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HISPANIC HERITAGE NIGHT CELEBRATED

Kenilworth Public Schools

Students love a good party, so it's no surprise that Kenilworth Public Schools' recent fiesta was hugely popular. The October 14th celebration also included the community – and a vibrant cultural theme.

The district's Hispanic Heritage Night helped represent the background of many Kenilworth students. Hispanic students make up 35 percent of the district's enrollment.

"We have students from Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Ecuador, and many more Hispanic countries and territories around the world," said David Brearley Middle-High School Principal, Jeremy Davies. "Events such as Hispanic Heritage Night highlight our commitment to make sure all students feel a sense of belonging."

Students served as "ambassadors" at the event, sharing information and heirlooms from their families' countries of origin. The event was partly sponsored by the New Jersey Education Association's Pride Program, which seeks to build community involvement in public schools.

Two of Brearley's World Language teachers, Kayla Khaled and Alejandro Mejia, spearheaded the night's activities. They coordinated student participation and arranged for entertainment and empanadas--both of which were big hits. A Mariachi band performed, and a Zumba instructor gave lessons. And those empanadas? They went rápido! Local restaurants donated more than 500 empanadas, which were gone within 30 minutes. Participating restaurants, La Casa del Pan in Union, Chilean Bakery in Roselle Park, and Antojitos Don Chucho of Elizabeth Port, contributed empanadas of various flavors, offering a taste of diverse regional cuisine.

"Students and community members were thrilled and appreciative that our school was able to provide an event that encouraged and inspired their interests in Hispanic culture, while also creating a cooperative approach to a collective positive school environment," Khaled said.

For extra credit, Hispanic Heritage Night also was educational. "This year we've implemented an instructional curriculum in World Language



(above) Student ambassadors display heirlooms and information about their countries at Hispanic Heritage Night

classes that provides students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in both Hispanic culture and Spanish language," Mejia said. "The event created an authentic experience that complemented and supported our instructional goals." Cultural events such as Hispanic Heritage Night also help advance one of Kenilworth's 2021-22 district goals, namely increasing the focus on nurturing diversity and equity and inclusion.

Judging by the feedback from the recent event, Kenilworth should expect a crowd at upcoming celebrations such as Black History Night in February and a Women's History Night in March. One attendee said, "I am proud that I was afforded this opportunity" to participate in Hispanic Heritage Night. Another appreciated how "the beauty of Hispanic heritage was highlighted". And the words of one student might have been the most poignant: "Our school felt different. We felt united."

Photos by Kenilworth Public Schools



(above) A mariachi band performs at Hispanic Heritage Night

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COMMEMORATION OF VETERANS DAY

Kenilworth Public Schools

For Kenilworth Public Schools, commemorating Veterans Day is an active duty.

This year at Harding Elementary School in Kenilworth, NJ, students created thank-you cards and presented them to veterans. Dozens of flags were placed around school grounds to honor service members in time for Veterans Day and Superintendent of Schools, Kyle Arlington, was among the speakers at the Kenilworth Veterans Center's holiday program on November 11th.

"We welcome any opportunity for our students to work with veterans," Arlington said in his remarks. "Young people can learn great lessons from their example of service and selflessness."

Around 100 people attended the Veterans Center event, which was cosponsored by VFW Post 2230 and American Legion Post 470. The turnout was higher than usual, noted Robert E. Jeans Sr., Commander of Post 2230.

Jeans led the VFW presentation, but Ed Sudnick, American Legion Post 470 1st Vice

Commander, and Jerry Dobbins, Kenilworth Veterans Center President, also spoke.

Further, community leaders, including Mayor Linda Karlovitch and Police Chief Fred Soos, joined Arlington in making remarks.

"Kenilworth Public Schools is proud of our veterans. And we are proud of the way our students honor veterans," Arlington said.

Arlington mentioned a recent example of student support for Kenilworth veterans. Last year, students in the Practical Arts class at David Brearley Middle-High School designed a nonprofit clothing line called Be Nice Co. to benefit local charities. The students and their teacher decided to give the first round of proceeds to the Kenilworth VFW.

"Kenilworth Public Schools will continue to contribute to veterans in the community," Arlington said.

