

CRANFORD MONTHLY_{NJ}

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CRANFORD FIRST AID SQUAD ANNUAL FUND DRIVE

The all-volunteer Cranford First Aid Squad has continued to operate fully during the COVID-19 pandemic, with response times as fast as ever. Although this has been an extremely challenging time for everyone, CFAS has been fortunate to have officers who, very early before there was an acute shortage, acted to procure adequate protective equipment for all our members.

An unfortunate situation for our college members, who had to leave their campuses and return to Cranford has proven beneficial for CFAS and the community. Many of these members have been filling personnel shortages and covering shifts. Even with a large drop in motor vehicle collisions, usually one of our top call types, our call volume is significantly higher than normal. We have responded to 590 calls during the first 6 months of 2020. In addition, when we have two crews operating both of our ambulances, we have also taken many 911 calls from surrounding towns, due to the shortage of EMS services in Union County.

COVID-19 calls are often long, stressful, and difficult.

We have seen many people stricken by this terrible virus. The only request we have is to respond to our annual fund-raiser letter, which all residents should have received in the past month. No donation is too small. Please help us so we can help you when you need it the most. We are a 501c3 non-profit, not affiliated with the Township. We run fully on your donations.

There has never been a better time for kindness and taking care of each other. This is the principle upon which the Cranford First Aid Squad was founded.

Please take the time to make a donation. Your donation is 100% tax deductible. We are extremely cost conscious and can only operate through the generosity of each of you. Any amount is greatly appreciated.

Your tax-deductible donation can be mailed to:
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(above) Members of the Cranford First Aid Squad.



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Recreation & Parks.....	908-709-7283
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ST. JOSEPH'S EXPRESSES THANKS FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Submitted by Bernadette Murphy

Dear friends,

We are more grateful than ever for your support of St. Joseph's and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Your assistance since the pandemic began has been incredible. People have stepped up to help in so many ways.

Your generous contributions of food and funds have had a tremendous impact. With your help, we have distributed over 5,000 bags of food to families since the end of March. We have also shared thousands of sandwiches, toiletries, and personal protective equipment.

We would like to extend a special thank you to the many people in Westfield, Cranford, Mountainside, Berkeley Heights, New Providence, Roselle Park, Union, Elizabeth, Warren, and Edison, among other towns, for your overwhelming response to our appeal for emergency food bags. So many people have contributed that we can't possibly list them all.

We hope you will stay with us as the economic fallout from the pandemic is just beginning, and together we can help our community survive and thrive. If you would like to donate food or funds, please visit our website at sjeliz.org for details.

With heartfelt thanks and appreciation,
The Team at St. Joseph Social Service Center



(above) Food distribution line at St. Joseph Social Service Center



(above) Food being distributed at St. Joseph Social Service Center.

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CRANFORD'S ANNUAL DUCKY DERBY CANCELLED HANSON PARK STILL NEEDS YOUR SUPORT

Submitted by Linda Livelli

One of the most beloved events in Cranford, the Annual Duck Race cannot be held this year due to Covid-19. The 10th Annual Duck Race was scheduled for October 11, 2020; however, it was decided by Hanson Park Conservancy Board of Trustees that we postpone until 2021. We will miss you all so much.

Hanson Park Conservancy, founded in 2004, has been holding the Duck Race since 2010. The event typically draws a crowd of over 400 people to cheer on the 1,500 numbered rubber ducks as they race over the waterfalls at Sperry Park. Prizes (generously donated by merchants) are given out to the first 10 ducks to cross the finish line. All rubber ducks are collected at the end of the race and reused the following year.

Over the years we have received tremendous support from businesses in town who have sponsored the Duck Race. We have appreciated their generosity and look forward to the future when Cranford businesses bounce back better than ever.

Hanson Park Conservancy has used the proceeds raised from the Duck Race for park maintenance and educational programs. Since park maintenance is ongoing, we need your support now so that we can maintain the standards in the park that residents as well as visitors have noticed, complimented and enjoyed.

Please help us make up for the funds lost with the cancellation of the 2020 Duck Race. We welcome any donation you can offer. You may

also donate via our official website at hansonparkconservancy.com or mail a check to P.O. Box 542 Cranford, NJ 07016. Please make your check out to Hanson Park Conservancy. HPC values its membership and even if you have recently renewed, please consider a one-time donation for the continued maintenance.

We are now offering a special gift; for every donation over \$50 you will receive an 8 x 8 print of "The Big Race" painted by Cranford's own Susan Knasko. Framed prints will be available for donations over \$100.

If you have not yet strolled through this idyllic little park, please visit us at 38 Springfield Avenue. All are welcome.

Thank you for your support.



(above) The 2020 Annual Duck Race has been cancelled. The Hanson Park Conservancy continues to raise funds for their efforts and asks for you support.



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Photos by Cranford Jaycees

THE FIRECRACKER RUNS ON FOR ITS 41ST YEAR

Cranford's July 4th Firecracker tradition continued virtually for its 41st year. The Cranford Jaycees annual road race adapted to social distancing guidelines by becoming a virtual event with more than 500 participants signing up to participate.

"We know how important the Firecracker is to our town's Fourth of July tradition, and so we really tried to find a way to keep the event going this year while keeping everyone safe," said Dave Farrell, who co-led the event for the Jaycees with Roger Imhof.

Runners could run the traditional one- or four-mile distances, or do an open course run, at the location of their choice, and then submit their times for scoring. The top male finisher in the four-miler was Liam Christman in a time of 21:47, while the top female finisher in the four-miler was Abby Granrath with a time of 27:00. The top male and female one mile fun run finishers were Sam Dempsey, age 7, with a time of 7:36 and Melody Jennings, age 11, with a time of 7:52. Full results are available online at my.raceresult.com/153331/results.

NEW AWARD CATEGORIES WERE ADDED THIS YEAR, INCLUDING:

- Greatest Distance, for the open run participant who ran the furthest, won by Yusif Mufti who ran more than 31 miles, and Valerie Chupela, who ran 13.1 miles.

- Most Socially Distant, for the runner who competed the furthest distance from Cranford, claimed by Brian Farrell who ran the four-miler in Australia.
- Oldest Firecracker shirt, won by John Bergacs who competed in a shirt from the 1989 race.
- Most Spirited awards were given to the Rosynsky family of Garwood for their patriotic attire and to Gina Schinestuhl, who ran the four-miler while carrying an American flag.

A kickoff show was live streamed by TV35 and on Facebook featuring the national anthem sung by local artist Kelli Bruno and the firing of a cannon to start the race.

Brighton Air Corp was the title sponsor for the second year in a row, while Investors Bank of Cranford was a primary sponsor for the 10th consecutive year.

