

Watchung Post

Watchung's Hometown Newspaper

NJ

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FAMILY ACHIEVES DREAM ON NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY

Submitted by Somerset County

Ten-year-old Christian Jesse Perez-Ortiz was adopted on November 19th as part of Somerset County's National Adoption Day celebration, allowing enthusiastic parents Jose and Anthony Perez-Ortiz along with their new son to enjoy their first Thanksgiving holiday as a family. The adoption process was completed with the assistance of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families as well as Somerset County Surrogate Bernice "Tina" Jalloh's Office.

"How wonderful that Christian's adoption is taking place for National Adoption Day and in time for Thanksgiving dinner with his new parents," said Surrogate Jalloh. "Thanks to the efficiency and dedication of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families and my Surrogate's staff there is one less child that needs a forever home for the holidays."

The excited new parents of Christian acknowledge that fostering and adoption is a long process with many bumps, twists, and turns. However, given their experiences, they encourage others to consider both fostering and adoption.

"We are so excited to grow our family through the foster care system and adoption process with more than 120,000 U.S. children waiting for their forever home," said Jose and Anthony Perez-Ortiz. "Being foster dads can be emotionally draining, but it has also been one of the biggest blessings of our lives. It has taught us that a family isn't made from blood, but made from love. We encourage any family who can foster or adopt to do so."

In the adoption process, the Somerset County Surrogate serves as Deputy Clerk of the Superior Court, Chancery Division, and is responsible for reviewing and processing the adoption paperwork to ensure that it meets state requirements. The Surrogate's Office also maintains records of all the required adoption paperwork.



(above, l-r) Surrogate, Bernice "Tina" Jalloh, joined Jose and Anthony Perez-Ortiz in welcoming their new son Christian to the family for National Adoption Day. The Honorable, Haekyoung Suh, finalized the adoption.

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY

To raise awareness about the 120,000 children in the U.S. living in foster care, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Alliance for Children's Rights, and the Children's Action Network founded National Adoption Day. Currently, there are more than 75,000 foster children adopted due to National Adoption Day events.

The first National Adoption Day was inspired by the innovative efforts of Michael Nash, a former presiding judge of Los Angeles County's Juvenile Court. Nash, in addition to the volunteer efforts of court personnel, opened the court on Saturdays in order to finalize adoptions, which reduced the backlog of one of the busiest courts in the nation.

More information on the Surrogate's office and how to adopt a child can be found at soconj.gov/surrogate.

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WINTER HOLIDAY SONGS FROM YOUR LIBRARY

'Tis the season — to stress out? According to a 2018 survey, a whopping 88 percent of Americans feel stressed out during the holidays.

But, did you know that “music can be used as a therapeutic tool to not only reduce stress, but to also promote healing and improve one’s overall emotional well-being?”

Chill out this holiday season with a playlist from the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) composed of tracks from CDs available in the Library’s collection.

The playlist features songs that highlight Hanukkah*, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and the Winter Solstice.

Take a mental vacation and travel down “Holiday Road” (aka the theme song from the comedy classic film “National Lampoon’s Vacation”) with former Fleetwood Mac guitarist and vocalist Lindsey Buckingham, then say “Mele Kalikimaka” to the residents of Hawaii with ‘60s pop sensations the Monkees.

Celebrate the Festival of Lights with rock tracks from funny man and musician Jack Black, pop-rockers the Barenaked Ladies, and sibling trio HAIM.

Welcome the Winter Solstice through the poetic lyrics and gentle melodies of alternative piano queen Tori Amos and her original song “Winter’s Carol.”

Commemorate community, family, and culture and learn the “Kwanzaa Dance” featured on the children’s album “Kwanzaa for Young People (and Everyone Else!).”

Get funky this Christmas and walk in a “Winter Wonderland” with bluegrass, jam band the Infamous Stringdusters, and discover a “Christmas in Hollis” with hip-hop legends Run-DMC.

