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YMCA VIRTUAL LEARNING SPACES PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

Submitted by Colleen Clayton

When local school districts announced their intention to start the school year virtually, The Gateway Family YMCA, which typically offers before and after school care, adjusted to offer Virtual Learning Spaces at the YMCA. This program, offered during school hours, provides children a safe space where they can attend virtual classes while supervised by Y staff.

"The Gateway Family YMCA has served the local community for more than 120 of years. We have survived many challenging times together, none perhaps as impactful as COVID-19," said Krystal R. Canady, CEO. "As an organization dedicated to youth development, we know how important it is that our children have a safe and enriching environment for learning. With many area schools operating virtually this fall, we restructured our YMCA branches to provide that environment to children, while also providing essential child care to those parents who need to return to work," said Melynda A. Mileski, EVP/COO.

The Gateway Family YMCA has created a video with information on the Virtual Learning Spaces program on their YouTube channel, which can be viewed at youtu.be/3HFm0FsYCes. In addition to daily support while remote students are learning, the Y also provides arts and STEM activities, physical activity and outdoor education.

"This program has been a huge blessing to and for me and my children. Due to Covid-19, many of our lives have been impacted in such a challenging way. My son and daughter look forward to coming to the YMCA each day, as they get to interact with different people, leave the house while also knowing that being in the YMCA care that safety and precaution measures are ensured 24/7," shared a parent. "I was under high stress before this program started, because I did not know how I was going to effectively help my children with their schooling while at the same time completing my work. The staff here has been very polite, kind, caring and efficient. I am grateful beyond measure."

In order to help keep children and staff healthy and safe throughout the school year, The Gateway Family YMCA, following state and local requirements, has adapted several changes to its day-to-day operations, including designating the Five Points Branch in Union as open only for Child Care and Virtual Learning Spaces at this time. Safety Procedures include: designated drop off and pick up locations and staggered times; daily health screenings for children and staff; reduced capacity in group activities; staggered activities, with children remain in "learning pods"; frequent safety reminders and hand washing; stringent cleaning protocols and additional day cleaning porters; cloth face coverings/masks required based on state and local regulations.

"We are so happy with our experience. From following CDC guidelines to the teachers being amazing to our children. Our kids look forward to coming to the YMCA," stated a parent. "He loves and looks forward to going to the Y on a daily basis. I have nothing but good things to say about this program, allowing the kids to have some form of normalcy," shared another parent.



"Throughout this crisis, we have looked for ways the Y can best serve everyone in our community. We are pleased to partner with local school districts to provide an equitable, safe learning environment for children to grow and thrive," stated Rodger D. Koerber, Vice President of Operations.

Since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, The Gateway Family YMCA has distributed 13,997 meals to combat food insecurity, provided emergency, transitional or supportive housing for 2,350 individuals, families and veterans, led 1,190 virtual Chronic Disease programs for 2,258 community participants, 3,119 Virtual Wellness participants, 1,038 Outdoor Group Exercise participants and recorded 71,127 outreach endeavors to 23,204 unduplicated socially vulnerable individuals. In addition to Child Care and Virtual Learning Spaces, The Gateway Family YMCA offers a Virtual WISE Adult Services program.

The Gateway Family YMCA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, health and community service organization of caring staff and volunteers dedicated to strengthening the foundations of community and stands For Youth Development, For Healthy Living and For Social Responsibility. The Y impacts the community by providing quality services to people of all ages, races, faiths or incomes.

For more information on Virtual Learning Spaces or The Gateway Family YMCA, visit tgfymca.org or call 908-688-9622.

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Did you or someone you know accomplish something amazing? We are interested in hearing about your latest achievement (accomplishment, honor, award, etc.). Do you have an event that you need help publicizing? Then send Renna Media your news!

