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FOSTER YOUTH JOIN FOREVER FAMILIES AT ADOPTION DAY

CASA of Passaic and Union Counties

On a recent fall morning, five youth ranging from three to 10 years old entered the courtrooms of Superior Court Judges Gavin Handwerker, Paul Nieves and Chanel Hudson as foster youth and, shortly after, emerged as official members of their new families.

Adoption Day is eagerly anticipated by many at Union County's Family Court, as ample smiles fill the courthouse – a juxtaposition to the daily navigation of complex issues fraught with loss or discord. This year, county dignitaries presented families with proclamations and certificates, and festivities included performances by 30 high school students from Elizabeth's Thomas Jefferson Arts Academy A Cappella Choir; a former foster youth sharing her personal journey and adoption story; a roaming balloon artist; sheriff's officers dressed as superheroes and a Batmobile outside for visiting; furry greetings from Kenilworth's David Brearley Middle High School mascot bear; personalized cupcakes; and ice cream, face painting, and friendship-bracelet making stations.

CASA of Passaic and Union Counties presented family fun-themed gift baskets made possible in part from donations by David Brearley Bears That Care program and the Union County Bar Association. Baskets were given to all those finalizing on Adoption Day, as well as several families who adopted earlier in the year.

Cynthia Evans of Scotch Plains was among the CASA volunteers to attend the ceremonies for their assigned children. "The day was a long



(above) Sheriff's officers dressed as superheroes, and maned a Batmobile outside the courthouse.



(above) Festivities included a balloon artist; personalized cupcakes; and ice cream, face painting, and friendship-bracelet making stations.



(left) Each family received a basket made possible by CASA of Passaic and Union Counties & the David Brearley Middle High School Bears That Care Program.

time coming for these sisters, and it was amazing," she said. "I've been their advocate since 2020. Between their adoptive families and all involved, embraces and cheers were aplenty. My time as their CASA volunteer was both rewarding and challenging. I'm thankful I could help ensure their needs were met and services were provided while in care."

Adoption Day is a national movement to raise awareness of children in foster care. Since its inception 23 years ago, nearly 60,000 children have found permanency. More than 437,000 youth in the United States are currently in the child welfare system awaiting a permanent home, and the average wait is four years. For more than 23,000 youth, that doesn't happen, and they age out of the system, facing life on their own.

For details on CASA of Passaic and Union Counties, becoming an advocate for foster children or other opportunities to support the organization's work, log on to www.casapassaicunion.org.

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COME SING WITH US AT OUR OPEN HOUSE

Hickory Tree chorus

Put some music in your life in 2024! Join the Hickory Tree Chorus for an Open House, which will include a meet-and-greet, movement warm-ups and, of course, some wonderful singing. Dates are January 10 and 17, 2024, from 6:45 to 9:30 p.m.

The chorus sings a variety of music, including old-fashioned love songs, Broadway, Disney, Beatles, and more in a fun, supportive community. Come sing with us and share the joy of music together! Stay for the friendship

and fun!

Hickory Tree is an award-winning women's chorus singing four-part a cappella harmony in the barbershop style. We are passionate about music, performance, fun & friendship. We believe every voice counts and encourage women singers of all ages, colors, ethnicities, and orientations to visit us and share our joy of music.

Please contact the Chorus for the Open House by email at info@hickorytreechorus.org. Find more information at hickorytreechorus.org.



(above) The Hickory Tree Chorus invites the public to sing with them at an Open House, on January 10 and 17, from 6:45 to 9:30 p.m.



