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NEW PRINCIPAL SAYS SCHOOL IS HER HOME AND HER HEART

Linden Public Schools

When Gwendolyn Long was a student at Soehl Middle School in Linden in the mid-1980s, she never imagined that one day she would be principal. But that's exactly where she sits today, and it seems to be a perfect fit for her.

"I am Soehl Middle School," she said. "This is me. This is my heart. I embody it."

Long is taking over the top job for the 2021-22 school year after spending five years as vice principal. She had joined the district in 2000 and taught language arts and social studies for many years at McManus Middle School. But returning to her alma mater as VP and now principal feels like a homecoming.

"There's something about Soehl," she said. "I can remember when I was a student in '86, Soehl always had a special place in my heart. The teachers, the family environment – no disrespect to McManus, because I was a McManus girl when I taught there – but this is home for me. I love it."

Superintendent Dr. Marnie Hazelton said that Long is the natural person to maintain continuity of leadership at Soehl.

As principal, one of Long's top priorities will be restorative practices. These are strategies that help students learn how to navigate conflict resolution, take ownership of their behavior, practice empathy, and learn from their mistakes.

Long said her favorite part of the job, whether as a teacher or an administrator, is interacting with and getting to know the students.

"I love the kids," she said. "That was my biggest fear in going into administration, that it would take me away from the connection with our students. But it doesn't have to. I can still get through all the paperwork, all of what needs to get done, and still reach out or walk into the classrooms. Visit kids, get to know kids, and make that a part of our everyday process."

Long grew up in Linden always knowing that she wanted to be a teacher. She attended School Nos. 5 and 1, then Soehl, and graduated from Linden High School in 1992. After graduating from Kean University, she sought to return to her hometown school district. Because she still lives in the neighborhood – in her childhood home, in fact – Long gets to know many of the students outside of school before they even get to Soehl.

"I like when they look at me and say, 'Ms. Long, you're the principal?' And they're like, 'Oh, my God, I know her! She lives down the street from me!' I like that," she said. "A lot of the kids are within my ward, so I know a lot of them, their families, maybe even some of their grandparents. So it's home. I have a vested interest to make sure everyone is successful and making sure that this school is the best."

Long, who has master's degrees in administration and the art of teaching, also says she has big shoes to fill, following prior principals Isabella Scocozza and Richard Molinaro, who have moved into district administrator roles.

"Ms. Scocozza, another Linden person, did a great job with this school,



(above) Gwendolyn Long is the new principal at Soehl Middle School in Linden after serving for five years as vice principal. She was a student at the school in the 1980s and says Soehl has always been like her home.

Photo by Linden Public Schools

especially with her 21st Century after-school program and the success that it has had for our students and parents," she said. "And also Mr. Molinaro brought a lot of great things to this building, so I just want to keep the flow going and put my spin on things."

Long says she has gotten a lot of positive feedback about her promotion from students, staff and parents. She said that is critical to her success and the success of the school.

"This job I don't take lightly," she said. "I make sure people know that I didn't do this by myself. You have to have the support of your students, your staff, and your parents. They have to be able to trust you. For them to be able to trust me and know that I have their best interest, that means the world to me. It really does something to my spirit and it motivates me to want to make sure that I maintain their support by doing what I have to do for the best interest of everyone involved."

That kind of support from parents and the community at large helps to spread the word about the great things a school offers and helps to battle misconceptions.

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Tina Renna: 908-418-5586

tinarena@rennamedia.com

Joe Renna: 908-447-1295

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LINDEN HIGH SCHOOL TO ENHANCE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Linden Public Schools

Linden High School has been accepted into a three-year pilot program to expand restorative justice practices to help turn around student behavior and create a more positive culture for students and teachers.

Out of hundreds of applicants, LHS is one of just 15 schools statewide to be accepted into the program created by the New Jersey Department of Education and implemented by Kean University.

"We are very excited to participate in the Restorative Justice in Education pilot program," said LHS Principal Yelena Horr . "It is really in line with the goals that we have always set at Linden High School to create a more positive culture and to build a community that enriches and supports the kids. This program will help us to build a broad culture where we're all pulling in the same direction."

The restorative justice initiative is designed to assist schools in achieving the following goals:

Reducing racial disparities in school discipline.

Improving the socioemotional and behavioral responses of students through the use of more appropriate, and less punitive, interventions.

Reducing recidivism rates among students who violate the school district code of conduct.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Marnie Hazelton said the program is a great opportunity for LHS.

"It is so important to continue to examine our disciplinary practices, and restorative justice a big part of that," she said. "This program will assist our Linden High School educators in keeping students on the right path and ensuring that justice is handed out in an equitable and fair manner for all students."