Proceeds from the event helped support the Cranford Jaycees scholarship fund and community efforts. In June, the Jaycees awarded a total of \$25,000 in scholarships to these graduating seniors from Cranford: Paige Brogan, Grace Caldwell, Chloe Carracino, Autumn Clarke, Thomas Cutro, Ariel Daryani, Jack Gard, Mikaylee Grohol, Ian Hanna, Andrew Iacovano, Benjamin Jones, Marina Nunziato, Pilar Paradiso, Shannon Roman, Daniel Serna, Erin Trojan, Grace Ushay, and Alex Whitmore.

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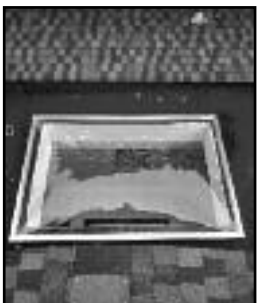
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VFW BLOOD DRIVE BRINGS OUT THE TOWN

Submitted by Jim Darcy

The citizens of Cranford showed their true colors on Thursday, June 25th as they came out in force for the Cranford VFW Blood Drive held at the Community Center. A VFW record of 103 units of blood were donated in the 6 hours that the drive was held. It was heart warming to see the turnout.

"We knew that the pandemic would stir the emotions of our towns people. They were well aware of the dire need of blood and they met it head on" said VFW Past-Commander Jay Boxwell, who sat at the door welcoming donors. "The Cranford people came with a purpose, a real need to help. It was so great to see and to thank them as they arrived. You felt a tremendous sense of community pride there that day."

A spokesperson for the New Jersey Blood Services indicated that as many as 309 people will benefit from the donations that were received. Because the need for blood over the

summer always grows, they hope to be able to hold an additional drive in Cranford soon.

The men and women of the Cranford VFW thank everyone for their help in making this effort such a success and will advise of future blood drives as information becomes available.



ATLANTIC FEDERAL CREDIT UNION SCHOLARSHIP

Atlantic Federal Credit Union scholarship recipient Autumn Clarke of Cranford, plans to attend Rutgers University.

"I plan to follow in my mother's footsteps by pursuing a degree in nursing or public health."



Autumn Clarke

COMMUNITY CENTER BLOOD DONOR EVENT - AUG 19

The Cranford Community Center, 220 Walnut Ave., Cranford, will host a blood donor event on Wednesday, August 19th from 2 - 8 p.m. Donors can schedule appointments by calling 1-800-933-2566 or visiting www.nybc.org.

As hospitals resume patient care at full capacity, need for blood has rebounded but donations have not.

Donating blood is safe and it only takes one hour. We are taking extra precautions to help

prevent the person-to-person spread of COVID-19. NYBC staff are also practicing health self-assessments prior to presenting at work. As always, people are not eligible to donate if they're experiencing a cold, sore throat, respiratory infection or flu-like symptoms. Additional information on donor eligibility and COVID-19 precautions is available at nybc.org/donate-blood/covid-19-and-blood-donation-copy/



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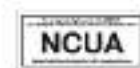
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GIRLS SCOUTS OF CRANFORD HONORED WITH PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Submitted by Kerry Rokicki

The Girl Scouts of Cranford, Service Unit 48 (SU48), is proud to announce that it has been awarded the President's Award by the Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Council. The President's Award recognizes the efforts of a service-delivery team whose exemplary service in support of delivering the Girl Scout Leadership Experience surpassed team goals and resulted in a significant, measurable impact toward reaching the council's overall goals.

"We are so honored to receive this recognition," said Elayna Torsone, manager of Service Unit 48. "Throughout the year our adult volunteers work together to create and lead initiatives that will help girls become women of action and character. It is wonderful to have our efforts recognized by our council, which also strives to shape the future by creating compassionate leaders."

In turn, the Girl Scouts of Cranford Service

Unit 48 honored a community partner by presenting a Plaque of Appreciation to the Cranford First Aid Squad. "The community of Cranford is fortunate to have so many dedicated volunteer groups," noted Torsone. "This year it is our honor to highlight the dedication and selfless efforts of the Cranford First Aid Squad. Whether it is a time of crisis or a time of quiet normalcy, they are there to support our residents, doing their best to keep us healthy and safe."

In addition to the President's Award honoring the accomplishments of the entire service unit, individual adult leaders from SU48 were recognized for their efforts through a peer nomination program endorsed by the Girl Scouts USA organization. These include:

Thanks Badge: Lisa Durant. The Thanks Badge is the highest honor in Girl Scouts. It honors a registered Girl Scout whose ongoing commitment, leadership and service has an exceptional, measurable impact on meeting the mission-delivery goals and priorities of the entire council or the entire Girl Scout Movement.

Volunteer of Excellence: Ginette Bracke (Troop 40525), Jessica Handsman (Troop 40583), Lauren Ramsay (Troop 40071); Introduced in 2013, the Volunteer of Excellence Award recognizes those volunteers who have contributed outstanding service while partnering directly with girls in any pathway to implement the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. It also honors volunteers who have contributed outstanding service in support of the council's

mission delivery to girl and adult members.

Appreciation Pin: Kerry Durante (Troop 40923), Christine Newport (Troop 40480). This pin recognizes volunteers who go above and beyond the expectations for the position held to make an impact on the geographic area, such as the township.

Dedicated Leader: Jillian Boidy (Troop 40779), Heather Burnett (Troop 40098), Amy DiPaolo (Troop 40688), Kristin Ferrara (Troops 40923 and 40744), Kristine Gaffney (Troop 40688), Michele Keating (Troop 40753), Kathleen Marchesi (Troop 40843), Sarah Marmarou (Troop 40856), Pamela Pirone-Benson (Troop 40098), Leslie Potenciano (Troop 40856), Jeanine Stroh (Troop 40098), Elayna Torsone (Troop 40013), Andrea Van Bergen (Troop 40013), Andrea Westervelt (Troop 40753). Dedicated Leaders were nominated by their troops for their extraordinary efforts.

Rookie of the Year: Jillian Boidy (Troop 40779). This award honored a new leader who demonstrated exceptional leadership.

The Girl Scouts of Cranford boasts over 1,139 Girl Scout Members in 71 troops and Juliette's making it one of the largest non-profit organizations in town. The Cranford Service Unit is a part of the Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey (GSHNJ) Council which is part of the Girl Scouts of the USA. If your family is interested in learning more about local Girl Scouts or to find out more information on the Girls Scouts of Cranford, please visit cranfordgirlscouts.com.



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Lost From HMT Rohna, American Military's Greatest Loss of Life at Sea by Enemy Action

By Don Sweeney, research by Stu Rosenthal, editing by Janet Ashnault, and military proofreading by Vic Bary.

Like many Cranford families this year, the Sweeneys honored a Hometown Hero by adopting one of the Cranford 86 War Veteran flags for Memorial Day 2020. While we knew a little about our selected serviceman, Major Benjamin E. Priddy, from his file at the Cranford Historical Society, we thought it appropriate to dig a little deeper into the life and death of this fellow Cranford resident. The Cranford 86 team has become quite well-versed in its research techniques, one phone call to Cranford 86 researcher extraordinaire Stu Rosenthal was all it took to bring back some exciting facts about Benjamin Priddy. Reacting like a bloodhound that has been given a scent Stu got back to us with information in record time.

