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The staff at Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss was so pleased to be able to offer our first in-person volunteer training since 2020 at our Mountainside Center this summer! Pictured are the participants in our 2022 Imagine Summer Training Class, who have joined our wonderful community of volunteers - facilitating grief support groups for children, teens, young adults and their parents/guardians. Our new volunteers participated in a three-day training program that prepared them to be present for the children and families that participate at Imagine, gave them tools to help support those in their family and community who are grieving, and provided an opportunity for them to receive support for losses they've experienced themselves.

Another big milestone is coming up for Imagine! Our

grief support groups will be returning to the city of Newark through a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Newark (BCGN).

This is an experience like none other; the experiential nature of the training will prepare you to facilitate support groups in a way that a lecture-style training could never do. Previously trained volunteers have said this training is "life-changing" and "inspiring," and we hope you can be a part of it!

If you're interested in making a difference in the lives of grieving families and would like to participate in Imagine's volunteer facilitator training, please visit our website at imagine.nj.org/become-grief-support-facilitator. If you have questions, please contact Imagine at 908-264-3100.



(above, l-r) Top Row: Debbie Berez, Mountainside; Stacey Glickstein, Scotch Plains; Vernita Bostick, Belleville, Carrie Greenberg, Springfield; Sonia Nunez, Imagine's Newark Program Manager; Joan Castellano, West Orange; Abigail Priece, Imagine's Interim Program Manager and John Hutchinson, Glen Ridge; Middle Row: Deborah Ojeda, Imagine's Graduate Intern, Dan Vorhaus, Summit; Bottom Row: Diane H. Tracey, Jersey City; Gen Belfiglio, Union; Anna Fishman, Short Hills; Gregory D. Edgell, Nutley; and Zakeeyah Harris, Newark.

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POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS ENHANCE VOCATIONAL SKILLS IN NEW PROGRAM

Students who have graduated from high school but are still attending school will benefit from a new program design that has started at Westfield's Lamberts Mill Academy. According to Carrie Datillo, Superintendent of Westfield's Union County Educational Services Commission, the courses will provide a basis for transitional skills taking the students to the world of work. "Now that our students benefit from extended time in school, we are able to address the toolkit that will better prepare them for success in work and other necessary independence supports" she said.

Once fully engaged, the students will participate in morning classes and afternoon job placements. Resume building, job searching,

personal budgeting, workplace attitudes, communication, attitudes for work, and organizational skills are among the many topics that will be reviewed in morning classes. These will be supplemented by jobsite visits, special presentations, role play simulations and interviews with already working teens and their supervisors. The students have already begun to operate LMA's school store, like a local corner store, where students choose items based upon their success in school. After conducting an inventory the student compiled a shopping list and visited a local supermarket to purchase the needed items. They also provide administrative tasks, assembled fans that were placed in the classrooms, and are supporting a plastic bottle recycling initiative.

Sponsored by the Union County Educational Services Commission, Lamberts Mill Academy supports students aged 13-22 who would not find success in a typical school. The program blends academic rigor with comprehensive clinical and psychiatric services and social and daily living skills all tuned to the needs and skills of each student.

Additional details about LMA and/or to arrange a tour, please reach Principal Reed Leibfried on 862-324-6373.



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TEEN HELPS RAISE MONEY FOR FAMILIES FACING PEDIATRIC CANCER

Nick Swandrak, 18, of Cranford, NJ, teamed up with retired NFL Coach Tom Coughlin to raise money for local families facing pediatric cancer on October 21 at Cipriani 42nd Street, New York. In a speech to a crowd of nearly 500 professional athletes, celebrities and supporters at the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund's annual Champions for Children Gala, Swandrak shared his own journey of being diagnosed and treated for acute lymphoblastic leukemia and his subsequent relapse earlier this year. The Jay Fund, the nonprofit founded by the two-time Super Bowl winning coach of the New York Giants, marked its 17th year of providing financial, emotional and practical support for families tackling pediatric cancer in the New York/New Jersey Metropolitan area.

Swandrak knows all too well the challenges families face when a child is diagnosed with cancer, and he is passionate about raising awareness and funds to support them. He has spent much of the last four years enduring grueling cancer treatments and being isolated from his friends due to his immunocompromised condition. His family, like all families who have a child with cancer, has faced expensive medical bills coupled with rising inflation and record-high

food costs.

