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# **SCOUTING FOR FOOD DRIVE A HUGE SUCCESS**

Mountainside Cub Scouts and Scouts BSA Troop 177 held their annual "Scouting for Food" drive on Nov 13th, 2021.

Approximately 90 scouts delivered about 2,500 food drive bags to Mountainside residents.

The donations returned, via the bags, filled a dump truck, a trailer and two pickup trucks. The food was donated to the Hands of Hope food pantry. It will be distributed to help families in need during the holiday season.

Thank you to all the residents that supported our annual food drive! Mountainside BSA Troop 177 wishes residents a safe and happy holiday season.





Photos by Mountainside BSA Troop 177

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# MOUNTAINSIDE VIEW

#### Renna Media LLC, Publishers

202 Walnut Ave., Cranford, NJ 07016 Mountainside View is published by Renna Media. 7,400 newspapers are printed monthly and mailed to every business and resident in the Mountainside.

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

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

#### Email: editor@rennamedia.com

Online at www.rennamedia.com like us on facebook.com/ Mountainside View

Tina Renna: 908-418-5586 tinarenna@rennamedia.com Joe Renna: 908447-1295 joerenna@rennamedia.com

# **SEA SCOUT EARNS COUNCIL LEADERSHIP AWARD**

Sebastián Heredia has been awarded the 2021 Patriots' Path Sea Scout Leadership Award. Sebastián is a Sea Scout from Ship 228 in Linden and he is an Eagle Scout from Troop 67 of St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church in Summit.

Sebastián discovered Sea Scouting in 2017 and has been dual enrolled in Ship 228 and Troop 67 ever since. In 2019, Sebastián was nominated Sea Scout of the Year and he was the only Sea Scout from Patriots' Path Council to attend the World Scout Jamboree in West Virginia as a member of the National Sea Scout Ship. At the World Scout Jamboree, 40,00 Scouts and leaders participated from all over the world.

Sebastián earned his Eagle rank in 2019 and later earned the Silver Palm award. He is a Brotherhood member of the Order of the Arrow. Sebastián graduated from Summit High School in 2020 and went on to become an EMT. He is a member of the Summit Volunteer First Aid Squad.

Currently, Sebastián serves as the Patriots' Path Council Boatswain. In 2021, he carried out a successful regional, virtual training program and was selected for this Area Leadership Award. He was also selected to attend SEAL this summer: the Sea Scout Advanced Leadership Training in San Francisco, California. SEAL Training is the highest leadership training for Sea Scouts. He is working to earn the rank of Quartermaster which is Sea Scouting's highest honor.

Sebastián is accepted to SUNY Maritime College and will enter the Regiment of Cadets in August. His goal is to obtain a United States Coast Guard deck license and a degree in Maritime Transportation. His future plans hope to include military service. He is grateful for all of the opportunities that have been granted to him through Scouting.

Sea Scouting is open to both male and female youth ages 14-21 who have graduated the 8th grade. There is a Maritime Explorer Club for younger youth in 6th to 8th grade. Adult volunteers with maritime experience or captain's licenses are needed too. If you are interested in learning more about Sea Scouting and Ship 228 in Linden please visit ship228.com.



(above) Sebastián Heredia

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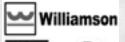
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# **HOLIDAY CRAFTING WITH COOKIES & HOT COCOA**

#### Mountainside Restoration Committee

In the spirit of the Gingerbread Open Houses of the past, the Mountainside Restoration Committee will host a holiday crafting session with cookies and hot cocoa on Saturday, December 4th from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. (rain date is Sunday, December 5th). The event will take place on the grounds of the beautiful, holidaydecorated Hetfield House. So, mark your calendars, gather the family, and stop by the Hetfield House before the Borough's tree lighting!

Due to COVID concerns, the Committee will not be holding its Annual Gingerbread Open House this year, but invites all to attend this festive holiday crafting event instead.

Crafts will include the ever-popular live boxwood holiday arrangements and special oneof-a-kind gingerbread themed ornaments. Adults and children are welcome to participate. The cost

Deck the Halls... and your Home for:

"Beautiful Mountainside's" Holiday House Decorating Contest!

- Submit info (include your name and address & phone #) to kulldonn@mac.com.
- \*Participants must be willing to have their addresses and photos share on social media.

