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Watchung's Hometown Newspaper

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47 COMPUTER SCIENCE STUDENTS OF ALL AGES ATTRACTED TO 2020 WHRHS HILLSHACKS HACKATHON

Forty-seven students, some as young as 4th grade, and some from as far away as East Brunswick Township and Middlesex Borough in Middlesex County, and Bethlehem Township in Hunterdon County, participated in the 2020 HillsHacks hackathon on Sunday, February 23, 2020, at Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS).

Coordinating the event for the second year were WHRHS Seniors Jagdeep Bhatia and Mayur Sharma. These WHRHS Computer Science (CS) leaders were assisted by a cadre of WHRHS CS students, who greeted and registered participants. They also assisted in directing participants to classrooms for workshop sessions and to the South Auditorium and Atrium for speaking programs and lunch and dinner breaks.

These and other WHRHS CS students acted as leaders in the session workshops, themselves. They shared with participants their expertise in various computer science languages. They showed participants where to find pertinent web sites on the internet to delve into various subjects, from Artificial Intelligence, introduction to Java, and video game design to Music in Coding, to name just a few.

They also sponsored CS discussions about the very real need to attract more and more girls and women into Computer Science. Of particular interest is tackling the notion of helping girls navigate through their middle school years when many girls feel the social pressure that embracing CS will label them as "nerdy" and "very uncool" in their peer groups.

The WHRHS CS students also shared helpful hints on how to broaden their ability to use computer tools to tackle and solve more problems both now and in the future.

Faculty and volunteers supporting the 2020 HillsHacks hackathon were: Supervisor of Mathematics and Business Dan Twisler; Director of Curriculum and Instruction Mary Ellen Phelan; and community volunteer and former teacher of the Gifted and Talented Program at Watchung Public Schools, Elaine Chesebro.

There was also a panel of speakers who started the day sharing their expertise and their personal stories about how they got into computer science, how they have learned and practiced the use of various computer science languages, and how they became more comfortable at mastering and using new computer science skills. The speakers included Mathematics and Business Supervisor Twisler, WHRHS Computer Science Teacher Daniel Lamson, and 2012




(above, l-r) WHRHS CS students at the HillsHacks, Sophomore Mariam Contractor of Watchung, Freshman Ronald Leung, and Sophomore Arjun Singh of Warren.



(above) 2020 HillsHacks Student Organizers Jagdeep Bhatia, left, and Mayur Sharma, right, congratulate winners.

WHRHS graduate Matthew Carbone, who is a graduate of the University of Rochester. Also on the panel was 2018 WHRHS graduate Jared Pincus, who has completed his second year as a CS student at Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken. WHRHS Senior and co-organizer of this year's Hills Hackathon, Mayur Sharma, sat in on the speaker's panel, sharing what he already learned.

Photo by WHRHS



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WHRHS NATIONAL MERIT FINALISTS

All four Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS) students, who in September were named National Merit Semi-Finalists, have now qualified as 2020 Finalists. This year's WHRHS National Merit Finalists are: Phillip Ding, Dave Ki, Jessica Young and Vivian Zhang.

"Congratulations to Phillip, Dave, Jessica and Vivian, and to their families and teachers for this important and well-deserved honor," said WHRHS Principal William J. Librera. "Students who receive this distinction have a chance to compete for scholarship prizes. Phillip, Dave, Jessica, and Vivian have outstanding academic records, participate in diverse school and community activities, demonstrate leadership ability and inspire their classmates and teachers."

Being considered for this year's National Merit designation is initially based on scores by more than 1.5 million students who sat for the 2018 PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test)/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQT).

WHRHS'S four National Merit Semifinalists this year had been the latest of the 52 WHRHS students who had qualified as National Merit

Semifinalists during the most recent six school years. The year-to-year totals have been: Class of 2015 – 11; Class of 2016 – 6; Class of 2017 – 10; Class of 2018 – 15; Class of 2019 – 6; and Class of 2020 – 4.

Many, although not necessarily all, of the semifinalists tend to go on to qualify as finalists. This is the second year in a row when all of the WHRHS Semifinalists went on to be named Finalists.