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FREE A CAPPELLA SINGING WORKSHOPS ON ZOOM

Looking for joy in the new year? Love to sing? Making the most of the Zoom world, The Hickory Tree Chorus chapter of Sweet Adelines International offers a free Winter Sing series. Join the chorus via Zoom on Wednesdays in January, 7:15 to 9 p.m.

The chorus sings a variety of music, including old-fashioned love songs, Broadway, Disney, Beatles, and more. Using learning tracks and breakout rooms, singers continue to pursue their passion for singing via Zoom.

Hickory Tree is an award-winning women's

chorus singing four-part a cappella harmony in the barbershop style. We are passionate about music, performance, fun and friendship. We believe every voice counts and encourage women singers of all ages, colors, ethnicities, and orientations to visit us and share our joy of music.

Please contact the Chorus for the Zoom link for the free Winter Sing 2020 Workshops by email, info@hickorytreechorus.org or call 908-377-1399. For more information visit hickorytreechorus.org.



(above) The Hickory Tree Chorus chapter of Sweet Adelines International is offering a free Winter Sing series. Join the chorus via Zoom on Wednesdays in January, 7:15 to 9 p.m.

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Edward Anthony Somma, MD
Internal Medicine

After graduating from medical school, Dr Somma served his internship in Internal Medicine at Trinitas Regional Medical Center. He then completed his residency in Internal Medicine at Seton Hall Post Graduate School of Medicine, where he was elected Chief Resident of Internal Medicine in his final year.

Dr. Somma has been in practice in Union and Middlesex counties for over 20 years, with an emphasis on excellence and compassion for his patients. He has served as the physician for the Elizabeth Fire Department, the Board of Health of Hillside and has served the Board of Education for Woodbridge NJ. He was granted the Humanitarian of the Year Award by Trinitas Health Foundation in May 2014, for his dedication to the community and his outstanding service to the goals of the Foundation.

Dr. Somma has special interests in various fields of Internal Medicine, including diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases and arthritis/rheumatology. He has represented to major pharmaceutical companies, such as Schering-Plough and Pfizer, in a consulting and educational role for his peers. Dr. Somma has been a clinical educator for Seton Hall's Physician Assistant Program as an Associate Professor of Medicine for their Internal Medicine program.