Horr  and school social worker Ryan Devaney will work with facilitators at Kean in Year 1 of the program to train LHS staff members. Year 2 will be for implementation of the program, and Year 3 will see further implementation, data analysis, and adaptation.

"For students who are making mistakes or going down the wrong path, we want to bring them back onboard," Horr  said. "We want them to understand that they are not defined by the mistakes that they make. We want to allow everyone to reinvent themselves and give students and their teachers the tools to do that."



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FIFTH-GRADER'S KINDNESS HELPS STRUGGLING NEWCOMERS

Linden Public Schools

Imagine showing up for your first day of school, and not only do you not know anyone, but you can't understand a word that anyone is saying.

That was what two young brothers, ages 5 and 6, faced recently when they arrived at School No. 1 in Linden. The boys came to live with relatives in the United States after they were displaced from their home by the Aug. 14 earthquake that devastated Haiti. Besides each other, the two boys had no one in school to turn to, or even talk to.

That is until fifth-grader Renal Ali stepped in. "They did not speak one word of English," said Acting Principal Michael Walters. "So I knew right away that we needed some help here. I wasn't aware of any Haitian Creole speaking teachers or staff, so I went to a fifth-grade class and asked, 'Does anyone speak Haitian Creole?' and Renal immediately said yes."

Walters explained that he and some other staff members tried to connect with the boys by being

jovial and excited, but they did not respond. Renal, however, got down on their level and spoke softly to them.

"He very calmly said something in Haitian Creole, and right away both of their heads snapped up and they made eye contact," Walters said. "It was a connection right away. And those kids were glued to him."

Renal was born in the United States and knows English and Haitian Creole well, so he has never been through a similar situation, but he said he could understand how the two boys felt.

"There's a lot of people out there that don't know how to speak English or don't know anything about the country, and I just wanted to help them," he said. "I think they felt like they had someone who can understand what they're going through."

Walters said the two brothers have since been

transferred to School No. 9, where they are getting guidance from the district's English as a Second Language program for students who speak Haitian Creole. But their first couple of days at School No. 1 were made much more bearable because of a friendly voice from Renal, who checked in on the brothers throughout the day, at recess, and after school to let them know they weren't alone.

"He just completely saved the first day for those kids," Walters said. "What could have been a horrible experience turned out to be something very positive."


Renal, who is in Sabina Robinson's fifth-grade class, said he got praise from teachers and his friends after he helped the two boys.

"It made me feel like a star," he said. "My mom was proud of me. She was happy, and she said, 'Keep it up.'"



(above) Renal Ali, a fifth-grader at School No. 1 in Linden, volunteered to help two young brothers who came to school not knowing any English after being displaced by the Aug. 14 earthquake in Haiti. He spoke to the boys in Haitian Creole to help ease their transition into school.

Photo by Linden Public Schools



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SALUTE TO VETERANS FILM FESTIVAL

Linden Public Library

After a year off because of the pandemic, the Linden Public Library is proud to once again present its annual "Salute to Veterans Film Festival". Four very different films about the Second World War will be presented during November. Each one is based on real events during and after the war.

On Monday, November 8 at 1:00 p.m., the library will show the 2018 film *The Catcher Was*

a Spy. This film stars Paul Rudd as former big league catcher, Moe Berg, who was known as "the brainiest man in baseball" and was described by Casey Stengel as "the strangest man ever to play baseball". While only an average player during his baseball career, Berg served as an undercover member of the Office of Special Services in leading espionage missions during the war. This film was based on a book of the same title.

On Friday, November 12 at 1:00 p.m., the 2002 film *Windtalkers* will be shown. Two U.S. Marines are assigned to protect Navajo Indian members of the Marine Corps, who use their native language as an unbreakable radio cypher against the Japanese. This film stars Nichols Cage, Mark Ruffalo and Christian Slater.

On Tuesday, November 16 at 1:00 p.m. we offer an inside look at the biggest secret and most fantastic weapon of World War II as we present the 1989 film, *Fat Man and Little Boy*. The Manhattan Project is brought to the big screen as

the first atomic bombs are built and tested in the New Mexico desert. Paul Newman stars as Army General Leslie Groves while Dwight Schultz plays the project's top scientist, Robert Oppenheimer.

The final film in the series will be shown on Friday, November 19 at 1:00 p.m. *American Traitor: The Trial of Axis Sally* details the trial for treason of an American-born citizen, Mildred Gillars, who lived in Germany throughout the war. She spoke both English and German and worked for the Nazi Propaganda Ministry as a radio announcer, reaching out to American G.I.s in Britain and the Mediterranean. The film stars Meadow Williams and Al Pacino.