What Stu discovered regarding Major Priddy was extraordinary and left us all dumbfounded. We could not believe that we had never heard of the HMT Rohna, the ship from which our Cranford hero was lost in WWII. Reviewing news articles from that era we realized that hardly any information had been available regarding this incredible tragedy at sea. Stu and I decided immediately that Benjamin Priddy would be our next featured Cranford 86 story. A tale already remarkably interesting before Stu's discoveries, but the history, or maybe I should say lack thereof, of this hero's passing, provided for yet another incredible, twisting and turning saga, similar to several others that we have encountered while fulfilling the Cranford 86 mission.

Benjamin Emmett Priddy was born in Brooklyn on July 24th, 1895 to Charles Benjamin Priddy and Henrietta (Foss) Priddy. He exhibited his leadership talents early in life by serving as president of the Young Men's Association and the Boys' Brigade of the Bushwick Avenue Congregational Church. Ben attended public schools, starting at P.S. 85 in Brooklyn and graduated first from the Manual Training High School and then from Pratt Institute of Technology as a draftsman. He

worked as a draftsman at Lidgerwood Manufacturing Company in Brooklyn from 1911-1915 and then as assistant chief draftsman at Cameron Machine Company in Brooklyn from 1915-1916. In 1917 he relocated to Muskegon, Michigan for a position at Shaw Crane Company as a mechanical designer and checker. He married Lila Wyckoff of Brooklyn while living there.

In 1917 after WWI had been raging in Europe for three years, submarine attacks on American shipping caused Congress to declare war on Germany. Ben had expressed a desire to join the service. He made a statement that if he did, he wanted to "see action". In May of 1917 at the age of 21, he enlisted into the Navy and quickly rose to the rank of Chief Machinist's Mate, an operating engineer position. Probably not fulfilling his initial vision of military service, Ben primarily was inspecting steel products at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard in South Philadelphia. In 1776 Philadelphia boasted the first shipbuilding yard in America and by WWI the yard had relocated within the city and grown to be the largest in the world. Ben was stationed in Philadelphia with his new wife for the duration of the war and his goal to "see action" during his military service in WWI never was attained, instead he used his valuable skills and knowledge in the shipbuilding arena and dutifully served to strengthen and grow our country's Navy. In 1920, while still stationed in Philadelphia Benjamin and Lila welcomed a daughter, Lorraine Carolyn, she would be their only child.

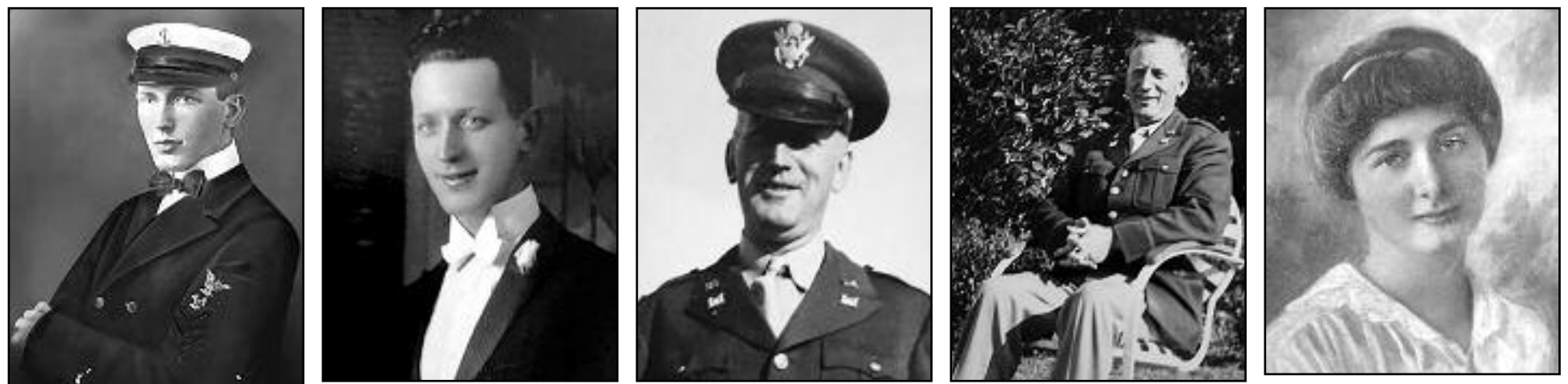
In 1924, we find Benjamin living in East Orange, New Jersey, married to Meliora "Millie" (Ogle) Priddy and employed by a manufacturer of automated road building equipment. In 1925, the couple purchased a house in Cranford and made it their home for 19 years through Ben's career with multiple companies in the asphalt industry. They raised



(above) Born and raised in Cranford, Lawrence and Carolyn Priddy in their backyard.



(above) The last Priddy family picture taken before Ben left for North Africa.



(above, l-r) 1: A beautiful oil portrait of Petty Officer First Class Benjamin E. Priddy, age 21 in 1917, as he began his WWI military career serving in Philadelphia's shipyard. 2: Ben Priddy, age 29, as the handsome groom that married Meliora Ogle in 1924. The couple moved to Cranford the following year and made it their home for 19 years. 3: Reentering the armed forces after a 23-year gap, forty-seven-year-old Captain Benjamin E. Priddy is pictured at Camp Claiborne in Louisiana in 1943 as he completed his "refresher course". As an Army officer in the Air Corps, he was in charge of runway building and repairs in North Africa. 4: Captain Priddy relaxing at Camp Claiborne, getting used to his new work clothes. After 23 years in the private sector he entered the Army Air Corps to command the building and repair of runways. 5: Meliora Priddy, but called Millie by everyone.

MAJOR BENJAMIN E. PRIDDY (continued from page 11)

two children at 210 Retford Avenue, Carolyn, born in 1928 and Lawrence in 1933. During the early segment of this period, the mass production of affordable cars and the need for roads and highways made the asphalt industry a booming business. Benjamin's education and work experience put him in a position for success in that field. In the early 1930's the Great Depression changed things somewhat. Even though there were some government programs which propped up the road building business, every industry, including the asphalt business was adversely affected. In 1935 Ben would take a job with W.M. McIntosh Company of Richmond Virginia, a national asphalt firm. He would rise to be Vice-President and Director of Operations for the entire East Coast. In 1941 after the outbreak of war, another economic factor affected the asphalt industry. Just as gasoline, rubber, coal, and nylon were restricted in their domestic use, asphalt was as well. The need for the mass construction of paved runways overseas all but eliminated the building of roads and highways here at home. Although I was aware of war-era rationing programs, I had never thought of how one's income would be affected if their livelihood was associated with one of those industries.