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PERFECT AND EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS SCORES ON NJSLA ASSESSMENTS

Rahway Public Schools

Franklin Elementary School in Rahway recently hosted a ceremony to honor the Franklin School NJSLA All-Stars and their induction into the 800 Club for their academic achievements. Twenty-three students in grades 4 through 6 were recognized for their outstanding achievements of earning an 800 or higher on the Spring 2023 New Jersey Student Learning (NJSLA) assessment. NJSLA is given annually in the spring to students in grades 3-12. NJSLA scores are reported on a scale of 650 to 850 for ELA and Mathematics. The scale is divided into five performance levels. Students scoring at least 750 are considered to have Met Expectations, while students scoring 800 and above have Exceeded Expectations. NJSLA scores are used to measure student progress over time and to identify students who may need additional support. The scores are also used to hold schools accountable for their performance.

Two students, Juliette (Grade 4 English Language Arts) and Jeison (Grade 5 Math) were also recognized for their exceptional achievement of earning a perfect score on the NJSLA. Jeison's accomplishment is particularly noteworthy as he is a former English Language Learner who has excelled through the school's

bilingual program and is thriving academically.

The honored students and their families were treated to a breakfast in the school's cafeteria, followed by a ceremony in the school auditorium. During the ceremony, the students were presented with certificates of recognition from Rahway's Board of Education President, Mr. Bernard Robson; Dr. Aleya Shoieb, Rahway's Acting Superintendent; and Dr. Patrick Holness, Franklin School's Principal. The honorees also received a gift bundle courtesy of Dr. Tiffany Beer, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and the Curriculum and Instruction staff. The event was well attended by their peers, families, teachers, district coaches, district administrators, and Rahway Board of Education Members.

"These students have demonstrated exceptional talent and dedication to their studies," said Dr. Aleya Shoieb. "We are thrilled to recognize their achievements and to celebrate their success."

"We are incredibly proud of our 800 Club members," said Dr. Patrick Holness. "They are an inspiration to their peers and the entire Franklin School community. They have set a high standard for their peers and have shown what it means to be a true Franklin Scholar."

Franklin School would like to extend a heartfelt thank you and special recognition to its exceptional teachers and staff who tirelessly dedicate their time, passion, and expertise to nurturing the minds and shaping the futures of our students. Their unwavering commitment to fostering a stimulating learning environment and their unwavering support for each student's growth are truly commendable.

These students' impressive academic accomplishments are a direct reflection of the dedication and expertise of these teachers and staff. Their commitment to providing students with a high-quality education has been instrumental in fostering a love of learning and empowering students to reach their full potential.

"It truly takes a village" to reach this level of greatness. It begins at home and continues through pre-k through grade two, where the foundation is laid for the testing grades. Franklin Elementary School is incredibly proud of the teachers, students, and families that have worked together for these accomplishments. Their hard work and dedication are an inspiration to all.

The school is committed to continuing the 800 Club tradition and celebrating the achievements of its students for many years to come.

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ATLANTIC FEDERAL GIVES RECOVERY GRANTS TO LOCAL NONPROFITS

The Atlantic Federal Credit Union (“The Atlantic”) distributed \$50,000 in grant funding to five local nonprofit organizations through the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York Small Business Recovery Grant Program (“SBRG”). The SBRG is designed to support the financial



(above) Check Presentation St. Joseph Social Service Center: Since 1983, St. Joseph Social Service Center has served the materially poor and homeless community of greater Elizabeth, New Jersey, by providing basic human needs such as food, clothing and medications, as well as a wide range of services and programs to help them acquire the material goods and social services they need to live with dignity. St. Joseph Social Service Center’s range of services include a food pantry, health and wellness programs, mental health counseling, an Adult Learning Center, access to clothing and household items, and more. Learn more at sjeliz.org.



The SHARE Alliance: The SHARE Alliance is a consortium of several congregations and other interested parties, including the Springfield Rotary Club, Springfield Unity Project (SUP), Springfield Chamber of Commerce, and more, dedicated to the proposition that no one should go to bed hungry, unless they want to, or wonder where their next meal will come from. Under the sponsorship of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, SHARE seeks to approach the issue of food security in Union County with a three-prong tactic of increasing availability of healthier food, coordinating their distribution, and promoting their right use in the kitchen. These objectives are achieved through the establishment of a Community Pantry and Community Kitchen that will operate from the Parish House, located at 37 Church Mall, Springfield. Learn more at share-alliance.net.

security and health of organizations that have faced economic challenges due to the rate environment, inflation, supply-chain constraints, and/or rising energy costs.