"Veterans embody the community spirit that is so important here in our small town."

Photo by Kenilworth Public Schools



(above) Kenilworth students meet with Commander of VFW Post 2230, Robert E. Jeans Sr., and other local veterans at Harding Elementary School after presenting them with thank-you cards.

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AN OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

Please Join the Kenilworth Historical Society at The Oswald J. Nitschke House (49 S. 21 Street) for “An Old-Fashioned Christmas” and Holiday Celebration with “Victorian Santa” and more on Sunday, Dec. 5 (12 to 5 p.m.), visitors will have an opportunity to meet and take photos with Victorian Santa, and to view all five period rooms of the c. 1880 home authentically decorated for the holidays and to visit the site’s multicultural Christkindlmarkt, where the recently created Kenilworth Commemorative Coverlet, handcrafted gift items and holiday treats/baked goods will be available for

purchase.

Admission to all activities is free. Masks/face coverings are required. Visitors are invited to bring, for the Nitschke House Cultural Heritage Tree, an ornament (labeled with their family name) that represents their family’s heritage/culture.

Details about the Dec. 5 event, along with a videotaped reading by Victorian Santa of ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas are available on the Kenilworth Historical Society’s website, kenilworthhistoricalsociety.org, and Facebook page.



HOLIDAY THEME GRAB N’ GO CRAFT

The Kenilworth Public Library located at 548 Boulevard will be offering two Grab ‘n’ Go crafts in December for Kenilworth residents ages 4 – 9 years old when a book is checked out from the library.

The Holiday Craft kits will be available as of Monday, December 13th while supplies last.

The New Year’s Craft kits will be available as of Tuesday, December 28th while supplies last.

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(above) One of the many families who visited the Nitschke House during last year’s holiday celebration.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO HOST KENILWORTH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOLIDAY MEETING

On Thursday, Dec. 9, 8:30 – 10 a.m., the Kenilworth Historical Society will host the December Kenilworth Chamber of Commerce meeting to be held inside the Oswald Nitschke House, a clapboard wood frame farmhouse built in 1880, located at 49 South 21st Street in Kenilworth. The house will be festively decorated for an old-fashioned Christmas. Santa Claus is usually in attendance wearing a Victorian Santa outfit, and telling tales of Christmas’ past. This is a free networking event for businesses, open to both members and non-member guests. Light refreshments will be served.

The Kenilworth Chamber of Commerce is under the umbrella of The Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce. To register for the December meeting visit visit.gatewaychamber.com; or call the Gateway Chamber of Commerce, 908-352-0900.



(above) On Thursday, Dec. 9, 8:30 – 10 a.m., the December Kenilworth Chamber of Commerce meeting will be held inside the Oswald Nitschke House, located at 49 South 21st Street in Kenilworth.



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RELIEF FROM CHRONIC KNEE PAIN

FDA Approved Treatment to Avoid Surgery

DON'T BLAME THE ARROW FOR MISSING THE TARGET

Just like tens of millions of other Americans, you were looking for relief from your chronic knee pain. You thought Viscosupplementation injections might be the answer, but the results were disappointing and painful. Don't assume the treatment wasn't right. That could very well be like blaming the arrow for its path to the target when the problem might be the archer. If you didn't get the pain relief you were hoping for, chances are your injection treatment was off target. Unlike blind injections or even ultrasound targeted treatments found elsewhere, **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** uses diagnostic fluoroscopy to make sure the area that needs treated is the exact area where the injection goes. This is the most advanced method of delivering this pain relieving treatment with 95% accuracy to give you the results you're looking for. The use of Fluoroscopy guided injections sets **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** apart. The end result is you living pain free from your chronic knee pain. You can avoid the lengthy and painful road of knee replacement surgery. You can avoid the endless trial and error assortment of potentially addictive prescription medications. This treatment, using fluoroscopy guided injections has seen a success rate of above 85% in those suffering from knee pain related to osteoarthritis, and that includes people with bone on bone involvement. You've suffered from chronic knee pain long enough. Call **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** now for a RISK FREE consultation.



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.
- No lost time from work or family.
- No expensive or time consuming rehabilitation.
- No potentially addictive prescription medications.
- Recovery time is almost instant, not months or years.

