

Watchung Post

Watchung's Hometown Newspaper

NJ

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UGGLA, THE GREAT HORNED OWL, PASSES

On January 9, 2021, The Raptor Trust announced one of their very dearest ambassador birds, Uggle, the Great Horned Owl, had passed on at age 40. Chris Soucy, director of the organization, wrote a tribute to Uggle on their Facebook page and asked the public to share their memories of Uggle. At this writing the post received 1.1 K likes, 135 comments, and 187 shares.

The Raptor Trust is a 501c 3 non-profit organization located in Millington, NJ that provides free medical care to thousands of injured and orphaned wild birds each year. In addition, they provide educational programs to individuals, clubs, and schools about New Jersey's native raptors. Learn more at theraptortrust.org.

Chris Soucy, Director, The Raptor Trust, Facebook homage to Uggle reprinted below, reveals the history, and passion of the organization.

Uggle was an almost unimaginable 40 years old. In the research I have done, I believe he may have been the second-oldest Great Horned Owl that ever lived, and he lived almost every day of those 40 years right here at 1390 White Bridge Rd, Millington, NJ.

In the early spring of 1980, I was a freshman in high-school. The backyard wildlife rehab facility that my parents ran on our property had not yet become The Raptor Trust. It was still The New Jersey Raptor Association at that point: not yet incorporated and without the 501(c)3 nonprofit status that would follow. A "fledgling" organization, one might say. But Len and Diane knew their birds. Even though The Raptor Trust wasn't hatched until a few years later, they had been caring for wild birds – often in the laundry room or bathroom of the house – since the mid-1960's.

It was in that setting that someone dropped off a young floof of an owl. Just a few weeks old, the owl had been found by some well-intentioned local folks who attempted to raise it on their own. There are few things cuter than a baby owl, I'll give you that. But raising a wild baby owl is not easy to do. It is also against state and federal law. The owl wasn't being fed a proper diet, did not have proper housing and it wasn't thriving.

Worse, even though it had been with the folks who found it for only a



(above) With Raptor Trust founder, Len Soucy.
Summer 1980

few weeks, it was already completely imprinted and dependent on humans, having been hand-fed and socialized to people. This youngster, still fluffy, had already lost his chance to survive in the wild. Since he was so young, and already so accustomed to people, Len and Diane made the decision to keep him as an education and ambassador bird.

My grandparents and my 95-year-old great-grandmother joined us for dinner one night that spring, shortly after the owl's arrival. Great-grandma Alma Gustavson, a first-generation immigrant from Sweden, saw the bird and proclaimed, "Uggle!" She explained: "Uggle" means "owl" in Swedish. And so, his journey as "Uggle" began.

For 40 years Uggle delighted visitors here. He was talkative. Children would inevitably "hoot" at him – he was an owl after all – and he would often return the favor.

He was inquisitive. Having been imprinted, he had no fear of humans and would often sit out during the day, right up at the front of his enclosure, engaging passers-by with his big, yellow eyes and that kind of funny way he always tilted his head to one side. He really seemed to enjoy it.

He was photogenic. He has graced many of

(continued on page 4)



(above, l-r) Summer 1980: Baby Uggle and his tennis ball friend,
Summer 1980 - As a fledgling in the Soucy family living room,
Circa 1983: As a "young man", Circa 2018: ready to greet visitors.



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PROMOTE YOUR COMMUNITY EVENT

Community service organizations and sports teams are encouraged to submit news of upcoming events or highlights and photos on recent events.

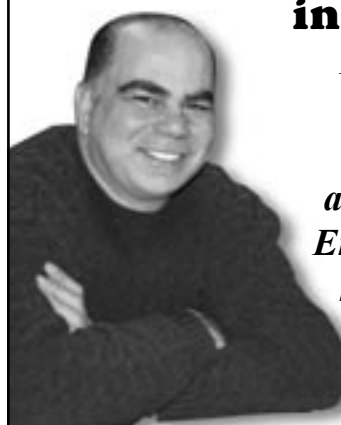
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WILLIAM KELLY APPOINTED AS POLICE CHIEF OF WATCHUNG BOROUGH

The Mayor and Council unanimously voted to appoint William P. Kelly, III as Police Chief of the Borough of Watchung Police Department at their Council meeting of December 17, 2020. Chief Kelly was appointed Acting Chief on October 1st, after the retirement of former Chief Joseph Cina.