The SBRG began in 2017 in response to hurricanes in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Program relaunched in 2020 and was made available again in 2021 to aid small businesses and nonprofit organizations facing challenges due to the Coronavirus pandemic. By participating in the SBRG this year, The Atlantic was able to grant \$10,000 each to Bianca F.L.O.W.E.R.S. Inc. in Plainfield, Jewish Family Service of Central New Jersey, Mobile Meals of Westfield, St. Joseph Social Service Center in Elizabeth, and The SHARE Alliance in Springfield.

“Thank you to the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York for their partnership and the opportunity to extend recovery grants within the

communities we serve,” shared The Atlantic Federal Credit Union Chief Executive Officer Anthony Mero. “The SBRG funding will help our deserving recipients continue their selfless work throughout Essex and Union counties – ensuring community members in need have access to food, clothing, social services and other crucial resources through the holiday season and beyond.”

ABOUT THE ATLANTIC FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

The Atlantic Federal Credit Union was founded in 1935 as a not-for-profit financial cooperative to meet the savings and borrowing needs of Members. Today, The Atlantic Federal Credit Union exclusively serves Essex and Union counties in New Jersey with financial wellness resources, competitive rates and technology-driven solutions for personal and business banking. For full eligibility criteria and more information, visit TheAtlanticFCU.com.

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AMERICAN LEGION & VFW POST BREAKFASTS

PANCAKE BREAKFAST – JANUARY 21, 2024

Come to a Pancake Breakfast, hosted by the American Legion Auxiliary - Unit 102, on Sunday, January 21, 2024 at the American Legion Post 102, located at 112 West Elizabeth Ave., from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. This month's special is Omelets. Donations: Adults \$8.00 / Seniors & Children \$7.00 / Ages 5 & Under Free. Take outs are available.

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

PANCAKE BREAKFAST – JANUARY 27, 2024

Come one, come all to the VFW#1397 Pancake Breakfast on Saturday, January 27, 2024 for the VFW Post #1397, which will be held at the American Legion Post 102, located at 112 West Elizabeth Ave in Linden from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Donations: Adults \$7.00 / Seniors & Children \$6.00/ Ages 5 & Under Free. Take outs are available.

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



SWEET SUCCESS: STAFF BUILD GINGERBREAD HOUSES

Submitted by Linda Lampert

The administrators and staff at Franklin Elementary School in Rahway believe that having fun together is essential for building a strong school community. This year, they decided to kick off the holiday season with a sweet new tradition: a gingerbread house building competition for the staff which took place at their last staff meeting.

Divided into groups of 3-4, staff members rolled up their sleeves and let their imaginations run wild. Laughter and friendly competition filled the room as they constructed elaborate gingerbread structures adorned with colorful candies and frosting.

But who would take home the coveted title of "Franklin's Finest Gingerbread Architects"? The

answer lay in the hands of the student body. The next day, after lunch, students were treated to a viewing of all twelve gingerbread houses and then cast their votes for their favorite creation.

The winners were announced with much fanfare at the end of the day, and everyone involved agreed: this was one sweet way to start the holidays. As Principal, Dr. Patrick Holness noted, "This event was a wonderful reminder of the importance of teamwork, creativity, and most importantly, having fun together. We're already looking forward to next year's competition!"

Thank you for supporting the Rahway Public Schools.

Respectfully,

Linda

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Santa made his first annual visit to Rahway to begin the holiday season the Friday after Thanksgiving. The annual Rahway tree lighting celebration was held in front of City Hall on November 24th, 2023. The family-friendly

event featured merchants opening their doors to visitors, bounce houses, fire pits, free hot chocolate, face painting, and more. The grand finale is Santa lighting the Christmas tree from the ladder of a Rahway Fire Department truck.