How Does This New Treatment Work?

Relief begins almost as fast as it takes to pronounce the treatment. It's called Viscosupplementation Therapy. To begin with, it starts with **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** investing in the use of diagnostic fluoroscopy. This enables them to target the exact location of your knee pain with pinpoint accuracy. What follows is a simple injection that causes little to no pain, especially when compared to what you may be living with daily. That explains what you will see on the surface of this revolutionary treatment. What's taking place below the surface is how and where the natural healing process takes place. The injection of a Hyaluronic acid called Hyalgan. This gel-like substance was approved by the FDA in 1996. Hyalgan is a natural substance that mimics the synovial fluid that is already produced by your body in your joints. Osteoarthritis sufferers in particular see a reduction in this much needed synovial fluid in their knee joints. Without that cushioning layer of protection, the cartilage in your knee can begin to wear away leading to the rubbing of bone on bone. Through Viscosupplementation Therapy, this natural substance immediately goes to work reducing the swelling and inflammation in the joint and adding a coating layer of protection. Think about Dorothy taking the oil can to The Tin Man. You'll begin to feel that same kind of relief and quite possibly feel like you're ready for a dance down the yellow brick road to recovery yourself. And with a success rate of over 85% in alleviating pain associated with osteoarthritis, it's easy to see why this treatment is so readily covered by Medicare and by most major insurance providers. Diagnostic fluoroscopy to target the pain. Viscosupplementation Therapy to relieve the pain. Simple, fast and no surgery!

Do you Suffer from any of these Symptoms?

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.

Once I am able to explain to my patients about the pin point accuracy of using diagnostic fluoroscopy and the amazing results viscosupplementation can provide, they are thrilled to get started. They are even more thrilled when they feel the relief. Please contact **Northeast Spine & Wellness Center** today to schedule your RISK FREE consultation.

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Scot Paris MD, FACS



Here's what our patients have to say

"I'm dancing without pain. I can move with no problem whatsoever. I can go up and down steps with no pain."

- Patricia G.

"Over 85% relief for the first time in 15 years, suffering with knee pain. My life is getting back to normal."

- Perry O.

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What, Where, and When in Old Kenilworth: CHRISTMASES I REMEMBER

As a young boy growing up in Kenilworth in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, I have memories of Christmas time. Harding and McKinley schools were hubs of holiday activity. Teachers would ask who could donate this or that for classroom decorations. Before consulting parents, someone called out, "I'll get the tree." Our beloved custodian, "Mr. Bill" (William Hartshorn) built Christmas tree stands for every tree.

Miss Margaret Ray's art students made tons of white cut-out snowflakes and snowmen that found their way in abundance onto every school window and door. Students fashioned never-ending chains from strips of green and red construction paper held together with a thick paste from huge jugs of peppermint-smelling paste. Some couldn't resist tasting it – I tried once – we all survived. Kids created long strands of popcorn to encircle the tree from top to bottom along with the red and green paper chains. Tree lights were brought in from home, but first had to pass Mr. Bill's safety inspection before adorning any tree.

Music teacher Miss Lorraine Conover put on Christmas concerts – as they were called back then. Every child at every grade level was featured singing or playing an instrument. The auditorium was standing room only. Fortunately, the fire marshal was in the Christmas spirit.

Santa visited the schools. One was Anna Ruscansky who arrived in her self-made Jolly Old Elf suit. For over 30 years she brought sweet treats for all. When she died at age 96 in 1996, the St. Theresa organist played "Jingle Bells" at the end of her funeral mass. For a number of years the Lion's Club brought a Santa via helicopter to Harding School on a December

weekend. When the FAA later prohibited such landings, the fire department took over and drove Santa all over town on a bell clanging fire truck. The tradition continues with sirens blaring.

