a journey of a college student detoured to war – sent to plains of Kansas, the jungles of Panama and the hell of Vietnam.

It ends with a much older man staving off blood cancer from Agent Orange – his parting gift from Vietnam – and coming to grips with his service, dedicating himself to helping others.

This is a soldier’s story.

Early Days

Mike Napurano was born April 3, 1946, in the Newark’s Italian “Down Neck” section and grew up in Elizabeth, the third child of Frank and Rose. The Napuranos had three other boys – Joe, who served in the Navy; Frank Jr., part of the Marine Corp; and youngest brother, Thomas.

A self-described “good kid,” Nappy worked in a bowling alley, food market and delivered newspapers. He enjoyed sports, joining his high school swim team. However, his biggest influence was being part of the Boy Scout Troop 25 where he earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

“A lot of things I learned in Scouting,” he said, “helped me in the jungles of Vietnam.”

After graduating, Napurano attended college Kean College with an II-S deferment, studying computers. However, a fateful decision changed his life course. During his 1966 sophomore year, Nappy planned on taking 14 credits, including a one-credit course studying Macramé. Thinking the course was “senseless,” he dropped it. He didn’t know taking just 13 credits changed his deferment status.

“Nine days later,” he said, “I got a draft notice. This was when (Defense Secretary Robert) McNamara was building up the forces in Vietnam. I got noticed.” Napurano next found himself at the Army Induction Center in Newark, then headed to basic training in Fort Dix, N.J.

“This sergeant,” Nappy remembered, “starts calling my name. There were like 10,000 guys there! He said there’s a car waiting to take me to Newark Airport. I said, ‘Sorry, I want to stay here with my friends.’ He handed me a brown envelope and told me to get the hell out of there.”

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“That was the scariest thing ever,” Nappy said. “Sure enough, there was this black Lincoln sedan. I got to Newark Airport and there were 20 other guys with brown envelopes. We got into an old two-engine plane and landed in Fort Riley, Kansas.

“President Johnson and McNamara were re-activating the 9th Infantry Division. We trained for almost a year – unheard for the infantry. McNamara called us the best-trained outfit that ever went to war.”

Nappy and his fellow soldiers went through basic and advanced infantry training, air mobile training to jump out of helicopters, and eight weeks of jungle school in Panama. “They even sent us for cold weather training in Colorado,” he said, “stupid because we were going to Vietnam.”

Nappy and the 5,500 soldiers of the 9th Infantry soon boarded the USNS General Alexander M. Patch, a recommissioned WWII vessel.

“I think I was the only person that wasn’t seasick,” he said. “I’d been fishing since I’m a kid with my father and brothers, and never got seasick. As soon as we went under the Golden Gate Bridge, 5,000 guys started puking their brains out. Some lost 60-70 pounds. When we got to Vietnam, they shipped them home. They didn’t even have to go to war.”

In the Vũng Tàu harbor, the Coast Guard patrolled to guard against divers with explosives. After a few days, the 9th Infantry climbed 10 stories down the ship’s side into crafts to transport them. Nappy and the soldiers expected to storm the beach.

“The front of the LST goes down,” Nappy said, “and we come running out. Luckily, the 9th Division Band was there playing us off. We were so happy, it was comical.”

Things wouldn’t be funny for long.

War Fighting

The 9th Infantry arrived at their base camp to find nothing – just the jungle cleared away. Later, there would be a moat with a minefield and guards to protect the base, but now, all Nappy and his mates could do was dig latrines and wait for orders.

“For every ‘ground pounder’ patrolling the jungle,” he said, “there were seven soldiers back at camp, taking care of ammo, food and maintenance. We went walking through the jungle looking for the enemy – basically we were bait. And there’s no way Americans were going to be quiet. We



Nappy on his 1998 Harley Davidson Springer Soft Tail Classic.

were listening to radio, smoking – we were too noisy. The VC claimed they could smell us coming.”

It wasn’t long before Nappy experienced combat.

“On our first patrol,” he said, “we’re still laughing and joking. We ran into some VC and one of our guys got killed. We couldn’t stop the bleeding. He was John Gonzales from California. We knew this guy for a year already – he was our friend. Everything changed.”

During the skirmish that killed Gonzales, Nappy’s patrol sprayed the jungle with automatic fire. In minutes, they were out of ammo. “We started carrying more ammo,” Napurano said, “more magazines and grenades. It turned into the real thing. It got very serious.”

It was never more serious than being a “tunnel rat.”

Because Nappy and his partner Jimmy were small, they were charged with crawling into the tunnels to look for the VC.

Holding their .45-caliber pistols and small flashlights, Nappy and Jimmy would enter, careful to feel the floor so not to drop into a concealed well.

Most times, they’d shoot first into the blackness ahead; other times, they’d blow tear gas into the tunnels. But each time they crawled inside, they never knew what they would find.

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The Life Journey of Michael Napurano

“The VC were digging these tunnels when they were fighting Japan (in WWII),” Nappy said. “When they were fighting the French, they dug tunnels. At different times during the year, the ground was soft. But then it would harden and the tunnel walls would be like concrete. You couldn’t believe the stuff we found underground – a cache of weapons the size of a small building, hospitals, tons of rice.”

Nappy also found courage with his partner Jimmy Chernesky beside him. “Having your partner with you who you’re so close to makes you stronger,” he said.

They were never stronger as when they rescued two pilots and a gunner from a crashed helicopter before it erupted in flames. For their heroic actions, Napurano and Chernesky were each awarded the Bronze Star.

Witnessing Heroism

After being wounded in January 1967, Nappy was sent to a hospital near Cameroon Bay. He rested on a beautiful beach and attended troop shows, seeing Nancy Sinatra and Jonathon Winters. Life was good – until his unit chaplain came to see him.

“He asked me why I wasn’t writing my parents,” Napurano said. “I told him I’d see them in a couple of weeks because I was going home. He told me I needed TWO Purple Hearts to go home – I was going back to combat.”