Chief Kelly's law enforcement career began when he was hired by the Somerset County Sheriff's Department in June 1995. After that, he was hired as a Police Officer with Franklin Township Police Department in Hunterdon

County. In April 1997, Chief Kelly began his distinguished career with the Watchung Police Department. Chief Kelly's tenure with the Watchung Police Department began in the Patrol Unit, and after various promotions he rose to Detective Bureau Commander in 2007 and Lieutenant in 2012. Chief Kelly holds a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University. The Governing Body looks forward to the leadership of Chief Kelly.



(above) Chief Kelly being sworn in by Mayor Balla, accompanied by his wife Raqitel, daughter Julia and son William.

RONALD JUBIN SWORN IN FOR NEW TERM

By Mayor Keith S. Balla

At the 2020 General Election, voters of the Borough re-elected Ronald Jubin to serve as Council Member for the next 3 years. Dr. Jubin is a 26-year resident of the town of Watchung and was originally appointed to serve as Council Member in December 2019. He is married to Karen and they are the parents of three children: Cheyne (23), Pierce (21) and Emma (13) with all children having attended Watchung borough schools. He has remained active in local community service volunteering in Bayberry school on science days and as a coach in little league baseball and basketball. He is a past member of the Watchung Board of Health since 2011, with prior roles as the Board Vice President as well as the borough representative to the

Middlebrook Regional Health commission. Born in Plainfield, NJ and attended Union County College (A.A., Biology), Kean University (B.A., Biology), Seton Hall University (M.S., Microbiology) and Rutgers Medical School (Ph.D., Microbiology and Molecular Genetics). Ron is quite passionate about health and wellness having dedicated his professional career to pharmaceutical sciences including important contributions to the successful development of lifesaving antiviral drug therapies. Currently he is Research Vice President at Prolong Pharmaceuticals, a clinical stage NJ Biotech organization. In his free time, Ron enjoys nature hiking with his family, gardening and is a life-long tropical fish hobbyist.

Photos by Borough of Watchung



(above) Council Member Jubin being sworn in by Governor DiFrancesco, presided over by Mayor Balla. Behind is Jubin's family (left to right) Emma, Karen, and Pierce.

FREDDIE HAYECK SWORN IN AS WATCHUNG BOROUGH COUNCIL MEMBER

By Mayor Keith S. Balla

At the 2020 General Election, voters of the Borough elected Freddie Hayeck to serve as Council Member for the next three years.

Freddie Hayeck grew up in Watchung and is an alumni of Watchung public schools. At 18 he was elected to a three year term to the Watchung Hills Board of Education becoming the youngest elected official in New Jersey. Freddie actively volunteers on the Watchung Fire Department

and as an EMT for the Watchung Rescue Squad. His commitment to service began in scouting and is also a proud Eagle Scout of Watchung Boy Scout Troop 32.

Freddie is a member of Saint Mary's-Stony Hill Church and Knights of Columbus Council 14675. He is currently working on his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration at The College of New Jersey and serves as an AmeriCorps member.



(above) Council Member Hayeck being sworn in by Governor DiFrancesco, presided by Mayor Balla. Behind him (left to right) is his father Fred, brother Tony, girlfriend Angelia, and his mother Andrea.

Photo by Borough of Watchung

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UGGLA (continued from page 1)

our gift shop cards, mugs and other items, including a holiday card we sent out last month.

Not long ago, some of my young second cousins came to visit – little guys two generations further down the family tree than me. While passing by Uggle's enclosure, it occurred to me that SIX generations of my family knew this one amazing bird. That's hard to wrap my head around, but there it is. SIX.

Later in his life, Uggle's voice changed and began to make this kind of scratchy, crackly-sounding call. Len used to say that he had "lost his hooter." He was still as talkative as ever; he just sounded like a grumpy, little old man mumbling under his breath. In owl-culture, perhaps that's exactly what he was.

There would be no way to even begin to count the number of people this one wonderful bird met, delighted, hooted at, taught. Tens of thousands for sure. Possibly hundreds of thousands.

While it would have been better in every way for him to have lived a natural life in the wild, he did live an amazing and meaningful life as an ambassador for his species and for all wildlife. Godspeed, old man.