Located at 31 East Henry Street, the Linden Public Library has been at the center of the city's social, cultural, artistic and educational life since it was founded in 1928. Films are presented thanks to special funding from the Friends of the Linden Library. If you have any questions, please call the library at 908-298-3830.

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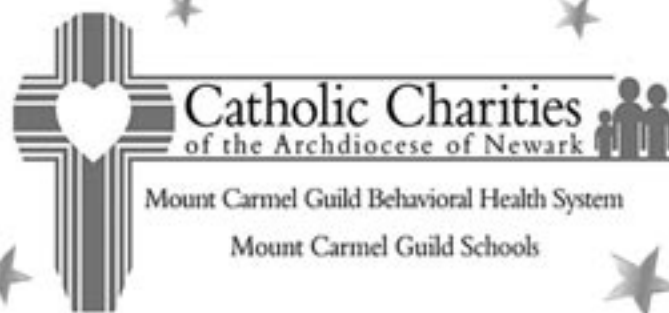
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SIX FROM LINDEN GRADUATE THE TRINITAS SCHOOL OF NURSING

Sixty-nine students received their nursing diplomas from the Trinitas School of Nursing for what would have been the 166th Convocation Ceremony on June 3, 2021. Including Linden residents Pearl A. Gumaroy, Catherine Hernandez, Leila Kavanagh, Solomon O. Onyebeke, Kemberly Rios, and Marilyn Zorrila Steede who also received the Daisy Award.

Fifty-eight women and 11 men became eligible to sit for the registered nurse licensing exam. The

convocation ceremony was a hybrid event of in-person ceremony and taped speeches. The class gathered in person in two groups to maintain social distancing. The students received their awards, pins, and nursing diplomas in person. No outside visitors were allowed. The event was recorded and edited by the UCC Media department, and the premiere of the complete version of the ceremony was conducted on June 11, 2021 at 6 p.m. A gift of the video was given by the school to each graduate.

“During the pandemic, the School of Nursing successfully underwent accreditation by the Accreditation Commission for Accreditation in Nursing (ACEN),” said Dr. Roseminda Santee, Dean of the Trinitas School of Nursing, which is affiliated with Union County College. “The school was granted the full eight years continuing accreditation by ACEN in March 2021. Graduates participated actively in the accreditation process. I am very proud of these graduates.”



Trinitas School of Nursing Class of 2021



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If Knee Surgery Sounds Scary, It Should

Have you have been told you are facing knee replacement surgery? Have you been told about all the downsides you could be facing? First and foremost, there are NO guarantees that knee replacement surgery will be the answer to your pain, but let's look further:

- Surgery is costly, regardless of the percentage of services covered by insurance.
- Surgery requires lost time from work and typically requires a regimen of rehabilitation and medications.
- With surgery, there is always a risk for unwelcomed complications. And you could be back to where you started, or worse.
- Medications will be required for relief from surgery and you have been down that road before. Addictions to these pain medications can cause potential side effects, something you do not want to experience.
- Rehabilitation can take years.

Consider This Alternative To Surgery

Northeast Spine & Wellness Center offers you a real opportunity and a painless way to say goodbye to your knee pain without any surgery. Here are just a few of the important benefits you should consider?

- Diagnostic fluoroscopy accurately targets the pain, unlike blind injections.
- Guided fluoroscopic injections are virtually pain free, unlike blind injections.
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There are a number of reasons why you developed Osteoarthritis pain. It can develop with age or because of heredity. It could be from repetitive stress from a job or some glory days in athletics. Of course your concern is with the symptoms you face daily and how to make them end, hopefully without surgery or the use of potentially addictive medications. **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** understands the symptoms you have been living with and can help. If you have any of the symptoms below, please call us today. Relief is a phone call away.

- **Pain** - Whether it's a sharp aching or maybe a burning sensation, the pain can range from irritating to debilitating.
- **Swelling** - This can cause tenderness and soreness to the entire knee area, making walking or going up and down stairs painful, getting in and out of bed or bathtubs difficult and dangerous just name a few activities affected by swelling.
- **Stiffness** - Getting up out of bed or after sitting for a period of time gets more and more difficult. This loss of mobility can be more than a hindrance. It can be dangerous if you need to move quickly.
- **Loss of muscle strength** - This can lead to balance issues and the strong possibility of falling.
- **Joint deformity** - Not just unsightly, but painful as well.
- **Creaking Joints** - Can be painful and a sign of more discomfort to come.
- **Sleepless nights** - Losing sleep over your suffering is not just irritating, but potentially dangerous because of so many other health concerns that can be affected by loss of sound sleep.

