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Published by Renna Media

Issue 8 • August 2018

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GARWOOD TEEN GOING PLACES WITH HIS MUSTANG

James Duffey drove his 2014 mustang through the doors of Tractor Supply in Monroe Township about 12:30 p.m. on a Tuesday. But it isn't what you think. The 18-year-old from Garwood's golden mustang is a 4-year-old horse named "Star Spangled Dune."

Dune was wild, untouched by human hands, until Feb 23 of this year. In June, James rode Dune into the Monroe store and bought a soda at the register.

Why ride a horse into a store? "Extreme Mustang Makeover." The contest is organized by the Mustang Heritage Foundation and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to showcase what mustangs can do as domesticated horses.

"I rode Dune through the Tractor Supply because it shows off how quiet and cooperative he is," James said. "The manager and other folks there were really accommodating of our adventure. Not only am I responsible for training him, I also have to market him to potential bidders and buyers."

James was expected to compete in the "Extreme Mustang Makeover" in Lexington, Kentucky, in June.

"I'm part of the competition," he said. "Each trainer has had about 100 days to work with his or her mustang. When we get to the competition we will each have to put our horses through challenges, like riding patterns and trail obstacles. The 10 trainers with the highest preliminary scores will present a freestyle routine. There are about 70 competitors in Kentucky this year. Seven of them are 18 years old, two younger than me."

At the end of the contest all of the mustangs go up for public auction. James attended middle school in Garwood before he was home-schooled during his high school years. A recent graduate from his home school group, he has accumulated 1,600 community hours.

Training horses like Dune has been a process.

"First I had to be able to touch him," James said. "First touch was a big deal. Dune progressed well, so I was able to do our first ride in about 30 days. We went to Island State Beach and rode next to the ocean in April, which is a little crazy since Dune is from the Pancake mountains of Nevada. We also marched in the Sayreville Memorial Day Parade. The Legacy Riding Stables (of Sayreville) mustangs were the first horses they have ever had in the parade. Dune was perfect."

James placed seventh in last year's Extreme Mustang Makeover Youth Challenge in Massachusetts. Competing as an adult for the first time, he said he is working with other Extreme Mustang Makeover competitors to organize a mounted drill team at the contest venue. He coached a drill team for Legacy Riding Stables as part of its Summer Camp program last year and is preparing to do so again.



(left) James Duffey of Garwood atop his mustang "Star Spangled Dune."

(below) James and Dune buying a soda inside Tractor Supply in Monroe.

Photos courtesy of Jerry Duffey.



"It won't be part of the show, but it should be good for some fun and laughs," James said. "Eight horses with 100 days of training doing choreographed patterns to music. Something for our spare time," James said, laughing.

He turned serious when asked about Dune being sold to the highest bidder at the end of the Kentucky contest.

"I try not to think about it too much. This is the first horse I can't keep. Which is supposed to be part of this lesson, having to give him up. God gave me a great horse for it. He is a pretty color, but not my personal favorite. He is only 13 1/2 hands tall and kind of small for me. And he is very Western. He is perfect for a lot of people, but he is not a good fit as my personal horse. But I still love him and it will be hard to watch him go. On the plus side, I have at least seven people actively watching him for possible purchase in Kentucky."

Legacy Riding Stables at 3299 Bordentown Ave. in Sayreville, New Jersey offers trail rides, pony rides and riding lessons for all ages and skill levels. You can call (732) 727-3838 for more information.

The Mustang Heritage Foundation is "passionate about the successful placement of mustangs into private care so future generations can enjoy this distinctive feature of our American heritage." It has placed over 8,000 mustangs into private care since 2007. You can call them at (512) 869-3225.



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PAT DIFABIO RECEIVES UNITY AWARD FOR SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN RECOGNITION OF A LIFETIME OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH A BIG HEART AND A BIG SMILE

Fifteen individuals and seven organizations recently received the Union County Human Relations Commission's prestigious Unity Award for Achievement, an honor given to role models who dedicate their time and efforts to activities and programs that raise and honor the human spirit.