Swandrak and his family have been supported by the Jay Fund throughout his treatment.

"The Jay Fund covered our mortgage payments when our bills became overwhelming and has given me experiences that I will never, ever forget," Swandrak told the crowd of current and former New York Giants, business leaders and Jay Fund families and supporters.

Swandrak's emotional words captivated the audience, and his speech was one of the highlights of a night that raised \$1.25 million for the Jay Fund and the families it serves in the New York/New Jersey Metropolitan area.

"Nick is a remarkable young man and a current Jay Fund scholarship recipient," said Mary Jane Pulzello, Managing Director of the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund in NY/NJ. "He received a

standing ovation from the audience, as many were deeply moved by this young man's courage and tenacity in fighting cancer for more than four years."

Swandrak thanked his medical team who continue to help him through this fight, as well as his friends and family who have lifted him up from day one. He saved his most heartfelt appreciation for his parents, stating their love and support have been everything to him.

"As of today, I've had 126 chemo shots, 28 spinal taps, and over 200 days sleeping on scratchy hospital sheets," Swandrak told the crowd. "Fighting cancer is tough. You're in bed, and sick a lot of the time. There are days that are a real struggle. But I'm looking forward to ringing that bell for the second time this December and being back in remission."



(above) Nick Swandrak, a Cranford, NJ, teen who has been tackling pediatric cancer for more than four years, joined former NY Giants head coach Tom Coughlin and the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund to help raise funds for other NY/NJ children and their families facing childhood cancer.



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“OUR CITY” PUBLIC AFFAIRS TELEVISION SHOW

Long-time Green Brook resident Michele Ford, President & CEO, Inroads to Opportunities, was a recent guest on ‘Our City’ – an Elizabeth, NJ based television show. Inroads to Opportunities is a Union County, NJ, non-profit human services agency that provides programs and services to individuals with disabilities ranging in age from 16 to retirement.

The show is hosted by Elizabeth Mayor Christopher Bollwage. During a lengthy conversation, Bollwage and Ford discussed the significance of National Disability Employment Month, which falls each year in October. Ford emphasized the importance for individuals with disabilities to be able to find gainful employment.

According to Ford, “We need employers to be more diverse and inclusive. That's always going to be the issue, there are plenty of us around who are doing the service work, but we really need the partnership with employers.” As the interview continued, Ford outlined the numerous benefits both the employer and the employee with a disability gain from each other.

With over 35 years of experience, Ford has made a tremendous impact on the lives of employees and participants in the Inroads to Opportunities program. Demonstrating selflessness and compassion, Ford has dedicated her life to support individuals with disabilities.

Within the last year, Ford has been recognized as a ‘2022 NJBIZ ICON’ by NJBIZ, given the Shero Award by the Union County Board of Commissioners, as well as received the ‘Inventive Leader in Adult Services, Courage and Compassion Award’ presented by the NJ Association of Mental Health & Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA).

To listen to the interview visit:
<https://youtu.be/bsuQUgDpX9E>



(above) Inroads to Opportunities President & CEO Michele Ford was a recent guest on ‘Our City’ – an Elizabeth, NJ based television show hosted by the Mayor.

ABOUT MICHELE FORD:

For over 35 years, Michele has dedicated her life to serving the needs of individuals with disabilities. A life-long advocate, Michele has been a champion for this most vulnerable population by serving on the Union County Nonprofit Consortium, Union County Crisis Consortium and most recently addressing members of the US Commission on Civil Rights in Washington, D.C. to raise awareness of choice in defense of employment options for individuals with disabilities.

ABOUT INROADS TO OPPORTUNITIES:

Since 1959, Inroads to Opportunities, formerly the Occupational Center of Union County, has provided programs and services to over 400 individuals each year with all types of disabilities

and ranging in age from 16 through retirement. Programs and services include vocational preparation, transition from school to work, job placement and mental health services.

Inroads to Opportunities is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), an approved provider of the NJ Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Commission of the Blind and Visually Impaired. Inroads is licensed by the State of New Jersey Department of Human Resources, NJ Division of Mental Health, and Addiction Services to provide partial care and Division of Developmental Disabilities to provide Day Habilitation Services. Inroads is an approved Medicaid provider and an approved Employment Network under the Ticket to Work Social Security initiative.