Friday nights were Kenilworth's "uptown" shopping nights. Stores stayed open late. Then one year it happened! The Kenilworth Businessmen's Association and the mayor and council shared the cost for first-ever colorful lights to span the Boulevard. The towering, illuminated official Borough Christmas tree stood on the library front lawn. Shoppers scurried into Jule's and Harvey's Commonwealth Department Store or to Heller's Boro Drugs for gifts. More expensive items could be found at Dick Hage's or Donlin's Jewelers. Tools and gadgets for dad or countertop appliances for mom could be gotten at Simmenroth's Center Hardware or Charlie's Kenilworth Hardware. Hobbies and games for

children – the Kenilworth Hobby Shop was the place. Still looking for something? It was off to Whalen & Berry's 5 & 10. Still short on gifts? Order something from the Sears & Roebuck catalogue or go to shops in Elizabeth.

In my childhood home at 47 Arbor St., my sisters, brother, and I went to bed Christmas Eve with no toys or tree in sight. Miraculously, the next morn there was a fully decorated tree with lights ablaze, an electric toy train chugging around under the tree, and most importantly, lots and lots of presents. Often still in our night clothes, there was no holding us back.

From me to you, enjoy your family and friends – "Merry Christmas!"

Persons with inquiries about this or other aspects of Kenilworth history may contact Walter E. Boright, Ed. D., at drbori@aol.com or call 908-256-5200.

Photo by Mr. Bill's family



(above) Anna Ruscansky played Santa for over 30 years.

Photo by Joan Merrill, daughter



(above) Miss Lorraine Conover presented Christmas Concerts.

Photo by Historic Signs



(above) William "Mr. Bill" Hartshorn made tree stands and checked tree lights.



(above) Dick Hage of Kenilworth Jewelers sold Christmas Gifts.

Photo by Historic Signs



(above) Santa has landed! On left, Priscilla Boright and Santa Dick Neyon. Sharon McGevna on far right.

Photo by Historic signs



(above, l-r) Boright Christmas, 1948. Diane, Lewis "Chippy," Claire, and Walter, Jr.

Photo by Walter Boright

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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/.

The Giving Tree

Please help St. Joseph's Social Service Center make the holidays special. We have over 400 households registered for our Giving Tree program and would appreciate your support to make this happen!

The easiest way to help is to donate \$25 gift cards (preferably Visa, American Express, or Walmart), supermarket gift cards of any amount (preferably Shoprite or Stop and Shop), or make a financial donation by visiting: www.sjeliz.org/donate - please mention Giving Tree in the "note" section. To make a donation by mail: Send your gift card or check to: ☐ ☐ St. Joseph Social Service Center, 118 Division St., Elizabeth, NJ 07201-2736.

Since 1983, St. Joseph's has served the materially poor and homeless community of greater Elizabeth, New Jersey, by providing basic human needs such as food, clothing and medications, as well as a wide range of services and programs to help them acquire the material goods and social services they need to live with integrity. St. Joseph's is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. To view our Form 990, visit www.sjeliz.org/about-us.html.

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ELF THE MUSICAL JR. TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Community Access Unlimited

A triumphant musical returning this December promises holiday cheer, a lot of laughs, and possibly too much sugar.

Tickets for Elf the Musical Jr. are now available for showings on December 10, 11, and 12th. All shows are streaming virtually at 7:00 p.m. for audiences to enjoy at home. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased on line at: www.showtix4u.com/event-details/57483

The CAU Community Players are an inclusive group of performers with and without disabilities who collaborate to stage incredible musical performances, including past productions of Hairspray and Aladdin. Community Access Unlimited (CAU) is a Union County-based, statewide nonprofit that works to integrate people with disabilities and youth at-risk into the community through comprehensive ways.

The cast of the show is thrilled to return to the stage after months of virtual rehearsals and preparation. Performers used clear masks to interact safely while allowing the audience to enjoy their expressions.

"The point of the show is to fill everyone with Christmas spirit," said Tyler O'Neill, who plays Buddy. "I'm discovering a side I never thought I had and a lot of joy. And like Buddy, I too enjoy a good hug every now and again."

Adam Fleissner, who plays Buddy's cantankerous father, Walter, said he is excited for everyone's hard work to pay off in the final production after a hiatus last year, due to the pandemic.

"It's the first time doing a CAU play since the shutdown and I just love seeing everyone again," said Fleissner.

Proceeds from the play support CAU's comprehensive services for people with disabilities and youth at-risk, which include housing, education, employment, support coordination, and life skills training.