Let Me Show You Targeted Relief From Your Knee Pain

Every day, I see patients suffering from knee pain due to arthritis, osteoarthritis, sports injuries or other conditions. Many have been told that they are in need of knee replacement surgery. Other patients say they have been prescribed various prescription medications to deal with the pain.

Something else I see almost every day, are patients that have tried viscosupplementation knee injections elsewhere and found it to be a painful and ineffective experience because the injections were not administered using fluoroscopic guidance. Instead of using the incredibly accurate diagnostic fluoroscopy we use at **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** these patients experienced a blind injection technique, which can be as inaccurate as playing pin the tail on the donkey.

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Scot Paris MD, FACS



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**Wilfredo Rodriguez
Pastor, OIF/OEF Veteran**

Special Guest Speaker

Michael Boll

US Marine Corps Veteran

President of NJ Veterans Network

R.S.V.P by November 3, 2021

PANCAKE BREAKFAST AT THE AMERICAN LEGION POST 102

Come to a Pancake Breakfast, hosted by the American Legion Auxiliary - Unit 102, on Sunday, November 21, 2021 at the American Legion Post 102, located at 112 West Elizabeth Ave., from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Donations: Adults \$8.00 / Seniors & Children \$7.00 / Ages 5 & Under Free.

So come out and enjoy a home cooked breakfast, including this month's special S.O.S.!

PANCAKE BREAKFAST AT THE VFW #1397

Come one, come all to our Pancake Breakfast on Saturday, November 20, 2021 at the VFW Post #1397, located at 20 Pennsylvania Railroad Ave., from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Donations: Adults \$7.00 / Seniors & Children \$6.00/ Ages 5 & Under Free.

This event is open to the public, so come out and enjoy a home cooked breakfast!

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LINDEN RECREATION NOVEMBER CLASSES

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The Parks & Recreation office is located
330 Helen Street. To view full class
descriptions, visit www.linden-nj.org
and click on Community Pass.

Linden Recreation announces a variety of in-person classes in November for children, adults and senior citizens. Pre-registration is required by calling 908-474-8600 or online at linden-nj.org and click on Community Pass. First time registrants, are required to call during business hours to have an account set up.

Wood Keepsake Box

Thursday, Nov 4, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.
Ages 5-12. The fee is \$10. Supplies included.

Youth Ceramics

Wednesday, Nov 10, from 6:00-7:30 p.m.
Ages 5-12. The fee is \$10. Supplies included.

Kids Paint

Thursday, Nov 18, from 6:00-7:30 p.m.
Ages 5-12. The fee is \$15. Supplies included.

It's Turkey Time

Saturday, Nov 20, from 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Families ages 5 & up. The class is free.
All supplies included.

Crocheted Beaded Necklace & Earrings Set

Thursday, Nov 4, from 7:15-8:15 p.m.
Ages 13 & up. Fee is \$10. Supplies included.

Adult Ceramics

Wednesday, Nov 17, from 6:00-7:30 p.m.
Ages 13 & up. Fee is \$10. Supplies included.

Gun Rights vs Gun Violence

Monday, Nov 1, from 1:00-2:30 p.m.
Ages 50 & up. The class is free.

Hanging Turkey Decor

Thursday, Nov 4, from 10:00a.m.-12:00p.m.
Ages 50 & up. The class is free.
All supplies included.

The State of Israel & the Palestinian

Monday, Nov 8, from 1:00-2:30 p.m.
Ages 50 & up. The class is free.

The History of Bad Behavior by Large US Banks

Monday, Nov 15, from 1:00-2:30 p.m.
Ages 50 & up. The class is free.

Basket Weaving

Thursday, Nov 18, from 10:00a.m.-12:00p.m.
Ages 50 & up. The class is free.
All supplies included.

Income Inequality in The US

Monday, Nov 22, from 1:00-2:30 p.m.
Ages 50 & up. The class is free.

KIDS PAINT CLASSES

Upcoming Kids Paint classes will be held on November 18 and December 9. Pre-registration is required by calling 908-474-8600 or online at linden-nj.org and click on Community Pass. First time registrants, are required to call during business hours to have an account set up.

For more information on recreation programs, email lindenrec@linden-nj.org or call the Parks and Recreation Department at 908-474-8600 or visit linden-nj.gov. The Parks & Recreation office is located at 330 Helen Street.



(above) On October 15, 2021, Linden Parks & Recreation held a Kids Paint class for ages 5-12 at the JTG Center.

