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#### **ROSELLE PARK MONTHLY JOINS RENNA MEDIA'S FAMILY OF NEWSPAPERS IN PRINT AND ONLINE**

Welcome to the premier issue of Roselle Park Monthly, Renna Media's newest addition to our family of newspapers which are read widely in print and on-line.

Roselle Park Monthly will be mailed to every postal patron in Roselle Park and will deliver important information from the departments within town hall, along with news from the schools and library. Community service organizations are encouraged to promote their events and celebrate their accomplishments free of charge. The newspaper's goal is to be a positive influence on the economic development and overall well-being of Roselle Park. There will be no investigative reporting or political content; Roselle Park Monthly exists to share community service news and the good things that are happening in town.

Renna Media is a Cranford based business owned and operated by husband and wife team Joe and Tina Renna. Roselle Park Monthly joins Renna Media's family of 21 community newspapers published in and around Union, Morris and Somerset counties. The publications are "hyperlocal" in nature in that they contain information focused on each individual town and are direct mailed within those towns.

The concept of being hyper-local is to give local businesses a venue to promote events and services. Reaching local customers gives you the highest return for your advertising dollars. The newspapers are designed (black ink on newsprint) to keep the cost of an advertisement to as low as \$60. Regional businesses can take advantage of one low rate for advertising in multi publications.

For more information about Renna Media publications, please visit rennamedia.com.

You can contact Tina Renna regarding advertising, or submitting news at info@rennamedia.com; or call 908-418-5586.



(above) Joe and Tina Renna, owners of Renna Media, LLC, have been publishing community newspapers

since 1998 with the launch of Around About Peterstown, a regional newspaper about the Italian-American neighborhood located in Elizabeth, NJ. In 2012 they published The Poterstown Pook, a

2013 they published The Peterstown Book, a compilation of the stories published in the paper over 14 years, recording the 100-year history of the Italian-American neighborhood.



(avove) Renna Media mails 135,000 newspapers to every home and business in 21 towns.



#### CALL TODAY TO ADVERTISE IN THE NEXT ISSUE Each month 5,600 newspapers are printed and mailed free to every home and business in Roselle Park.

Reserve space in the next issue. Call Tina today at 908-418-5586 or email info@rennamedia.com



*REoselle Park Monthly* is published by Renna Media. 5,600 newspapers are printed monthly and mailed to every business and resident in Roselle Park.

Although great care has been taken to ensure the information contained within is accurate, Renna Media assumes no liability for errors or omissions.

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#### **SEND US YOUR NEWS**

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 Cranford Monthly your news!

#### Call: 908-418-5586 Email: editor@rennamedia.com

**Roselle Park Monthly** 

#### **GREEN TEAM GREEN THUMB GARDEN CONTEST WINNERS**

Submitted by Michele LoManto

Roselle Park's Green Team hosted its first 'Green Thumb' Flower Garden contest in July 2020, when resident gardeners were asked to "Show Us Your Green Thumb" by submitting their photo entries into three categories: Best Garden Overall, Best Flower in a Garden Bed and Best Native Flower in a Garden Bed.

The winners of this inaugural contest were Vita Sandoval (Best Garden), Marilyn Tavormina (Best Flower), and Gina Parrillo, (Best Native Flower). The three lucky winners were awarded with a Certificate of Recognition and a \$25 gift card to Costas Restaurant.

The Green Team would like to thank Mayor Signorello and the Signorello Foundation for providing the gift cards, Green Team member Mariann Brenner for reaching out to the prestigious Elizabeth Garden Club and the four Elizabeth Garden Club members who graciously served as independent judges for this virtual contest. Thanks also to our community of gardeners whose photo submissions were positively delightful! Happy gardening all!

For more information about the Green Team and to learn about Roselle Park's online community flower garden forums please visit Facebook @RPSJGT.



(above) Vita Sandoval, Best Garden





(above) Marilyn Tavormina, Best Flower



(above) Gina Parrillo, Best Native Flower

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#### FOOD PANTRY IS OPEN FOR RESIDENTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our town in many different ways, and we remain concerned about what the current public health circumstances mean for our friends, family and neighbors – and especially for our community's most vulnerable members. Please remember we are in this together, and we are here to help.