Along with the know-how to gather information from on-line databases, Stu Rosenthal also has great skill in finding family members of our Cranford 86. He certainly did not let us down on the Benjamin Priddy story and unbelievably he was able to locate Benjamin Priddy's son, 87-year-old Lawrence Priddy, an Army veteran, living in New Jersey. Ben's son Larry told us that during WWII his father was approached by the Army with an offer to enable him to put his skills to use in the military. So, in October of 1942 Ben became a part of an elite group of Americans who stepped up to serve our country in not one, but two World Wars. At the not-so-young age of 47 he enlisted once again into the military, this time with the Army Air Force. He was commissioned a Captain and was sent to Camp Claiborne in Louisiana for a refresher course, then to Richmond Air Base in Virginia. Ben then proceeded to Dyersburg Army Airfield in Tennessee, the home of the newly formed 853rd Engineer Battalion. Their main duty would be to build airfields for the 20th Air Force and it was with the 853rd that Captain Benjamin Priddy would enter the battle theater of North Africa in October of 1944.

After just two months in North Africa, Benjamin was promoted to Major and put in charge of runway construction and repair for the Army Air Corps. He then received orders to ship out to the China Burma India (CBI) Theater with 792 Army engineers from the 853rd. Their purpose there would be to construct air strips to accommodate B-29 Superfortress bombers which flew missions over a very dangerous airlift route across the Himalayas into China nicknamed "The Hump".

He sent a letter home to Cranford on November 18, 1944, before the trip from Africa

began. In it, Ben told his wife Millie not to worry if she did not hear from him as he shortly would be enroute to a new station.

The 853rd along with several thousand other military personnel converged on Oran in French Algeria where four converted ocean liners awaited their arrival. Ben's unit was assigned to the HMT (His Majesty's Transport) Rohna, a British India Steam Navigation Company ocean liner that was converted into a military transport ship four years prior. When in commercial use, the Rohna would accommodate 100 berthed passengers. This trip it would be carrying 2193 passengers and including the crew, total number on board would be 2,388. The overcrowding was immediately apparent, and some rearranging of assignments occurred in order to allow the 853rd to bunk together, a move which would prove fateful to this battalion of engineers. Every square inch of deck space was covered by a soldier or his gear and many slept on the upper decks as well as in the corridors.

In the story that we wrote about the USS Indianapolis and the plight of Patrick Castaldo, we followed the survivors' memoirs from the book *In Harm's Way*. For this open sea tragedy, we had a similar guiding book, *Allied Secrets... The Sinking of the Rohna*. The book's description of the Rohna provides important insight as to what the battalion experienced during their fateful voyage as well as hints as to what would become its ultimate destiny. It was stated that the Rohna was suffering badly from a lack of maintenance. There was more rust visible than paint. Even though there were dozens of cats on board to control the rodent population, there were several generations of rats living amongst the passengers. The strong smell of fuel oil battled the stench of vomit as the dominant fragrance that permeated the ship. Many American soldiers, who were accustomed to quality accommodations on US transports, rated the Rohna unfit for human habitation. The first day at sea was November 25th, Thanksgiving Day, and this being a British India ship, Thanksgiving was not celebrated. There was no turkey dinner awaiting the men, instead, their meal was brought to the bunk room in buckets and consisted of creamed chipped beef dished into mess kits with a ladle. There was a mention of a cart of fresh fruit that passed through crowds of enlisted men which initially brought cheers, only to be realized that it was for officers only. This made us feel that Major Priddy might have been eating a little better than the average soldier.

The Rohna was part of Convoy KMF-26 which had a total of 24 ships in a formation of four across and six deep. It was one of four military transports escorted by an assortment of British and American defensive ships, mostly corvettes, destroyers, minesweepers, and frigates. Above, the Free French Army and the British Royal Air Force provided air support. The Rohna was placed in the "Coffin Corner", named for that position's vulnerability in past convoys. The Rohna was also the only ship not flying "barrage balloons", devices that

entangled invading enemy aircraft or their weapons. The American soldiers, who made up the majority, were superstitious about livestock being on board a military ship. The Indian crew kept numerous farm animals and even the Captain had a pet goat that was the mascot of the ship, undoubtedly causing unease amongst the Americans.

Going into day two, information about their route was circulating amongst the men. The convoy was going to pass through an area known locally as "Suicide Alley", a vulnerable stretch of the Mediterranean from Algeria to Tunisia that was known for air attacks from German-occupied France.

At 4:30 p.m. on Friday November 26, 1944 off the coast of Bougie, Algeria, Convoy KMF-26 approached "Suicide Alley". Almost as if on cue, from the northwest a "staffel", German for squadron, of thirty to thirty-five Heinkel He-177A Griffin long-range bombers approached. Some of the bombers carried traditional "vertical" 500-pound bombs, but twenty-one of the bombers were carrying Hitler's latest secret weapon, the HS 293 remote-controlled chemically propelled glide missile. The HS 293 looked like a small winged plane and was attached to the bombers under each wing or directly under the fuselage. Once launched, it was visually controlled with a joystick type of device by a crew member of the plane from which it originated. Although in development for several years under German engineer Herbert Wagner, at this point the HS 293 had never yet had a successful strike. The attack on the convoy had two fifteen-minute waves. The first wave saw many vertical bombs splash next to the ships answered by cheers from the men crammed below deck, viewing the action through portholes. Two bombers were downed by anti-aircraft guns from aboard the defending ships as well as by the guns mounted on the Rohna. A dozen guided missiles were also launched and fell into the rough sea, none hitting their targets. Many misses were attributed to the allied defenses that had been created since the inception of the guided glide missiles. At least six of the guided bombs were successfully drawn off target by new radio-jamming equipment on some of the convoy escorts and heavy smoke screens that had been released, limiting the visual aspect of the missile's guidance system. The second wave of the attack started after a 30-minute break, with much of the same activity. Still not one ship had been hit. The French spitfires above were also successful in downing two of the Griffin bombers. It would seem that the KMF-26 convoy was close to surviving the well-armed assault from the Luftwaffe's latest technological creation. In the last minute of the second wave, an experienced German pilot named Hans Dochtermann, launched his second rocket boosted glide missile and it was successfully steered as it strafed across the wave tops and approached the Rohna at 340 miles per hour. Survivor accounts tell that many watched

(continued on page 13)

MAJOR BENJAMIN E. PRIDDY (continued from page 12)

through the portholes as the missile approached, it seemed that it might miss the moving ship. Tragically, it struck the aft on the port side, fifteen inches above the water line, directly into the kitchen, engine room and the bunk area that housed all of the 853rd Engineering Battalion. Its delayed fuse caused the 650-pound bomb to explode inside the cabin. Eyewitness reports say it made a seventy-five-foot hole that went right through the ship. Men were jumping overboard, some with just a life vest, into rough seas. From the point of impact at approximately 6:00 p.m., it took just ninety minutes for the Rohna to sink. The USS Pioneer, a minesweeper, was first to the rescue and would nearly capsize itself with the weight of 650 survivors. Several other ships also eventually made their way over to aid the Rohna. In total there were 966 survivors rescued, 35 of which died of their wounds on the journey to on shore hospitals. Those 35 were buried together in Carthage, Tunisia, at the North Africa American Cemetery, where a memorial to the American sailors and soldiers lost in the Mediterranean Sea is maintained still today.