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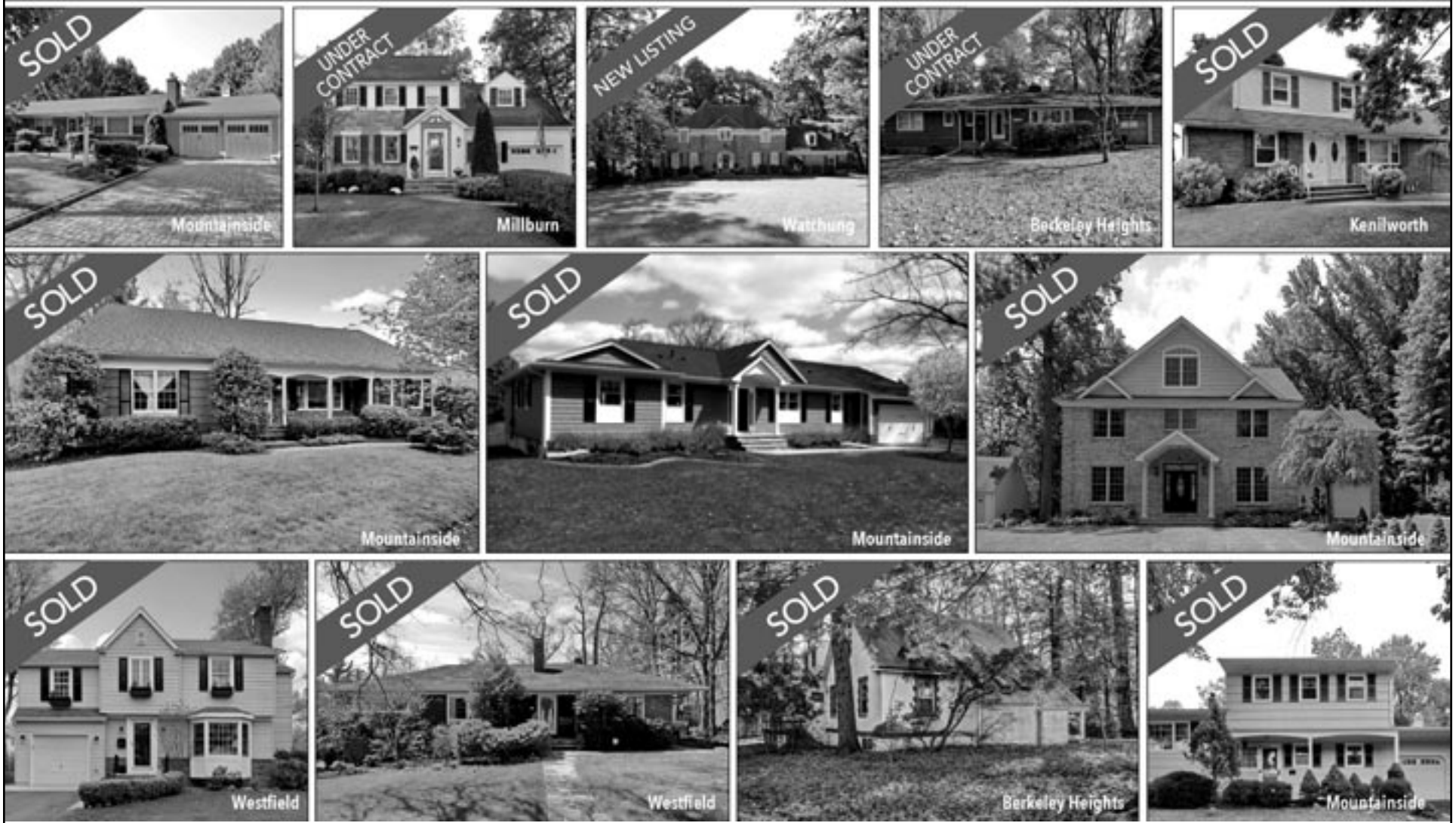


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ROGER, FOR NEW JERSEY VETERAN COMMUNITY TO FIND SUPPORT

ROGER, a search platform for New Jersey veterans, launched on November 9th, just ahead of Veterans Day 2020. The platform was created by Backpacks For Life founders Brett D'Alessandro and Alexa Modero. After serving the Veteran community for 6 years, they found many inefficiencies and convoluted systems that prevented veterans from getting the care they need in a quick and efficient way. From lengthy intake processes to outdated information on organizations' websites, the Backpacks For Life team knew there was a better way to get veterans the care they needed.

ROGER allows veterans and their family members to search for programs, resources and care by a variety of factors such as zip code, branch of service, discharge status and income. With these customizable search features, veterans will see only the programs that they qualify for. This helps mitigate time wasted for not only veterans searching for programs that fit their needs, but also the service providers to ensure the veteran is a good fit for them.

"Navigating through resources is hard...we get it. As a veteran myself, I was often running around in circles trying to find programs that I

was eligible for and that fit my needs. When we're working with veterans, every minute matters and with ROGER we can work more quickly to get veterans what they need. We're excited to bring ROGER to the NJ veteran community." - Sgt. Brett D'Alessandro, Retired US Marine & President of Backpacks For Life

To explore ROGER, visit www.roger.vet or contact the ROGER team at

roger@backpacksforlife.org

Backpacks For Life is a 501(C)3 nonprofit organization that serves the homeless and at-risk veteran community. By regularly distributing backpacks filled with essentials to veterans on the streets and providing mentorship to at-risk veterans and their families, Backpacks For Life aims to bridge the gap between veterans and the resources available to them.

JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS BEREAVEMENT SEMINAR

Submitted by Virginia Waters, PhD and Patti Williams, RN

We are all navigating through especially challenging times due to the ravages of the pandemic, exhaustion from political conflict, depletion of our resources, the loneliness of increased isolation, and the unprecedented chaotic environment in which we currently exist. When you are also grieving a loss in the midst of all these stressors, life can become very dark and everyday may seem overwhelming.

As we enter the darkest time of the year, we offer a ray of light and welcome you to join the Journey Toward Wholeness bereavement seminar. The seminar, sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church of Cranford, grew out of a spark from Dr. Bruce Williams who co-created this program 20 years ago. Due to our respect for keeping our participants safe, the program has transitioned from in person to a ZOOM platform which allows us to include participants from a wider distance.

The co-leaders of the program Patti Williams,

RN, Certified Bereavement Counselor, and Virginia Waters, PhD have both personal and professional training and experience in the field of grief and loss and are joined by a team of trained facilitators who provide support and lead breakout groups for individuals with like losses.

Follow the light to find comfort, support, tools, and connection at our next seminar.

The seminar begins Sunday, January 10, 2021 for 6 consecutive weeks, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Meet us on ZOOM, a meeting link will be provided upon registration. Register by calling Patti Williams at 908-709-1341.

We Welcome all who have experienced loss of any kind, in the past or present. All faiths are welcome. We also welcome all who have previously attended this Seminar to return for a refresher.

There is no cost for this seminar. We have had over 3,500 participants over 20 years. Come join us as we light up the darkness together.

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What's more, we continue to provide the best in virtual programs. Best way to stay informed - follow us on Facebook UnionPublicLibraryNJ, sign up for our newsletter or check our website.

Programs are free and on Zoom. Register at www.uplnj.org

Do You Dream of Sleep?

Wed., Jan. 6 @ 2pm

Presented by Atlantic System Sleep Center

Desperate for just one good night of uninterrupted sleep? We'll show you how!

Meditation

Thursdays, Jan. 7, 14, 21, 28 @ 11:30am

Presented by Bindu Bhatt No experience necessary.

Your 2021 Career - Be a VictOR not a Victim

Jan. 7 @ 4pm

Presented by Abby Kohut

Stay in control of your career and job search during the Pandemic. Learn how to survive and even thrive. All attendees receive a FREE COVID-19 Job Search Resource Guide.

Does Duct Tape Cure Warts?

Tues., Jan 12 @ 2pm

Presented by the National Library of Medicine Do "miracle cures and solutions" work? Learn how to evaluate websites, avoid "bad science" and become more proficient in searching for evidence.

Conversation with Kathleen Rooney, Author of Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk

Thurs., Jan. 14 @ 4pm

Kathleen Rooney is an author and poet and a founding editor of Rose Metal Press, and Poems While You Wait. Ask her about writing, poetry, memoir, and how she came to write a book about a pigeon!

Black Women and the Long Struggle for Freedom

Fri., Jan. 15 @ 1pm

Presented by Hettie Williams, Asst. Prof. of African American history in the Dept. of History and Anthropology at Monmouth University

What is Jeopardy?

Tues., Jan. 19, @ 1pm

Claire McNear, author of Answers in the Form of Questions: A Definitive History and Insider's Guide to Jeopardy!

Mediterranean Diet: Start the New Year Right!

Wed., Jan. 20 @ 2pm

Presented by Karen Ensle, EdD, RDN, FAND, CFCS, FCHS educator, Union County Get recipes, and get inspired by this healthy and delicious eating plan. Presented by y

Build Your Emotional Toolbox

Tues., Jan. 26, @ 2pm

Presented by Diane Lang

Learn how to cope effectively with stress, retrain thoughts from negative to positive, deal with and manage anger, forgive and more.

Electronic Resources for UPL Cardholders

Overdrive: Collection of fiction, non-fiction eAudiobooks and ebooks.