If you have your own story about this wonderful owl, please do share. We know that many of you loved Uggle just as much as we did. Visit us on Facebook at The Raptor Trust.

RAPTOR TRUST VIRTUAL EVENTS THIS SPRING

The Raptor Trust is a 501© 3 non-profit organization located in Millington, NJ that provides free medical care to thousands of injured and orphaned wild birds each year. In addition, they provide educational programs to individuals, clubs, and schools about New Jersey's native raptors.

The Raptor Trust is offering the following virtual program options this spring:

RAPTOR CONFERENCE CALL

\$30 for two screens/households. 20 minutes with a TRT educator and one of our ambassador birds.

SMALL GROUP PROGRAM

\$60 for up to 12 participants. 40-minute program led by one of the TRT educators and an ambassador bird. Program topics vary.

LARGE GROUP ADULT PROGRAM

\$80 for up to 50 participants. 45-minute program led by one of the TRT educators and an ambassador bird. Program topics vary.

TEACHER-MODERATED CLASSROOM PROGRAMS

\$80 for 45-minute program. Maximum 35 students and 2 teachers. Choose from a variety of lesson plans that can be integrated into your existing curriculum.

For more information and to book a program please visit theraptortrust.org/education/programs

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U.S. News & World Report

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2019-20

 Nathan Weiser
★★★★★


Spring Grove is by far the best rehab center I have ever been to. The staff are kind and caring and have gone above and beyond my expectations. The building is kept extremely clean and the new renovations are very nice.

Thank you Spring Grove for a wonderful and pleasant stay.

 Charles Sherrick
★★★★★

I have been at Spring Grove for a few weeks now, they have exceptional service and excellent staff. All the nurses have been professional and attentive to all my needs. I never thought a rehab center can have such a beautiful layout and well put together. The newly renovated room I have stayed in, is up to date and extremely clean. The therapy staff have gone above my expectations with their expertise and getting me to where I am today. Alyssa the social worker has gone above and beyond with all her assignments.

Thank you Spring Grove.

 Chrissy Sloan
★★★★★

The nursing staff and administration is professional, patient, attentive and understanding. The facilities are very clean and well maintained. My parents room is always clean and tidy. Although it was a difficult decision to make relocating my folks from a home environment to a senior living facility, Spring Grove made my decision easy.

Thank God for them!

4 Million Dollar RENOVATIONS NEAR COMPLETE!

WATROUS FAMILY HELPS RESTORE STAIN GLASS WINDOWS AT WILSON MEMORIAL UNION CHURCH

Submitted by Cota Kania

Mary E. Wilson Memorial Union Church was the recipient of a modern-day miracle during this world-wide pandemic, thanks to the Watrous Family!

Bob Watrous approached Wilson Memorial to express an interest in helping restore the original 1889 stained glass windows in what is now referred to as The Chapel. With the assistance of his brother Scott Watrous and his sister, Nina Nesky, the three Watrous siblings committed to honor their parents, Bill and Vera, with the full restoration of the Chapel's stained glass windows. Bob said, "My parents loved this church, and the church loved them back."

Bill and Vera were long-time members of Wilson Memorial Union Church, and Bill was the caretaker of the Memorial Garden. Wilson Memorial began as the Washingtonville Sunday School Association in the 1850's, and in 1886 the Sunday School needed a permanent home.

The current Chapel was dedicated in 1890 to honor the wife of Colonel John E. Wilson, Mary E. Wilson, who contributed funds in order to complete its construction.

Today Wilson Memorial Union Church, located on the corner of Hillcrest and Valley Roads, at 7 Valley Rd, Watchung, NJ, continues to fully function as an interdenominational

Christian Church, and welcomes all to worship in a family-friendly environment. For more information visit wilsonmemorialchurch.org.



(above) The Watrous family helped restore the original 1889 stained glass windows at Mary E. Wilson Memorial Union Church.

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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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(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

ROGER HELPS VETS 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.

SEA SCOUT SHIP 228 VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE

Are you interested in boating, sailing, or 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 females ages 14-21 who have graduated the 8th 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) 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.



(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. Sea Scouting (Part of the Venturing Program of the BSA) offers young adults the opportunity to travel and learn skills that could be useful in future careers.

DARRIN WOLSKO - EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Submitted by Denis Kelly

Science Teacher Darrin Wolsko has been selected as Educator of the Year for the 2020-2021 School Year at Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS).