Nappy’s parents had received a telegram saying he was wounded in action – then heard nothing. His mother was frantic. His parents went to the monsignor at St. Michael’s, who contacted a congressman, who alerted his chaplain. Nappy returned to his unit in March.

Nappy and Jimmy were transferred to the 4th Division as squad leaders, moving to the mountainous area of the Cambodian border. Nappy stowed his personal objects in a duffel bag and went on patrol. They’d be gone when he returned. So would Jimmy.

“Jimmy was the last surviving son in his family, like Private Ryan,” Nappy said. “A chopper came and got him and he went home. That was the darkest night for me ever.” Nappy’s next memorable action was fighting in the infamous Battle of Polei Duc, known as the “Valley of Tears.”



Top left Michael Napurano (Army 1966-1972), top right Thomas Napurano, bottom left Frank Napurano (USMC 1962-1967), bottom right Joseph Napurano (Navy 1959-1961). “My brothers and me, we wouldn’t let Tommy join,” said Nappy. At right, that’s Nappy and Cindi.

Of the 108 Americans in the 4th ID’s 2nd Brigade, Company A, 22 men were killed and 42 wounded by a larger North Vietnamese Army force. If not for the heroism of Medal of Honor winner David McNerney, first sergeant of Company A, the count would have been worse.

“McNerney was like Superman,” Nappy stated. “He was shot and had gotten some shrapnel from a mortar round. When the evacuation helicopters couldn’t find us, McNerney climbed a tree and waved a rag. The helicopter spotted us. Our perimeter was shrinking and the wounded guys were in the center. We started throwing wounded guys into the helicopter. The floor was nothing but red.”

Along with the Valley of Tears battle, Nappy fought in the Battle of Dak To, which he called “the worst,” and the Tet Offensive.

Near the end of his tour in January 1968, the Army wanted to make him a staff sergeant. “I’m getting out of this man’s army,” he said. “Give it to somebody else.”



Thankfully, treatment at the John Theurer Cancer Center at Hackensack Meridian Health stabilized his CLL, and he met a wonderful VA therapist who helped him emotionally. “She told me that that time in Vietnam,” he said, “shouldn’t define your whole life.”

Nappy ultimately regained his footing, spending 50 years in the automotive business and successfully managing high-end Mercedes, Lexus and Infiniti dealerships.

He lives today with his second wife Cindi in the Four Seasons community overlooking Clifton. He’s close to his daughter Marla and husband Stuart, and adores his new granddaughter Serafina.

And he continues serving, especially other veterans. Nappy, 79, is an officer at VFW 7165 in Clifton, part of the Four Seasons Veterans Club, and rides his Harley with the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association since 2009. He also conducts multiple food drives for veterans.

At this year’s Clifton Veterans Parade, Mike Napurano will be riding upon a float, proud of his service and proud of his fellow veterans. Give him a wave and thank him, along with every veteran.

Like Nappy, their commitment to our nation and their sacrifice endures – throughout their entire lives.

Homefront

Returning home, Napurano admits his personality changed. He became augmentative. Hearing helicopters or loud noises alarmed him. He never discussed his service. Agent Orange gave him chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) in 2022 and killed all the men he served with – including his partner Jimmy, who died in 2014.



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VETERANS PARADE



Clifton's Veterans Parade is Nov. 9, steps off 2 pm at the Athenia Veterans Post on Huron Ave. and continues down Van Houten and into the Avenue of Flags. The Mustang Marching Band and Grand Marshal Paul Oliver, (at right with his daughter Debbie) a WWII and Korean War US Navy veteran, age 99, will lead the line of march. Retired US Air Force Lt. Colonel Michael Gielbeda will deliver the keynote.



On Aug. 20, 1940, UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared "never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few." He was praising the Royal Air Force for overcoming stupendous odds and for repelling a Nazi invasion of England.

Five years later, President Harry Truman could have used the same words to recognize what the US Navy submarine service had achieved in preserving democracy and defeating America's enemies.

Between Dec. 7 1941 and VJ Day, Sept. 2, 1945, the "silent service" succeeded in destroying 80% of the Japanese Navy and literally all of its merchant marine capabilities. It was not without costs. During WWII, 52 submarines were lost, crewed by over 4,000 men. When a sub is lost in combat it is considered on *eternal patrol*.



On Aug. 6, 1945, the USS Bullhead [S-322] was on patrol in the Java Sea when it was attacked and sunk by enemy aircraft. The Bullhead was the last sub lost in WWII. One of its crewman, 25-year-old Quatermaster 2nd Class Alfred Aiple, of 8 Englewood Rd. was one of the 84 sailors lost to the sea. They remain on *eternal patrol*. Four weeks after the sinking of the Bullhead, a peace treaty was signed in Tokyo Bay ending the war in the Pacific. This Veterans Day, remember veterans such as Alfred Aiple and all who served. **By Richard DeLotto**