If you’re feeling a bit bah-hum-bug, there are songs here for you, too, Scrooge. Joni Mitchell’s journey of heartbreak during the holiday season is chronicled in the folky-blues track “River.” While Lindsey Stirling and Sabrina Carpenter tell the Grinch how it is, through their electronic, violin-fueled rendition of “You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch.”

If classical music is your cup of hot cocoa, explore SCLSNJ’s digital resource Naxos Music Library, a streaming service that features a comprehensive collection of choral, orchestral, chamber music, and more, available 24/7 with your Library Card.

Discover the “40 Most Beautiful Winter Classics” composed by the likes of Bach, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky. Learn the history of “Chanukkah in Story and Song” as narrated by actor Leonard Nimoy and performed by Western Wind Vocal Ensemble.

Celebrate “Christmas and Hanukah: I’ll Be Home for the Holidays,” through the soothing sounds of piano, cello, and violin as performed by Eaken Piano Trio. And, welcome the “Seasons of Hope” with the United States Air Force Strings. Warm up this holiday season with Naxos Music Library and SCLSNJ:

SCLSNJ.org/Naxos.

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U.S. News

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Nathan Weiser

★★★★★

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

Thank you Spring Grove for a wonderful and pleasant stay.



Charles Sherrick

★★★★★

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

Thank you Spring Grove.



Chrissy Sloan

★★★★★

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

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31ST ANNUAL TREE OF LIGHTS FUNDRAISER - WATCHUNG RESCUE SQUAD

The 31st Annual Tree of Lights will once again light up the Village Green this holiday season and a spectacular fireworks display will illuminate the sky. Please join us for the festivities on Saturday, December 4th starting at 5:30 p.m. (Rain/snow date December 5th).

The Rescue Squad is proud to illuminate the holiday tree, and thanks to Garden State Fireworks, the skies will light up with a spectacular fireworks show!

The names of honorees and remembrances on our website will be continually updated throughout the holiday season. Visit watchungems.org to participate. Your contribution to the Tree of Lights is not only a symbol of your feelings of gratitude and love, but also serves to help the Watchung Volunteer Rescue Squad with major endeavors. This year, through the generosity of the residents and businesses, the squad continues to provide high-quality, excellent Emergency Service.

Thank you in advance for your continued support and contributions. To learn more about

the squad or for information about becoming a volunteer, please visit our website at watchungems.org or call us at 908-755-1297. Adult volunteers are desperately needed!

THIS YEAR'S TREE OF LIGHTS IS DEDICATED TO THE EDUCATORS OF WATCHUNG:

Watchung Hills Regional High School, The Giving Nest Preschool Bayberry School Valley View School Mount St Mary's Academy

The members of the Watchung Rescue Squad are proud to dedicate this year's tree in honor of all the teachers and educators in Watchung. They work hard to make a difference. We are proud of our teachers and thank them for always being there.

Teachers are a lot like first responders: they work hard to get the credentials required to do their job, then practice and prepare so they can excel and make a difference. Although teaching can be a thankless job, it's still such an important part of our community. When the global pandemic struck, teachers were asked to educate our children remotely, without warning or preparation. Everyday they had to think of ways to teach and keep their students engaged, active and learning. Since this was unprecedented, there weren't guidelines or rules; they had to quickly dive in, get creative and find solutions. The

demands on them were never-ending and there was no relief in sight. At the same time, many teachers were also battling their own personal struggles at home. The endless stress of juggling their personal and professional lives made many feel like finding some sort of balance was just unattainable. Teachers, like First Responders, try to have a plan going into a situation. But even the best laid plans don't always work out. In addition, how teachers budgeted their time was a double-edged sword. At times, they've felt pressed for time, overwhelmed and exhausted. Yet when they have had adequate time, it has allowed for new experiences which in turn created strength, confidence and a sense of momentum.

Our teachers took a crisis and turned it into a success story! They worked hard, went above and beyond and set examples for our children to do the same. We are thankful for their diligence and resolve and appreciate all they do for our community every day, and every year. We are privileged and thankful to be able to trust them with our children's future.