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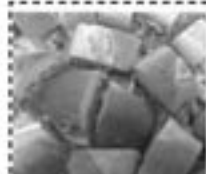
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SCHOOL NO. 10 NATIONAL SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

Linden Public Schools

School No. 10 in Linden has been selected as a National PTA School of Excellence, a distinction that recognizes the strong bond that the school has forged with its families and the community.

The elementary school is one of just 351 schools chosen nationwide and only six in New Jersey.

"We're super excited," said Principal David Walker. "This came about because the school and the PTA work together for the benefit of our students. We're a team. We have a tremendous relationship. I think that's what it takes. We welcome their participation, and they are very supportive of our staff."

National PTA School of Excellence is a recognition program that supports and celebrates partnerships between local PTAs and schools to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being for all students. School No. 10 staff, led by Walker and teacher Frances Czylek, started the application process in 2019 by identifying an action plan where the school could improve its outreach efforts.

"Congratulations to School No. 10 and its PTA for being selected as a National PTA School of Excellence," said Superintendent Dr. Marnie Hazelton. "Support from our families and community are essential for our schools to be able to give our students the outstanding education and support they deserve. The teamwork they have demonstrated at School No. 10 lays the foundation to allow our students to soar."

Walker credited the teachers and support staff for their outstanding work.

"A great big thank you to all of you for your efforts to include our families in the educational process, and for the overall support you always provide to our families and in our work with the PTA," Walker wrote in an email to staff announcing the honor. "It truly makes a difference in the lives of our students."

The school worked to be more inclusive of different cultures by adding cheerful signs around the building in multiple languages and using ClassDojo to communicate with families, allowing messages to be translated into 35 different languages.

"Our community and our school are evolving and changing, and it is important that we do so as well, so that we can meet and exceed the needs of our families," Walker said.

The school also held a multicultural night in 2019, where students and their families were invited to share the food, music, and other facets

of their culture.

School No. 10 also forged a partnership with Atria Senior Living Community, located in Cranford just around the corner from the school. The school hosted residents for a celebration of military veterans in 2019, and fifth-grade students visited the senior community to sing and perform for Valentine's Day in 2020.

Walker said that although the COVID-19 pandemic has been very difficult on staff, students, and families, it also gave the school an opportunity to put its increased family and community outreach into action to make sure everyone stayed informed and included.

"This has been a very illuminating and transformative process to undertake, we also

know that our work continues, and that we can still improve," Walker said.

Two School No. 10 staff members – paraprofessional Sherre Carbone and fifth-grade teacher Mary Lee – are on the PTA executive board for the upcoming school year, and Walker said together they will focus on continuing to improve family engagement supporting student success, specifically in the areas of literacy, math, and science.

"We have grown tremendously as a school as a result of our work in the National PTA School of Excellence process," he said, "and we are looking forward to not only being recognized for the work we have done, but also committing to further improvement."



(above) Fifth-graders from School No. 10 in Linden performed for residents at the Atria Senior Living Community in Cranford for Valentine's Day in 2020. The school was chosen as a National PTA School of Excellence in part because of its community and family outreach.

Photos by Linden Public Schools



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US SPACE FORCE: GUARDIANS OF THE HIGH FRONTIER

Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program (NJ-102)

As we explore new horizons, the United States expands beyond what is imaginable. With the creation of the US Space Force, the country truly embodies the notion of “reaching for the stars”! On June 29, 2021, Captain “Bud” Jackson Composite Squadron (NJ-102) of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), an Auxiliary of the United States Air Force, had special guest speakers from the US Space Force - Major Jose Almanzar and Captain Ronald Nguyen. In a virtual meeting of over 110 participants, including visitors from other CAP squadrons, attended and the speakers shared the goal and purpose of this new branch of the military, talked about their jobs, gave advice to the cadets considering the path and much more. There was time for a Q&A session, where the speakers provided valuable information towards a wide range of cadet/senior member questions. Cadets took away extensive information to inspire them about this new exciting path of space research and operations.

Headquartered at the Pentagon, the US Space Force is an independent branch of the military that was carved out of the Air Force in December 2019. With their Command motto as “Guardians of the High Frontier”, the US Space Force is considered a critical asset, impacting everyday life. Although it is currently the smallest of the US armed services, the Space Force is responsible for operating and defending military satellites and ground stations and supports

communication and navigation on Earth. It provides a much needed position of strength, especially technology-wise, for protecting US interests in space or going on offense, if needed, in the future. Civilian life cannot survive without our space capabilities. Our military based missions are now largely supported by space operations. Additionally, as space tourism is about to lift off in the coming years, the US will have a growing space community.