The "Beautiful Mountainside" committee will judge in the following categories:

- \*Most Traditional, \*Winter Wonderland
- \*Kid Friendly, \*All Around Favorite.
- Entry deadline : Dec. 13th
- ~Prize: \$100 Gift Card to a local establishment in Mountainside!

Winners will be announced via Facebook Good Luck to All!

Questions? Call/text Donna 908.377.5094

is \$10, which includes one living boxwood Mountainside Library, off Birch Hill Road. Funds arrangement craft, one gingerbread ornament craft, as well as cookies and hot cocoa. Additional cookies and hot cocoa will be for sale. Participants will complete the craft on-site and all materials and instructions for crafting are included. Stop by at any time between 2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. to assure completion of the crafts before dark!

is located on Constitution Plaza adjacent to the

raised will benefit the Mountainside Restoration Committee, which is a 501(c)(3) charity and a committee of volunteers whose purpose is to restore and maintain the Deacon Andrew Hetfield House as well as the Levi Cory House. They also collect and save historic information and items from destruction.

For further information or to donate funds for The historic Deacon Andrew Hetfield House historic restoration, please call 908-789-9420; or, go to, mountainsidehistory.org.



(above) The Mountainside Restoration Committee invites the community, on Saturday, December 4th (rain date, December 5th) for the crafting of boxwood holiday arrangements and gingerbread ornaments taking place on the grounds of Mountainside's festively decorated Hetfield House. Cookies and hot cocoa will be available.

Photo by the Mountainside Restoration Committee

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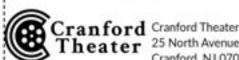
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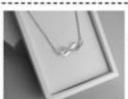
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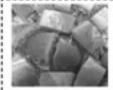
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# **GRIEF SUPPORT FACILITATORS NEEDED**

Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss

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 Spanishspeaking 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

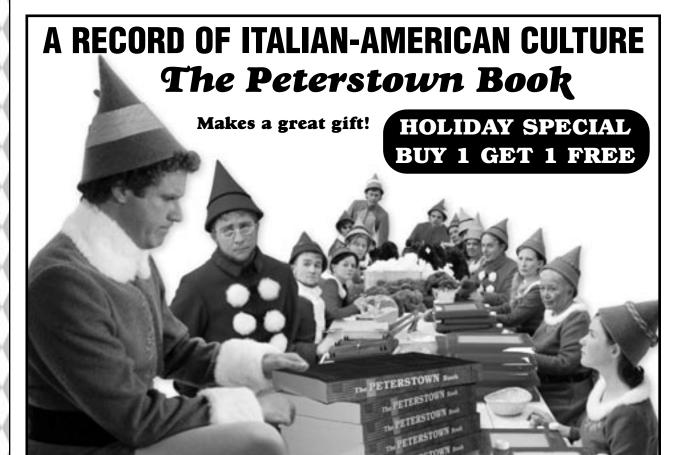
Imagine's support groups are only possible because of our amazing team of volunteers who facilitate the groups. Imagine currently has a wait list of families looking to join our support groups. We are unable to offer them support at this time because we do not have enough volunteers to begin another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

Imagine's volunteer facilitators come from all

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 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@imaginenj.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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# IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE FOR A KID TO LEARN HOW TO RUN FASTER?

Retired San Francisco 49ers QB Joe Montana, is arguably one of the greatest NFL players that has ever played football...when his son started playing football it would have made sense for him to help his son learn how to play Quarterback.

But that's not how it went. Joe Montana had to hire a quarterback coach to help his son be a better football player. Here's possibly the greatest NFL QB of all time, needing to hire someone else to help his son. It was not that Joe Montana was not equipped for the job...it was that his son needed a second voice to help him get to the next level.

Many parents who have much less knowledge, experience, and skills than Joe Montana are in the same boat in regards to helping their kids get stronger, faster, and more confident.

Most parents we've come across want their kids to eat healthier, be more active, and have a stronger mindset. But many have told us they need help.

Even with the constant reminders of telling their kids to eat more vegetables, get outside instead of watching TV, practice their sport more, get to bed earlier...they find that sometimes the message falls on deaf ears...and some backup would be helpful toward their vision of helping their kid be the best they can be.