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

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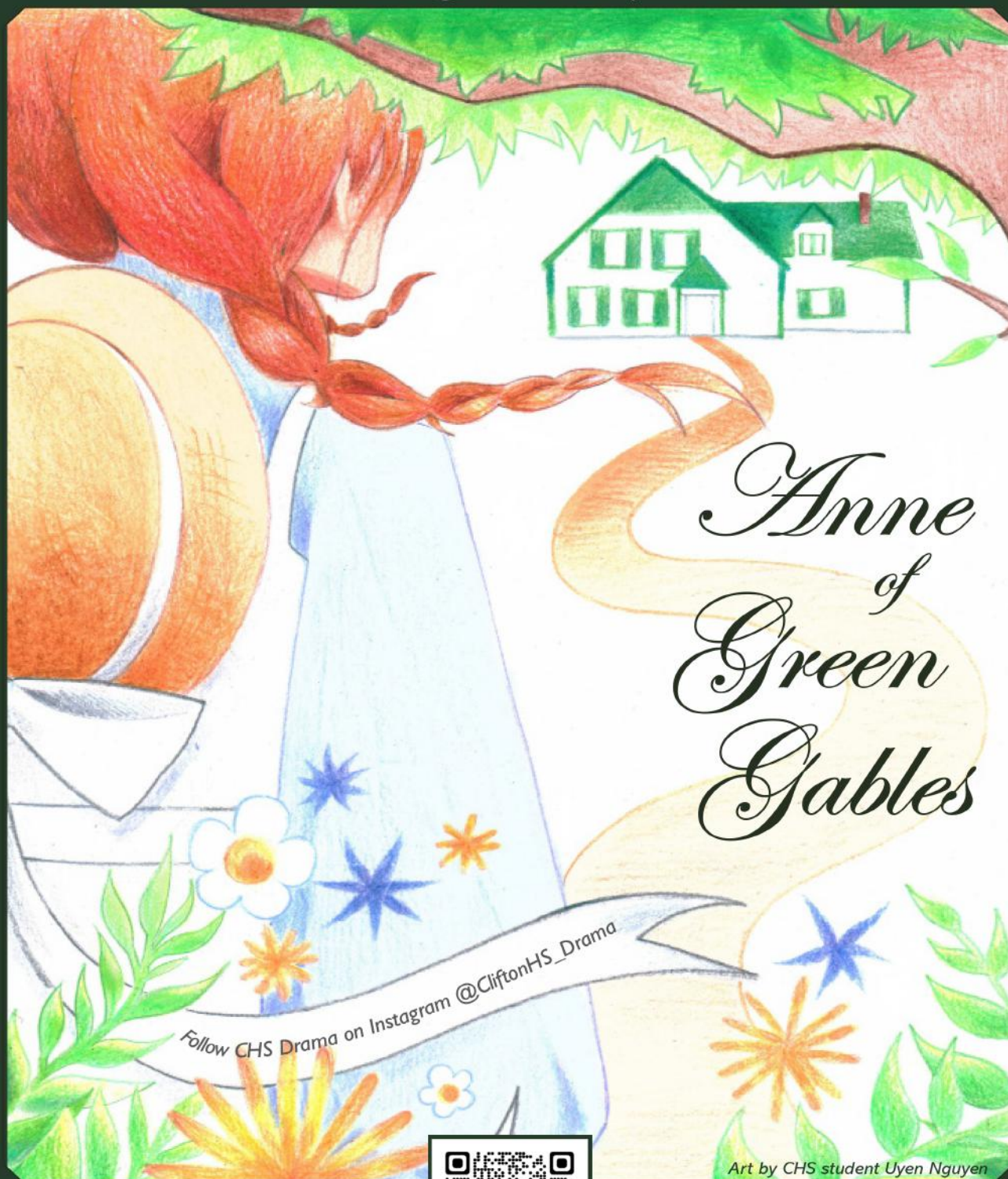
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Mustangs of the Month



Malak Yaghi, Elsa Schimpf, Lewis Ferreras, Maura Coleman.

Here are the **Mustangs of the Month** for November 2025.

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

Malak Yaghi – Freshman

Starting over in a new country has felt challenging for Malak Yaghi, especially leaving behind the home that she knew amidst the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

“I was placed into a lower grade in CHS than I was in Palestine. Knowing that I should be in a higher grade can feel a bit discouraging at times,” said Yaghi (CHS 2029). “But I have worked hard to stay strong, mature, and dedicated to my education.”

Yaghi’s favorite subject is Algebra, because she enjoys problem-solving and appreciates “the logic and structure of mathematics.” When the time comes in a few years, she is interested in pursuing higher education as an accounting major in college.

Although she is not currently involved in any extracurricular activities, Yaghi makes use of her free time by focusing on her academics and adjusting to her new environment.

“When things get tough, I try several times to solve it and I don’t give up,” said Yaghi. “I refuse to give up, no matter how hard it gets.”

The freshman has many to thank for their ongoing support. “My family, my friends, and the people of Palestine inspire me,” she said. “They have been my foundation of strength, comfort, and resilience through immense change and uncertainty.”

Elsa Schimpf – Sophomore

Elsa Schimpf has no shortage of people to draw inspiration from in her life. Two of those people are Math teacher Ms. Eftihia Kelso and World Language teacher Ms. Rasha Girgis.

“[Ms. Kelso] was always easy to approach if I had any questions and was willing to take the time to thoroughly explain the subject,” said Schimpf (CHS 2028). “[Ms. Girgis’] calmness and patience have always made me look forward to going to her class, both this year and my freshman year.”

Math and Art are Schimpf’s favorite subjects, because she gets to challenge herself with solving problems and express her creativity and emotions, respectively.

“I also find that hearing others’ perspectives on an art piece can be even more fulfilling than finishing a piece that I am proud of,” said Schimpf.

Schimpf plays on the Girls’ Varsity Soccer team and plays club soccer in the winter and spring. Soccer is a long-time outlet, and she enjoys “contributing to the building and development of a team.”

Her future plans involve possibly pursuing a Master of Education with hopes of continuing her soccer career, whether by playing or coaching.

“Discipline on and off the field has ... been a very important aspect of life that [soccer] has taught me.”

Lewis Ferreras – Junior

Communication is key, which is why Lewis Ferreras works hard by focusing his time and energy on his studies and “improving myself.”

“Communication has been a major hurdle for me, because I don’t speak English fluently,” said Ferreras (CHS 2027), “but I have been working hard to overcome it.”

It has meant setting aside participating in extracurriculars, but Ferreras knows how to handle things when they feel tough, or perhaps even insurmountable. “I stay motivated by listening to music and talking with my mom, who encourages me and helps me keep going,” he said.

That will serve him well in the years to come and in the career path that he chooses. Right now the Mustang is interested in someday becoming a police officer.

For the right reasons, too. “I hope to serve and protect my community,” said Ferreras.