If you or someone you know needs help, please call the Casano Center at (908) 245-0666 to determine the best way to assist you.

Donations of non-perishable food items are highly appreciated and may be dropped off from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday to the Casano Community Center, 314 Chestnut Street, Roselle Park.



## **BICYCLE COLLECTION FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

Submitted by Larry Holt

In August 2020, Renna Media reported that Faith Lutheran Church collected and repaired 170 used bikes from residents of New Providence, Berkeley Heights and neighboring towns. The collection was conducted on behalf of Pedals for Progress, an organization which recycles bikes for persons in developing countries. Faith contributed \$1,700 toward the shipment of the bikes.

In the United States daily transportation occurs conveniently with little or no forethought. This is not the case in developing countries, where a village may not have one car. The mode of transportation for commuting to work, going to market and receiving medical care is frequently a pedal bike.

Later this year, Faith will again be asking persons to donate bikes for Faith to process through Pedals for Progress. A person may ask Faith to pick up the bike from his/her house or deliver the bike to Faith. If one wishes to donate a bike before the request, one may place the bike by the shed at the back of Faith's parking lot located at 524 South Street, New Providence, NJ. If you would like a bike picked up call 908-464-5177.

Since 2002 Faith has been participating in the Pedals for Progress program. For the past five years, Casey Walsh has chaired the ministry for Faith. The pastor of Faith is Rev. Jane McCready. Visit online at famfaith.org, or reach by phone at 908-464-5177.



(above) This picture, sent to Faith by Pedals for Progress, demonstrates how completely and creatively the recipients use their bikes.

### **ANNOUNCING THE NEW OFFICE OF DR. EDWARD SOMMA IN BERKELEY HEIGHTS** *"Providing exceptional comprehensive health care with unrivaled compassion and personalized attention for more than 2 decades"*



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.

## 654 Springfield Ave Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922 (908) 219-8800 • www.intuitivemedgroup.com

### **GIRL SCOUT AIMS TO PROMOTE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

#### Submitted by Liv Meier

As the saying goes, when women support each other, incredible things happen. At Union County Magnet High School, girls have a new, weekly opportunity to reaffirm their power, thanks to Gold Award Girl Scout Sarah Kossor.

In an effort to create a safe and supportive environment for girls to gain confidence and knowledge at her high school, Sarah, a resident of Kenilworth and now a Magnet High School alumna, formed a Women in Leadership and Service club during her senior year.

As part of her Gold Award project plan, Sarah and her team worked with school administrators to create the club, recruited new members, and then conducted weekly meetings that involved guest speakers, discussions on global women's issues such as education, and the creation of informational posters to display around the school.

"Knowing the importance of supportive friendships, I wanted to create this environment for girls to have the chance to come together and raise each other up whenever they needed it," said Sarah.

Despite being an outgoing senior last year, Sarah's vision, and the new club will remain sustainable beyond her involvement through commitments from younger club members and the club's advisor.

Sarah, who has been a part of Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey (GSHNJ) Troop 40128 for 13 years, said being a Girl Scout has taught her the value of selflessness and that anyone is capable of making the world a better place.

"Being a part of a Girl Scout troop has also taught me the power that girls have when we come together; because when we do, we always make a positive change," she added.

The Women in Leadership and Service club is

currently hosting virtual meetings to support girls within the school during the global health crisis.

"It is so wonderful to see our Gold Award Girl Scout using this project as a way to support other girls within her community," said GSHNJ CEO Natasha Hemmings. "GSHNJ is an organization based on women supporting women and Sarah's project is a perfect example of that."



(above) Sarah Kossor, a Gold Award Girl Scout from Kenilworth, used her project to create a women in leadership and service club at Union County Magnet High School last year.

Photo by Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey



## DECREASING BACK PAIN BY INCREASING TREATMENT OPTIONS

If you've been living with back pain, it's time to discover the innovative treatment options at the Center for Back Pain at Hackensack Meridian JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute.

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To find a doctor, visit HackensackMeridianHealth.org/BackRehab or call 732-897-BACK (2225).



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### ROTARY CLUB OF ROSELLE PARK IS LOOKING FOR YOU

Interested in membership from \$95 per year, or wish to join a Zoom meeting?