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Alpha is for everybody that wants to discuss seeking answers to life's big questions. Why are we here? Is this all there is to life? Where are we going? How do I attain peace of mind, heart, and soul? Whether you are young or old, have faith or are atheist or agnostic, Alpha provides a safe environment for exploring our big questions about life.

We begin by sharing a meal together and getting to know each other. We watch a video

together then break into small groups for uninhibited discussion about what is on our minds.

There is no cost to participate. The series runs for 12 weeks on Monday nights beginning at 7:30 p.m. and ending at 9:00 p.m. It will begin February 5th, 2024, and end May 6th, 2024. Three of the sessions are live in person and the remainder are on Zoom. You will need a desire for frank discussion, a willingness to participate and a commitment to attend. You will also need a computer or smartphone capable of Zoom sessions.

The live in person sessions will be held at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, 1571 S. Martine Ave., Scotch Plains, NJ 07076. If you have any questions, please call (908) 889-2100. To register go onto IHMParish.net/alpha.



Meet new people & explore faith together.

Alpha is a place to connect with other people who are open to exploring life, faith, and meaning. Each session includes a time to connect with others (often over a free meal), hear a short talk on an element of the Christian faith, and then a chance for each person to share their own questions with the group. We'd love to hear your perspective!

Alpha Winter/Spring 2024
Season begins **LIVE**
Monday February 5th
7:00 pm @
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DJ DREWSKI & FRIENDS CONCERT AT THE UCPAC

Dj Drewski a radio host on Hot 97 fm and TV Personality hosted a Hip Hop concert that concert goers will never forget for years to come.

The Halloween themed concert was a huge success that sold out the UCPAC in Rahway NJ. Majority of its attendees were High School and college students who attend local schools in the New Jersey area. One concert goer said "Shout out to DJ Drewski because this has been the best show I ever seen!"

The attendees got way more than they bargained for when they got to witness some of the hottest hip hop acts hit the stage.

The show featured hip hop stars such as Sleepy Hallow, 41, Ron Suno & Dj Drewski (who is a Elizabeth NJ native.)

"I was extremely happy with the turnout and being able to use my platform to entertain and inspire the youth" said Dj Drewski.

"It was a great opportunity to bring the local youth to an incredible theatre like the UCPAC and show them they do not have to go out of town to see some of their favorite performing artists."

Solar, who is Dj Drewski's 2yr old daughter also joined the stage with him to celebrate such an incredible show. For Drewski, that was a full circle moment because as a child himself DJ

Drewski's father hosted a Rock & Roll concert at the same theatre years prior. Inspired by his upbringing in Elizabeth NJ, Dj Drewski plans to host more events and shows like this in the near future and is glad he was able to give both The City of Rahway and the surrounding communities a taste of what is to come.

Thank You to the Union County Police Department, Rahway Police Department and UCPAC for making sure everyone was safe and had a wonderful time.

To keep up with more of what Dj Drewski is doing follow him on social media at [@SoDrewski](https://www.instagram.com/SoDrewski)



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A LOOK AT RAHWAY – 100, 75, 50 YEARS AGO

Submitted by Al Shipley, City Historian and Rahway Library Research Consultant

1924

The invited speaker at a meeting of the Rebecca Cornell Rahway Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) spoke on immigration, a hot topic in the 1920s. It was the speaker's opinion that the government should restrict the influx of immigrants and expressed a need for a policy of selective immigration. The presenter also promoted the view that all publications should be printed in English. The more things change...

The Union County Park Commission purchased 129 acres of land located on the west side of St. Georges Avenue from the City of Rahway with plans to create a county park. The acreage, consisting of two parcels known as the Castor-Denman property and the Rahway Poor farm, had previously been bought by the city to help expedite the plans of the park officials. The action assured that Rahway would have a beautiful park within the city limits that would be managed and maintained by the county.