He enjoys Science, particularly Biology and Physical Sciences, while learning about the natural world and “understanding how things work.” He said many teachers have influenced him, but ESL/Bilingual teachers Mr. Luke Walsh and Ms. Frances Vidal are the most influential ones.

“I really appreciate their support and encouragement in my learning journey,” he said.

Maura Coleman – Senior

Maura Coleman has over 400 volunteer hours and is motivated by what her visibility might mean to others.

“I remind myself that there are people who are looking up to me, such as underclassmen in the clubs that I lead,” said Coleman (CHS 2026), “and middle and elementary school students that I see during volunteering locally.”

Coleman is the President of the Key Club and led a bake sale event earlier this year, raising \$300 for wildfire relief through Habitat For Humanity during the California wildfires. She has served over 100 hours in Key Club and received the Bronze Presidential Service Award.

Other extracurriculars include: Vice President of the choirs, member of the Madrigals, playing Girls’ Varsity Tennis, participating in CHS theater productions, volunteering at the Clifton ISEE program, serving on or being a member of several National Honor Societies, plus more.

“Managing my clubs and after-school responsibilities with AP and Honors coursework has been something that I struggled with,” said Coleman, “but as I’ve advanced in high school, I’ve gotten more used to it.”

Coleman is interested in majoring in Music Education.

“I want to teach music and help people as much as I can,” she said. “I plan to continue to do community service my entire life.”



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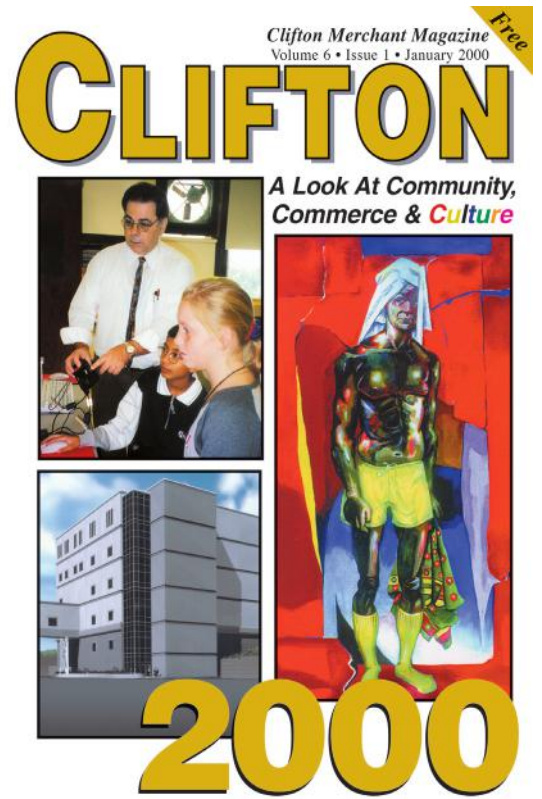
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At the Oct. 5 Clifton Arts Center 25th celebration, councilmembers Rosmary Pino and Joe Kolodziej, Assemblywoman Rosy Bagolie, CAC Director Roxanne Cammilleri and Mayor Ray Grabowski. Our January 2000 cover heralded the opening. Below in 1999 or so, Councilwoman Gloria Kolodziej singing—as part of a fundraiser.



CAC @ 25

Many governmental complexes in New Jersey serve a functional role—the practicality is clear but the character is often sterile, writer Matt Ward stated in our January 2000 magazine.

The Clifton Municipal Complex is a showpiece with art at its core. Walk the 26-acre site and the pulse of life is ubiquitous with a sculpture park containing the works of over 50 pieces on the grounds.

Among the most notable was a piece located between the main parking area and the entrance to city hall. The sculpture originally called “Point of View” and eventually renamed “Cliff Hall” was on loan to the city. After a five-year stay, the piece has since been returned to its owner, Seward Johnson, one of the principal heirs to the Johnson & Johnson fortunes, and is now being shown at different shows throughout the world.

On Jan. 6, 2000, another step was taken, furthering the collaboration of arts and the community with the opening of the Clifton Arts Center—located on Well Rd.

Built in the early 20th century and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, two former barns of the US Animal Quarantine Station had been skillfully up-



dated. The renovated brick barns were joined together by a modern, airy atrium creating a unique venue for the exhibition of the visual arts.

“The Arts Center will have a major impact on the City of Clifton... almost every town that has a cultural and artistic center benefits in countless ways,” said Jeffrey Labriola, then President of the Clifton Arts Center. Only aged 21 at the time, the college student believed the reputation of the community would only grow as more and more people became aware of it.



The initial exhibition, on display through Feb. 5, was entitled “Clifton. Arts.2000.” The exhibition showcased more than 50 artists, working on a wide range of media, drawn from the memberships of many organizations and artists’ groups that worked together to create the Clifton Arts Center. Exhibitors were members of the Clifton Association of Artists, the Clifton Camera Club, and Clifton Schools faculty.

Pieces from the collection of the Clifton Historical Commission traced the history of the Animal Quarantine Station and the development of the Arts Center.

Labriola cited the involvement of many, from political and civic leaders to DPW workers and people like the late Dr. Jerry Raphael for his commitment in moving ahead with the sculpture park. Raphael led the effort in the placement of sculptures on the grounds of the municipal complex, starting with the piece entitled, “One City One Nation” that celebrated Clifton’s multiplicity.

After that came the successful effort with “Point of View”, afterwards renamed “Cliff Hall”, in front of City Hall. Raphael expanded efforts on behalf of the committee by reaching out to sculptors and having their works located on the complex grounds.

Councilwoman Gloria Kolodziej believed the new Arts Center and Sculpture Park would provide a place “for the community to replenish its soul” and “for the community to celebrate, rejoice and come closer together.”