This adaptation of the hilarious, hit film is sure to warm hearts as we prepare for the holiday.

"I want people to get tickets so they can laugh hard," said cast member Ernie Smalls.

ABOUT COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED:

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), who is celebrating 42 years in 2021, supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives voices to adults and the 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 3,000 individuals and families, with the number growing each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908-354-3040, online at caunj.org, or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ, 07202.



(above, l-r) Zoe Rivera and Tyler O'Neill perform as Jovie and Buddy in Elf the Musical Jr. with other CAU Community Players.



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In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for children's grief support programs has never been greater. Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss, a non-profit organization based in Mountainside and Newark, exists to support children in New Jersey who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling, or close family member. Imagine offers free peer support groups for children ages 3-18, young adults 19-30, and the parents and guardians of the children in the program. Groups for Spanish-speaking bereaved adults are also available. Currently, all groups are being held virtually, however, there are plans to transition some groups to in-person as soon as it feels safe to do so.

Imagine's support groups are only possible because of our amazing team of volunteers who facilitate the groups. Imagine currently has a wait list of families looking to join our support groups. We are unable to offer them support at this time because we do not have enough volunteers to begin another Night of Support. We need your help!

Imagine's volunteer facilitators 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, but volunteers must be 18 years or older. Bilingual (Spanish-speaking) volunteers are needed as well. Volunteers serve as companions and caring listeners for those who are grieving to help create a safe space where participants can share tears and embrace the joys of life.

We are hoping to fill our upcoming training with lots of wonderful new volunteers! We are planning to offer virtual facilitator training December

10-12th from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. For information on joining Imagine's team of volunteers, please contact Imagine's Program Manager, Veronica Ortiz, by emailing veronica@imagine-nj.org, or by calling 908-264-3100. Please help us address the growing need for children's grief support and ensure that no grieving child is required to wait to receive the support they need.