Every year, in addition to the naming of the Semifinalists and Finalists, National Merit also names a list of commended students. This year's WHRHS students named to the 2020 Commended List, which is the category immediately following Semifinalist, are: Laura Baeyens, Jagdeep Bhatia, Catherine Cai, Nyna Chacko, Tina Chen, Tamara Hadzic, Jenna Hansen, Nicole Harris, Roopa Irakam, Niharika Iyer, Apurva Joshi, Stephanie Ju, Abigail Kotar, Sana Mamtaney, Aaron Marmolejos, Manthan Naik, James Narayanan, Annabell Pu, Julia Rubin, Cristina Sarrico, Julia M. Schink, Mayur Sharma, Katie Tan, Sarah Young, Maya Zhang, and Kevin Zu.



(above, l-r) WHRHS Principal William J. Librera, center, congratulates the school's four Class of 2020 National Merit Finalists: Jessica Young, Dave Ki, Vivian Zhang, and Phillip Ding.

Photo by WHRHS

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JAGDEEP BHATIA FINALIST FOR REGENERON SCIENCE TALENT SEARCH

Submitted by Denis Kelly

Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS) Senior Jagdeep Bhatia, 17, of Green Brook Township has been selected as one of 40 finalists nationwide in the Regeneron Science Talent Search 2020.

The announcement of the 40 finalists was made on Monday, January 20, in Tarrytown, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., by Science Talent Search sponsors, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and Society for Science & the Public (the Society).

Bhatia's project title is: "Simple and Fast Algorithms for Interactive Machine Learning with Random Counter-Examples."

Bhatia explained that while the current processes of training machines – what is generally thought of as 'Artificial Intelligence' – those processes now tend to be slow, requiring a lot of data.

"My project tries to solve that," he said, "tries to make the whole process more data efficient. My proposal asserts that there is a more data efficient way to train machines. I attempt to prove that assertion using mathematical proofs. The whole point is to find a way to make the learning

process for machines more like human learning."

He said he plans to study Computer Science and machine learning in college, but is undecided yet about whether he plans to pursue a Ph.D. or other advanced scholarship in computer Science, or build his knowledge and expertise in Computer Science to then apply that preparation in an applied or business use.

For the short term, he is very excited to have been selected by the Science Talent Search, and is looking forward to meeting his fellow search finalists in Washington, D.C.

While at WHRHS, he has been President of the Computer Science Club, which has included, among other things, helping to organize and stage the WHRHS "HillsHacks" Hackathons the last couple of years. In addition, he is president of the WHRHS Math Team, and a four-year athlete on the WHRHS Cross Country Team.

The Regeneron Science Talent Search 2020 is the nation's oldest and most prestigious science and math competition for high school seniors. Alumni have gone on to have world-changing careers in STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) fields and earn some of the most esteemed academic honors, including

the Nobel Prize, the Fields Medal, the National Medal of Science, the MacArthur Fellowship and even an Academy Award.

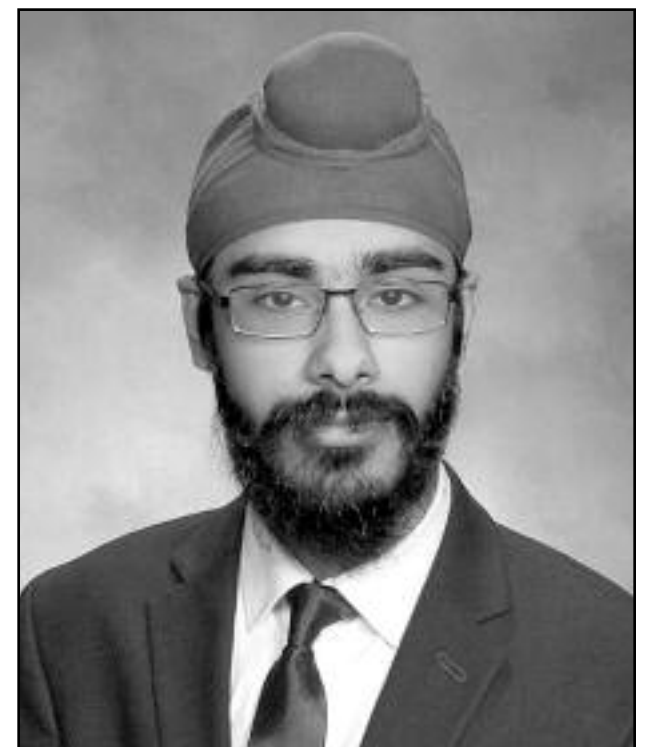
The 2020 finalists were selected from 1,993 highly qualified entrants, all of whom completed an original research project and extensive application process. The finalists were selected based on their projects' scientific rigor and their potential to become world-changing scientists and leaders.