Clifton Arts Center Timeline

- 1980s–Discussions begin to create a cultural center on the new City Hall campus.
- 1984–The Barns Museum-Workshop Committee is formed in coordination with Council and BOE to establish the center using two former US Quarantine barns.
- Rita Cadorin leads the group with Richard Moran, Eugene Angiulli and Juel Olzak. Their mission is to create a center in which all would enjoy seminars, music recitals, demonstrations and discussions.
- Summer 1985–The Barns Museum-Workshop Committee begins fundraising.
- 1990-1992–Plans are finalized after successful fundraising and construction joining the two Quarantine barns with a contemporary atrium structure begins.
- 1992–The Barns Museum project is placed on hold.
- 1997–The Clifton Association of Artists urges the City Council to finished the artistic and cultural center.
- Summer 1998–In an effort spearheaded by Councilwoman Gloria Kolodziej, the non-profit Clifton Arts Center Inc. is formed. Trustees were Mary Ann Baskinger, Dr. Joseph Leo Barone, Roxanne Cammilleri, Cynthia Czesak, and Jeff Labriola. Labriola is voted its first president with Czesak as vice president.
- Fall 1998–The CAC fundraising offers trips to Broadway and other fundraisers.
- Winter 1999–The CAC logo contest is won by Richard Ashton, a stylish script and image of one of the barns is represented.
- Spring 1999–Clifton Sculpture Park is dedicated on a April afternoon with a ceremony coordinated by Dr. Jerry Raphael and the Clifton Beautification Committee.
- Summer 1999–The CAC launches Support the Arts-2000 and the first curator, Don Burmeister, is hired to perform operational tasks.
- Fall 1999–The CAC announces its grand opening and the millennium Gallery schedule. Clifton.Arts.2000 featured the work of over 50 artists who were instrumental in forming the CAC.
- Jan. 6, 2000–The Clifton Arts Center’s inaugural reception.

Michael Gabriele's pastels will be displayed at Cedar Bean's Coffee Joint, 575 Pompton Ave., Cedar Grove, through Nov. 30. Gabriele has done much work with the Clifton Arts Center and the Theater League of Clifton. He's also an author of five books on New Jersey history, all published by The History Press: mcgabrielenjbooks.com. Interested in seeing or purchasing his work? Call Cedar Bean's at 908-955-8200 for info.



Friends of Clifton Public Library's membership meeting and celebration of 40 years of service is Nov. 10 at Main Memorial, 292 Piaget Ave., from 1-3 pm. Richard Stillman will perform patriotic music in recognition of Veteran's Day. Follow @friendsoftheCPL on Instagram or @friendsoftheCliftonPublicLibrary on FB for updates on a possible relocation to Allwood Branch, 44 Lyall Rd.

Clifton Garden Club meets Nov. 13 at the Allwood Library, 6:30-8:30 pm. The guest speaker is Karyn Cichocki, an African Violet Society of American judge and master judge for both AVSA and the Gesneriad Society. She will do a presentation on African Violet species, semi-miniature, miniature, trailers, and a few standards. Questions? Call Donna Fantacone at 973-473-0577.

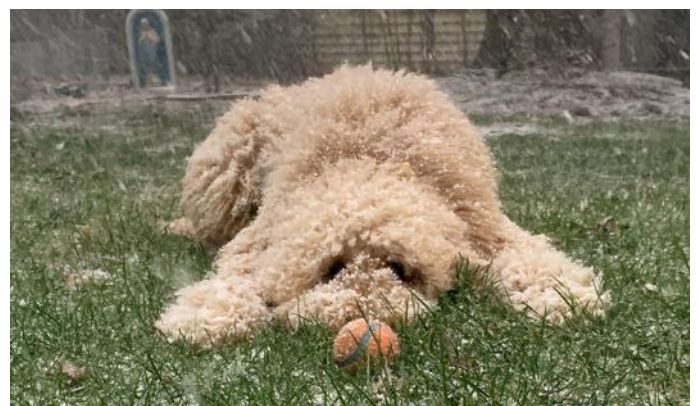
Clifton Public Library Friends fundraiser is at Shannon Rose, Nov. 19 and 20. Dine in or take-to-go so 10% of sales goes to the library. Use a Dining to Donate printed or digital flyer on cliftonpl.org/friends-of-the-library. Questions? Call the Main Branch: 973-772-5500, Allwood: 973-471-0555, or visit cliftonpl.org.

St. Philip the Apostle Columbiettes annual Harvest Harmony luncheon is Nov. 16, 1 to 4 pm, at St. Philip Auditorium. Tickets are \$45. Catered by Matthew's Restaurant, the event also includes live music by solo guitarist Ed Tripold, prizes, and a 50/50 raffle. Questions? Call Pat at 973-881-7977 or email pattyscarp@aol.com.

The Valley Seniors Social Club trip to Sight & Sound & the Dutch Country in Lancaster, PA is Nov. 18-19. The group will leave from the Clifton Masonic Lodge, 1476 Van Houten Ave., at 8 am. For more info., call Karen at 973-420-8605 or Janet at 973-473-2321.

School 5 HSA's 90's Tricky Tray and Bingo is Nov. 14, 6 pm, at the Boys & Girls Club. Tickets \$25. To purchase: school5hasa.membershiptoolkit.com. Bring your own food and drinks. Questions? Email school5hasa@gmail.com.

Saint Peter's Haven's Empty Bowls is Nov. 14, 6 to 10 pm at Athenia Veterans, 147 Huron Ave. The \$40 ticket includes dinner, bread, dessert, and a handcrafted bowl. Reserve at saintpetershaven.org or call 973-546-3406. Empty Bowls raises awareness to end hunger and will support The Haven's food pantry. There will also be a 50/50 raffle, a holiday gift table, live music and food by local eateries.



Clifton Fire Department's annual Pet Food Drive supports the Clifton Animal Shelter. Accepted donations (deliver through Nov. 30) include: Temptations or Friskies Cat Treats, Kitten Chow, Blue Buffalo Chicken & Brown Rice Dog Food (Blue Bag), and Top Chews Chicken & Apple Sausage Bites for Dogs. Use the CFD's Amazon Wish List for easy ordering. Drop-off at Clifton Fire HQ, 880 Clifton Ave. or at: Fire Station 1 (69 1st St.), Fire Station 2 (7 Dumont Ave.), Fire Station 3 (180 Mahar Ave.), Fire Station 4 (144 Main Ave.), Fire Station 5 (51 Brighton Rd.), Fire Station 6 (1202 Van Houten Ave.).