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UCEDC AWARDED THE DEI TRAILBLAZER AWARD FOR ACCESS TO CAPITAL

On November 3rd, Union County Economic Development Corp., UCEDC, a non-profit economic development corporation, was honored with the DEI Trailblazer Award for Access to Capital, which recognizes New Jersey companies that are demonstrating tangible and measurable progress in the critical areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), by the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce.

UCEDC is proud to share that over the last three years, 85 percent of UCEDC's over \$6 Million in lending has gone to either minority-owned businesses or businesses located in low-income census tracts or low-income borrowers. In 2021 UCEDC issued 162 loans, 62% of which were to minority-owned businesses and 42% to women-owned.

UCEDC also started two new programs centered on social justice, including the Virtual Incubator Program, which is focused on diverse businesses from underserved populations, and Entrepreneurship As a Second Chance which enables citizens reentering society to forge an alternate path toward employment free of the typical societal prejudices and obstacles they traditionally face. Both programs include live educational workshops, one-on-one mentorship, and access to capital in the form of forgivable loans.

"Being in support of diversity, equity and inclusion is not always synonymous with proactive advocacy, and cohesive company-wide implementation of measurable equity and inclusion goals," said John E. Harmon Sr., founder, president & CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey. "The inequities that exist in the marketplace were put in place with intentionality and it will take intentionality to reverse these generational impediments. If we are adamant about making an impactful difference, then we must advocate for a reimagined corporate culture of inclusivity in New Jersey and across the nation. That is the pathway to our mutual success."



(above) UCEDC President Adam Farah accepted the DEI Trailblazer Award

Courtesy photo

Tom Bracken, president and CEO of the N.J. Chamber, added, "We are recognizing and celebrating the champions who are meeting the challenge and challenging the status quo."

In response to the DEI Trailblazer Award, UCEDC President Adam Farah said, "I want to thank both chambers for this recognition. This is the first award we've received that has recognized UCEDC's diversity efforts. First and foremost I want to thank our staff. They were the driving force behind this. Also, our Diversity Advisory Committee, whose work helped us expand our reach in underserved communities."

Mr. Farrah also thanked UCEDC's Board of Directors, who encouraged him to invest UCEDC capital in diverse communities as a way to effect change. UCEDC's popular Virtual Incubator Program and its Entrepreneurship as a Second Chance program were born from that investment. The Entrepreneurship as a Second Chance and Virtual Incubator Programs have also been

funded in part by Impact 100 Garden State, Valley Bank, Santander Bank, Capital One Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, Union County Savings Bank, and Northfield Bank.

UCEDC understands that the work to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture is never complete. There will always be more to learn and more that can be done to create an atmosphere that is socially just. Moving forward, UCEDC will continue to work with its Diversity Advisory Committee to refine our programs and further efforts toward developing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for UCEDC's staff, partners, and the clients we serve.

If you would like to contribute to our Virtual Incubator or Entrepreneurship as a Second Chance programs, please email Adam Farrah at afarah@ucedc.com.

For more information about the services of UCEDC visit ucedc.com.

A festive Christmas menu for Cozy Corner deli & caterers. The menu is framed by a decorative border of pine branches, snowflakes, and Christmas ornaments. At the top, the logo "COZY corner deli & caterers" is displayed. Below it, the text "Let Cozy Prepare you a... Christmas Feast" is written in a stylized font. The menu lists various food categories and prices, including Main Course, Housemade Soups, Salads / Side Dishes, and Veggies / Potatoes. It also includes pricing for individual meals and group orders, as well as information about paper products and extra soup. The bottom of the menu provides contact information for Cozy Corner, including the address, phone number, and accepted payment methods.

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HANUKAH: A HOLIDAY OF LIGHTS AND MIRACLES

Submitted by Rabbi Paul David Kerbel

Hanukah is a 'major' Jewish holiday. You might be surprised by that. Most rabbis and Jewish educators would say just the opposite, that Hanukah is a 'minor' Jewish holiday. From the perspective of religious Jewish law, Hanukah does not have the same religious significance of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (our Day of Atonement and forgiveness), Passover (our Festival of Freedom), Shavuot (the holiday where we celebrate the revelation of the Five Books of Moses), and Sukkot (our Fall festival celebrating the end of the summer harvest and our relationship with God).