Hoopla: Movies, music, audiobooks, ebooks, comics and TV shows to enjoy on your computer, tablet, phone or TV.

freegal music: Ad-free music per day from a vast catalog.

RBdigital Magazines: More than 60 current issues.

Tutor.com: Tutoring and career service resources available 24/7.

Job & Career Accelerator: Careers, skills and interest assessments and tools to look for a job.

Mango: Self-paced language courses.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Virtual Biographical Storytime

Tuesdays at 7:00 PM

| All ages | No registration necessary

Learn all about important figures from the past and present, broadcast on Facebook Live and subsequently available on Instagram!

Virtual Storytime

Wednesdays at 10:30 AM

| All ages | No registration necessary

Spend this special time listening to a story and singing songs & rhymes, broadcast on Facebook Live and subsequently available on Instagram! NOTE: The 1/13 and 1/20 storytimes will be presented by special guests. More information under 'Additional Programs'.

Virtual Storytime

Fridays at 10:30 AM

| All ages | No registration necessary

Spend this special time listening to a story and singing songs & rhymes, broadcast on Facebook Live and available on Instagram!

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

Club Teen Virtual Check-In

Wednesday, 1/6 at 6:00 PM

| Ages 14 - 18 | Registration required

Catch up with your pals at Club Teen without leaving the house! This program will take place on Zoom.

Construction Zone Virtual Challenge

Monday, 1/11 at 4:00 PM

| All ages | Registration required

Challenge yourself to design new creations with your own Legos and blocks! We'll set the challenge and a timer, and you'll put your building skills to the test! This program will take place on Zoom.

Virtual Music & Movement with Boogie Woogie Babies

Wednesday, 1/13 at 10:30 AM

| All ages | No registration necessary

Enjoy a virtual music & movement class led by Boogie Woogie Babies! This program will be broadcast on Facebook Live and subsequently available on-demand for one month.

Kids' Paint-Along

Wednesday, 1/13 at 4:00 PM

| Ages 5 - 13 | Registration required

Grab some art supplies and join us for this month's virtual paint-along! This program will take place on Zoom.

Bendy Bookworm Yoga Storytime

Wednesday, 1/20 at 10:30 AM

| All ages | No registration necessary

Bendy Bookworm uses books and yoga to teach children cognitive, social, and emotional skills! This program will be broadcast on Facebook Live and subsequently available on-demand for one week.

Club Teen Virtual Check-In

Wednesday, 1/20 at 6:00 PM

| Ages 14 - 18 | Registration required

Catch up with your pals at Club Teen without leaving the house! This program will take place on Zoom.

Virtual Bedtime Storytime

Thursday, 1/21 at 7:00 PM

| All ages | No registration necessary

Get ready for bedtime with a great story, broadcast on UPL's Facebook Live and subsequently available on UPL's Instagram! Don't forget to wear your coziest PJs!

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OPEN HOUSES AT HISTORIC CALDWELL PARSONAGE

The Union Township Historical Society will host two open houses at the Caldwell Parsonage, 909 Caldwell Avenue, Union, on Sunday, January 10, and Sunday, January 24, from 2 to 5 p.m. both days. Admission is free.

VISITORS CAN:

collect Union County's Hannah Caldwell, James Caldwell, and Battle of Connecticut Farms trading cards;

receive Union County Passport booklets and having them stamped--the Parsonage, part of the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area, is an official National Park Service cancellation site;

view a new exhibit of 10 historic Union documents archivally preserved, partially through a grant from the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs;

purchase 36" x 48" reproductions of the Thomas Hughes 1860 Union farm map for \$15; and

enjoy the exhibit of historic household conveniences; farm implements; old TV's, radios, and office equipment in the Tool Museum in the carriage house (aka barn).

THE FOLLOWING PROTOCOLS WILL BE OBSERVED:

- masks required;
- social distancing inside;
- sign in with email address;
- temperature checks;
- portable UV sanitizing wand for surfaces; and
- hand-sanitizer available.