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December 3rd
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The Barrow House introduced Executive Chef Milton Esteban Sanz. Chef Sanz is expected to draw on his multicultural roots, and he emphasizes seasonality, bold flavors, and elevated comfort classics while “honoring the restaurant’s farmhouse-inspired spirit.” The Barrow House, 1296 Van Houten Ave., has begun harvest season with its new fall food and cocktail menus. Interested in booking a holiday party or The Barrow House catering your next event? Email events@skoposhospitality.com.

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

A fundraiser social on Dec. 14, from 3-6 pm, will feature DJ music, dancing, and light refreshments. Tickets are \$15. The “Find Hope” Stress & Anxiety Support Group meets Thursdays, facilitated by Kim Castellano, from 6:30-8:30 pm on Nov. 13 and Dec. 11 at the Senior Center. Free technology assistance is available for seniors, provided by CHS Key Club Students from 2:30-4:30 pm on Dec. 16. Register at the Senior Center. Power of One is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public charity to empower healthy communities. Visit powerofoneccom.org or email info@powerofoneccom.org.

St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 81 Washington Ave., near Main Ave., holiday food sale is on Nov. 23, from 10 am to 2 pm, offering for sale dozen potato pierogi \$8, dozen cherry pierogi \$10, stuffed cabbage \$3.

Clifton Cares supports our troops with holiday packages each November, but the volunteers are relying on community support more than ever. The rate for sending packages was increased to \$31.40 per package. Tax deductible donation for any amount can be made payable to: Clifton Cares Inc., Clifton City Hall, 900 Clifton Ave., Clifton, NJ 07013. Donations of supplies can be brought to the Clifton Cares bin at City Hall any time up to Nov. 14. Items can be small bottles of toiletries, sanitizers, shampoo, soap, power bars, cookies, candy, small bowls of microwaveable mac and cheese, and soup. Ramen noodles and beef jerky are other popular requests, as are packaged hot chocolate, packaged sweetener for water, and gummy candy. Make sure items are within the expiration timeframe. Questions? Email Chris at grandmachrissy99@aol.com.

CHS Class of 1975’s 50th Reunion is Nov. 15 at the Glen Ridge Country Club. For details and how to attend, join Facebook group “CHS Class of 1975” or email CHS1975cliftonNJ@gmail.com.

All Careers Tour is Nov. 15 from 1-2:30 pm at the Clifton Public Library, 292 Piaget Ave. Children can discover exciting careers, take part in hands-on activities, and participate in games and giveaways. Free public event. Career fields include: Architecture, engineering, healthcare, technology, and entrepreneurship. Registration is encouraged. Visit careercarnivalforkids.com/upcoming-events or @careercarnivalforkids on Instagram.

Johnny George invites the CHS ’76 Mustangs Bicentennial class to join the 50th reunion in a date TBD in June, 2026. Email him at: georgesservice@gmail.com.

The Power of One’s “Seniors, We Care” program runs through December with opportunities for fitness, social activities, support groups, and technology assistance. The fall schedule includes Zumba classes (Thursdays from 3-4 pm at the Clifton Senior Center) with all levels of experience welcome and a low-impact fitness class (Fridays from 2:30-3:30 pm at the Clifton Senior Center). Membership is required for fitness classes. Residents \$15 per month and \$20 for non-residents. Register in person or by calling Kim Castellano at 201-328-2326.

THANKS CLIFTON!

For over 30 years I've been Hot Dog Dave, the Chief Winning Wiener, Pushcart Purveyor and Italian Ice Vendor at the Original Jumbos.

But the time has come to move on... So as my friend Jack Mayo takes over the Original Jumbos, I'd like to wish him success. I want to also thank our customers who'd sit with us at that landmark on Van Houten Ave. and smoke and joke as we all became friends. So please, continue to visit, smoke, joke—and buy Sabretts from Jack!

I'll still be a stagehand in northern New Jersey and the Meadowlands with IATSE 632, and living nearby, but when it gets cold I'm heading to warmer climates. That's why I invite you to visit me in Florida where I'll still be Hot Dog Dave at Tampa Bay Downs Race Track & Casino! That's where my sisters live... in Clearwater.

From my days at the Capitol Theatre in Passaic to manufacturing Sabrett Push Carts and seeing them in movies and on the Big Apple streets, I've had a lot of fun...

So thank you Clifton!

We've helped each other through great times! God Bless!

Dave Martina



As he exits Clifton and turns his Sabrett stand over to Jack Mayo, Dave Martina says thanks to the community and remembers his family. In a photo before his brother Rudy died on August 24, 2000, from left, siblings: Rudy, Norman, George, Robert and Dave. Seated are Marylynn, Nancy and Linda.



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Food & Wine Festival

October 27, 2025

Thanks to 30 vendors pictured on these pages, 350 attendees enjoyed foods, craft beers, wines, specialty cocktails and desserts, as they sampled their way through the 11th Annual Taste of Clifton. Thanks to sponsors and ticket buyers, the Taste raised \$20,000 which helps provide services to 7,000 kids at the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton.









Announcing the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton's 2025 Annual Campaign!

Every day, hundreds of kids and teens walk through the doors of The Boys & Girls Club of Clifton. Behind these doors, Club Kids are seen, supported and inspired.

For more than **four generations**, The Club has been building confidence and character, and preparing Clifton's young people for a future full of possibility.

Your gift fuels the promise of every child's Great Future! Help Club Kids grow—stronger, smarter, and ready for what's next. Please scan the QR code below or send your donation today!

Thank you for supporting the Boys & Girls Club of Clifton!