Hanukah is a 'major' Jewish holiday culturally and ethnically. One of the ways we can understand any religion is not just what the religion 'teaches' but what its followers actually observe and practice. More Jews observe Hanukah than any other ritual, other than participating in a Passover Seder. Part of Hanukah's 'popularity' is that it falls in the Jewish calendar between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Hanukah represents a powerful response to the feelings of exclusion and of being a minority in the larger Christian culture of America and allows members of the Jewish community to celebrate its own traditions and be proud of the Jewish heritage even as the airwaves, malls and

TV commercials are filled with the sounds and traditions of Christmas.

But regardless of where Hanukah falls in the calendar, I would suggest the following four reasons why Hanukah is a 'major' Jewish holiday and has lessons for both Jews and our non-Jewish neighbors to learn from share:

1. Hanukah represents the first victory in human history for religious freedom. Had the Jewish Maccabees not won their war with the Greek/Syrian kingdom, Judaism may have died out and Christianity and Islam, both of which have roots in Judaism, may never have developed. The Jewish people celebrate the value for all of us to celebrate our respective religious traditions.
2. Hanukah teaches us religious tolerance and to celebrate diversity and pluralism. As America becomes more diverse and welcomes citizens of many different religions from around the world, we learn from each other and how much we have in common.
3. Hanukah reinforces the ability and opportunity of each minority to teach, learn and celebrate its religious traditions and its principles and unique ethnic and religious identity while we all share and believe in the values of freedom and democracy.
4. Hanukah reminds us of the modern-day miracles that we have participated in: the redemption of over one million Jews from

the former Soviet Union who were not allowed to learn about their Jewish faith and practice Judaism while under Communist rule; the rescue and welcoming of over 100,000 Jews from Ethiopia and the rescue and of endangered Jews and other Jewish communities around the world. We must always be prepared to deliver the few from the many, the weak from the mighty and the righteous from the wicked.

Finally, I would like to share that the word "Hanukah" means 'dedication' and comes from the same Hebrew word as 'education.' Hanukah is about making sure that we maintain our Jewish identity, that we teach our children, the values, the history, the rich heritage which is ours to embrace and pass on to the next generation. May the lights of our Hanukah menorah symbolize our love for Judaism, our right to practice Judaism as a minority while at the same time, sharing symbols of light and the theme of miracles with those who celebrate Christmas even as all of us strive to make the world a better place. For our Jewish tradition has taught us this eternal message: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

Happy Hanukah and Happy Holidays to all!

Rabbi Paul Kerbel is the spiritual leader of Temple Beth El Mekor Chayim in Cranford and the current chair of the Cranford Clergy Council.

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TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS

The Gateway Family YMCA was awarded a \$35,000 grant from the Community Foundation of NJ, on behalf of the J.C. Kellogg Foundation Fund, to assist the YMCA in serving homeless and housing insecure residents through affordable and transitional housing programs, and wraparound support services.

“We are thankful for the generous support and assistance from the Community Foundation of NJ and the J.C. Kellogg Foundation Fund. This grant assists us in supporting this vulnerable demographic during the coronavirus pandemic,” stated Krystal R. Canady, CEO. “In 2021, our Y served 763 men, women, seniors and children through YMCA residential housing programs.”

The Gateway Family YMCA has served the local community for over 122 years, providing housing and social services for over 250 individuals, families and veterans each evening. Through residential housing programs in

Elizabeth and Plainfield, as well as a supportive housing program throughout Union County, the Y provides emergency, transitional and affordable permanent housing opportunities along with wraparound social services focusing on mental health, food access, wellness services, chronic disease management, employment preparation, life skills and case management.

“At The Gateway Family YMCA, we provide residential housing support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for individuals, families and veterans in our community,” stated Melynda A. Disla, EVP/COO, The Gateway Family YMCA. “We continue to see an increased need for housing and social services, food access and mental health services. The COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone, and our residents lost jobs, became food insecure and struggled to access resources, which necessitated extra precautions, facility improvements and additional services provided by the YMCA.”

The Gateway Family YMCA’s housing programs are open to all residents of Union County regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, primary language, veteran status, and more. As one of more than 25 agencies collaborating in Union

County’s Continuum of Care unit, The Gateway Family YMCA works with other partner agencies to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness in Union County, NJ.

If you or someone you know is in need of emergency shelter, please contact Union County’s 24-Hour Homeless Emergency Response Hotline at 2-1-1. They will direct you to the housing program and support services that can best support you and your loved ones.