The UTHS had to cancel tours in March, July, and August and programs in April, May, September, November, and December. Each of

those would have produced much needed revenue for the centuries-old house. It's hoped that members of the community would consider an in-person contribution or an on-line donation at unionnjhistory.org.

For more information, please call 908-591-4377.



BE A LIFE-SAVER!

On Sunday, January 10, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. a blood drive, conducted by Vitalant, will be held in the parish hall of Holy Spirit Church, 971 Suburban Road, Union.

To comply with social distancing, appointments are necessary.

Please schedule yours at donor.cbsblood.org or by calling (201) 251-3703.

During this time, the need for blood donations is more urgent than ever.

All successful donations will be tested for the antibodies that can help patients battling COVID-19.

Donors are required to wear cloth-based masks or face coverings, bring ID, weigh at least 110 pounds, and eat a meal and drink plenty of water before donating.

If you have any questions, please call Dan Petrucci at 908-370-6678 or Brenda McEntyre-Saunders at 862-250-0544.

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DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER IN 2020

Submitted by Erin Jerome

Hiring people with disabilities is not just a step toward being an inclusive part of your community- it's also good business sense.

October was Developmental Disabilities Employment Awareness Month, an observance made more important this year in light of job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rate of new job growth for people with disabilities has slowed in recent years. Between March and April 2020, coinciding with business closures and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the percent of adults with disabilities currently working decreased by nearly a quarter, declining from 18% to 14%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly Current Population Survey.

Businesses that actively seek to employ people with disabilities outperform businesses that do not, according to a 2018 study by Accenture in

partnership with the American Association of People with Disabilities. Their revenues were 28% higher, net income was two times more, and profit margins were higher by 30%. Businesses that hire people with disabilities also showed a major boost in employee retention.

People with disabilities seeking assistance in their job search or job readiness training, as well as businesses looking to hire people with disabilities in New Jersey, can contact Community Access Unlimited. CAU is an Elizabeth-based nonprofit that seeks to integrate individuals into the community through comprehensive supports.

"Everybody brings different skills, talents, experience and a diverse background to work," said CAU Assistant Executive Director of Employment Sandra Lynch. "It [hiring people with disabilities] brings more talent to the workforce. People need to look at it as an opportunity, not an extra chore."

CAU member Reginald Payne has worked at ShopRite for 28 years and also works at Target. He collects shopping carts and completes in-store maintenance, and he has a CAU job coach who makes weekly check-ins at his stores "to make sure I'm doing well and have no complaints," Payne said.

"If I didn't have a job it would be hard to take care of myself," Payne said. "I pay my bills like rent, internet and my phone bill."

CAU member Megan Modero was searching for a part-time job for much of the year. After 6 months of searching and with assistance from employment support counselor Feyikemi Jacob, Modero was thrilled to start a new job at Office Depot in late August. Modero cleans and organizes the store and will be training to be a sales consultant.

"It was pretty hard finding a job with the pandemic, I was going through a rough time and a lot of job searching," Modero said. "Once I

found this position I was comfortable with my job, it's exciting for me."

Modero got married in October and said she was relieved to have a regular income before the big day.

"I like getting paid," Modero said. "We're going on a honeymoon to Virginia so I'm very happy and satisfied to have some money before I go on my vacation."

The Employment Services team acts as a liaison between employers and members to facilitate a win-win relationship for both parties. CAU offers comprehensive career planning, prevocational training and supported employment for small groups and individuals. Whether a person is seeking life skills training for job readiness or is searching for their dream position, CAU is equipped to provide the employment support needed.

To learn more about CAU, visit caunj.org or follow the agency on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Learn more about supporting the agency and become a monthly donor at caunj.org/support-us/.

ABOUT COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating more than 40 years in 2020, supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives voice to adults and youth who traditionally have little support and no voice in society. CAU helps people with housing, life skills, employment, money management, socialization and civic activities. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. CAU currently serves more than 4,000 individuals and families, with the number served growing each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908-354-3040, online at caunj.org or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.