Eyewitness estimates report that 300 men were killed instantly, flames reached up over 100 feet and the ship started leaning severely as it started to take on water. Suffering from the lack of maintenance, like much of the equipment on the Rohna, the ship's 22 lifeboats were in poor condition from the start. The blast from the attack then destroyed or damaged most of them. Some that were still usable were unable to be released from their hardware and the lifeboats on the port side could not be launched due to ship damage. Ultimately, only eight lifeboats could be deployed and all but two of them that did get in the water were quickly overloaded, swamped, and sunk.

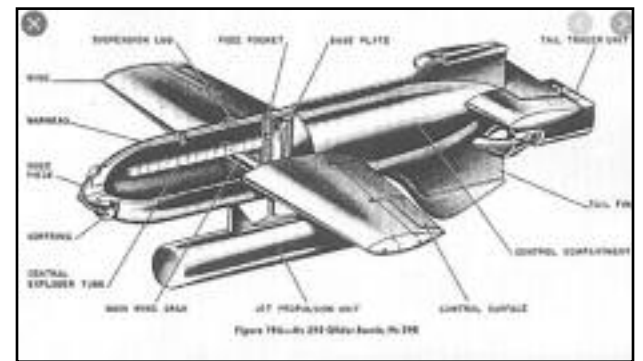
It was reported by surviving soldiers that immediately following the abandon ship announcement, the Indian crew was the first to do so. No assistance was offered to military passengers as would be the usual protocol. This led to additional embarrassment over the incident for the hosting British government. Of the 30 officers and 793 enlisted men of the 853rd who boarded the Rohna, it was discovered that 10 officers and 485 enlisted men were missing in action when the chilling roll call was read to the regrouped survivors. Our Major Benjamin Priddy was one of the names, that when read, had no response. The 853rd had lost 62% of their battalion. In total 1,138 were lost, 1015 were American soldiers. It was the greatest loss of U.S. life at sea due to enemy action in American history. The USS Arizona suffered a greater loss of life, but it was not at sea and those lost from the USS Indianapolis numbered 880.

Amazingly there was a Cranford 86 member in the three largest tragedies in American military history, Patrick "Perk" Castaldo on the USS Indianapolis, Keith Jeffries on the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor, and now Benjamin Priddy on the HMT Rohna. In all of these

stories, during the heart-pounding description of the chaos that ensues during an open sea disaster, a feeling comes over me and a thought comes to my mind. Writing the details of the moments before each ship sank, I have paused along the way to think, where is our Cranford hero now? Once again, that same feeling came to me. Where was Ben during all of this?

As they were recuperating from their wounds, each of the 931 Rohna survivors was informed that the happenings of the disaster that they had just endured had been deemed "Classified" by the Army. A strict order of secrecy was given to each soldier and they were warned, if anyone spoke a word of it to anyone, even amongst themselves, or sent any news of the event home they would be court-martialed. No family member of the deceased was informed about the fate of their loved ones for over a month. Many families were becoming suspicious that something had gone wrong since the normal flow of letters home had stopped. Finally, a vague telegram was sent to each Gold Star family simply stating that their loved one perished at sea on a transport ship and no further information was available. Some were given information insinuating their ship had been a victim of a torpedo strike. The "Classified" status of the incident was soon updated to be "Permanently Classified" due to persistent pressure by the British military.

The news of Major Priddy's missing status reached Cranford on December 28th. There was no military service, no write-ups or mention of the incredible event in local newspapers. At the time of Benjamin's death his daughter Carolyn was 15 and his son Lawrence was 10. Eight years later Millie passed away, the same year that Larry would head off to Rutgers University. Nearly fifty years would pass before Ben's children would even hear the name HMT Rohna or hear the fate of their brave, dedicated father. By the early 90's some of the silenced survivors had started to share their secrets. Ben's son Larry was retired in South Carolina when he saw a newsletter from the office of Congressman Strom Thurman about the transport ship that was sunk off French Algeria in 1944. Thurman welcomed family members to contact him for more information. It was then that the Priddy family first heard the still vague details of the Rohna's sinking. Then, on CBS's Sunday Morning's Charles Osgood's national radio broadcast on Memorial Day 1993, nearly fifty years after the tragedy, the story of the Rohna was told in detail to the American public. Carlton Jackson and Michael Walsh, historic authors, started interviewing members on the survivor list and used them to create a few books, two of which were *Allied Secret: The Sinking of HMT Rohna*, published in 1997 and *Rohna Memories, Eyewitness to a Tragedy* in 2005. Another group, led by Jack Ballo, a filmmaker from South River, NJ, collected interviews and is in the process of producing a documentary of the open sea tragedy, which is due to be completed by December of 2020.



(above) Hitler's secret weapon, the Hs 293 glide missile, a remote-controlled flying 650-pound bomb.



(above) The 461-foot-long HMT Rohna in her glory days. By 1943 she had been being used as a military transport ship for four years and was described as a floating rust bucket, suffering badly from lack of maintenance. On November 25th, 1944, the day after Thanksgiving, she would be struck by a guided glide missile and sink in 90 minutes. 1015 American soldiers would perish on that Black Friday.

Seventy-seven of the lost soldiers were from New Jersey, one was from South River. We have reached out to Mr. Ballo requesting a possible showing of his film in Cranford, on Memorial Day weekend 2021.

Although the sinking of USS Arizona and USS Indianapolis are far better known, the greatest loss of U.S. life "at sea," due to enemy action, was not suffered by the Navy, but was actually suffered by U.S. Army troops aboard the HMT Rohna. But, no history of WWII mentions the Rohna; not even a recent Encyclopedia of World War 2. Officially, the destruction of the Rohna was shrouded in secrecy during the war because neither the British nor the American governments wanted their populace to know that the age of guided bomb warfare had arrived, and that their sons were its first victims. Still, even many years after the war, very few details of the Rohna were released and some people believed the real reason for the information blackout was because the American government did not wish to embarrass the British government.

In addition to locating Ben's son, Lawrence Priddy, Cranford 86 also contacted Ben's granddaughter (daughter of Lawrence), Jeanne (Priddy) Viscito, who is the former mayor of Berkeley Heights and still lives in New Jersey and Ben's grandson (son of Lawrence), David Priddy, a Naval Academy graduate and former Naval helicopter pilot, living in Minnesota. They all helped to put the life story of their father and grandfather together for us. When we started to create his profile, we only had an unbelievably bad newsprint photo, but

(continued on page 14)

MAJOR BENJAMIN E. PRIDDY (continued from page 13)

fortunately the family has provided us with amazing photos from Ben's service in 1917, a photo from his marriage to Millie and many others. In our conversation with Benjamin's granddaughter Jeanne we found out that Ben's daughter Carolyn spent the last days of her life

CRANFORD 86

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here in Cranford at Cranford Hall Nursing Home on Lincoln Park East until she passed in 2011. A note received from Jeanne Viscito after their family's approval of our story told us that she had learned more about her grandfather in the last two days than she had ever known before. It is feedback like that, that fuels our team to surge forward in our mission. The family has promised to join us next Memorial Day for the dedication of Major Priddy's street banner when we hope the 100th Memorial Day service and parade will be able to take place.