"Mr. Wolsko has been teaching at WHRHS for 17 years and has made an indelible mark on student learning both in and out of the classroom," said WHRHS Principal William Librera.

"As a 9th-grade biology teacher, he has assisted students in their transition from middle school to high school with an empathic attitude," Librera said. "Mr. Wolsko takes pride in his every interaction with our 9th graders: he not only facilitates their understanding of biology, but he also eases them into a high school environment. For some of our students this support is invaluable because it can be daunting to move from a middle school of less than 300 to a high school of 2,000 students."

WHRHS Director of Science Michael D'Alessio characterized Wolsko as the consummate team player.

"Mr. Wolsko works with other members of the science department to prepare resources that challenge all students he teaches," he said. "He is known to his peers for modeling inquiry-based instruction. Other departments even hear students speak highly of him, and when he was presented with the Educator of the Year Award, multiple teachers beyond his department commented on how surprised they were that he hadn't won previously."

Beyond the teaching staff, security, assistants and administrators rejoiced for him and agreed it was an overdue and well-deserved honor, he added.

"In addition to mentoring freshmen expertly, he also teaches Human Biology," D'Alessio said. "Mr. Wolsko helps students understand how the systems of the body and their interlaced mechanisms work. His goal is not to make them physiologists, but rather he is committed to preparing students for life. Mr. Wolsko uses the curriculum as a metaphor to help students practice independent and evidenced-based

thinking when encountering difficult material not only in preparation for college but beyond."

D'Alessio continued, "Students who have graduated and who have taken Mr. Wolsko's human biology class often return to WHRHS extolling the deep learning they experienced in his classroom. Every break, it seems students cannot wait to visit and to thank him. His memory is exemplary; not only do students remember him, he frequently demonstrates his social and emotional IQ when he asks returning students about how their sibling is doing or whether they are still political science majors, philosophy or business majors; he also often gets their graduation year correct even if it's been 10 years."

Principal Librera concludes, saying, "Mr. Wolsko has it all: classroom prowess, personal commitment, and collegial relationships that he nurtures year after year. It is with great pride that we honor him as the WHRHS Educator of the Year."

Wolsko said he grew up in Hopatcong in Sussex County, and graduated from Hopatcong High School in 1992.

He said he wanted to make sure he acknowledged the person who inspired him to become a teacher.

"I would like to give props to Mr. Robert Schray, who was my German teacher, and bowling coach, throughout my high school career," he said. "He is the number one reason that I am a teacher today, and I dedicate my career to him."

Wolsko went to Montclair State University for his bachelor's of science degree in Biology and teacher's certification in Biological Sciences, as well as for his master's degree of science in Biology. He also has a supervisor's certification.

He began his career as an 8th grade teacher of life sciences at Mount Olive Middle School in 1997, and left there to come to WHRHS in January of 2004.

"While I taught middle school, I was also an adjunct professor of biology at Montclair for a few years before my first son was born. So, I am here 17 years at Watchung on January 4," he said.



(above) Science Teacher Darrin Wolsko has been selected as the Educator of the Year for the 2020-2021 School Year at Watchung Hills Regional High School.

Photo by WHRHS

It was at Mount Olive Middle School 21 years ago that he was awarded Teacher of the Year there, he said.

Wolsko lives in Clinton with his wife, Aimee, who has been the Youth Services Librarian at Hunterdon County Library for 24 years. "We just celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary on December 3," he said. Also in the household are his father, Vince, a retired therapist, their children, James, 17, a senior at North Hunterdon High School, who plans on attending at the University of Northwestern Ohio, Lima, Ohio, to be an auto mechanic, and Henry, 8, a second grader at Clinton Public School.

"Hobbies? I am passionate about cooking for my family and friends, reading nerdy sci-fi books, collecting cookbooks/researching recipes,

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SCLSNJ'S FEBRUARY VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Register on clsnoj.libnet.info. All programs listed are free. Registration is required unless otherwise indicated. Programs are subject to change. All programs are virtual unless otherwise indicated. Visit sclsnoj.libnet.info/events.org for SCLSNJ's complete calendar of events. For questions contact SCLSNJ staff at ask@sclibnj.org. The Warren Twp. branch will be open limited hours from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. on February 15.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES

Twilight Tales (families with children)

6:30-7 p.m. Register now:

February 4: sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4631122.