Parents have told us that having us(the Grit Athlete Performance Coaches) as a second voice to help reinforce the habits they want for their kids...is changing the game.

Further...Our Grit Athlete Founder has over 20 years experience with training athletes himself...and certainly knows a LOT more about getting stronger and faster than the average parent...But has all 3 of his children(9,8 and 6) enrolled in Grit year round....because he knows the power of that second voice.

And after they come through our program, parents tell how it's turbocharging their parenting. Here are some real-life examples that have been reported...

Before, parents struggled with getting kids to eat vegetables...now their kids are asking for more.

Before, parents struggled with getting their kids to get enough sleep....now their kids are getting to bed earlier on their own.

Before, parents struggled with getting their kids to watch less TV or play video games...now they are limiting these activities because they've learned they don't really help them become better athletes.

Before, parents struggled with helping their kids have more confidence...now their kids are doing things out of their comfort zone more often which is helping them believe in themselves which further improves self-esteem.

Before, parents had no clue how to help their kid get faster...now they are faster because they've learned that speed is a skill, and a few simple tweaks can make a kid faster immediately.

Before, parents could not get their kids to make their beds...now their kid makes their

bed each morning on their own because they learned that making their bed in the morning helps them have a better day.

Before, parents struggled with getting their kids to do even one good push-up...now they catch them in their room practicing on their own.

Before, parents wanted their kids to have more determination and grit when training new things...now they are staying calm under pressure and seeking out challenges instead of avoiding them.

Many times it's not about telling your kid to eat more vegetables or stop watching TV...but rather finding the right environment for them to be more successful.

Right in your backyard, there's a team of great coaches waiting to be second voices for your kids...so that all the things you're teaching as parents will be reinforced. But most importantly, the results you're after for your kids will actually become a reality. The Grit Athlete winter Sports Performance session starts on December 13th in Berkeley Heights NJ, visit www.gritathletes.com to fill out an application for your child.

Grit Athlete Performance is a Sports Performance Training Company located in Berkeley Heights that helps kids ages 6-18 get strong, fast, and confident so they can have a bigger and better future. They have just released the dates for their winter program that starts on December 3rd. Visit www.gritathletes.com to register for their winter session...or see below for more details...

# SPORTS PERFORMANCE TRAINING FOR KIDS AGES 6-18 STARTS DECEMBER 13 (17 SPACES REMAINING)

# PPLY NOW







Warning: The Winter session is the most popular session of the year and always sells out before it starts. We strongly encourage you to scan the QR code today and enter your information to make sure your child doesn't get locked out of the winter session.

# **Attention Parents of Kids Ages 6-18**

# UPDATE: THE GRIT ATHLETE PERFORMANCE WINTER PROGRAM HAS ONLY 17 SPACES REMAINING

Give us 12 weeks with your kids and we'll have them stronger, faster, and more confident...guaranteed.

#### Here's what parents can expect to happen:

- They will get stronger which means when they show up to their sport they'll be able to perform better than ever.
- They will run faster and jump higher so they can show up to their next season and people will start asking what the heck have they been doing.
- They'll become more coordinated and improve agility which means they'll pick up new skills their coaches teach them faster.
- Your children will start to eat better because we'll be educating them daily on what's good and what they should avoid ...don't be surprised if they start asking you to buy more vegetables.
- Confidence will skyrocket. When kids get stronger, faster and more fit...their confidence will rise...so will their self-esteem which means their performance in every aspect of life will get better.
- Their mindset will improve. We're going equip your child with very specific mindset skills that'll help them learn how to transform how they think about mistakes and failures.

# HAPPY PARENTS TALKING ABOUT THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TRANSFORMATION OF THEIR KIDS...

- "When my son started Grit he was quiet, shy, and had some difficulty with movements...Now he is confident in himself, has become more vocal, and is mastering the exercise he struggled with in the past."
  - Jen O'Brien, Grit Athlete Parent
- "My son is more disciplined and confident in himself"
  - Steve Hughes, Grit Athlete Parent
- "I have watched my children become more confident and vocal."
  - Christine Stramandinoli, Grit Athlete Parent
- "His confidence has shot up in the last few months...and has carried forward to the way he approaches other activities like sports and schoolwork. My son is now making his bed daily and exercising every day."