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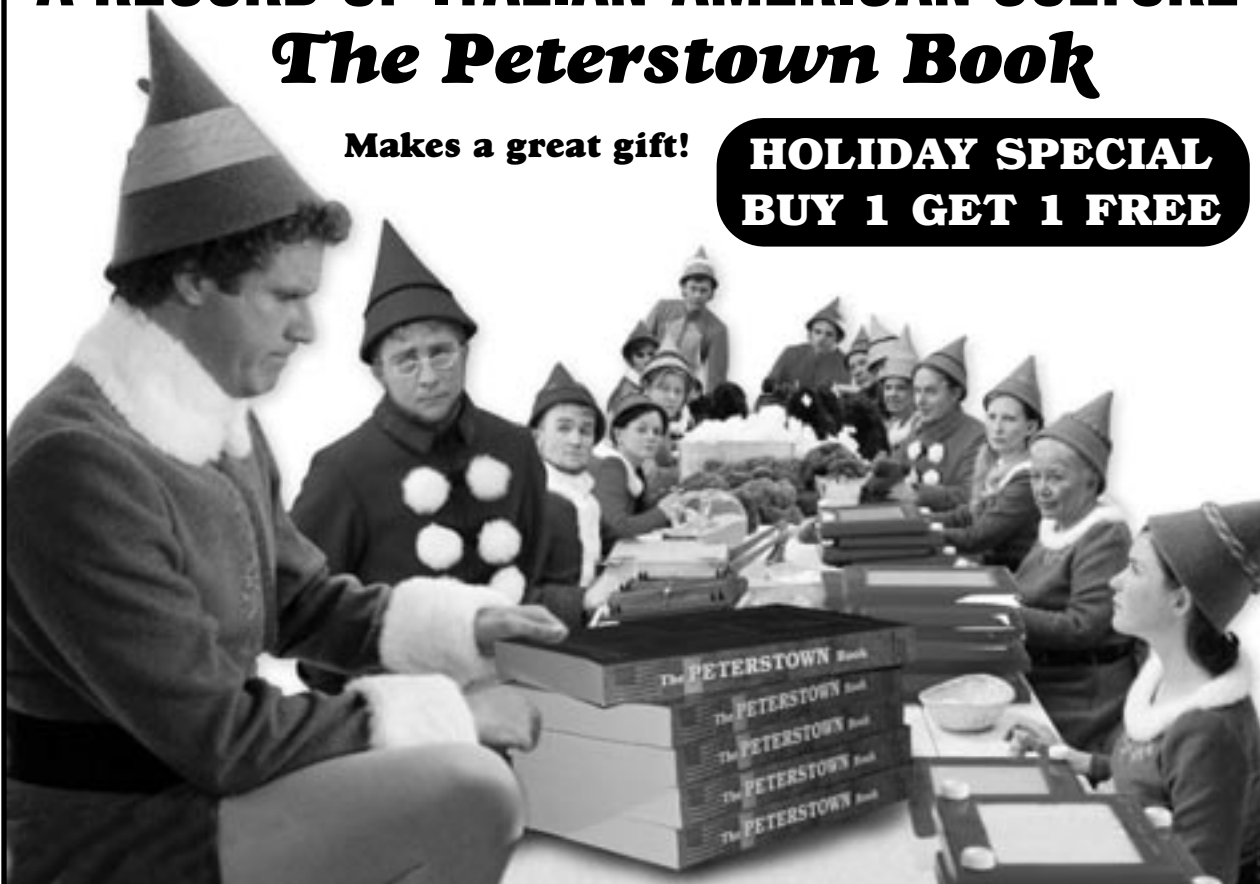
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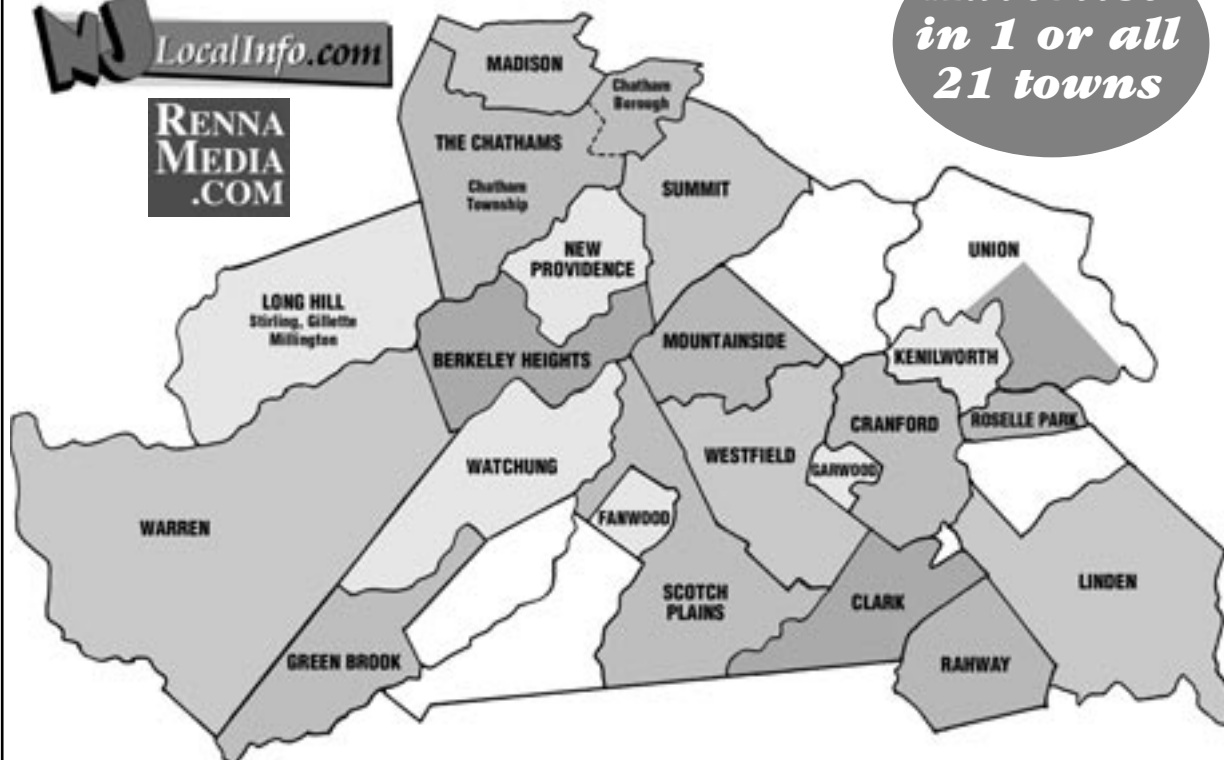
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HANUKAH: A CELEBRATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

By Rabbi Paul David Kerbel Temple Beth El Mekor Chayim, Cranford

Hanukah is one of the Jewish religion's most popular holidays. No doubt, part of Hanukah's popularity derives from its proximity to Christmas and the bundling of a variety of religious, ethnic and cultural holidays that occur at this time of year creating a festive holiday season.