The Gateway Family YMCA is a leading 501(c)(3) non-profit, health and community service organization committed to strengthening community by connecting all people to their potential, purpose and each other. Working locally, the Y focuses on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities. By bringing together people from different backgrounds, perspectives and generations, the Y ensures that all have access to the opportunities, relationships and resources necessary to learn, grow and thrive.

For more information about The Gateway Family YMCA or YMCA Residential Housing Programs, visit tgfymca.org or contact 908-355-9622.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The YWCA Union County is actively seeking new volunteers to serve our communities. Crisis Response Team Volunteers are needed to work with local police departments that are providing options, advocacy, and emotional support to domestic violence survivors reporting abuse.

IF INTERESTED, THE FOLLOWING IS REQUESTED:

- Must be 18 years of age or older
- Evening or weekend availability a plus
- Bilingual a plus (Spanish, Creole, Polish & Arabic)
- Must have a valid driver’s license and access to a vehicle
- Experience working/volunteering with vulnerable & diverse populations a plus
- Must complete a mandatory, free, 40-hour Domestic Violence Training session (to be held via Zoom in September)
- Background check required

For more information - please contact Amanda Gonzalez, CRT Coordinator via email at: amgonzalez@ywcaunioncounty.org.



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Michael Boll, Director New Jersey Veterans Network

For the last five years the New Jersey Veterans Network (NJVN) has been working tirelessly to combat veteran's suicide with our mobile outreach and recreational programs. The NJVN volunteers aggressively seek out veterans in need and provide them with life changing and saving resources. Every day we encounter veterans in need, and some are in desperate need of the proper assistance to live a better way of life.

To accomplish this, our charity has joined forces with the NJ VFW. We work together on numerous outreach events that are dedicated to help veterans and their families. Also, we built relationships with the NJ National Guard, NJ American Legion, NJ SOS Stakeholders, Catholic Charities, NJ RWB, Backpacks For Life, Rebuilding Warriors, NJ Elks, Branchburg Rotary Club, and many other organizations. These partnerships are vital to help our veterans, and we are extremely lucky to have so many

dedicated organizations putting veterans first.

What makes the NJVN different is that we are able to provide veterans various services because of our strong network. Our Team is comprised of people from all over the state with different skillsets and this gives us an edge when it comes to helping veterans with their unique needs. Through the NJVN veterans have access to volunteers from all different professions, like lawyers, mechanics, service officers and physical therapists. Our volunteers do their very best to help assist veterans and their family members. We are the unit or detachment that provides the veteran a new purpose and empowers them to help others. We believe "Paying it Forward" is the best way to help veterans get in a better place and motivates them to live a better way of life.

In the last few years, our team has fed thousands of active-duty National Guardsmen

and disabled veterans living in shelters and nursing Homes. We have been able to donate nearly 30 refurbished and new vehicles to veterans in need. Also, we have been able to give thousands of veterans new suits, clothing and toiletries. But the most important thing our team does is, "SAVE LIVES". We are able to this because we love our veterans and provide them with in person human contact and stay with them throughout the process.

The American volunteer has always been there first for every crisis or disaster and our team is extremely fortunate to have the best group of men and women, who are willing to put their egos aside and focus on helping our veterans live the best life possible. The team is always looking for volunteers to help us with our mission. If you are interested in joining the team, please send me your name, email, and phone number via email NJVN1775@gmail.com. Help us save Vets!!



About New Jersey Veterans Network

We are a group of veterans and volunteers dedicated to helping our veterans and their families live better lives. Our mission is to identify veterans and connect them with resources and programs designed to meet their unique set of needs. If you are a veteran or family member that is in need of assistance, or are interested in joining our team, would like us to speak at your event, or contribute to our mission, call 973-332-1556 or email mbollio@optonline.net. To learn more visit njvn.org.



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To register for all events, please visit uplnj.org/events/month/2022-December

Union County Department of Aging (In-person at Main)

**Thursday, December 1
from 10 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

Do you have questions about services for seniors or their caregivers? Come visit the Aging Services Kiosk, speak to our specialist and get answers to your questions about: Pharmaceutical Assistance, Home Energy Assistance/USF, Cooling Assistance, Home Care, Home Delivered or Congregate Meals, Medicaid Eligibility, Social Security, Caregiver Relief Programs, Transportation.