They are our neighbors, our friends, our leaders, and they truly deserve recognition for their efforts. It is with great honor that we dedicate this year's Tree of Lights to The Educators of Watchung.

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WHRHS SOCCER STAR COMMITTS TO CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

A three-year starter for Watchung Hills High School, Jenna Tobia has been a main stay for the girls soccer program. They are off to a great season earning the number one seed in the prestigious Somerset County Tournament, and they are in line to receive a top seed for the state tournament.

Long-time Head Coach Brian Figueiredo has had the good fortune of coaching many elite players, and Jenna Tobia stands amongst them. "She is a difference maker. She has been incredibly driven since her arrival and has earned all of her accolades. She continues to improve and work as hard as anyone and her dedication to WHRHS shows a lot about her character. She is going make any program better that she is a part of it. Very excited for her future."

Jenna earlier this season committed to playing at Clemson University. One of the top 25

women's soccer programs in the country in arguably the toughest conference the ACC.

Jenna on her commitment, "After attending my first ID Camp at Clemson, I knew immediately that this was exactly what I was looking for to further my academic and soccer career. I wanted a place that shared my vision for hard work and commitment to winning. The coaching staffs' style of a family culture, teaching and support for their players on and off the field aligned with my beliefs. I am so grateful for the opportunity and can not wait to begin my journey at Clemson."

In addition to being ranked as one of the top players nationally, Jenna has also been a member of the United States Soccer Regional ID Centers.

To follow Watchung Hills Regional High School girls soccer catch them on the athletic website at whrhs.org.



(above) Jenna Tobia



WHRHS HALL OF FAME SEEKING NOMINATIONS

Watchung Hills Regional High School

The Watchung Hills Regional High School Hall of Fame Committee is now accepting nominations for The Class of 2022 Hall of Fame. The deadline for nominations is January 15, 2022. Nomination forms may be found on the school website whrhs.org, under the Community heading. Forms may also be picked up in person at the WHRHS, 108 Stirling Road, Warren.

The Hall of Fame was set up to recognize individuals who have achieved distinction either during their high school days and/or in their professional or community life thereafter, as well as those who have served, with diligence and devotion, as Watchung Hills educators, coaches,

board of education members, volunteers, and so on. Alumni nominees must have graduated at least 10 years ago.

To date, 69 individuals have entered the Hall of Fame in a wide variety of different fields, including education, athletics, humanities, the arts, medicine and volunteerism. Those selected to the Class of 2022 will be honored at a ceremony to be held in May of 2022. Those not selected will still be considered for future classes.

For more information, please feel free to contact Ms. Laurie Grafer, Administrative Assistant to the Principal at 908-647-4800 ext. 4870 or e-mail her at lgrafer@whrhs.org.

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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 season.

"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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MAY YOUR CHRISTMAS BE FURRY AND BRIGHT



During this Holiday Season, we at Home for Good Dog Rescue, would like to express our gratitude to those who passionately believe in our mission to save dogs from horrific conditions, dangerous environments, and cruelty at the hands of heartless offenders. Your support of the rescue by generously serving through volunteering, adopting, fostering, and sharing your financial gifts is extraordinary.

Repeatedly, you have welcomed our beloved dogs into your homes, participated in our advocacy work, and shared our miraculous stories on social media. Now, as this year ends, please take a moment to reflect on what truly sets Home for Good apart from most animal welfare organizations. It is the heart of the rescue that leads us. It is what binds us together as a community, serving the most vulnerable amongst us, the voiceless. While we are approaching our 10,000th adoption, it is not about the quantity of dogs, but it is about meeting each dog's needs, regardless of age, medical condition, or expense. It is truly a miracle to see these lives being saved and families eagerly extending their love to these vulnerable, loving creatures. Meet Frankie...