The World War 1 "Baby Boomers" were reaching school age and the Board of Education was discussing the need for more school buildings and for renovations to the older ones. The new Franklin School, built in 1922, was already over-crowded and Lincoln, Washington, and Columbian were antiquated. Plans soon got underway for the construction of Roosevelt and Cleveland Schools to give relief to the conditions at Franklin. Public school student enrollment reached 2,300 when schools opened in September, the largest number in the city's history. St. Mary's Parochial School had also reached its highest enrollment and plans were being made for a new, more modern building.

After the war, the Ku Klux Klan reared its ugly head and their hate-filled activities began to surface in cities in both southern and northern states. By the middle of the decade, their shadowy presence was being felt in cities throughout Union County including Rahway. In July, Rahway Police received a report of a cross burning on the southeast corner of St. Georges and Central Avenues. The noxious presence of the Klan would become even more overt in 1925 and 1926.

1949

Construction of the housing development on the west side of Madison Avenue on the acreage behind Rahway High School began in the spring of 1949. More than 360, single family homes would eventually be constructed. Plans for building projects were also commencing for the vast area on the west side of St. Georges Avenue between Lake Avenue and Colonia Boulevard. By the end of the year, Rahway broke all records for new construction.

New homes in the western section of the city meant new schools were needed for the children who would grow up in these neighborhoods. In May, the Board of Education purchased property on Madison Avenue next to the high school as

the site for a new elementary school. Madison School would open in September, 1953.

The scourge of polio, the dreaded, highly contagious, infectious disease, that had been crippling adults and children during much of the first half of the 20th century, would reach pandemic proportions by the late 1940s. In August, eight polio cases, including one death, were reported by the Rahway Health Department. Union County officials reported 26 cases, including three deaths, with the state totaling 227 cases in the same month. The pandemic would get worse and would reach its peak in 1953 with 58,000 cases reported in the United States. The Salk vaccine (1952) and the Sabin oral vaccine (1955) helped to end the pandemic and control the disease.

1974

In October, 1973, the Arab oil nations placed an oil embargo that targeted several nations including the United States that would last until March of 1974. Wide-spread shortages of oil and gasoline soon caused serious problems for most Americans as long lines of cars leading to gas stations stretched for blocks. Wait time to get served could take hours. To lessen the hardships, mandatory state regulations were put into place on Monday, February 11. Automobile owners with even numbered license numbers would get gas on even numbered days, while odd license numbers would get served on odd days. A minimum purchase of \$5.00 was required to get gas. If the car's tank was more than half full, no gas would be pumped. Station hours were staggered to help deal with the crisis. The embargo finally came to an end after six months of inconvenience.

A site for a new city hall-police station to stand on the corner of Main Street and Milton Avenue was finally selected and approved at a meeting of the city council in early February. Although the project was given approval by a vote of the council in June, the complex was not completed and dedicated until 1982.

Rahway Boy Scout Troop 141 was certified by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration to be the first official Bicentennial Scout Troop in the nation. Sponsored by the Second Presbyterian Church, the troop was presented with the Bicentennial Flag during a ceremony at the National Office of the Boy Scouts of America in North Brunswick.

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OUR TOWN RAHWAY



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRDS

Now common in our area, Northern Mockingbirds are widely known for their singing ability. Mockingbirds sing to establish their territory and attract mates. Their songs have a series of phrases that are repeated two to six times. They can incorporate other sounds into their songs, often imitating other songbirds but sometimes frogs and dogs. On a warm summer night unmated male mockingbirds fill the air with their songs. Mockingbirds sometimes sing during late fall and winter for reasons still being studied.

Mockingbirds have been videoed mimicking car alarms and emergency sirens making them very unpopular to the residents of those neighborhoods. You can see some of these videos on YouTube.