(above) CAU member Reginald Payne is one of the thousands of workers with disabilities recognized during Developmental Disabilities Employment Awareness Month.



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SANTA CLAUSE CAME TO TOWN

Spirit of UNION • Page 9 • January 2021



(above) On Saturday, December 19th Santa Clause toured the Township of Union with the help of the Police and Fire Departments and many volunteers. The community came out to cheer and wave at Santa.

Photos by the Township of Union.



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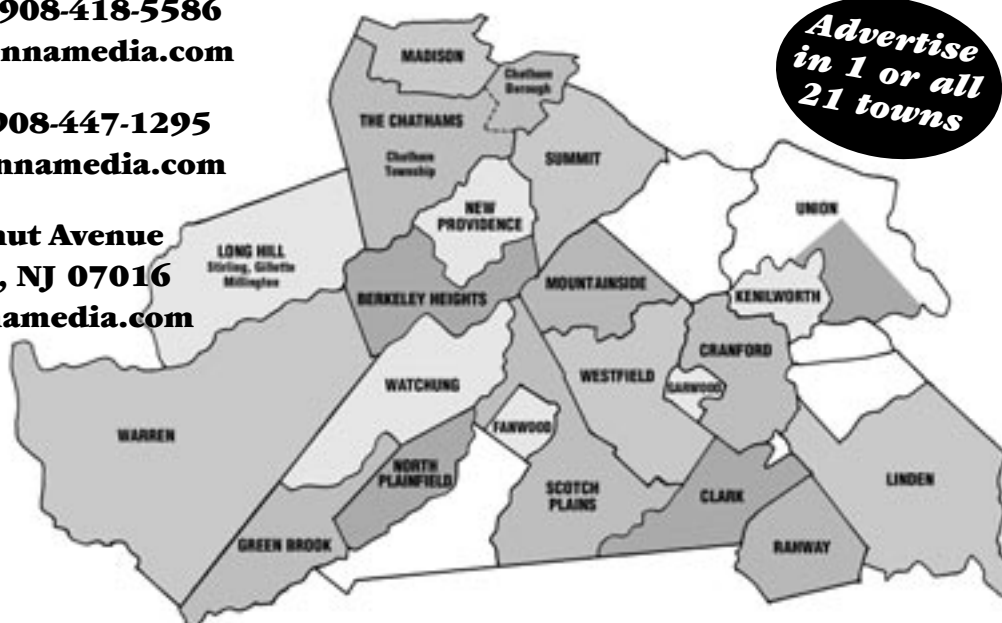
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1 Unit (Business card)	3.25" x 2"	\$60	\$150	\$250	\$350	\$400	\$450	\$500	\$550
2 Units	6.5" x 2" or 3.25" x 4"	\$100	\$250	\$400	\$500	\$600	\$700	\$800	\$900
4 Units	3.25" x 8" or 6.5" x 4"	\$180	\$450	\$700	\$900	\$1100	\$1300	\$1500	\$1700
6 Units	6.5" x 6.25" or 10" x 4"	\$240	\$600	\$900	\$1200	\$1400	\$1600	\$1800	\$2000
9 HALF PAGE	6.5" x 9" or 10" x 7"	\$320	\$800	\$1000	\$1300	\$1600	\$1900	\$2200	\$2400
12 Units	10" x 8"	\$360	\$900	\$1200	\$1500	\$1800	\$2100	\$2400	\$2700
18 FULL PAGE	10" x 14"	\$400	\$1000	\$1400	\$1800	\$2200	\$2500	\$2800	\$3000
2 PAGE SPREAD	21" x 14"	\$700							
BACK PAGE	10" x 14"	\$500							
FRONT PAGE BANNER	8.25" x 2"	\$320							
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- Goals & Budget
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Link to
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monthly website content updates
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