This past year has been challenging and marked by many unforgettable moments. And Frankie is just one of the thousands of memorable Home for Good stories. Rescued from the brink of death at a garbage dump in Millen, Georgia, at just 1.5 years old, this sweet pup endured more than any dog should in a lifetime. Frankie was covered in severe mange, extremely

malnourished, and emaciated. He had an advanced case of Heartworm disease, a lethal condition in which heartworms infest the heart, and eventually cause organ damage. All treatment was provided at the rescue's expense through "Lexi's Beating Heart Medical Fund", established by a benefactor during the pandemic to support the expensive treatment of Heartworm disease. Home for Good saves over 50 dogs from certain death from this disease each year.

Home for Good is not just who we are, it is what we do. We intend to never leave a dog behind that comes into our care and have not yet done so. Without you, our community, none of this would be possible. We are grateful that you stand beside us, carrying out the heart of our mission. And that is why we ask you to please consider a year-end gift. There are many more souls to save. Join us at homeforgooddogs.org or scan this QR Code to donate today.



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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 Adventure Camp in Long Lake NY, and the four 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 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.

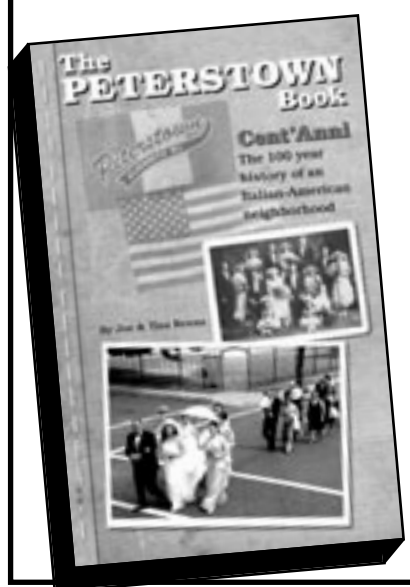
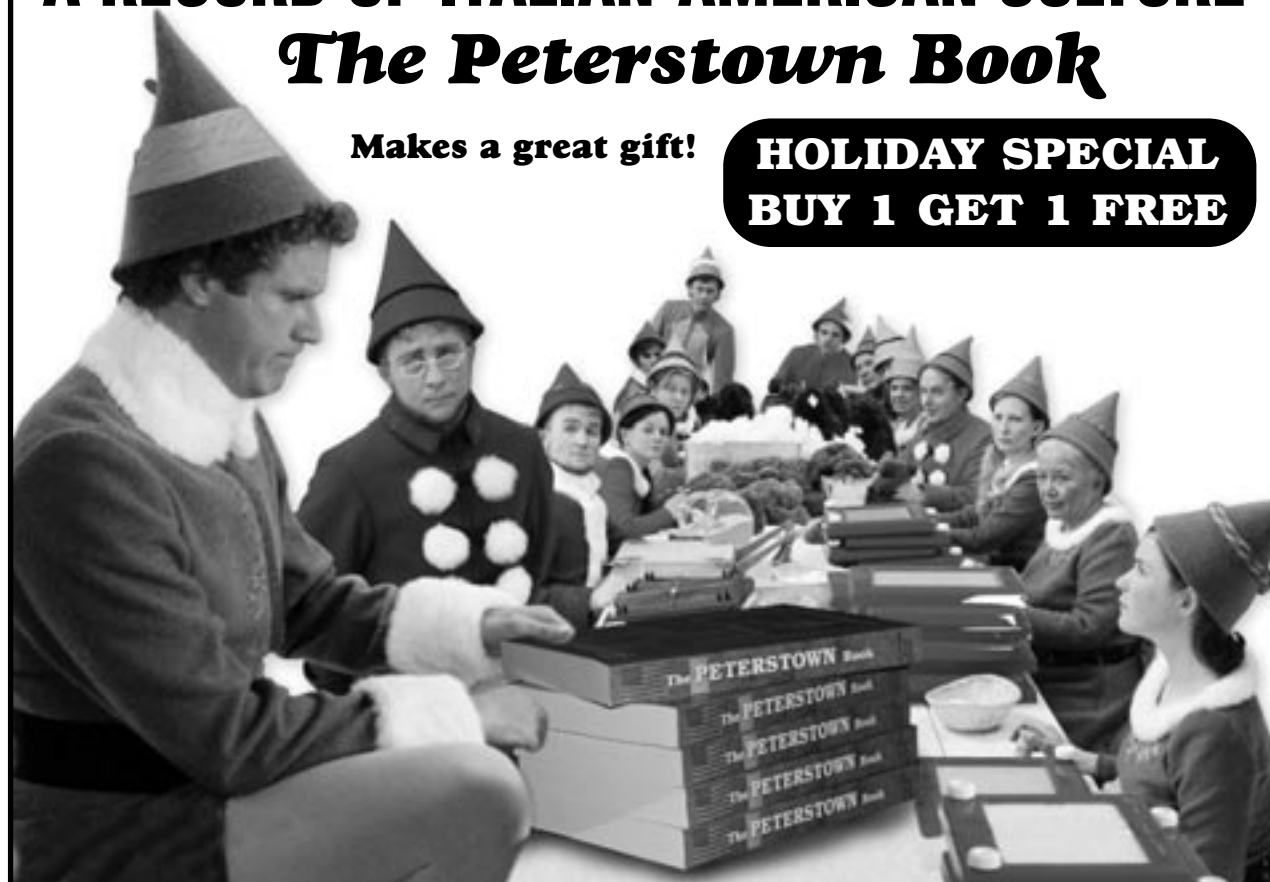
Scout Executive Marc Andreo asked the Rotarians to help spread the word about local Scouting. With units and camps open again, they are seeking more youth to join the local programs. Please visit beascout.org to locate a unit near you!