The American patriot Nathan Hale made a famous quote before being hung by the British for being an American spy, "I only regret, that I have but one life to lose for my country." Benjamin Priddy's one life was offered twice to his country, in two different wars, in two branches of the armed services and in two different decades, a rare occurrence. We are blessed as Americans to have such brave dedicated men that loved our country so much, that they would choose to put their life in danger so that all Americans can live a life of freedom. Major Benjamin Priddy is truly an American patriot and we owe him and his family who was left here in Cranford without him, a huge debt of gratitude. It is unfortunate that it has taken so long for the people of Cranford to learn of this amazing story of dedication and sacrifice. Major

Priddy is truly a Cranford Hometown Hero.

Special thanks to Christina Ponte for sponsoring the banner of Major Priddy. I met Christina at Memorial Park this year as I was sitting quietly near the 27 Cranford 86 banners on display there for Memorial Day. Recently introduced to me and fresh in my mind, I was able to relate the Priddy story to her. Coincidentally, she had already sent in money to sponsor a Cranford 86 hero but had not yet selected one. My chance meeting with Christina made her mind up as to which hero she would choose.

The history of the designer of the glide missiles, Herbert Wagner is quite interesting. Wagner was captured not long after the sinking of the Rohna and was rushed to Washington D. C. to lead an American team of engineers to develop guided missiles that would be used against Japan. He remained a German citizen but lived in California until his death at age 82 in 1982. The veteran pilot Hans Dochtermann was also taken prisoner shortly after sinking the Rohna, he spent the rest of his life apologizing for the grief he caused the survivors and family members of the deceased. Dochtermann even attended and spoke at many survivor reunions. See the Benjamin Priddy story on-line at cranford86.org for links to additional historical details and photos.

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JUSTIN ROACH NAMED NEW CRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

The Cranford Board of Education is pleased to announce Justin Roach as the new Assistant Principal of Cranford High School. Mr. Roach was selected after an extensive search process which included multiple interviews with the selection committee; reviews of work samples; and a very thorough reference check.

Mr. Justin Roach began his career as a high school English teacher in Wall Township Schools and Manasquan Public Schools. During those twelve years, he also served in numerous roles such as mock trial advisor, literary club advisor, athletic site supervisor, and head coach for girls cross country, boys track and field, and JV boys lacrosse. In 2016, while remaining at Manasquan Public Schools, Mr. Roach moved into administration as supervisor of humanities for grades 6-12, and then in 2018, as supervisor of instruction and STEM for grades K-8. During this time he served as district HIB/Affirmative Action officer, as well as the district grant writer - securing tens of thousands of dollars in

competitive grant funds from sources like Sustainable Jersey, Hackensack Meridian Health, and the NJ Health Communities Network.

Mr. Roach was also involved in many district wide initiatives including overseeing federal Title and Perkins grant funding and serving on the strategic planning committee, QSAC review committee, and school crisis/emergency management team.

Mr. Roach earned his Bachelor of English and Education from Monmouth University, then continued at Monmouth for a Masters of Education, graduating summa cum laude. He was also the recipient of the Caryl K. Sills Teaching Award.

Justin Roach lives in Toms River with his wife, Jacqueline, and son, Rohan. He feels honored and excited to be joining the Cranford team this summer and looks forward to partnering with faculty, students, parents/guardians, and community members to determine how he can best serve our community.

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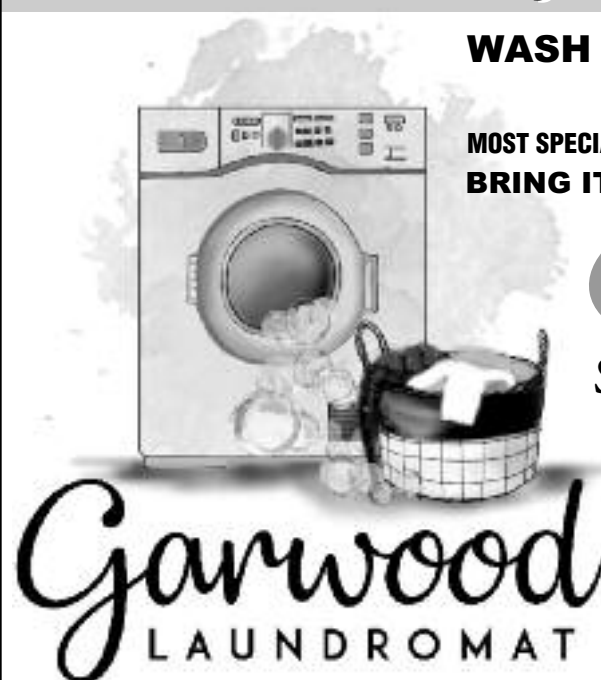


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CRANFORD KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS 2020 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

The Cranford Knights of Columbus presented Scholarships to 10 students recently in the Mary Garden at St. Michael's Church.

Liam McGovern received the Monsignor Louis Fimiani Memorial Award, Ashleigh Cotter received the Christine Bagniewski Memorial Award and Paige Brogan received the Irene Shackell Memorial Award. The other scholarship winners are Andrew Palacio, Claire