The awards were handed out during a special presentation held at the Kean University's STEM Building in Union Township on Monday, May 7, 2018. The 2018 awards marked the 17th year in which the Commission has named honorees.

Pat DiFabio, a Garwood resident, has always been committed to his hometown. All of his life, between his full-time job as a shop foreman, his part-time job as a band leader and drummer, and his commitment to raising his family, he has volunteered his time and talents for the betterment of his community.

Pat's passion for volunteering began at an early age. Born in 1928 to Italian immigrants, he realized the impact of volunteering when his family needed help in the 1930's. This virtue prompted him to reciprocate. At the age of 21 he joined the Garwood Rescue and the Garwood Volunteer Fire Departments, and has supported them for the past 58 years. Through the years he served as a firefighter and Relief Fund Treasurer. Today, 68 years later, he still actively serves with the Fire Department, currently with the Fire Police.

He also volunteers as president of the Garwood Senior Citizens, as Vice President of the Garwood Historical Society, and served for 16 years as a member of the Runnel's Specialized Hospital's Volunteer Guild, including as a past president. He has served as a member of the town's First Aid Squad and Lions Club, founded the Babe Ruth League, and served as its Little League Coach, Recreation Director, and boxing coach (having been a Golden Gloves Champ in his hayday).

He has also donated his musical talents to raise

funds for local causes including St. Anne's Church and the D.A.R.E. program, and as producer/director of local variety shows.

In 2002, Pat received a Citation from the Retired Senior Citizens Volunteer Program (RSVP) for donating his time and talents to making a difference in the lives of others, and in 2009, the Governor's 'Jefferson Award' for recognition of his career volunteerism.

Pat has shared that no matter your age or employment status, volunteering helps the body, mind, and soul of both the volunteer and the recipient, and, by impacting the lives one touches daily, helps our country.

Pat was honored for not only his decades of community service, but also for his ever-ready smile, happy heart, enthusiastic commitment, and contagious spirit of volunteering that spreads to other volunteer recruits, and for all the joy he has brought to those he has assisted.



(above) Pat DiFabio Receives Unity Award for Special Achievement.

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(above, l-r) EFG President Sara Todisco, Principal Mary Emmons, EFG Member Jen Blumenstock, Superintendent Dr. Teresa Quigley, EFG Members Rachel Herz and Sean Benoit, and (front row) children of EFG Members.

NEW ROCK GARDEN CREATED BY THE EDUCATION FOUNDATION OF GARWOOD

The Education Foundation of Garwood (EFG) is very proud to unveil a new rock garden around the flagpole near the entrance of Lincoln School, located at 400 Second Avenue. This stemmed from the EFG's desire to engage all students at the Kindergarten through 8th Grade school in one project.

EFG member Rachel Herz brought the idea of having each student paint a rock in their own unique way to her fellow Foundation members. She was inspired to come up with this idea by the book "Only One You" by Linda Kranz. Mrs. Herz shared, "I wanted all students K-8 to come together in a meaningful way." She explained how this art project promotes individuality and creativity, "while students simultaneously brighten their community."

A special thank you to Superintendent Dr. Teresa Quigley and Principal Mary Emmons

for supporting this idea from the very beginning. All students painted their rock in Mrs. Rebecca Planer's art class after reading "Only One You."

Sara Todisco, EFG President, said, "The rock garden looks beautiful and is a wonderful example of how through teamwork, ideas become reality." New rocks will be added annually as each new class of Kindergarteners enter Lincoln School.

The EFG is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization. It was founded in 2004 to work with the Garwood School District "in pursuit of educational excellence." In addition to supporting projects like this one, the EFG provides scholarships for graduating 8th Grade and High School students and grants for educators. You can follow the foundation on Facebook at "Education Foundation of Garwood."

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(above) The winning bookmark designs created by students from pre-k to grade 8.

BOOKMARK DESIGN WINNERS

Garwood students from pre-k through 8th grade were challenged to submit original bookmark designs around the theme “Libraries Rock”, this year’s Summer Reading theme. A winner was chosen from each grade.