CONTACT ROBERTZEGLARSKI@AOL.COM CALL (908) 868-2798

#### Decency, Good Will and Lifting People Up. DURING THE COVID LOCKDOWN MEETINGS ARE HELD ON ZOOM THURSDAYS AT 8:30 AM

Roselle Community Center 1268 Shaffer Ave., Roselle, NJ

## **ADOPT A DRAIN**

On October 25th 2020, the Roselle Park Green Team launched an ongoing "Adopt-A-Drain" program where interested residents can sign up to clean leaves and other debris from the surface of a storm drain grate of their choosing. Through this community initiative, residents can monitor one of the 687 neighborhood storm drains and by keeping them free of debris, storm water will flow freely without pooling and flooding on the streets.

The Green Team will provide paper lawn bags for the leaves and other vegetative waste. Plastic bottles and other litter would be disposed of separately. Please contact Donald Chin, dsdchin@yahoo.com, for locations of the borough's storm drains and to adopt one near you!



#### **COURTNEY WASHINGTON, A PERSON OF ACTION**

Submitted by Bob Zeglarski, Secretary, Rotary Roselle-Roselle Park

Courtney Washington, President-elect of Rotary Roselle-Roselle Park, was recently elected by members of the Roselle Board of Education as Board President. Mrs. Washington, a mother of three including a son who is disabled, is also CEO of Bold Community Care Services, an organization that provides programs and support services to families and caregivers of youth and young adults with disabilities and special needs.

Rotarians consider themselves "People of Action." Courtney is one of the best amongst us in Rotary in this regard.

For more information about the Rotary of Roselle-Roselle Park visit roselle-roselleparkrotary.org.



#### **Corey Chiropractic** (908) 964-8607 • www.drcoreychiro.com 2086 Morris Avenue • Union, 07083 • Spinal Misalignment Specialists • Sports Injuries Serving the local • Full Body Holistic Care • Auto Injuries Union County community since 1984. A Team You Can Rely On SERVICES Ice Pack Cryotherapy Quality, compassionate care. Hydrocollator Therapy **Dr. Michael Corey** • Electrical Stimulation Therapies Chiropractor-founder Adjustments and Manipulation **Dr. Crissica Giles** Custom Foot Orthotics Chiropractor Therapeutic Exercise **Dr. David Corey** Therapeutic Ultrasound Chiropractor WE ACCEPT MOST INSURANCE including all MEDICAID and NEW JERSEY FAMILY PLANS and Medicare WE'RE EXPERIENCED IN TREATING PATIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN IN AUTO ACCIDENTS • We help patients with insurance applications Offer referrals to medical specialists Supply Free legal medical reports to attorneys Give Free expert testimony at trials One moment everything may seem fine, when suddenly you're involved in a serious collision. Most people have one thing on their mind after a car accident--their car! However, it's important to remember that you and your injuries come first. A visit to a chiropractor should always follow an auto injury, as chiropractors are specialists in damage to soft and hard tissue.

## **SCHEDULE YOUR COVID VACCINATION**

The County of Union opened an online registration system at ucnjvaccine.org for those eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.

Please note the registration system will only log those who are eligible to receive the vaccination. Those who are ineligible to receive vaccinations will not be allowed to pre-register, and must wait until they are eligible.

Those who are eligible to receive the vaccine include paid and unpaid persons serving in health care settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials and long-term care residents and staff, and also sworn law enforcement personnel and fire professionals. Residents 65 and older are also eligible to receive the vaccinations, as are those between the ages of 16-64 with medical conditions, as defined by the CDC, that increase the risk of severe illness from the virus.

The county is offering the Moderna vaccine. The vaccination clinic is located at Downs Hall at Kean University in Union, and is currently open five days a week from 3-7 p.m. Once more vaccines are available, the county is planning to offer the COVID-19 vaccine in different areas of the county.

To secure an appointment for the COVID vaccination visit ucnjvaccine.org.

### NAMI UNION COUNTY "CIRCLE OF FRIENDS"

The Union County chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) invites area residents to join its Zoom "Circle of Friends" for a free informal evening of discussion on Feb. 23, from 7:30 - 9 p.m.