Finalists' projects span a diversity of STEM-related topics including targeting cancer via signaling pathways, developing a mobile application for stroke diagnosis using deep learning and computer vision, and identifying an improved method for trace level arsenic quantification in water.

The finalists are each awarded at least \$25,000, and the top 10 awards range from \$40,000 to \$250,000. The top 10 Regeneron Science Talent Search 2020 winners will be announced at a black-tie gala awards ceremony at the National Building Museum on Tuesday, March 10. In total, more than \$3 million in awards will be distributed throughout the Regeneron Science Talent Search, which includes the awards to finalists as well as the \$2,000 provided to each of the top 300 scholars and their schools.

"The Regeneron Science Talent Search finalists are the stewards of our future," said Maya Ajmera, President and CEO of Society for Science & the Public, Publisher of Science News and 1985 Science Talent Search alum. "These finalists are the top young scientists of our country today and they give me great hope for what lies ahead."

For a list of this year's finalists, visit societyforscience.org/regeneron-sts/2020-finalists/.



(above) Senior Jagdeep Bhatia, 17, of Green Brook Township has been selected as one of 40 finalists nationwide in the Regeneron Science Talent Search 2020. Bhatia will travel to Washington D.C. with the other finalists Thursday, March 5 to Wednesday, March 11 to compete for awards.

Photo by WHRHS

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LIBRARY SYSTEM CELEBRATES 90 YEARS OF SERVICE EXCELLENCE



(above) Shirley Todoroff, lifelong Somerset County resident and SCLSNJ operations supervisor of processing in technical services, who is celebrating 50 years of employment with the Library System in 2020.

Submitted by Tracy Carney

Over the past nine decades, the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) has evolved from a small book truck, known as the bookmobile, to a Library System consisting of 10 full service branches across Somerset County. This year, SCLSNJ will celebrate 90 years of service to the Somerset County community by making enhancements throughout the system including additions to the collection, new resources and services, and more.

“Since 1930, SCLSNJ has striven to maintain our vision to work together to enrich lives, to expand knowledge, and to strengthen communities,” said Brian Auger, county library administrator. “The Library System is, and always has been, a cornerstone of our community. We are consistently responsive to the needs of our customers and are planning a number of exciting releases and events for our 90th year.”

THEN AND NOW

In the 1930s, Somerset County residents would have access to explore the bookmobile only once per month, when it made its rounds to their local community. Fast forward 90 years to 2020, and customers can browse the Library’s collection in the comfort of their own homes, through the internet, or even on the go through the Library’s cell phone app.

In the 1930s, there were just 100 stops a month on the bookmobile’s route that consisted of 37 centers and 63 schools. In 2019, the Library System branch visitors totaled over 1.1 million.

Nine decades ago, SCLSNJ’s collection consisted of just 500 print books. Now the Library System has a growing collection of over 702,000 books while also offering newspapers and magazines; media including music CDs, DVDs, and videogames; and audiobooks and e-books. While the bookmobile lent out an average of 300 print books a day, the current Library

System circulates an average of 3,700 physical materials and almost 700 e-books daily.

Today, in addition to books, the Library System is so much more. SCLSNJ offers hundreds of programs a month for patrons of all ages; a cultural adventure pass, which allows Library customers to explore local museums, parks, and more; dozens of digital resources; and a number of services including foreign language learning, notary services, and passports.

WHAT’S NEW IN 2020 AND BEYOND

SCLSNJ continues to evolve by enhancing current services, adding to the ever-expanding collection, and by offering new resources to the community.

In 2020, the Library System launched Internet On the Go, free mobile hotspots available for checkout; appointment-based notary services; and new digital resources including BrianHQ and Gale courses.

In future years, the Library System will continue to evolve and grow to meet the needs of the dynamic community by offering relevant resources, programs, and services to Library customers.

Explore everything your Library has to offer: SCLSNJ.org.

ABOUT SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM OF NEW JERSEY

Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) partners with you to connect, to explore, to share and to discover. Together we enrich lives, expand knowledge and strengthen communities. SCLSNJ branches can be found in Bridgewater, Bound Brook, Hillsborough, Manville, North Plainfield, Peapack & Gladstone, Rocky Hill at Mary Jacobs Memorial Library, Somerville, Warren Township, and Watchung. Additionally, there are two SCLSNJ reading stations in Branchburg and Washington Valley. Visit SCLSNJ.org.