The winners are as follows: Pre K winner: Kendal Trentacosta; Kindergarten winner: Riley Herz; First Grade winner: Hasen Gallardo Gomez; Second Grade winner: Hannah Scepkowski; Third Grade winner: Craig Lowry; Fourth Grade winner: Tyler Lerouge; Fifth Grade winner: Ava Hladek; Sixth Grade winner: Lauren Raftree; No entry from Seventh grade; Eighth Grade winner: Peyton Ann Collings.

All winners received a certificate and small gift from the Library. The winning bookmark for each grade was reproduced and distributed to the

winner’s classmates. All the bookmarks are now available to the public at the Garwood Library. Come in and take one. Thanks goes out to Advanced Printing of Garwood for donating their service for this project.

Lego Club

Time for summer Lego free form building. No registration required.

Thurs., August 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 at 3 p.m.

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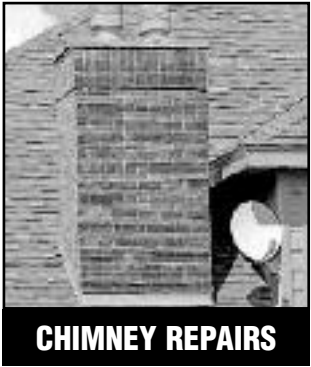
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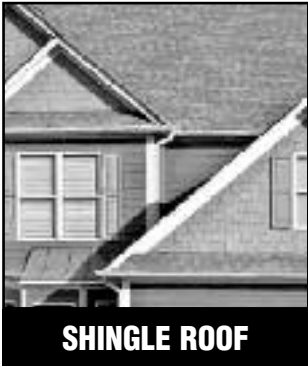
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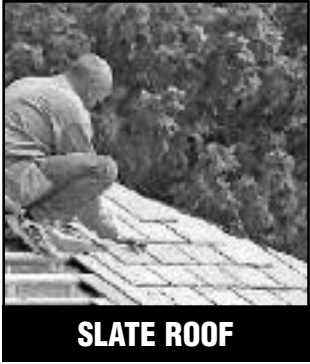
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The Garwood Department of Ageing sponsored a free picnic for Garwood seniors on Thursday, June 28, 2018 at the Garwood Firehouse. The seniors were treated to great food, music, and games.



Photos of this and other events can be found at rennamedia.com and Garwood Times Facebook page. Feel free to "Like," "Tag," and "Share."



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“SHINING STARS” MAKES TRIUMPHANT DEBUT ON UCPAC STAGE

With a crowd of over 1,000 packed into the historic Union County Arts Center, the Shining Stars cast put on a spectacular performance, singing and dancing their way through “Music From the Decades” — which featured songs from the 20’s to today while totally engaging the audience at every turn.

The show, which starred 30 special needs individuals from around Union County, took the stage with their high school volunteer buddies and rocked the house from start to finish. The well-conceived concept kept everyone engaged throughout the show, topped off by the finale, which featured Gloria Estefan hits Get On Your Feet, Conga and Turn the Beat Around, where the cast joined the audience for the exciting finish.

U.C.P.A.C. Executive Director Brian Remo could not have been more impressed with the cast performances.

“This event and these amazing young artists have inspired not only the surrounding community, but each other, in what was truly one of the most memorable nights this stage has ever seen.”

Each decade was represented by several songs, where the entire cast took part in a big dance ensemble. The show was highlighted by solo acts from each member of the special needs cast who performed an array of hits, from the Beatles “All You Need Is Love” to Frank Sinatra’s “My Way” to Bobby Darin’s “Mack the Knife,” which garnered one of many standing ovations throughout the evening.

The 7th annual “Evening of Shining Stars” was an idea conceived and developed by Cranford resident Sally Curci, who back in 2012 had the idea of giving local special needs children the opportunity to shine on stage through the performing arts by putting on a full show. Since then, the show has become a must-see event, leading to their recent record-breaking show.