Rich Mariso

Rich Mariso
Chair, Annual Campaign
BGCC Board of Trustees

Gabe Blau

Gabe Blau
Chief Executive Officer
Boys & Girls Club



Boys & Girls Club of Clifton | 822 Clifton Avenue, Clifton, NJ 07013 | 973-773-0966 | www.bgccclifton.org



Clifton's Halloween Parade & HarvetFest on Oct. 26 tops the many family-fun events offered by Clifton Recreation. Costumed Marching Mustangs, hundreds of kids, parents, pets and some pretty spooky characters paraded along Van Houten. Then it was on to HarvestFest, on city hall grounds, with free hayrides, arts, crafts, carnival booths, rides, and vendors and food concessions. Apple pie contest bakers top winners were Alivia Unis, Maria Rodriguez and Gianna Figueroa. Clifton Rec offers more family stuff... the Clifton 5K on Nov. 16, Candyland on Dec. 13 and a door decorating contest but you must register by Dec. 5. Go to cliftonnj.myrec.com.



Halloween & Harvestfest

2025

October 27th





Across from Board of Ed Building

IT'S A GOOD DAY FOR A SANGWEECH!

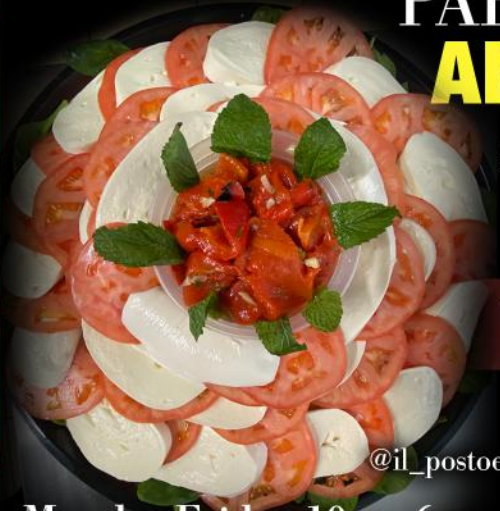


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www.kismettheatre.org



This event is coordinated in part by
Clifton Arts Center Inc. the
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the Clifton Arts Center

The Clifton Arts Center
900 Clifton Ave, Clifton NJ
www.cliftonartscenter.org

"And Then There Were None" is
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The fence covers are down and the VIP waitlist is up. As we went to press this month, we got an update on the Black Prince Distillery project site. Officially named Clifton & Co., located at 691 Clifton Ave., tours of the luxury accommodations are fast-approaching.

“We’re excited to share that tours are expected to begin at the end of November, with move-ins anticipated for January 2026,” said Gina Barretti of RHO Residential LLC. Get on the waitlist at cliftoncoapts.com, call 862-298-5160 or email cliftonco@rhoresidential.com.

Clifton & Co. will offer a collection of 300 units, consisting of studio, one-, and two-bedroom apartment homes with “modern open-concept layouts.” Residents will have access to multiple outdoor courtyards with a pool and dining areas, plus more amenities.

In October of 2019, the city declared that the 7.72-acre site was in need of development after Black Prince moved its operations to Tennessee.

By October 2020, the City Council approved redevelopment. Due to its proximity to the Clifton train station, city officials would regard it as a transit-oriented village. On June 8, 2021, the property sold for \$8,150,000 to Clifton Station Developers, LLC. Owner and project developer Kevin X. Codey expected initial residents by Spring 2024.

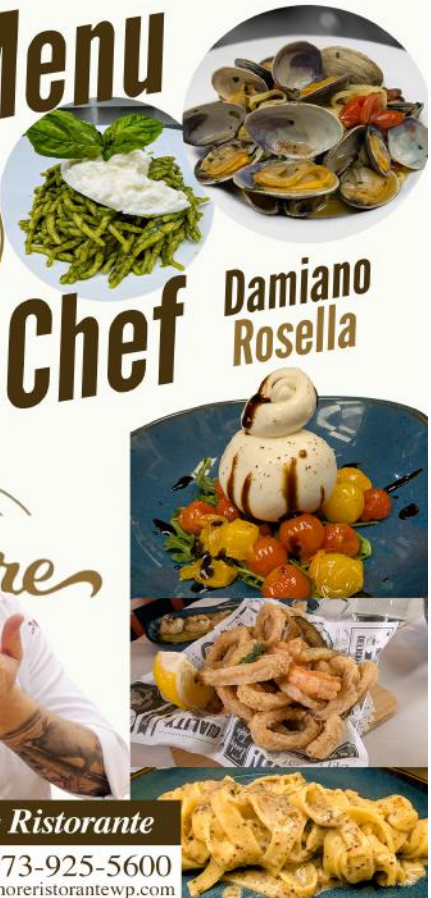
Work halted in March 2024 when Codey said his sub-contractors were needed elsewhere. Work resumed briefly that summer, but it came to a halt again in September 2024. That’s about when Codey put the project on the auction block in an online bidding.

This past August, City Manager Gary DeMarzo told residents of a property transfer done days prior to the Council meeting, avoiding foreclosure. At the helm now is Zachary Kadden, the Managing Director of Development at Madison Realty Capital Advisors, LLC. The 300 units will be introduced in three phases.

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MUSTANG

SPORTS

Story by Tom Szieber
Photos by Matthew Pfouts



Clifton boys soccer's five losses are a bit eye-popping, but only because the Mustangs' dominance is normally so much greater. Still, Clifton (10-5-1) is playing some of its best soccer of the season and seems ready to be a force in the North I, Group IV playoffs.

Since a 2-2 start, Clifton has won eight of its last 12—with one-goal losses to county champion Wayne Hills and powerhouse Bergen Catholic. "We have had to go through a lot of things, especially earlier in the season, but I think we are in a really good place," said coach Stas Lembryk.

Senior forward Simon Deossa and junior midfielder Emre Pesocan finished October tied with the team lead in points, with 18 each. Deossa's seven goals and Pesocan's eight assists are both team-highs.