Meditation (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 1 at 11:30 a.m.

Join Bindu Bhatt for a virtual meditation session. No experience is necessary. Bindu has practiced meditation for over 30 years and would like to share her insight.

Beginners Flow Yoga (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 1 at 6:00 p.m.

This class will lead you through the foundations of yoga postures, body awareness and alignment, relaxation of the mind, and connection with the breath. In addition, you will learn how to improve muscle strength, promote flexibility, and build your yoga program.

Friends of the Library meeting (In-person at Main Library)

Thursday, December 1 to 6:00 p.m.

Join the Friends of the Library at their monthly meeting. New members are always welcome.

Come and support your library.

Poetry Readings and Open Mic (Hybrid at Kean University and via Zoom)

Tuesday, December 6 at 6:30-8 p.m.

Join notable guest poets for inspiration and read your own poem at our open mic (one poem each). Note: Participate online or at The Wilkins/Little Theater at Kean University in the Student Center (directions here). Please register to read by writing to abjette@kean.edu. This event is always very popular.

Meditation (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 8 at 11:30 a.m.

Join Bindu Bhatt for a virtual meditation session. No experience is necessary. Bindu has practiced meditation for over 30 years and would like to share her insights.

Beginners Flow Yoga (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 8 at 6:00 - 6:30 p.m.

This class will lead you through the foundations of yoga postures, body awareness and alignment, relaxation of the mind, and connection with the breath. In addition, you will learn how to improve muscle strength, promote flexibility, and build your yoga program.

First Time Home Buyers Series (In person at Main)

Thursday, December 8 from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

MLB Residential Lending LLC presents The Legal Process from A to Z. Join us for the last of a 3-part series covering all aspects of home buying.

Holiday Jazz (On Zoom)

Wednesday, December 14 at 7:00 p.m.

The number of jazz recordings of holiday music is endless and just keeps growing. We'll highlight some classics, including Duke Ellington, Vince Guaraldi, Wynton Marsalis, Dave Koz, Kenny G., and Maia, as they celebrate Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Hanukkah.

Presented by Sanford Josephson, editor of Jersey Jazz Magazine and author of Jazz Notes: Interviews Across the Generations and Jeru's Journey: The Life and Music of Gerry Mulligan.

Meditation (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 15 at 11:30 a.m.

Join Bindu Bhatt for a virtual meditation session. No experience is necessary. Bindu has practiced meditation for over 30 years and would like to share her insights.

PowerPoint Basics (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 15 at 12:00 p.m.

This workshop is for you if you're new to PowerPoint or need a refresher. It includes starting new presentations, templates, Workspace, basic commands, presentations,

saving to the Cloud for easy accessibility, and sharing your work with others. So join us for live exercises and your questions.

Off the Shelf Book Club (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 15 at 7:00 p.m.

New members are always welcome. This month's title is The Last Days of Night by Graham Moore.

Holiday Origami for Adults (In-person at Main Library)

Thursday, December 15 at 6:00 p.m.

Join us for a holiday-themed origami class at the Main Library! Instructor Joy Ann will teach us how to make a star wreath. Registration is limited so sign up soon.

Beginners Flow Yoga (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 15 at 6:00 p.m.

This class will lead you through the foundations of yoga postures, body awareness and alignment, relaxation of the mind, and connection with the breath. You will learn how to improve muscle strength, promote flexibility, and build your yoga program.

Off the Shelf Book Club (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 15 at 7:00 p.m.

New members are always welcome. This month's title is The Last Days of Light by Graham Moore.

Meditation (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 22 at 11:30 a.m.

Join Bindu Bhatt for a virtual meditation session. No experience is necessary. Bindu has practiced meditation for over 30 years and would like to share her insights.

Animal Crossing (Virtual)

Friday, December 23 from 3-5:00 p.m.

Come explore UPL Island! Check out our inclusive virtual library building that serves children, teens, and adults. Discover our Mario-themed maze, shake fruit/money trees, shop at Nooks & Abels, help craft DIYs, and leave a message on the bulletin board. As a thank you for visiting, there will be freebies! In order to visit our island, you must add us as a friend before entering the island. Our UPL Nintendo friend code is SW-4027-1837-6212. All ages welcome. No registration necessary. If you have any questions, please contact jcarvajal@uplnj.org.

Meditation (On Zoom)

Thursday, December 29 at 11:30 a.m.