The format will be a panel discussion with Joyce Benz, LCSW, Director of Intensive Family Support Services of the Mental Health Assoc. in NJ as moderator along with other NAMI members. The panel will explore various topics affecting persons with mental

illness and offer insight from their own experiences in dealing with these problems. Join us and bring your questions and concerns. This is an opportunity for information sharing with others who have a common interest.

Please register for this evening at naminj.org/support/affiliates/union/Upcoming Event. Click on the "Register Here" link which will not be available until a few days before the event.





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"Finance charge begins from date of purchase and is repaid over the term. Offer valid for loans approved and funded December 15, 2020 through January 31, 2021 and cannot be combined with other offers. Minimum loan amount \$10,000 and valid for both new and used vehicles. "APR=Annual Percentage Rate. Rates and percentage financing shown offered to Premier Members meeting selected credit criteria for up to a 2-year term. Other rates and terms available based on Member Merits status and credit worthiness criteria. Rates in effect as of December 15, 2021 and are subject to change without notice.





### **NJ CAREER NETWORK – JOB SEEKER COMMUNITY**

Are you a New Jersey resident and looking **WHAT THIS COMMUNITY IS:** for work? Do you want to be part of a community of job seekers and volunteer coaches who want to support and encourage each other along the way? If so, consider joining the NJ Career Network Job Seeker Community today!

What is the NJ Career Network Job Seeker Community? A free online community to help you in your job search and to connect you with other people who are looking for jobs and with our volunteer coaches. This community offers a supportive network so you know where to turn with your questions and concerns. Volunteer experts and your peers will be here to help you navigate your job search and cope with all aspects of searching for work.

Why should you join? The job seeker community will share resources, facilitate conversations, and welcome questions about looking for a job. You will gain access to exclusive community member-only events when you join. We also understand that your job search will not be successful unless you are okay, both physically and mentally. That's why the community will be a place for you to share challenges that get in the way of or discourage your job search.

- A safe space to ask questions and share your concerns.
- A chance to connect with your peers.
- A place to participate in conversations and events.
- A place to share and contribute your knowledge and expertise to your fellow community members.
- A place to figure out solutions to problems. • A network to offer support for your overall
- well-being. • An opportunity to help yourself and others looking for employment.

What this community is not: A job board or other impersonal networking. Networking that ignores the rest of your life. A place to just get information without participating.

Please visit nj-career-network-jobseekercommunity.mn.co and join us! One of our coaches or moderators will reach out to answer any questions you may have and to help you get started! We are using the Mighty Networks online platform to host the NJ Career Network Job Seeker Community. When you join the online community, any references to Mighty Networks are in regard to the community's hosting platform service.



### **SEA SCOUT SHIP 228 VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE**

Are you interested in boating, sailing, or females ages 14-21 who have graduated the 8th mechanics? Come check out Sea Scouting and let the adventure at sea begin! The crew of Ship 228 will be hosting a virtual open house, taking place over Zoom on Saturday, March 13 at 4:00 p.m. and featuring various activities that are bound to pique a young adult's interest in scouting.

Sea Scouting is open to both male and



(above) Whether you're steering the vessel from the wheelhouse, learning engine room repair, or visiting a new location on one of the many trips, there's something you'll enjoy in Sea Scouting.

grade; we also have a new Maritime Explorer Club for younger youth in 6th to 8th grade. Adult volunteers with maritime experience or captain's licenses are needed too. Join us for a day on the water and bring a friend! Visit our website for more information ship228.com.

Ship 228 is proud to host the virtual open house. The event will include a tour of the ship's main vessel (the 65' Sea Dart II, one of the largest Sea Scout vessels on the east coast), an introduction to the Sea Scout program, appearances from current Sea Scouts, a lively Q&A, and more.

To register, please provide your name, email address, and phone number (which is optional) in an email to Ship228.SeaDart@gmail.com.

Sea Scouts from Ship 228 operate the 65' vessel Sea Dart II, along with a fleet of smaller vessels (including sailboats) from their picturesque base located in Linden, New Jersey. Sea Scouting (which is part of the Venturing Program of the Boy Scouts of America) offers young adults the opportunity to travel and learn skills that could be useful in future careers. Whether you're steering the vessel from the wheelhouse, learning engine room repair, or visiting a new location on one of the many trips, there's something you'll enjoy in Sea Scouting. So, try something different, check us out, and prepare yourself to set sail for a real adventure.