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(above) Pictured is the original SCLSNJ Bookmobile.

ISHA GIDWANI AND RHEA PATEL COMPETE IN BEE SPECTACULAR

SCLSNJ's Bee Spectacular Spelling Bee was held on March 7, 2020 at the Somerset County Vocational and Technical School. Thirty-three

3rd-8th graders, including 2 from Watchung, competed for the title of spelling bee champion. Seventh-grader Aritra Banerjee, of Bridgewater-

Raritan Regional Middle School in Bridgewater, won the bee by correctly spelling the word "viscerotonia."

Viscerotonia is a noun of Latin origin defined by Merriam-Webster Unabridged as "a pattern of temperament that is marked by predominance of social over intellectual or physical factors, and exhibits conviviality, tolerance, complacency, and love of food."

Banerjee, who also won SCLSNJ's Bee Spectacular Spelling Bee in 2019, will attend the 2020 Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. as the Library System's representative.

Fifth-grader Atharv Narvekar, of Montgomery Lower Middle School in Skillman, came in second place. For more images and information explore SCLSNJ's Bee Spectacular Spelling Bee Facebook photo album: facebook.com/SCLSNJ.



(above) Isha Gidwani, grade 4 of Bayberry School in Watchung.



(above) Rhea Patel, grade 7, of Valley View School in Watchung.

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PARTICIPATE IN THE 2020 CENSUS AT THE SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM OF NEW JERSEY

The U.S. Census count is about to begin and for the first time in history you can complete the survey online. All 10 branches at the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) are safe, secure, easily-accessible locations to fill out your Census survey. Including the Watchung branch, located at 12 Stirling Road in Watchung.

“We recommend that you use one of the Library’s internet computers to respond to the Census at an SCLSNJ branch location,” said Lynn Hoffman, director of operations. “When you use the Library’s internet computers, we don’t

keep track of any information about who you are or what you’re doing. Your internet history is discarded as soon as you log out, and any information you submit for the Census will only be available to the Census Bureau.”

The decennial count helps shape the future of the community by determining how hundreds of billions of dollars are allocated across the country.

“The 2020 Census is fast-approaching,” said Nicole Pascoe, civic services supervisor. “It is important that you respond to the Census to help

our community get its fair share of the federal funds spent on schools, hospitals, roads, public works, libraries, and other vital programs. Make sure you count everyone living in your home, including newborn babies and young children.”

Invitations to respond to the 2020 Census were delivered between March 12-20. Once you receive that invitation, you can respond online, by phone, or by mail. For questions about the upcoming count contact: census@scslnj.org or visit SCLSNJ.org/census.

LIBRARY INTRODUCES TRANSLATOR DEVICES

Submitted by Tracy Carney

According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 30.5 percent of Somerset County residents speak a language other than English at home. As a result, the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) offers translation devices at all 10 Library branches to ensure that all customers are able to communicate with Library staff.

“We are excited by how well these inexpensive devices enable us to bridge the language divide,” said Brian Auger, county Library administrator.

The Google minis can translate to and from 44 different languages including Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. The U.S. Census survey shows that approximately 11 percent of residents in the County speak Spanish at home, while 9.5 percent speak a European based language, and 8.3 percent speak an Asian or Pacific Island based language.

“We deployed these devices to serve as on-demand language translators in our communities,” said Lauren Ryan, manager of branch services, strategic initiatives and special projects. “While we aim to have bilingual staff present in our branches, these devices can supplement communication when a bilingual staff member is not present. This initiative is in alignment with our Strategic Priority of addressing the needs of shifting demographics and our Core Service of providing technology access and expertise that meet the needs of the community.”

In addition to these devices, the Library System offers hundreds of titles in Spanish; foreign language learning resources including Mango Languages and Rosetta Stone; and English Conversation classes in partnership with Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County.