Mykola Datsyk, another senior, has been an incredible rock on defense, while senior midfielder Lucas Chen has used his skill and flexibility to play multiple positions.

Cross country season has been a good one for the Mustangs, with the girls taking third in the Passaic County meet on Oct. 23. Senior Alexis Smith (20:37.00) and junior Samantha Rodrigues

(20:46.00) finished fifth and sixth, respectively, individually. The Clifton boys finished in fourth place.

Both the boys and girls teams won the Lou Fraulo invitational, and the girls won a share of the Big North Liberty Division title with Passaic County Tech.

"We had a lot of inexperienced runners to start the year," admitted head coach John Pontes. "For these groups to do as well as they did in the county, that's a good mark for them." The sectional meet took place Nov. 1.

After years of success, Clifton football has clearly hit a rough patch. The Mustangs went winless (0-9) this fall—its first time doing so since its only other winless campaign (0-8) in 1939.



Sophomore Mikaela Jorge-Jaramillo steps into the spotlight as Anne Shirley in the CHS production of Anne of Green Gables.

Directed by drama teacher Lisa Poggi, performances are Nov. 14 and 15 at 7 pm and Nov. 16 at 1 pm. Purchase tickets at the door.

Based on L.L. Montgomery's beloved 1908 novel, the play follows spirited Anne as she grows from a whirlwind twelve-year-old into a bright, ambitious young woman, Anne's journey unfolds with wit, warmth, and cinematic energy.

At its heart lies Anne's unforgettable bond with Gilbert Blythe—a relationship that evolves from rivalry to friendship to something far deeper.

Thanks to the Clifton Education Foundation for helping to support this production.

Birthdays & Celebrations - November 2025



Ed & Casey (Hawrylko) Bivaletz are celebrating their 5th anniversary on Nov. 11 pictured with their kids **Lyla, 2**, and **Josie, 3!** **William Wishard** and **Amber Casey** will marry on Aug. 8, 2026. **Joey Angello** is 66 on Nov. 6. **Rosario LaCorte** blows out 79 candles on Nov. 16. **Bev Lacsina** turns 36 on Nov. 8. Our friend **John Seiple** turns 84 on Nov. 26.

Jazzlyn Caba 11/1
 Robyn Jo Paci 11/2
 Thomas Scancarella 11/2
 Kelly Tierney 11/3
 Paul Guzowski 11/3
 Lance Dearing 11/4
 Olivia Nysk 11/4
 Andrew Seitz 11/4
 Mr. Cupcakes 11/4
 Victoria Krzysztofczyk 11/5
 Tanya Ressetar 11/5
 Kristina Azevedo 11/6
 Nicole Lorraine Bonin 11/6
 Martha Derendal 11/6
 Danielle Osellame 11/6
 Kristen Soltis 11/6
 Gabriella Marriello 11/7
 James Ball 11/7
 Kevin Lord 11/7
 Francine Anderson 11/8



Andrea Roza and **Iván Cepeda**
 celebrate their 8th Anniversary
 on Nov. 20.

Ray Konopinski 11/8
 Marie Sanzo 11/8
 Donna Camp 11/9
 Tricia Montague 11/9
 Brandy Stiles 11/10
 Tom Szieber 11/10
 Stacey Takacs 11/10
 Joseph Franek III 11/11
 Laura Gasior 11/12
 Geraldine Ball 11/13
 Patricia Franek 11/13
 Robert Paci 11/13
 Gabriel Garcia 11/14
 Gregory Chase 11/15
 Ken Peterson 11/15
 Kathy Schmidt 11/15
 Matthew Phillips 11/16
 Anthony Wrobel 11/16
 Michael Zangara 11/16
 Marilyn Velez 11/18



The Sister Act: **Mary Vatasin** is 67 on Nov 6 and **Anna Diduch** turned 68 on Oct. 29. **Adeline (Lombardo) DeVries** turns 89 on Nov. 29. She and **Jack** have been married for 69 years. **Spencer Olivia Guzowski** turned 1 on Oct. 31. Parents are **Paul** (CHS 2008) and **Cecelia**.

Joseph Tyler 11/19
Joseph Guerra 11/20
Jon Whiting 11/21
Andreas Dimitratos 11/22
Katerina Dimitratos 11/22
Margaret Egner 11/22
Carol Peterson 11/24
Brian Derendal 11/25
Eileen Fierro 11/25
Peter Kedl 11/25

Crystal Lanham 11/25
Rachel Prehodka-Spindel 11/25
Brian Derendal 11/25
Kristen Bridda 11/26
Jessi Cholewczynski 11/26
Dillon Curtiss 11/26
Bethany Havriliak 11/26
Kelly Moran 11/27
Sami Suaifan 11/28
Amanda Grace Feiner 11/29

Anne Hetzel 11/29
Christopher Seitz 11/29
Adeline DeVries 11/29
Kaitlyn Graham 11/30
Barbara Luzniak 11/30

Dennis and **Janet Kolano**
celebrate their 55th wedding
anniversary on Nov. 21.



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Clifton Evolves On3



On Sept. 30, Prism Capital Partners announced that Chase and Chipotle are coming to ON3 in Clifton. Fronting Route 3, the bank branch and fast-casual restaurant join Starbucks, which opened in late 2024, and account for nearly 6,000 sq-ft. Hackensack Meridian Health & Wellness Center (above) opened this past summer, joining 1.47 million sq-ft of fully-occupied office space, R&D/lab facilities, and convenience retail. More than 2 million sq-ft of additional space is planned for the site. Prism's vision for ON3 began in 2016 with the acquisition of the former Hoffmann-La Roche North American Headquarters campus spanning Clifton and Nutley. ON3 is transforming the 116-acre complex into a world-class, multi-tenant lifestyle hub, integrating office and R&D, educational, residential, recreational, retail, hospitality, and wellness facilities.

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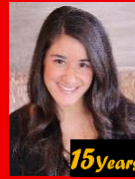
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