You might be surprised to know however, that unlike Christmas, Hanukah is not one of Judaism's major holidays. That billing goes to Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Fasting and Atonement) and the Pilgrimage Festivals of Passover, Sukkot and Shavuot that are explained and discussed in The Book of Leviticus (Chapter 23).

But Hanukah is important for many reasons. In the first place, next to the Passover Seder, more Jews celebrate Hanukah than any other Jewish ritual or holiday observance. We celebrate two miracles on Hanukah: the military victory of a small, outmanned Jewish army winning out over a superior Syrian-Greek King Antiochus

Epiphanes, who forbade the Jewish people to study their scriptures, keep their calendar, observe their holidays or offer sacrifices in the Temple. The King wanted the Jews to sacrifice to the Greek Gods and study the best of Greek culture. King Antiochus was jealous of the God of Israel and sought to eradicate distinctive Jewish practices and culture.

The second miracle of Hanukah is the story in Rabbinic tradition, that when the revolt ended and the Jewish people sought to rededicate and purify the Holy Temple in Jerusalem that had been defiled by the decree of King Antiochus by lighting the Menorah, the religious candelabrum that served as a major symbol of religious Jewish life in the Temple, that there was only enough purified olive oil to last for one day, but the lamp remained burning for eight days!

But I also think the story of Hanukah teaches and shares important lessons for our friends and neighbors of other faiths about religious faith and belief. To me, Hanukah represents the first



victory in human history of religious freedom. In a certain sense, Hanukah is a universal holiday of religious freedom. If the Jewish people had lost this physical and spiritual war in 164 BCE (before the common era) and 164 years before the birth of Jesus, Judaism would have died out and since Christianity and Islam emanate out of and are connected to Judaism, there would not be today any adherents of these great faiths. Judaism, Christianity and Islam exist today because of the religious faith of these defenders of Judaism to stand up for their beliefs and rights.

Hanukah also teaches religious tolerance and the celebration of pluralism. Hanukah reinforces the rights of a minority to stand up for its beliefs while living in a larger secular or religious culture of other religious faiths. Our country was built on the idea of freedom of religion and the freedom to live by and practice the customs, rituals and commandments of our respective religions. Hanukah teaches me that sometimes miracles happen in the quiet constancy of our everyday practice of our respective customs, prayers and traditions and our interaction and bonds of friendship and community responsibility with our neighbors of all religions and ethnic groups.

The most enduring symbol of both Hanukah and Christmas is the celebration of light. We light a Menorah to symbolize the miracles of our survival and the dedication of our people - for over four-thousand years even in the midst of persecution or the attempt to suppress our faith and practice - to practice our customs and traditions with hope and confidence in the future as a monotheistic ethical religion and culture.

For our Christian friends, the lights of the Christmas season represent essential religious beliefs including joy, peace, kindness and service to our fellow human beings. Even with the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic has caused, among the most difficult in our lifetimes, may the lights of our respective traditions strengthen our commitment to our respective faiths and our obligation and opportunity to make a difference in our community and in the world at large. As one great rabbi wrote: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Wishing all of us a meaningful holiday season!

Rabbi Paul David Kerbel is the rabbi of Temple Beth El Mekor Chayim in Cranford. He is active in the Cranford Clergy Association, the Union County Board of Rabbis, the Rabbinic Roundtable of the Jewish Federation of MetroWest, NJ and on the New Jersey Advisory Board of The Anti-Defamation League.

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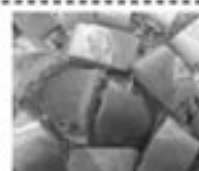
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