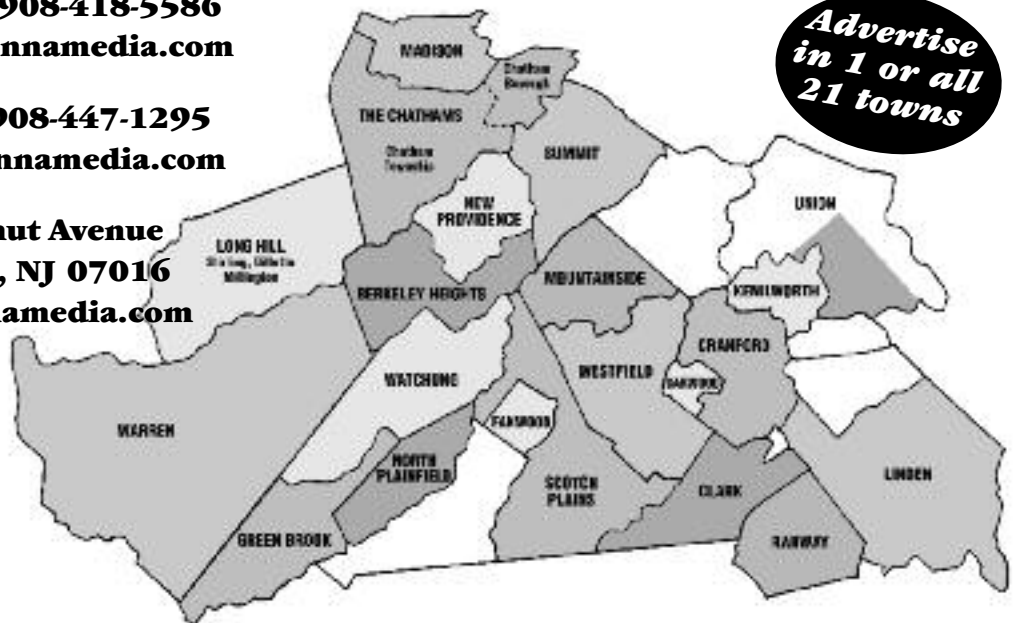
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RAPTOR TRUST'S DIANE SOUCY'S LEGACY LIVES ON THROUGH "THE LEONARD AND DIANE SOUCY MEMORIAL FUND"

The Raptor Trust announces with deep sorrow the passing of Diane Soucy co-founder of The Raptor Trust, who selflessly dedicated her life to the rehabilitation of wild birds.

Along with her husband, Len Soucy, Diane was there every step of the way: from the inception of The New Jersey Raptor Association in the 1970's, to the incorporation of The Raptor Trust in 1982, to her much deserved 2018 Women in Wildlife Lifetime Legacy Award.

From hands-on rehabilitation, to administrative matters such as bylaws and thank you letters, to the countless personal sacrifices she made over decades, nearly everything about the Raptor Trust was done through Diane.

For over 50 years, Diane devoted her life to the rehabilitation of wild birds. She inspired thousands of people who called or passed through the doors of The Raptor Trust, looking for help with an injured or orphaned wild bird. For years,

she and Len were the sole providers of the Raptor Trust, financing all of the aviaries and supplies completely on their own.

Diane handled more avian patients and was responsible for more successful bird releases than anyone else at The Raptor Trust.

Before there were any standards for wildlife rehabilitation, Diane developed successful songbird diets and recipes which have been shared, replicated, improved upon, and used for decades throughout the larger wildlife rehabilitation community.

Diane wore every hat there was to wear at The Raptor Trust, working as a behind-the-scenes adviser, songbird manager, and emergency resolver. At a time when the phrase "wildlife rehabilitation" didn't even exist, Diane and her husband were working to develop techniques which would later become the best practices in the field.

The Raptor Trust takes in 50% of all birds admitted to New Jersey's various rehab centers—over 150,000 songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl, hummingbirds, raptors, and other birds have now been cared for here. Ultimately, there would be no Raptor Trust had it not been for Diane's willingness to go along for the ride. She dedicated nearly her entire life to the mission of The Raptor Trust and the well-being of New Jersey's wildlife.

Fittingly, in 2018, Diane was honored with Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey's Women in Wildlife Legacy Award. Her close friends and colleagues recall not only a patient and accomplished rehabilitator, but also a quiet, calm spirit that was instrumental in shepherding The Raptor Trust to where it stands today.

Donations can be made to The Raptor Trust with a note designating "The Leonard and Diane Soucy Memorial Fund." She and Len began The Raptor Trust together, cared for it throughout their lifetimes, and now that legacy will continue in both of their names. Visit theraptortrust.org or mail check to: The Raptor Trust, 1390 White Bridge Road, Millington, NJ 07946.



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