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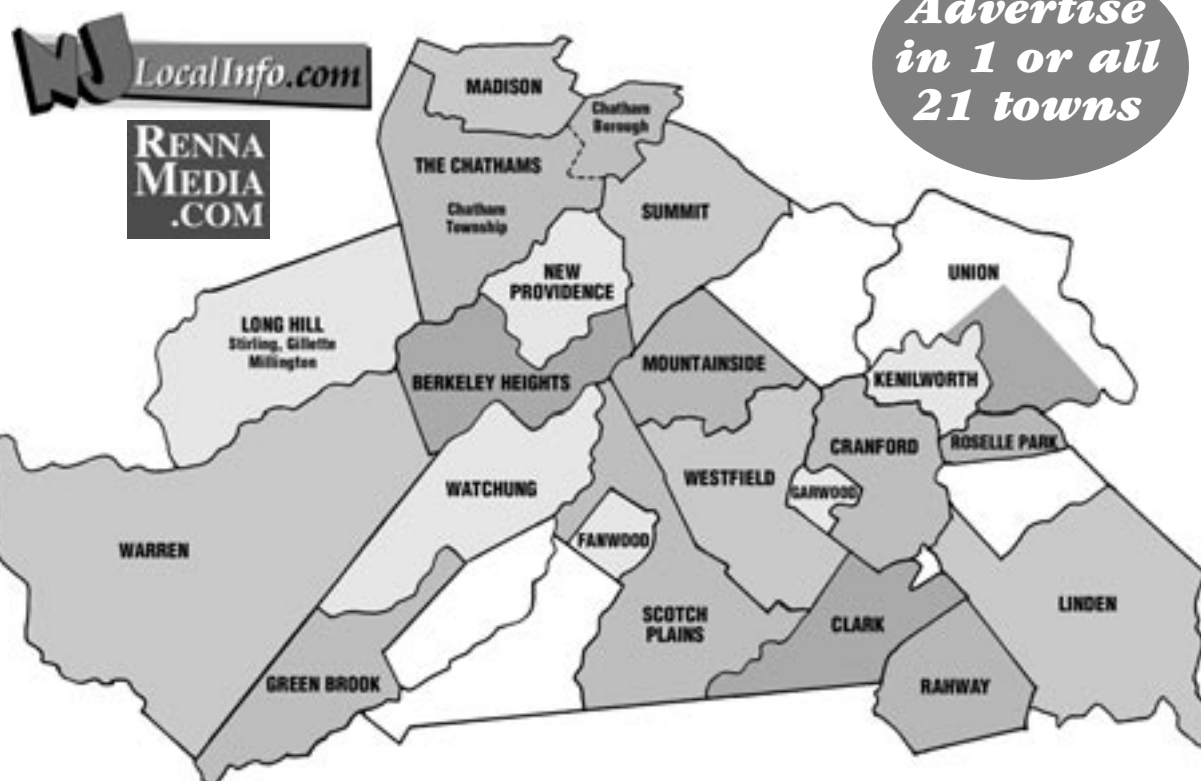
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DIGITAL OFFERINGS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AT YOUR LIBRARY