Join Bindu Bhatt for a virtual meditation session. No experience is necessary. Bindu has practiced meditation for over 30 years and would like to share her insights.

Kwanzaa! (In-person at Vauxhall Branch)

Thursday, December 29 at 2:30 p.m.

Choreographer, author, and dancer Walter Rutledge's Kwanzaa Dance Party incorporates the traditional elements of the holiday while introducing new movement, art, and music concepts.

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STUDENTS TAKE THE LEAD IN 'STUDENT GOVERNMENT DAY'

Union High School (UHS) students recently visited the Municipal Building to gain firsthand experience on how local government works. The program, which has taken a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, assigns students in AP United States Government and Politics, AP Comparative Government and Politics and Public Relations classes to shadow the Mayor and Committee members, as well as various department heads.

"My favorite part of the day was exposing the students to our Police and Fire Departments and to see what goes on behind the scenes and the intricacies of it all," said Mayor Manuel Figueiredo. "I think they learned a lot, and it's

great to see their faces when they're like, 'wow, that's what happens.'"

The classes, which are led by Christopher Faraone and assisted by Anthony DeRosa and Jonathan Jeklinski, offer students a unique perspective inside Town Hall, and also a chance to get out of the classroom.

"It's exceedingly prideful and special to see our students interact with government officials and to take on the roles that they do on a daily basis," said Christopher Faraone, a social studies teacher at Union High School. "Community, town and country are important concepts in the current world, and having our students learn

about levels of government and different things that happen in society are important features."

At the end of the day, students had the opportunity to run a Township Committee meeting and pass ordinances.

"I think we learned a lot today, mostly about the day-to-day activities that go on around town," said Jelani Beaugris, who shadowed the Township Committee for the day. "It was great to see how much our politicians really do care about the people. I feel like nowadays we don't really see that a lot."

Photo by Township of Union



(above) Mayor Manuel Figueiredo, elected officials, UHS students and teachers in the Union Town Hall Meeting Room at the conclusion of Student Government Day on Tuesday, October 25.

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UNION COUNTY DAY OF PRAYER

On Thursday, October 27, over 130 people attended the Union County Day of Prayer organized by Community Access Unlimited (CAU) and the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council (UCICC).

It was the 8th annual "Day of Prayer" event, hosted by Temple Emanu-El in Westfield. The event featured a variety of inspirational speakers and performers from Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, and Buddhist faiths. The service included a chant from the International Society for Krishna Consciousness of Central New Jersey and musical offerings from Shimon Smith, Cantorial Soloist/Artist in Residence at Temple Emanu-El, who shared Hebrew songs with attendees.

CAU spearheaded UCICC in 2012 to build bonds in the interfaith community and encourage the respect and welcoming of others regardless of faith, sexual orientation, legal status, or ability. CAU is based in Union County and works statewide to assist people with

developmental disabilities and youth at risk to integrate into the community through support services and support coordination. CAU services include housing, education, employment services, behavioral management, advocacy and more.

Rev. LL DuBreuil, who has been a part of UCICC since the first Day of Prayer, said "I was looking for this kind of community because I believe that when we all come together in celebration...then we're already ready to be together in difficult times. UCICC does not only have these worship experiences, but we sometimes do vigils and marches and we raise money for causes. And it's because we know each other from this that we can more easily work together when times are more difficult." DuBreuil is the Interim Pastor of Willow Grove Presbyterian Church, Scotch Plains.

Joyce Cargle, a longtime CAU member, said of the event, "We learned inclusion and we learned about community today."



(above) The Union County Day of Prayer was held on Thursday, October 27, with over 130 people in attendance.

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SHINING STARS “CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR” DECEMBER 9

Celebrate the holiday season when the Shining Stars take the stage for their 2022 “Christmas Spectacular” set for Friday, December 9 at 7:00 p.m. The show will take place on the main stage at the historic Union County Arts Center in Rahway as this talented cast sings and dances to many of your holiday favorites.

With many cast members from all over Union County and beyond, Shining Stars Network has been producing live programming for the special needs community for ten years.

This year’s Christmas Spectacular marks the return of the Shining Stars to one of the most beautiful theaters in New Jersey and will feature 35 special needs cast members and their volunteer buddies from local high schools, who serve as mentors to the cast during rehearsals.

Two previous Shining Stars shows at UCPAC

drew more than 1,000 audience members for each performance, and already, the buzz is building in the community.