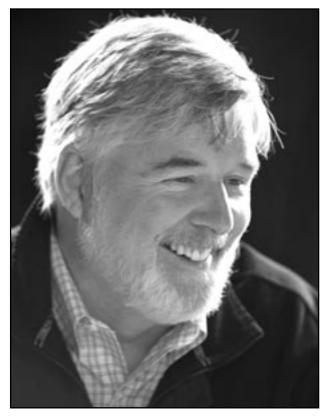
(above) Sea Scouts from Ship 228 operate the 65' vessel Sea Dart II, one of the largest Sea Scout vessels on the east coast, along with a *fleet of smaller vessels (including sailboats)* from their base located in Linden, NJ.



(above) Adult volunteers with maritime experience or captain's licenses are needed too. Visit our website for more information ship228.com, or email Ship228.SeaDart@gmail.com.



## **HOW TO BE A GRANDPARENT DURING THE PANDEMIC**



(above) Michael Thompson



Can't be combined with any other offers.

will host a live zoom event featuring New York Times bestselling author and Ph.D. Michael Thompson on February 9th at 4:00 p.m. "Grandparents are missing their grandchildren; grandchildren want to see their grandparents, and the parents in the middle are missing the support and connection across the generations," explained Thompson, who himself is a grandparent of three.

While Facetime and Zoom allow for face-toface communication, the technology can feel awkward and unsatisfying to older adults. Thompson will discuss this and the stress of being separated from families, the yearning to be in touch and the unique difficulties grandparents are experiencing during COVID-19. He will also share alternative modes of connecting that can help.

Thompson is the author or coauthor of nine books, including the New York Times bestseller Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys as well as Best Friends/ Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children, The Pressured Child and Homesick and Happy: How Time Away from Parents Can Help a Child Grow. He also works as a clinical psychologist and school consultant. He is presently the supervising psychologist for the Belmont Hill School in Belmont, MA and has worked in over

SAGE Eldercare and Your Decisions Matter 700 schools in the U.S., Asia, Africa Europe and Central America.

> "We are excited for SAGE to offer this very informative program," said Nina Tiger, Coordinator of Your Decisions Matter. "We know the difficulty older adults are facing during this unprecedented time and one of the biggest issues they are voicing is that they miss their grandchildren terribly. We're hopeful this program will offer them helpful solutions."

> Register here: http://bit.ly/SAGEEldercare. For questions, more information or help using ZOOM email: yourdecisionsmatter@sageeldercare.org or call 908-598-5511.

> Your Decisions Matter is a community initiative funded by Atlantic Health's Chilton and Overlook Medical Centers' Community Advisory Boards whose goal is to encourage families to talk with their loved ones about endof-life care and decision making.

> Since 1954, SAGE Eldercare has been helping make the communities it serves amazing places to age. The non-profit organization provides a wide array of information, support, and services designed to help individuals lead the most independent and active lives possible. For more information, please call 908-273-5550 or visit sageeldercare.org.

### **ROSELLE PARK VETERANS MEMORIAL LIBRARY**

The Roselle Park Veterans Memorial Library is looking forward to our grand re-opening later this year, when residents can experience our reimagined space! Our library is completely new inside, with a cafe, small group meeting and presentation area, and a large programming space that seats over 100. Cardholders will be able to sign up for a full array of programs in The Catalog, our makerspace and STEM workshop.

Looking for something fun for the kids? Brand new storytimes are posted on our website every Saturday and Sunday. Kids (and adults) can pick up craft kits at the library any time we are open, Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Check out our Facebook page 'Roselle Park Veterans Memorial Library', for the details on what crafts are

available.

Are you looking for e-books, audiobooks, free streaming music, and other digital resources? They're all available to Roselle Park cardholdersjust click "Online Resouces" on our website, roselleparklibrary.org.

Until we are able to open our doors, you can request books from our library and our LMXAC partner libraries for curbside pickup at RPVML. Don't have a library card? Apply for one on our website, .roselleparklibrary.org and e-mail library@rosellepark.net with any questions you may have.