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, during which the country aims "to help raise awareness about the inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in all areas of community life." In order to reach this community, the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) continues to enhance their services and programs to better serve persons with disabilities.

"SCLSNJ strives to foster a sense of safety, connection, and belonging in our libraries," said Nanette Peterson, branch manager. "We hope to remove barriers to our materials and services that impact utilization while offering people with impairments more independence, and control."

According to the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities, over 1,200 adults in Somerset County are eligible for their services.

"In response to the state's continued initiative to move individuals from its developmental centers into the community, more adults with developmental disabilities are living in the community every day," said Jennifer Sulligan, civic services supervisor. "At SCLSNJ, we are committed to addressing the needs of this shifting demographic by striving to improve the accessibility of our spaces, resources, and services."

Throughout the month of March and beyond, the Library System will offer a series of virtual programs that foster the needs of adults and children with disabilities. The programs include a disability awareness panel discussion that will help attendees learn about local resources and support service available; an information session that helps navigate college and career resources; and an engaging, all ages and abilities music, bubble, and comedy show.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly presented many challenges in reaching individuals with developmental disabilities, and our staff is aware of just how isolating

quarantine has been for this population," said Lynn Mazur, youth services supervisor. "We are so delighted to be able to offer programs through a virtual platform, and we are excited about connecting with our patrons online."

She continued, "While all of SCLSNJ's programs are open to the public, programs such as the upcoming music, bubble, and comedy show with Matt Mazur (no relation to Library employee) are specifically designed to create library experiences that are especially welcoming to individuals on the autism spectrum or with other intellectual or developmental disabilities."

The music, bubble, and comedy show was designed by Matt Mazur, who created Turtle Dance Music and AutismFriendlyShows.com, to "help kids come out of their shells."

"Over the last decade I have had the pleasure of working with 10s of 1000s of children, teens, and adults with autism, including my brother-in-law and co-author, Tim Shaw (whose book Scrak's Big Adventure we published, illustrated and co-wrote together)," said Mazur. "[At Turtle Dance Music] we have been working hard to translate our live/in-person sensory-friendly music experience to the virtual world. Live streaming is connecting more parents and new parents who might not have used the Library System before to how incredible the Library System is."

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- Disability Awareness Panel Discussion (adults)
- March 8, 7-8 p.m. Register now: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4723786.
- Music, Bubble, and Comedy Show (all ages)
- March 9, 4:30-5:15 p.m. Register now: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4652088. Show And Share - An Event For Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (adults)
- March 11, 2-3 p.m. Register now: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4711308.

Sensory Time - STEAM Edition (families with children): 10:30-11 a.m. Register now:

- March 20: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4702995.
- April 24: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4702277.

American Sign Language Storytime (ages birth - 5 years and caregivers): 10:30-11 a.m. Register now:

- March 23: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4635120.
- April 27: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4635123.
- May 25: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4635125.

STEP Up Social Hour - Navigating College and Career Resources (grades 9-12)

- March 29, 4-5 p.m. Register now: sclsnj.libnet.info/event/4704139.

For more information about resources, services, and programs for persons with disabilities available through your Library visit SCLSNJ.org or contact npeterson@sclibnj.org.

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