As an empowerment message to the young cadets, Maj Almanzar and Capt Nguyen talked about the Space Force’s need for bold and diverse leaders with new ideas. They stressed the importance of being exposed to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) experiences and education early on - “Always take advantage of opportunities presented to you and explore the growing areas of the Space Force. The sky is not the limit so it is your time to soar!”

The Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Cadet Program is open to all Middle School and High School students from ages 12 to 18. For more information about C.A.P., please contact the NJ-102 Squadron Commander, Captain Jose Vergara, at jose.vergara@njwg.cap.gov, or the NJ-102 Squadron Recruiting Officer, 1st Lt Josline Pinto, at josline.pinto@njwg.cap.gov. Visit the CAP National webpage at gocivilairpatrol.com or the NJ-102 squadron website at nj102.cap.gov. Also, be sure to check out the NJ-102 Squadron’s Facebook page at facebook.com/NJ102/.



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IMAGINE IS SEEKING VOLUNTEER FACILITATORS

Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss offers free peer grief support groups for grieving families that are facilitated by a wonderful group of trained volunteers. Imagine's volunteers are an essential part of Imagine's programs and they're looking to grow their community of facilitators. Are you interested in joining Imagine's team of volunteers? If so, we'd like to tell you more about Imagine's programs.

Imagine offers free peer support groups for children ages 3-18 who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or close family member. Groups are also available for young adults ages 18-30, and for the parents and guardians of the children in the program. Groups for Spanish speaking bereaved adults are also available. All groups are currently being held virtually, with some set to transition to in-person as soon as it is safe to do so. Other groups will remain virtual.

Support groups are facilitated by trained adult volunteers who attend a three-day training totaling 24 hours, as well as regular continuing education. Volunteers come from all walks of life



and no special background is required other than a willingness to listen, a heart inclined to serve, and the ability to be with children and adults in grief without trying to fix, solve or give advice. No prior experience is necessary. Volunteers must be 21 years or older. Bilingual (Spanish speaking) volunteers are needed as well. Volunteers serve as companions and loving listeners for those who are grieving and help create a space where participants can share tears and embrace the joys of life.

"In order to continue to grow our English and Spanish speaking programs, we need to constantly recruit and train new volunteer

facilitators," said Veronica Ortiz, Imagine Program Manager. "Our programs are growing because of the great need in this community, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 220 children and adults have been participating in our virtual support groups this year. We have recently launched a new program year, but there is more demand for our programs than we're able to meet with our current number of facilitators. Doing this additional training will ensure that no child will ever have to wait to get the support they need."

Are you interested in joining Imagine's incredible community of volunteers and help us eliminate a wait list for our groups? Imagine is planning to offer a virtual facilitator training from Friday, November 5 through Sunday, November 7 from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. each day. An interview is required prior to the training, so please contact Imagine Training Manager, Jamie Saltamachia at jamie@imagineinjenj.org to arrange a convenient interview time. If you have questions regarding the training, please call 908-264-3100.

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HELP US SAVE A VET - VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Michael D. Boll, Director
New Jersey Veterans Network

For the last few years the New Jersey Veterans Network and its mobile outreach team has been aggressively seeking out veterans in need and providing them resources to have a better way of life. This is only possible because of our volunteers' commitment and dedication with helping our veteran community. Donations are wonderful and help us purchase food, clothing, medical equipment and other life changing items, however someone's time is what makes an enormous difference.

During our charity's existence, we have provided meals for thousands of veterans and servicemen, dropped off PPE and clothing to veterans, provided medical equipment for disabled veterans, had 30 cars donated to disabled veterans, and most importantly we successfully saved the lives of veterans who were in some type of a dangerous crisis.

Every day we lose approximately 22 veterans to suicide and unfortunately this number hasn't changed over the years. Depression, PTSD and

trauma run extremely high among our veterans and their family members. There are countless lifesaving programs out there for veterans, however it's a difficult task to get veterans to trust others and go get the help they need to live a better life.

The New Jersey Veterans Network also has a program called Operation Rebound that consists of a mobile outreach team that helps to train veterans for events like races, hiking, and other athletic activities. The goal of Operation Rebound is to do athletic events from 5k races to long distance Iron Man competitions in order to empower the veterans and show the public how people can do amazing things with the proper support. It is truly incredible to see the veterans go from no physical activity to completing these tremendous athletic challenges.