- Catherine Solfaro, Grit Athlete Parent

# STARTS DECEMBER 13TH (Only 17 Spaces Remaining)







Warning: The Winter session is the most popular session of the year and always sells out before it starts. We strongly encourage you to scan the QR code today and enter your information to make sure your child doesn't get locked out of the winter session.

## **TICKETS NOW ON SALE FOR 21ST ANNUAL PIPES OF CHRISTMAS**

The Pipes of Christmas will celebrate its 23rd season with performances in New Jersey and New York this December. The holiday favorite opens on Saturday, December 18 at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, located at 921 Madison Avenue (at 73rd Street) in New York City for a 2PM performance. The concert moves across the Hudson River on Sunday, December 19 to Central Presbyterian Church located at 70 Maple Street in Summit, NJ with performances at 2PM.

For those weary of the ceaseless stream of secular seasonal music from department stores to TV, the Pipes of Christmas offers a spiritual and traditional take on the season that connects concertgoers to the holiday in a fresh, meaningful way. The show features tunes such as, Highland Cathedral, Joy to the World, and Amazing Grace, all performed live on pipes and drums, harp and fiddle, and organ and brass and more. Not only does the performance define Christmas cheer, but also it inspires those of Celtic descent to retrace and reconnect to their ancestry.

The concert presents the music of Christmas accompanied by readings taken from the Celtic literature of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Featured performers include singer Margaret Kelly from Aberdeen, Scotland, James Robinson from the film "Braveheart," New England fiddle champion Paul Woodiel, champion harpist Rachel Clemente, and the Pipe Major Kevin Ray Blandford Memorial Pipe Band from Redlands, CA among many more.

#### **TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW**

Tickets may be purchased online exclusively through ShowTix4U. (Be certain to select "The Learned Kindred of Currie" as the organization name.)

#### **LEARNED KINDRED'S ONLY FUNDRAISER**

This annual concert is the Learned Kindred's only fundraiser, generating their operating budget for the year ahead. Losing the concert income is financially devastating to outreach programmes which support young people in education in Scotland, Canada and the United



States through scholarships and sponsorships.

Proceeds from the concert support an extensive music scholarship program, which includes the Carol Hassert Memorial Fine Arts Scholarship at Summit (NJ) High School as well as annual gifts to the National Piping Centre, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (both located in Glasgow, Scotland), Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Royal National Mòr and the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia, among others.

#### **ABOUT THE PIPES OF CHRISTMAS**

Since making its debut in 1999, The Pipes of Christmas has played to standing room only audiences. Now a cherished holiday event, the concert provides audiences with a stirring and reverent celebration of the Christmas season and the Celtic spirit. Audience-goers return year after year to experience the program, many reporting that the Pipes of Christmas has become part of their family's annual Christmas tradition.

The concert has been lavished with critical acclaim. In his review for Classical New Jersey Magazine, Paul Somers wrote, "The whole evening was constructed to introduce gem after gem and still have a finale which raised the roof. In short, it was like a well constructed fireworks show on the Glorious Fourth. The Westfield Leader described the concert as "a unique sound

of power and glory nowhere else to be found."

The Pipes of Christmas Virtual Concert, produced by The Clan Currie Society / The Learned Kindred of Currie, has been nominated for an award in the prestigious MG ALBA Scots Trad Music Awards (Na Trads) 2021.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Robert (Bob) Currie (United States) currierobert82@gmail.com, (908) 858-6357

Neil Gunn (Scotland) neil@ngwriting.com, 07493 509991

Clan Currie Society Facebook page: facebook.com/ClanCurrieSociety Concert Facebook page: facebook.com/ThePipesofChristmas





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Concert Facebook page: /ThePipesofChristmas

## **SCOUT EXECUTIVE SPEAKS TO ROTARY CLUB**

#### Submitted by Dr. D. Michael Hart

Marc Andreo, the Scout Executive and CEO of the Patriot's Path Council. Boy Scouts of America spoke to the Rotary Club of Westfield on Tuesday, September 21, 2021. His topic was to update the club on the state of the local Scouting. The pandemic has decreased the scouting program somewhat, but it is still going strong, and they are planning to rebuild it to where it was before the shutdown.