Mockingbirds have gray-brown feathering on their heads and backs, with pale undersides and long tails that stick out while flying. Each of their somewhat short wings has two white bars and white patches that can be seen on the wing while the birds are in flight. They have long, thin black bills that curve slightly downward. Mockingbirds are a medium-sized song bird. Adults are 8.3-10.2 inches long, with a wingspan of 12.2-13.8 inches. Generally, they weigh around 1.6 to 2 ounces.

Juvenile's bellies can be heavily spotted with pale edging giving their back and head a streaked appearance.

Northern Mockingbirds prefer open areas, such as forest edges, parks and suburban backyards. They can be found year-round throughout the United States and Caribbean, Southern Canada, Mexico and Central America. Some individuals in the northern part of their range will migrate south if the weather gets too extreme.

Mockingbirds live alone through much of the year, but males and females pair up during the breeding season. Both birds can be fiercely territorial and will chase off a wide variety of



(above) A mockingbird stands guard over its territory in Rahway, NJ.

Photograph by Audra Loccisano in her Rahway garden.

intruders. Northern Mockingbirds aggressively defend their nest and are known to attack and mob potential predators including people that approach too close. Northern Mockingbirds have been known to identify individual people who repeatedly encroach into their nesting territory and will selectively harass them.

I will write about mockingbirds mating in more detail in the early spring as mating season approaches.

Northern mockingbirds eat mainly insects in the summer, but occasionally crustaceans and small lizards depending on the region. In winter, they eat berries and fruits, including ones found in backyard gardens. They scout out their foraging area from an above-ground perch and will descend as low as the ground when the coast is clear to look for food.

In the winter mockingbirds are very protective of food within their territory even if they don't eat it themselves. I have watched them eat peanut butter off the logs meant for woodpeckers, but in my garden their favorite food seems to be apples. Mockingbirds will chase away smaller birds from seed feeders that I have never witnessed them eating themselves.

In order to help these smaller often colorful birds, I place the apple away from the rest of the feeders. This draws the mockingbirds away but



(above) Past President of The Rahway Garden Club, James Keane, has been researching and answering garden questions since 1995.

Visit 'Keane Gardener' blog at: keanegardener.blogspot.com

now their main competition for the apple will be Starlings that comes in flocks for this fresh fruit snack and of course squirrels.

Information gathered from The Birders handbook, Ehrlich, Doblin & Wheye, Smithsonian and National Geographic.

Happy New Year,

James

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RAHWAY ELKS SPECIAL CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

Submitted by Kristina Petti, SCC Chair

On Saturday, December 9th, the Rahway Elks' Special Childrens Committee hosted the annual Christmas Party in the lodge hall. We had over 70 people in attendance with 30 special needs students receiving gifts and siblings receiving goodie bags.

This event was made possible by the fundraising of the lodge and a grant from the Elks National Foundation. Due to the grant, we had to purchase gifts instead of gift cards, as we usually do. Members Doreen Duffy and Kristina Petti, went gift shopping, using the recommendations of the family members who filled out the registration form. Then members, Kristina, Doreen, Karen, Lori, and Robyn held to wrap gifts that following Tuesday. Our members were so integral in the entire process leading up to the party and the day of! At the party we had music by DJ Mike, crafts, games, elves, gifts, santa,

food, and ice cream! So much for our kiddos to see and do.

A HUGE shoutout has to go the Mr. John Samsel for donating ice cream for the party from his So Delicious ICE Cream truck! He supplied ice cream for over 80 people in total that day at absolutely no cost to our lodge or the guests of the party! It is community members like him who make such an enormous impact on our kids. The party was a huge hit and so many familiar faces attended! Liam Donovan, the Area 4 ambassador, and his family were in attendance too!

If you are interested in learning more about our organization or becoming a member please visit our website rahwayelks.org and follow us on Facebook: Rahway Elks #1075. To become a member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks you must be 21 or over, an American citizen, and believe in God. May God bless all of you during this holiday season!





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