Roselle Park Veterans Memorial Library 404 Chestnut Street Roselle Park, NJ 07204 908-245-2456

## SPOTLIGHT ON GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS MEETING

The Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce issues of mutual interest. (GRCC) is a business organization which its members. It has 1,200 members, which makes it the largest chamber in North Jersey, Central Jersey, and the New York Metro Area.

The GRCC hosts over 180 events year-round including a monthly Government Affairs Committee meeting which is held in alternating towns. Hosting town officials give a report on their town, and Gateway Chamber members network with local businesses during the meeting. This is a forum to facilitate communication and cooperation between the business community and local government on

The last meeting, held virtually over Zoom on represents and advances the business interests of January 8, 2021, included a mayoral report by Roselle Park Mayor Joseph Signorello, a legislative update, chamber announcements, and the launch of Roselle Park Monthly was announced.

Mayor Signorello gave a very positive report on developments happening in Roselle Park, a 1square mile borough which is home to 15,000 residents. The mayor concluded "You will see a very differing RP over the next 5 years."

For more information about the Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce visit gatewaychamber.com.

#### **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

#### **COMMUNITY HOPE CONNECTS VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH HOUSING, SERVICES**

#### **CALL THE REFERRAL HOTLINE FOR ELIGIBILITY**

Veterans and their families who are experiencing a housing crisis may be eligible for emergency assistance such as motel/hotel stays, security deposits, rent, rental arrears, groceries and utilities through Community Hope.

Community Hope's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program is currently providing assistance remotely. Urgent community-based services such as critical supplies and veteran wellness-checks are provided in person.

The increase in support services to veterans and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic is possible thanks to funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

To make a referral, please call the referral hotline at 1-855-483-8466 or email SSVF@communityhope-nj.org, or email Gema Diaz at gdiaz@communityhope-nj.org.

Community Hope is a nonprofit that helps individuals, including veterans, and their families, overcome mental illness, addiction, homelessness and poverty. Learn more at communityhope-nj.org.





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.

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## A DREAM COME TRUE WEDDING FOR COUPLE WITH DISABILITIES

#### Submitted by Erin Jerome, CAU

After six months of physical separation during COVID-19 lockdown, Megan and Maurice Stephens couldn't wait to be together and say their vows.

"COVID-19 wasn't going to stop our wedding," Megan said. It was meant to be, according to Maurice.

From the time they met at a Halloween party held by Community Access Unlimited (CAU), the two instantly connected and took things slowly to make the relationship a lasting one, Megan said. CAU is a Union County-based, statewide nonprofit that strives to integrate people with disabilities and youth at risk into the general community through comprehensive supports.

Maurice proposed to Megan on her birthday in June of 2019 at one of her favorite places to eat, the Rainforest Cafe.

"I was scared and nervous but I knew Megan would be happy no matter what," he said.

A few months into planning their nuptials, the couple realized that their plans to have a large wedding wouldn't be possible due to the pandemic. To make matters worse, they were separated while quarantined at different CAU residential programs.

"We couldn't see each other and it was very hard," Megan said. "It did make our wedding day more special."

Thankfully, their family and support system at CAU stepped up to make their special day possible and find the couple the perfect apartment in Fanwood, where they moved just in time for the wedding. On October 17, the couple were married before their closest family members and friends in a garden at Warinanco Park in Roselle.

members and staff because they really are a second family for both Megan and Maurice - we really wanted to share the day with them," said Marguerite Modero, Megan's mother. Rolando Zorrilla, managing assistant executive director of youth services at the agency, served as the best man.

Modero teaches music and theater classes at the CAU Academy of Continuing Education and is the founder and director of the CAU Community Players, an inclusive theatre group made up of performers with and without disabilities.

Maurice has brought his talents in painting and visual arts to CAU productions to share in the family's love of musical theater. He said Megan's passion for the shows convinced him to join in.

"Maurice is a very creative person and he fits in perfectly with our family," Modero said. "It meant so much to have everyone at CAU at the wedding, because without the staff at CAU they would not have made this journey into adulthood and found this love."

Through employment supports at CAU, both Megan and Maurice are working part-time to help finance their independence.