Paul Harris, the man who started Rotary International in 1905, was great friends with James E. West who started the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. Paul gave advice on how to spread the program throughout the US, mirroring the way Rotary clubs were spreading. Both organizations have a lot of similarities, including an ethical code, teaching leadership skills, being community based and service oriented. Rotary clubs currently charter 1,000 scout units across the US.

The Patriot's Path Council, BSA consists of 5 counties in northern New Jersey with more than 10,000 scouts and 4,000 adult volunteers. They are in the counties of Sussex, Morris, Somerset, Union and northern Middlesex. The headquarters in Cedar Knolls has only 25 full-time staff. There are two scout shops one in Cedar Knolls, and one in Mountainside.

The Council offers three Day Camps: at Watchung Reservation; Johnson Park, New Brunswick; and Camp Wheeler at Mt. Allamuchy Scout Reservation. The Council offers four overnight camping opportunities: Winnebago Scout Reservation in Rockaway, NJ; Mt. Allamuchy in Byram Township; Sabattis

national high adventure bases: The Summit in West Virginia: Northern Tier in Minnesota, Sea Base in the Florida Keys, and Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

Recent changes to the Scouts include welcoming girls to the Cub Scout and the legacy Boy Scout programs three years ago. The purpose was to include entire families in the activities. To accommodate this change, the "Boy Scout" program for ages 5th grade through age 18 was renamed the "Scouts BSA". The name of the parent organization remains the Boy Scouts of America. The Cub Scout program is for children from K through 5th grade; Scouts BSA is for children 5th grade through age 18. Other programs have been coed for many decades, including Explorers - who explore career opportunities, Venture Crews - who go on high adventure trips, Sea Scouts who learn mariner skills, and a relatively new program - STEM- in which students explore science related careers. These last four programs welcome boys and girls from ages 14 to 21.

Cub Scout Dens may be all boy and all girl, or unit near you!

Adventure Camp in Long Lake NY, and the four coed. Scouts BSA Troops are either all girl or all boy. This year there are 250,000 young women in the scouts, and 1,000 girls were the first graduating class of female Eagle Scouts. Only 4% of all scouts ever achieve the rank of Eagle, making it a mark of distinction.

> The residents of Westfield are enthusiastic supporters of Scouting. There are 12 units: 7 Cub Scout Packs and 5 Scout Troops, with nearly 500 youth, which is double the national average. Last year the Patriots' Path Council recognized 315 Eagle Scouts and Scouts collectively earned more than 6,200 merit badges. The Rotary Club of Westfield has been a long time supporter of the Scouts. Several members are Eagle Scouts, and many of the children of Rotarians are in the Scouting program, and a number have earned the rank of Eagle. The club likes to support Eagle Service projects financially.

> Scout Executive Marc Andreo asked the Rotarians to help spread the word about local Scouting. With units and camps open again, they are seeking more youth to join the local programs. Please visit beascout.org to locate a









# **DECEMBER LIBRARY PROGRAMS**

Phone: 908-233-0115 Email: info@mountainsidelibrary.org 1 Constitution Plaza, Mountainside Monday, Wednesday, Friday; 10 AM - 5 PM.

Tuesday, Thursday; 1 PM-8 PM,

#### **Christmas Lights of New York City**

Tuesday December 7th at 7 p.m. presented by Mario Medici, Photographer/Historian, via Zoom, Register at info@mountainsidelibrary.org

#### **Holiday Card Workshop for children** Through December 11

Create one-of-a-kind cards to give or mail to family and friends for Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanza. Look for samples displayed at the Library's front window or Facebook page. Email eperrin@mountainsidelibrary.org with your numbered choices.

Funding for programs is generously provided by the Friends of the Mountainside Library.

# **BOOK SALE**

The Friends of the Mountainside Library is seeking donations for a book sale to be held in November.

Book donations will be accepted during library hours on November 12, 13, 15, 16 & 17.

We cannot accept books that are musty, yellowed or damaged.

We cannot accept textbooks, magazines, encyclopedias, dictionaries or condensed books.