February 18: sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4631135.

February 25: sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4631154.

Family Storytime (families with children)

Register now:

February 16, 7-7:30 p.m.:

sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4672424.

February 17, 6-6:30 p.m.

sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4672425.

February 25, 2:30-3 p.m.

sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4673905.

Family Trivia - Don't Break My Heart (families with children)

February 22, 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Family Night - Valentine Snowflake Garland (families with children)

February 11, 6:30-7:15 p.m.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN, TWEENS, AND TEENS

Tips and Tricks for Animal Crossing (grades 6-12)

February 1, 5-6 p.m.

Meet Dr. King (grades K-5)

February 1, 6:30-7:15 p.m.

Meet the Author - Rita Williams-Garcia (grades 6-12)

February 2, 1-2 p.m.

T-Shirt Bag Craft (grades 3-8)

February 2, 4-5 p.m.

Fables, Folktales, and Stories - Celebration of African Storytelling (grades K-5)

February 3, 5:30-6:15 p.m.

Kids in the Kitchen (grades 3-5)

February 4, 4-5 p.m.

Exploring Tangrams - Lunar New Year, The Year of the Ox (grades K-5)

February 5, 4-4:45 p.m.

Advanced Strategies for Chess (grades 9-12)

February 5, 4-4:45 p.m.

Preschool Storytime - Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award Books (ages 3-4)

February 8, 2:30-3 p.m.

"To All The Boys I've Loved Before" Party (grades 6-12)

February 8, 5-6 p.m.

Groundhog Gambit - A Honey Heist Adventure (grades 6-12)

February 9, 4-6 p.m.

Crafting With Foil - Money Tree (grades 2 and up)

February 10, 4:30-5:15 p.m.

Chinese Knots and Paper Cutting Workshop (grades 3 and up)

February 10, 6:30-7:30 p.m.

George Washington Carver and Friends (grades Pre-K to 5)

February 12, 3-3:45 p.m.

Valentine Fun (grades 1-4)

February 12, 4-4:45 p.m.

History IQ (grades 4-6)

February 13, 3-3:45 p.m.

Dogs Save the Day - Stories of Canine Heroes (grades K-5)

February 17, 7-8 p.m.

Math Matters (ages 3-6)

February 18, 11-11:30 a.m.

Let It Shine - The American Civil Rights Movement 1955-1968 (grades 3 and up)

February 23, 4:30-5:15 p.m.

Budget Shopping - Food (grades 9-12)

February 26, 4-5 p.m.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

A Black News Service for America - Presented by Dr. Lawrence Hogan

February 1, 7-8 p.m.

Manage Stress, Manage Your Heart Health - Presented by Karen Sammer of WomenHeart

February 2, 7-8 p.m.

Phillis Wheatley Slave Girl, Literary Genius - Portrayed by Dr. Daisy Century

February 3, 7-8 p.m.

Frederick Douglass's Relevance - For the 21st Century's Black Lives Matter Protests

February 4, 7-8 p.m.

Defeating Unconscious Bias: Five Strategies

February 5, 10 a.m. - noon

Overcoming Chronic Pain - Dr. Gene Ketselman
February 5, 3-4 p.m.

From Farm to Table - Genuine Southern Cooking

February 6, 2-3 p.m.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Caroline Fraser

February 8, 7-8 p.m.

Derick Lugo

February 11, 7-8 p.m.

Brian Armstrong

February 20, 2-3 p.m.

Mally Becker

February 26, 2-3 p.m.

The Civil Rights Movement and Organized Labor - Presented by The Labor Museum

February 9, 7-8 p.m.

Webinar Búsqueda de Empleo - Clases en Línea Para Hispanohablantes

February 10, 7-8 p.m.

Upcycle Crafts

February 11, 6-7 p.m.

VIRTUAL BOOK DISCUSSION SALON

Traditionally hosted at the Watchung branch
"Furies of Calderon" by Jim Butcher

February 11, 6:30-7:45 p.m.

Register now: sclsnoj.libnet.info/event/4670377.

Traditionally hosted at the North Plainfield branch

"Educated" by Tara Westover

February 18, 7-8 p.m.

Lincoln Our Most Inspirational President? - Presented by Professor William Healey

February 12, 2-3 p.m.

Ancient China - Presented by Pr. Jeff Kampf

February 16, 7-8 p.m.