Our charity has been able to work alongside other amazing charities that always put veterans first and are capable of rapidly providing them with essential resources. Recently, we formed a veteran anti-suicide and PTSD awareness coalition, called Uniformed Heroes, that will

provide peer support sponsors for any veteran in need. Our peer support sponsors will be trained by the VA and Penn Med and our goal is to have volunteers statewide to help veterans in need.

To make this upcoming Uniformed Heroes campaign successful, we are in desperate need of volunteers from both the veteran and civilian communities. There are numerous events and daily tasks that our charity could use assistance with and we are always looking to have more volunteers willing to help us reach veterans in need.

Our goal is to provide all veterans in need with a peer support sponsor that will do whatever they can to help veterans with obtaining the resources needed to live a better life. This is not an easy thing to do, but the New Jersey Veterans Network has already been able to make a huge difference because of the team's volunteers and its strong partnerships with other charities.

If you are interested in joining the team, please send us an email at NJVN1775@gmail.com and provide your name, email, and phone number. Also, if you have any questions, and concerns please feel free to contact us at 973-332-1556.



(above) Memorial Day Murph Event

Photos by New Jersey Veterans Network

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RETIRING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEAVES LEGACY OF LOVE

Linden Public Schools

School No. 1 Principal Dona Preston is retiring after 33 years in Linden Public Schools, leaving behind a legacy of love for her neediest students and leadership for the many teachers who have served with and learned from her.

"I was really lucky in my career," she said. "I've worked with seven different superintendents, phenomenal supervisors, wonderful teachers, and truthfully I've been blessed by all the people who have helped me in my career."

But it was always the students who came first for Preston, who started in 1988 as a special education teacher at School No. 5. She had previously worked with autistic students in Jersey City and emotionally disturbed children in New York City. She used kindness to try to reach the most troubled students.

"For me, it was making a dent with the special ed population," Preston said. "Kids that were really down and out. Kids that lived with grandparents, foster kids. If the kid falls asleep on the desk, it's not, 'Oh, the kid's bored, the kid's this or that.' The kid is falling asleep for a reason and we have to figure out what the reason is."

"So I think empathy and kindness and just helping them was my shining star. Especially when they come back to visit. That's just the best."

The story of one young girl stands out from Preston's days at School No. 5. She was a 6-year-old emotionally disturbed girl who was between foster families and out of control. Preston ended up adopting her.

"I got her out of her situation, to teach her what love is. To teach her what a family is like," she said.

But it wasn't always an easy situation.

"She had more problems than I can tell you," Preston said. "So she was in and out of my house and in the system. But now she has a family of her own. She came to visit me the other day."

"She always came back. So even though she might not have been in my house every year, she was always with me."

It wasn't always certain that Preston was going to be a teacher. After her stints in Jersey City and New York, she owned a florist in Elizabeth and The Sub Shoppe sandwich shop on Wood Avenue in Linden in the 1980s.

But after those, she said, "If I'm going back to work, I'm going back to what I love. And so I saw an ad in the paper for Linden, and I applied."

Preston was a special education teacher at School No. 5 for 13 years, then served as supervisor for special services for five years. After a year as principal at School No. 10, she became principal at School No. 1 in 2006, and has been there since.



(above, l-r) School No. 1 Principal Dona Preston was surprised by the other Linden elementary school principals with flowers and gifts days before she retired. Front row are School No. 10 Principal David Walker, School No. 6 Principal William Mastriano, School No. 2 Principal Peter Fingerlin, and School No. 9 Principal Dr. Larry Plummer. Back row are School No. 5 Principal Dr. Laura Scamardella, Preston, School No. 8 Principal Michelle Rodriguez, Coordinator of Special Projects Antoinette Modrak, and School No. 4 Principal Dr. Suzanne Olivero.



(above) Linden School No. 1 Principal Dona Preston, right, at her surprise retirement barbecue with Vice Principal Nicole Frankonis and the Linden Tiger mascot. Photos by Linden Public Schools

"Ms. Preston is leaving an incredible legacy behind in Linden Public Schools," said Superintendent Dr. Marnie Hazelton. "She has touched countless lives of students and staff members alike and we wish her the best in a well-deserved retirement."

Preston gives great credit for her success to her mentor, Alexis Jarose, who was her principal at School No. 5 and went on to be assistant superintendent.

"She taught me how you love kids, how discipline doesn't work, everything I think that I am today is truly because of Alexis Jarose," Preston said. "And so many of the administrators have worked under her, and we always talk about how many people she has touched. She was a great mentor."

Preston has tried to emulate her mentor by helping young teachers learn and grow.

"That's been another highlight of my career, seeing people go from young and inexperienced, and gaining and gaining," she said. "That's really nice to see."

One of those who credits Preston with helping her become a better educator is School No. 5 Principal Dr. Laura Scamardella.