“We’re so excited to ring in the holiday season,” noted Shining Stars Network co-founder and President Mike Curci. “Our stars are ready to share their smiles, energy and amazing talents with everyone. This will be a great way to cap off our 10th anniversary celebration.”

“We strongly believe in creating an inclusive environment for our cast, and our buddies are an integral part of the Shining Stars experience,” noted Shining Stars co-founder and director Sally Curci. “We are so excited to bring a new show to the stage and cannot wait to connect with our incredible audience again to celebrate the holiday season.”

Shining Stars Network is wrapping up a big year, which included their annual “Evening of

Shining Stars” Spring Show, Summer Performing Arts Workshop, and their successful Paper Mill Playhouse debut performing in front of a sold-out audience at the Paper Mill Brook Side Cabaret.

“Shining Stars Network is not only about performing, but more importantly we’re about building self-confidence and self-esteem,” said Shining Stars co-director Nicole Greene. “Our cast members are not only talented, but inspire us every day, and we are all very excited about taking the stage again to share another magical night with the audience.”

Tickets are on sale now at UCPAC.org. For groups of 10 or more, email shiningstarsnetwork@gmail.com.

The night will also feature a Tricky Tray and 50/50 raffle. Doors will open at 6:00 p.m.

Shining Stars Network is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization based in Cranford, N.J. that offers opportunities in the performing arts for the special needs community.

Plans for the 2023 season include their 2nd “Reach for the Stars” Gale, set for March 14 at the elegant Park Chateau Estate & Gardens in East Brunswick.

For more information on Shining Stars Network or to make a donation, please visit shiningstarsnetwork.org.



(above) The Shining Stars will take the stage for their 2022 “Christmas Spectacular” on Friday, December 9 at 7:00 p.m.

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ADOPTION DAY FETES YOUTH LEAVING FOSTER CARE FOR FAMILIES

CASA of Union County

On the morning of Thursday, Nov. 10, children from 18 months to 18 years gathered at the Union County Courthouse surrounded by courthouse staff and judiciary, county commissioners, area organizations and more – all there to celebrate youth reaching the long-awaited end to living in foster care with adoption into a forever family. Family courts see complex issues fraught with loss or discord nearly every day, yet Adoption Day is eagerly anticipated by all, as fresh starts and ample smiles fill the courthouse.

November is National Adoption Month and National Adoption Day, celebrated the Saturday before Thanksgiving, is a national movement to raise awareness of children in foster care awaiting a family. Since its inception in 2000, more than 75,000 children have found permanency on this

day. Still, more than 110,000 youth in the United States need a permanent home and the average wait is four years. More than 23,000 youth nationwide age out of the system each year and must face life on their own.

This year, Union County's celebration came early, but no complaints; it just means children received permanency even sooner. After Judge Daniel Roberts performed the adoption ceremonies, the festivities began: from roving a balloon artist and CASA Volunteer Dina Gharaibeh providing face painting to a musician and more than a dozen superheroes from the Union County Sheriff's Heroes Initiative – the Batmobile even made an appearance – there was nothing but smiles to go around.

Speakers included 17-year-old Maeve Boger-O'Bryan of Cranford and Joseph Coston of Fair

Lawn. Maeve discussed her own open adoption and Joseph shared his story as an adoptive parent of eight youth from the foster system.

CASA of Union County provided family fun baskets with donated board and card games, fleece blankets, jars of popping corn, movie candy and more from David Brearley High School's Bears that Care group, all packed into baskets donated by Cranford Girl Scout Troop 40836. The high school bear mascot also made the rounds, much to the delight of the littlest adoptees and their siblings. In addition, each family received a ShopRite gift card made possible by a Union County Bar Association donation, as well as gifts from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's Theta Phi Omega, Phi Eta Omega and Omega Psi Omega chapters.

For details on CASA of Union County and becoming an advocate for a foster youth, contact Chanel at info@casaoofunioncounty.org or log on to www.casaoofunioncounty.org.



(above) Superheroes from the Union County Sheriff's Heroes Initiative.



(above) The Honorable Daniel Roberts, J.S. C. (Adoption Day Judge), with David Brearley High School Bears That Care



(above) Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's Dewanna Graham, 1st VP; Liz Nolley Tillman, President; Joyce Hobbs, Secretary;

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