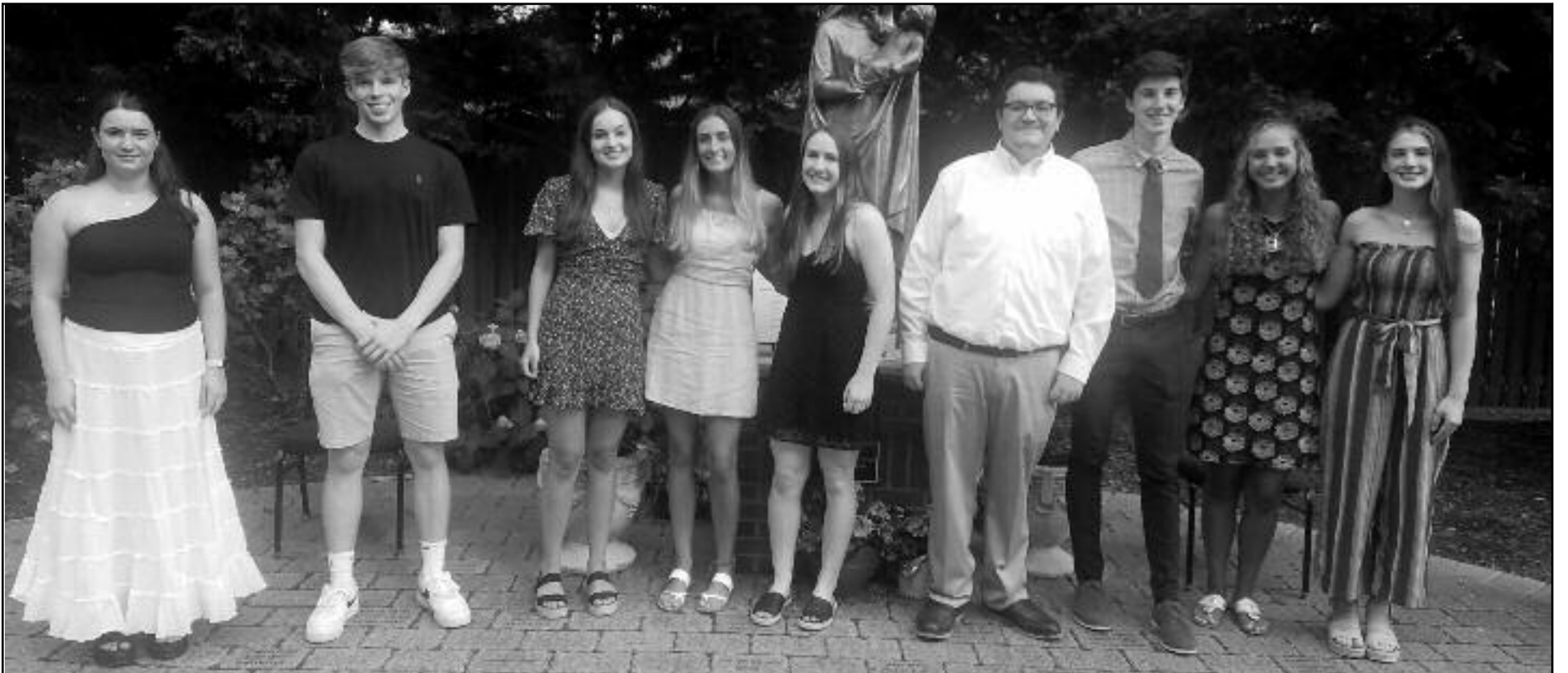
Ganley, Aiden Turner, Chloe Carracino, Pilar Paradiso, Makayla Cartnick and Colin Flynn. This year, the Council distributed \$8,000 in scholarship monies.

The Council would like to thank the Scholarship Committee chaired by Ed Bagniewski.

The Cranford Knights of Columbus is a Catholic Men's Fraternal Organization dedicated

to our four core principles, Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism. The Cranford Council supports many worthy charities and civic causes locally, state-wide and nationally and is committed to be a viable part of our community.

For information about joining the Cranford Council, please contact our Membership Chair John Caprio at 732-306-5634 or visit cranfordknights.org.



(above) The 2020 Cranford Knights of Columbus scholarship winners.

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CRANFORD COUGARS WRESTLING ALUMNI DONATE TO FLAG OF CRANFORD

Submitted by Robert Bulger

The Cranford Cougars wrestling team, founded by Herb Farrell and established in the town of Cranford at Cranford High School during the 1955-56 season and currently coached by Patrick Gorman, has been part of the fabric of our athletic community for 64 years. Rich in history and tradition, the wrestling program in Cranford has produced some of the finest men the town has ever known. Our wrestlers have gone on to success in every level of business, military, police, and fire, to raising families of their own and have always presented tremendous leadership and teamwork in those roles. As good citizens they have always remained loyal to their Blue and Gold roots and still today display a love for the hometown they grew up in. Our slogan is truth, "Tradition Never Graduates".

The Cranford Wrestling Alumni is comprised of all wrestlers who put on Cranford singlet or tights and wrestled for the Cougars of Cranford High School. Once one of our CHS wrestlers

graduates, they automatically become part of our team. There are no dues or fees for this membership. It is earned on the mats and in the room at Cranford High School. As a team, we are here to support the current program in any way that we can to make a positive difference by giving back to the program that was there for us when we needed it.

Cranford wrestling is a team of action. When Covid19 hit, many citizens were left with a choice on what they could do to make a difference. Cranford Wrestling has always been built around the concept of hard work, discipline, teamwork, and community. We chose to raise donations as a "TEAM" for Flag of Cranford, who will utilize our donations to help our small business community in town while also showing support for our Front-Line workers of this pandemic.

It is on behalf of our entire roster of Cranford Wrestling Alumni, current wrestling family, our fans and our friends that we make this donation to Flag of Cranford to assist our small business

community and show support for our Front-Line workers during this pandemic. We also make this donation in remembrance of our Cougars who are no longer living. They walk with us eternally.

We remember our coaches, mentors and brothers who are no longer with us. Their memory and spirit live on with the alumni and wrestlers today. No Cougar will ever be forgotten. We are family and will carry on with those lost in our hearts forever. Founder and Head Coach Herb Farrell, Asst Coach Stan Grayson, Asst Coach Merlyn Jones, Anthony "Nooch" Cerrato, Dennis Sullivan, Glenn Breuer, Jimmy Dwyer Sr., Phil Sandford, Sam Richardson, William "Willie the Kid" Carpenter, Peter Pender, Ralph Zobel, Michael Dillon, James Bulger, Frederick Faulkner, J.T. Vicci, John "Murph" Murphy, George Krip and Stat Elizabeth "Liz" Mattson, athletic trainer Bob "Cotto" Cottingham. If there is anyone who I have missed, please notify me and I will have their name remembered and honored. Until we meet again our Cougar brothers, Rest in peace.

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(above) Cranford Wrestling Alumni completed a fundraiser for Flag of Cranford to help the community and support front line workers during COVID.

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CRANFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2020 MEMBERSHIP

Submitted by Margaret Gerlach, President

The Cranford Historical Society has been busy. Once again, the Crane-Phillips House Museum remains open to visitors every 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month. Our free programs include: book discussions and signings by Cranford authors, speakers on an array of interesting topics, Civil War reenactors, family, craft and holiday events and much more. The Society has also sponsored educational and entertaining events such as concerts, films and lectures to honor the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. Cranford third graders visit the museum to learn what life was like in the 1870's. Our volunteers continue to maintain and beautify the gardens around the museum. It looks great! At our office in the Hanson House, we continue to assist a steady stream of people researching their homes or looking for information about local history.

Please help us to keep the Cranford Historical Society strong by becoming a member. Thank you for your support!

Mail membership form to:
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KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS CIGAR KNIGHT

Submitted by John Doolan

The Cranford Knights of Columbus held their annual Cigar Knight event to kick off the Father's Day weekend on Friday, June 19th at the Garwood Columbian Club Hall with 39 guests attending. From the proceeds of this worthy event, the Council made a \$500 donation to the Cranford PAL and their Will DeGregorio Scholarship Fund. Will was an 11-year old great kid that we just lost way too soon to cancer and the Cranford Council did help Will and his family in 2013 as well with a \$5,000 donation from the Annual Golf Outing. Will and his family will always be in our thoughts and our

prayers. The Cranford Council would like to thank all that supported and attended this worthy event. The Cranford Knights of Columbus is a Catholic Men's Fraternal Organization dedicated to our four core principles, Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism. The Cranford Council supports many worthy charities and civic causes locally, state-wide and nationally and is committed to be a viable part of our community. For information about joining the Cranford Council, please contact our Membership Chair John Caprio at 732-306-5634 or visit cranfordknights.org.