Harriet Hemmings and the Pursuit of Happiness - The Story of Thomas Jefferson's Enslaved Daughter

February 17, 7-8 p.m.

Tulsa 1921 Race and Power - Destruction of America's Black Wall Street

February 18, 7-8 p.m.

Avoiding Employment Scams

February 19, 2-3 p.m.

Explore the Documentary Movie "Blacked Out"- Questions and Answers with Director John Hulme

February 22, 7-8 p.m.

Mango Languages - Inglés Nivel Principiante e Intermedio (Mango Languages - English for Beginner and Intermediate Level)

February 23, 5-6 p.m.

The World Changed, So Did the Music - Presented by Dr. Robert W. Butts

February 23, 7-8 p.m.

Black Children and the Civil Rights Movement - Presented by Pr. Mekala Audain

February 24, 7-8 p.m.

Representative John Lewis - Joins the Pantheon of Our Strong Black Ancestors

February 25, 7-8 p.m.

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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.

"It was important for us to invite CAU 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 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.

To learn more about CAU, visit caunj.org or follow the agency on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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. 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) Executive Director of CAU Bernadette Griswold, left, received a corsage from Megan Stephens at the wedding.



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

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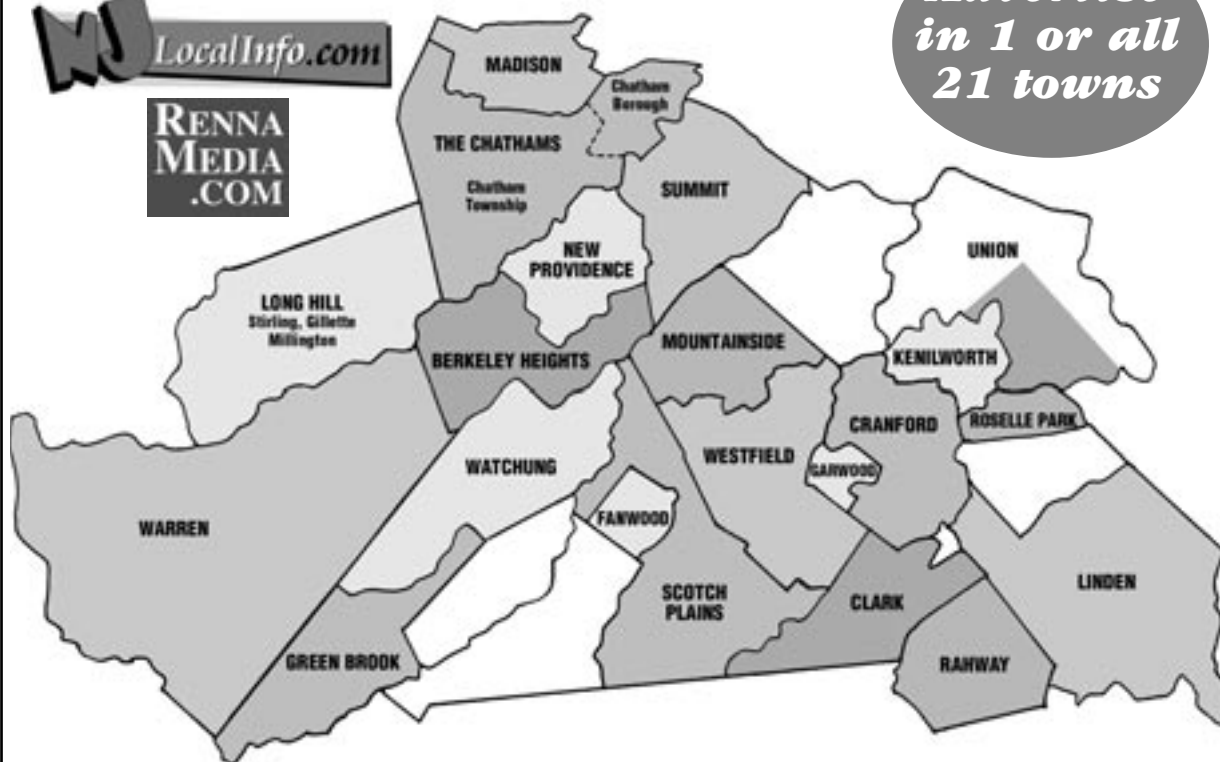
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