“While all of our previous shows have been wonderful, we wanted our cast to have the chance to perform on a professional stage and the Union County Performing Arts Center was the perfect venue,” said Sally Curci. “I’m so proud of every one of our stars. It was like being on Broadway. The crowd was amazing and the performances were wonderful. It was a perfect night.”

Master of Ceremonies Ryan Fay was masterful again, entertaining the audience in between acts while making sure the show moved smoothly. Ryan has been the emcee from the beginning, and his wit and humor continues to charm the audience. His brother, Sean Fay, had everyone singing to Sweet Caroline in another great moment.

Along with Director Sally Curci, the show was guided by Co-Director Nicole Greene, Sally’s daughter, and Assistant Director Angie Sandoukas, who was a former volunteer “buddy” who returned to join the Shining Stars staff. All three are special needs teachers.

“This was an incredible night,” noted Nicole Greene. “For many of us, it’s our favorite time of the year. The performers put their hearts and souls into rehearsals for months, and to see them

shine on stage even brighter every year is absolutely incredible. It is amazing to see how passionate the audience is, and how proud the performers are of themselves. I feel so lucky just to be a part of this experience.”

The show’s Executive Producer and Shining Stars CEO, Mike Curci, is a television broadcaster and producer who also runs the day-to-day operations of Shining Stars Network, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization which shines the light on the special needs community through the performing arts and various events throughout the year. The annual show is the biggest highlight.

“I am so proud of every one of our cast members and the entire Shining Stars team of volunteers,” said Curci. “Each and every one of them shares in the success of this show. They truly inspire us every day. It was an emotional night watching them perform in front of a big

crowd at an iconic venue. They proved they belonged there.”

Shining Stars would like to thank the U.C.P.A.C. staff, who helped them through the process of putting on a show of this magnitude.

“It was incredible to see this show come to life after four months of rehearsals,” continued Mike Curci. “Everyone worked extremely hard. I was especially moved by the audience response. They were wonderful. We’re honored that so many people came to see our stars. And of course, this couldn’t have been done without the generosity of our sponsors and boosters who helped make this happen and our dedicated parents who helped in so many ways. It was a night we’ll always remember.”

Members of the cast include: Joe Bacque, Gina Berry, Alexis Cassino, Alejandro Colon, Brian Curci, Courtney Curci, Aidan Dolan, Andrew Downey, Ryan Fay, Sean Fay, Adam Fleissner,

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“SHINING STARS” (continued)

Bret Fleming, Aidan Flynn, Jessie Gaeta, Elizabeth Garcia, Meghan Lamar, Caitlin Madden, Brian McAuliffe, Dan Montealegre, Josh Moreines, Simone Palermo, Melissa Pearl, Gerard Russomanno, Alyssa Santos, Andrew Seiler, Nicole Serkin, Garrett Smith, Dominick Vito, and Mark Zulauf.

This year's volunteer high school “buddies” were Johnny Bush, Diego Colon, Tim Eimer, McKenna Flynn, Abby Heller, Kayla Hooey, Judith Kikakis, Mark Lynch, Kelly McAuliffe, Izzy Pinto, Peter Roefaro, Kelly Ryan, Hannah Scepkowski, Leah Scepkowski, and Sarah Scepkowski,

Special thanks to Jamie Greene, Beth Wolfe,

Jim & Kathy Parlapiano, Amy Downey, Johanna Hathaway, Christina Smith, Maria Palermo, Joe Silano, Derek Thorn, Andrew Iocavano, Megan Convery, Megan Santarelli and all the parents who contributed their time and efforts, and thank you to Lori Fleissner for her outstanding photography.

Shining Stars Network is also excited to announce the return of Camp Shine, a two-week performing arts camp for special needs individuals ages 10 and up. The camp will take place at the Fanwood Presbyterian Church from August 21-30. Please email ShiningStarsNetwork@gmail.com for more information.



(above) The cast of the Shining Stars Network's “Music From the Decades” drew in a crowd of 1,000 people for their 7th annual performance. The Shining Stars Network shines a light on the talents of local special needs children through performing arts.

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