"Maurice is one of a kind - he loves me a lot and he cares for me," Megan said. "We share a lot of happiness and ups and downs. We have a lot of togetherness and we understand each other...We were very excited to move in together. I want to be on my own and independent."

Many people discount that people with disabilities want to find love and companionship, according to Modero.

"I think as advocates of people with disabilities we need to say that they deserve love and a 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.

"It was important for us to invite CAU relationship and their happily ever after if it's possible," she said. "I'm grateful to CAU for having an enlightened perspective on marriage. They treated them as two adults with dignity and understood they were in love."

> Megan agreed that finding love can mean taking chances to connect with others in your community.

> "I would definitely tell people with disabilities to not be afraid to get out there and do things," she said.

> Maurice added that they have already started asking other CAU couples when they plan to tie the knot.

> To learn more about CAU, visit cauni.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 cauni.org or by mail at



(above) Mr. and Mrs. Stephens at their wedding in Warinanco Park.

## FIVE-TOWN PARADE INCLUDES SUPERHEROES, GIFT BASKETS AND MORE

Submitted by Gretchen M. Boger-O'Bryan A recent Friday morning had special meaning to five Union County foster youth celebrating an end to living in foster care as adoptions into their forever families became finalized. Union County's Family Court celebrated National Adoption Day on Friday, Nov. 20, ahead of the national Saturday Nov. 21 festivities, as five youth ranging from two to 11 years old, along with their foster families, met on Zoom with Judges Marc R. Brown and James Hely to make official what each already felt - they were home.

Although COVID-19 required the day be different than prior years, the excitement was as palpable as ever. A car parade included judiciary staff, CASA of Union County staff and interns, fire trucks, police cars and a band of superheroes from Heroes 4 Heroes, a volunteer organization of corrections officers that don superhero costumes and visit children facing adversities. The parade included stops at each adoptive home - Cranford, Elizabeth, Linden, Newark and Union - with sirens blaring, horns honking and rounds of applause.

Each family received a gift basket from CASA of Union County, with collaboration from David Brearley Middle and High School, Live or Tie Dye, Two Park Princesses, Kappa Alpha Theta of Westfield, Division of Child Protection and Permanency and Catholic Charities, Girl Scout Troop 40042 of Cranford, and Scotch Plains Girl

Scout Lauren Cunningham, Union County Bar Association, and many generous community members who heeded the call for donations. Each family fun-themed basket contained board and card games, puzzles, fleece blankets, teddy bear for each adoptee, themed picture frame for the first official family photo, jars of popping corn, movie candy, Delice Macarons, ShopRite and WalMart gift cards and a welcome mat declaring, "There's No Place Like Home." Adoptees and siblings received tie-dye sweatshirts from Live or Tie Dye and books handpicked by Kappa Alpha Theta's Westfield chapter. At each parade stop, Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan, Development and Communications Manager at CASA of Union County, took photographs of each family as they emerged from their homes and were greeted by superheroes, the symphony of honking horns and applause, and received balloon bouquets from A Birthday Wish. A hot breakfast – sponsored by Union County Surrogate James LaCorte – was delivered to each family by DCPP staff and Cranford resident Robin Johnstone.

Adoption Day began 20 years ago when a coalition of The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Alliance for Children's Rights and permanent home for each child served. Children's Action Network encouraged nine cities to open courts the Saturday before Thanksgiving to allow adoptions to be finalized and celebrated. Today, more than 120,000



(above) CASA staff interns at parade step off at Union County Courthouse

nationwide need a permanent home, with an average wait in foster care of four years. Each year, 23,000 youth age out of the system without a family or safety net in place.

#### **ABOUT CASA OF UNION COUNTY**

Since 2005, Court Appointed Special Advocates of Union County has been recruiting, training, supervising and supporting community volunteers to advocate for abused, neglected and abandoned children placed in foster homes or residential facilities. CASA volunteers ensure children's best interests remain the priority while working toward establishing a safe, stable and

For details on CASA of Union County and becoming an advocate for a foster youth, contact Walia at wworrill@casaofunioncounty.org or log on to www.casaofunioncounty.org.



(above) The Pennicook Family of Union with Superheroes

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