The Book Sale is open to the general public and will be as follows:

November 18 - 4 - 8 p.m. November 19 & 20 - 10 - 5 p.m.November 21 - Bag Day -1 - 5 p.m.

# **RED RIBBON WEEK COMMUNITY WELLNESS FAIR**

Submitted by Victoria Baum

School in Berkeley Heights, NJ participated in a community wellness fair in October as part of Red Ribbon Week (redribbon.org). Community organizations that focus on youth services showcased their programs and student-centered opportunities in an outdoor format where students engaged with professionals from 18 local vendors to learn more about health, wellness, emotional support, as well as volunteer and job possibilities. Hundreds of students visited the 18 community organizations and learned about how caring the school and community are, but also some of the many services available to them. Students were able to interact with the organizations during their lunch period, ask questions, and collect information. Each vendor received a sign with a QR code that students could scan upon visiting with the organization to be entered to win a prize, which were sponsored by Prevention Links and Peace of Mind Yoga.

#### **COMMUNITY VENDORS INCLUDED:**

Leadership Opportunities: Prevention Links, Youth Challenge Academy, Police Department, Fire Department, Township political committees, YMCA, Union County Youth Services, White Tiger Dojo, Job Corps

**Opportunities**: Volunteer Community FoodBank, Relay for Life, Township political committees, Police Department, Department, YMCA

Counseling Opportunities: Cooperative Counseling Services, Peace of Mind Yoga, Union County Youth Services, Prevention Links

Recreational Opportunities: AIR Fitness, Pure Students from Governor Livingston High Barre, White Tiger Dojo, Institute of Music, Visual Arts Center of NJ, YMCA, Peace of Mind Yoga

> Organized and coordinated by the CMS and GL Student Assistance Counselor, Ms. Madison Rowohlt, she commented, "I wanted to find a creative way to recognize and celebrate Red Ribbon Week (substance use prevention) that would be impactful and tangible for students. A wellness fair helped accomplish this goal in two primary ways, the first being that the underlying cause of substance use in many cases are mental health concerns, therefore, I wanted to bring mental health resources right to the students. Students being able to seek out their own support can be empowering and more impactful than a second-hand resource. The second reason being that a wellness fair was key since we often hear the phrase, 'The opposite of addiction is connection', meaning that if students find fulfillment and connection in other areas such as volunteering, leadership, or recreation, they are less susceptible to substance use. By showcasing all of these amazing community supporters, students saw firsthand how important connections are and what a difference our community makes in the lives of people."

> The Governor Livingston High School community truly appreciates the outpouring support demonstrated by our community organizations and members. They hope to continue this tradition and grow the Red Ribbon Week Wellness Fair to incorporate more organizations and opportunities in the future!



(above) The Red Ribbon Week Wellness Fair at Governor Livingston High School



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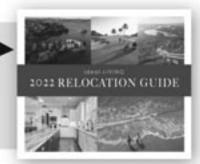
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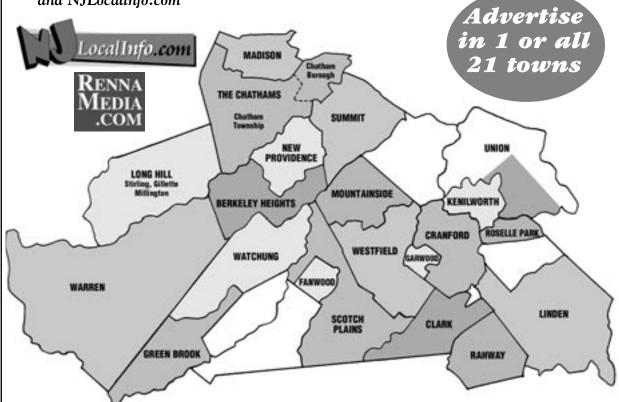
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# HANUKAH: A CELEBRATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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.



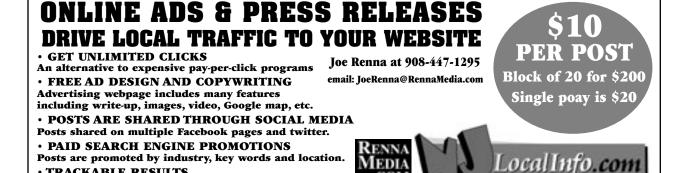


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