"Dona encourages her staff to strive for personal and professional excellence," Scamardella said. "She can see the potential that lies within each staff member and cultivates the confidence needed in a safe and loving way, so success is met. Dona will be missed every day and remains a consummate professional in our district."

Her colleagues' love for her was on display in her last few weeks on the job, when the staff at School No. 1 held a surprise retirement barbecue in her honor and a "clap-out" of applause as she left the building. Preston was taken completely by surprise.

"I pride myself in knowing everything," she said with a laugh. "I know the ins and outs, I know the gossip. But I knew nothing. It's just amazing that somebody thinks they know everything. But they got me."

She was also surprised by a visit from the district's other elementary school principals for a visit at the end of the school year to say goodbye.

"When the principals came marching in, it was like, oh, my God," Preston said. "We have formed such a great bond. We help each other, we do things together. The collaboration has always been there. That's been a very strong bond."

When contemplating what she will miss the most as she retires, it of course came back to her students and her staff.

"There are so many things," Preston said. "I'm going to miss the kids, because they are fun. Some of the things they say are just hysterical. I always say I'm going to put them in a book."

"And the teachers, because they're such good people. I've been lucky. I've always worked in great atmospheres with great people. So that will be hard."

In retirement, she expects to do more work with rescue animals, a cause that has always been close to her heart. And she is considering volunteering as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) who advocates in schools and homes for children in need.

Stating the obvious, she said, "That's right up my alley."

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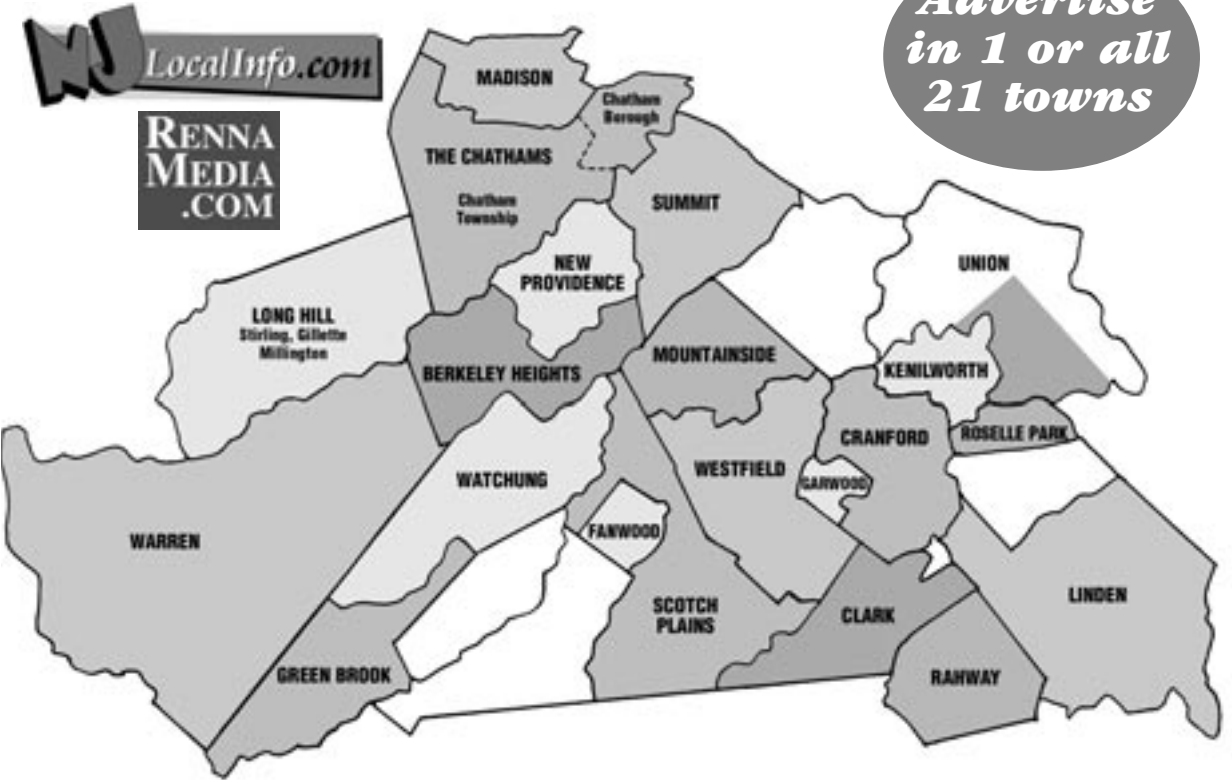
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