(above) Recently, Past Grand Knight and Lecturer John Doolan presented a check to Detective Sgt. Matt Nazzaro and Lt. Chris Polito of the Cranford Police Department representing the Cranford PAL.

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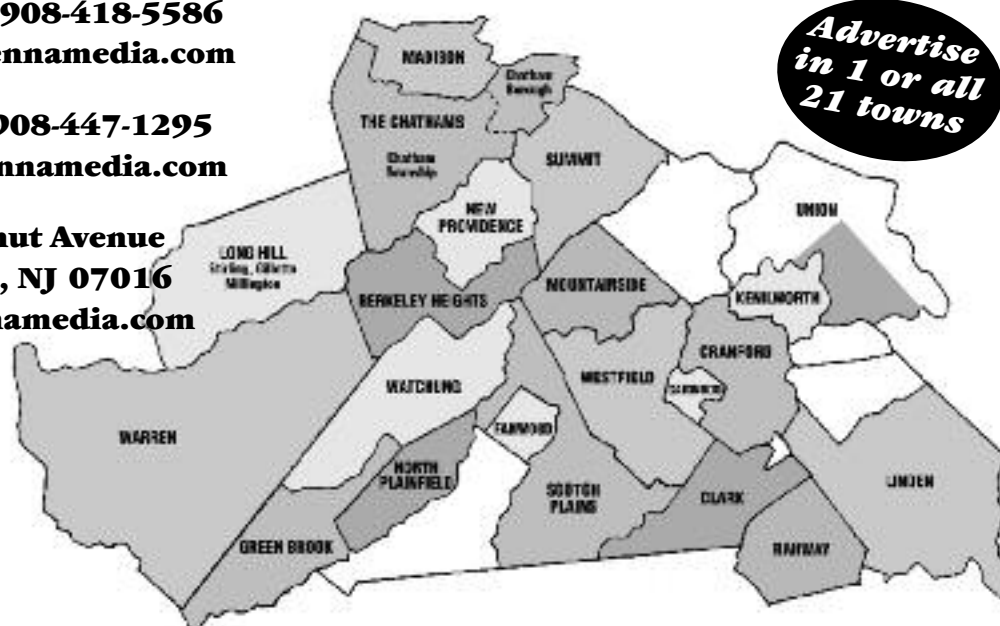
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CRANFORD ASSISTANT WRESTLING COACH STEVE VAN DAM – 2020 DISTRICT 14 COACH OF THE YEAR. CRANFORD COACH FOR THE AGES!

Submitted by Bobby Bulger "Bulge"

Cranford Cougars Assistant coach Steve Van Dam is the current link from Cranford's glorious past to today's present day's success. In 2020 Steve was honored as the District 14 Assistant Coach of the Year for his 32 years of service as a coach with the Cougars. Steve started coaching the Cranford PAL Cougars in 1988. His tenure with the high school wrestling program began in 1997 under then head coach Michael Artiliere.

Steve started wrestling for the Cougars during the 1983-84 season as a freshman at Cranford High School. As a wrestler, Steve was a member of the 1984-85 and 1985-86 North Jersey Group 3 State Championship Teams under Head Coach Charles Ferrara and Assistant Coaches Roy Dragon and CHS Alumnus Ron Ferraro. His teammates over his career include legendary Cranford Captains such as Anthony Cerrato, Greg Laverda, Frank Genova, John Murphy, and classmates Gary Jones and Jim O'Donnell. The 1986 team he was part of will be inducted into the Cranford Sports Hall of Fame on November 19th, 2020 for their achievements. Steve earned the varsity starter position as a senior in 1987 at 157 pounds. Steve will always be remembered as a true student of the sport, a credit to our program and a class act and true sportsman.

As an assistant at Cranford, his record is 304-

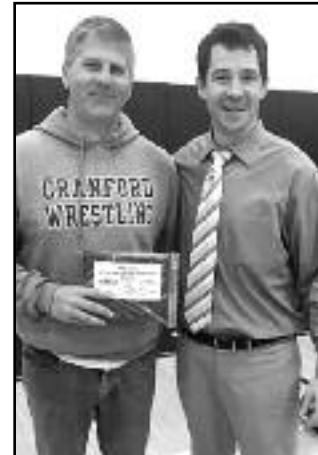
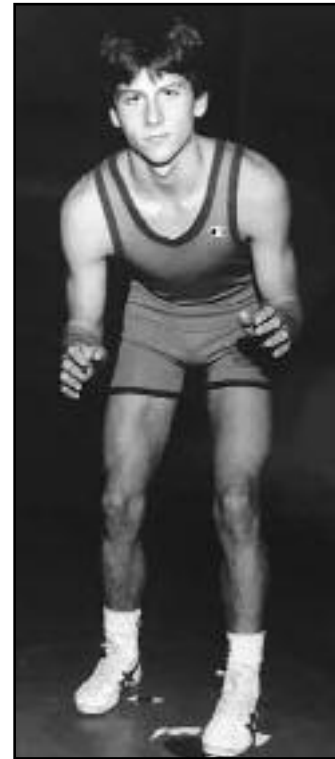
157-2. In his tenure, the Cougars won 5 Conference Titles, 6 Union County Tournament titles, 6 District Titles, were State Sectional Finalists twice and won the 2017 N2 G3 State Sectional Championship. Steve has also coached 59 State Qualifiers, 1 State Champions, 2 State runner-ups, 2 3rd place finishers, 15 All State Wrestlers, 78 District Champions, 43 Union County Champions, 20 Region Champs, 13 100+ match winners, and 1 CHS Hall of Fame Wrestler.

Steve's loyalty and dedication to Cranford Wrestling can never be challenged. From our early days together going to Lighttower Wrestling during the off season to today, Steve has never been very far from the Cranford Wrestling mats. It cannot be contested that he is the winningest coach in program history and his impact has cemented his legacy into Cranford Wrestling History forever.

His true links to the past started with his freshman coach Ron Ferraro who was a successful varsity starter for the Cougars himself under Herb Farrell in the late 70's. Wrestling was always a passion for Steve and he trained in a room that was filled with some of the best talent our program has ever seen. He earned his varsity letter! For 32 years Steve has given back to the program and team that he loves. Today, he is part

of the fabric that "IS" Cranford Wrestling. We honor him for all the hard work, sacrifice, dedication, and efforts he has made to help make our program what it is today. His record speaks for itself. Steve Van Dam – A Cougar 4 Life – A Coach for the ages!

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