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## STUDENT ORATORS IN AMER LEGION CONTEST CELEBRATED

### Township of Union Public Schools

Township of Union Public Schools (TUPS) proudly announces the results of the first round of the Union American Legion Post 35 Oratorical Contest at Union High School (UHS), where students showcased their public speaking prowess and knowledge of the U.S. Constitution this past Saturday. Morgan Covington, a UHS senior, earned 1st Place and advances to the next level of competition. Kanoa Miguel, a freshman, took 2nd Place with a \$75 award, while Valerie Okonofua, a junior, secured 3rd Place with \$50.

The first round featured five talented participants: Valerie Okonofua, Kanoa Miguel, Dominic Excellent, Morgan Covington, and Jerry Germain, all competed Saturday with confidence and purpose. Recognized as the most rigorous academic competition in the United States and approaching its century mark since 1938, the American Legion's National Oratorical Contest empowers high school students to explore constitutional principles, build leadership and public speaking skills, and compete for scholarships.

UHS teachers Sandra Mangarella and Jon Tummillo coordinated the event with Union American Legion Post 35, upholding this tradition. Mangarella stated: "Public speaking is a difficult, if not impossible, task for most people. We are very proud of UHS students who push themselves to do this. Now Jon and I are going to prepare Morgan for the next level of the competition. We have had three state champions and have been to nationals three times as well. We are hoping that UHS will have a national champion soon with all of the talent we have here." All participants deserve applause for their hard work and passion.



Courtesy Photo

TUPS remains committed to programs that prepare students as informed leaders. For more information, contact [smangarella@tups.org](mailto:smangarella@tups.org) or [jtummillo@tups.org](mailto:jtummillo@tups.org). The mission of the Township of Union Public Schools (TUPS) is to empower and inspire Every Student, Every Day. By providing accessible, tailored learning opportunities and robust support systems, all students will reach their full potential.

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Do you have a community service that you need help publicizing? Did you or someone you know accomplish something amazing? We are interested in hearing about your latest achievement (honor, award, etc.), send us your news! Email: [editor@rennamedia.com](mailto:editor@rennamedia.com)

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- Feb 1: Montclair Art Museum, Montclair
- Feb 7: Livingston YMCA, Livingston
- Feb 21: Morris Museum, Morristown
- Feb 22: Ridgewood Community Center
- Feb 28: Menlo Park Mall, Edison

all fairs 12-3pm



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# UNION PUBLIC SCHOOLS HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2026

## Township of Union Public Schools

The Township of Union Public Schools, together with the TUPS Hall of Fame Committee, proudly announces the Hall of Fame Class of 2026. This distinguished group of graduates, educators, and community leaders represents decades of excellence, innovation, and service that continue to inspire the Union community.

### TUPS HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2026 INDUCTEES HONOREES WHOSE LEGACY LIVES ON:

*Alphabetized by last name:*

**Michael T. Bono**, a proud 1959 graduate of Union High School, dedicated his life to serving the Township of Union. His public service was extensive and deeply impactful. He served as a Union Board of Education member, Township Committee member, Police Commissioner, and ultimately the 46th Mayor of Union.

**Grace Durling** was the first and longest-serving Principal of Union High School. A pioneering educational leader, she advocated for high standards, equal opportunity, and strong school culture. Under her leadership, Union High School experienced significant growth and lasting academic improvements.

**Samuel Fortunato** served as Principal of Union High School and was known for his leadership, fairness, and commitment to students. His career also extended to coaching at Seton Hall Prep, where he influenced young athletes through mentorship and discipline. Fortunato created an environment built on respect, academic focus, and community pride.

**Dr. Donald Ralph Marangi** was a renowned pediatric electrocardiologist whose expertise, compassion, and contributions to pediatric cardiac care touched countless families. A graduate of Union High School, he became a trusted physician known for his dedication to improving the lives of young patients.

**Colonel Lawrence Edward Roberts**, a member of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen, served the United States with heroism during World War II and the Vietnam War. A graduate of Union High School, he earned national respect as a decorated aviator, leader, and advocate for military equality. He received the Congressional Gold Medal for his service.

### RETIRED STAFF

**David Arminio** Known across the community as Mr. Union, David Arminio dedicated more than fifty years to the Township of Union through roles as educator, coach, Board of Education member, and civic leader. He inspired generations of students through his teaching, mentorship, and commitment to community involvement. His presence at school events and township activities makes him a beloved figure.

**Dr. Theodore Jakubowski**, better known as Teddy to those who know him well, is a respected educational leader and former Coach, Teacher, Vice Principal, Principal, and Superintendent from TUPS whose career has been defined by service, integrity, and a deep commitment to student success. Throughout his tenure, he played a key role in advancing academic excellence, supporting educators, and strengthening partnerships between schools and the broader community.

## ALUMNI

*Alphabetized by last name:*

**Christine A. Amalfe, Esq.**, is a prominent attorney and partner at a leading law firm specializing in labor and employment law. She is known for her advocacy on behalf of women in the workplace, her leadership in professional organizations, and her contributions to legal policy initiatives.

**Nija Charles** Grammy Award-winning songwriter and producer Nija Charles has become one of the most influential young creatives in the music industry. Her work includes collaborations with internationally recognized artists across multiple genres. Known for her distinctive sound and creative vision, she continues to inspire aspiring musicians and proudly represents Union at the highest levels of the music world.

**Douglas DeLuca** is an Emmy Award-winning producer, entrepreneur, and community advocate. Best known for his work as a co-executive producer of Jimmy Kimmel Live, he has built a successful career in entertainment and philanthropy. His dedication to supporting charitable causes and local communities reflects the values he carried from his time at Union High School.

**Elizabeth Duffy** is a Metronics Engineer with NASA, where she played a key role in developing advanced systems that support cutting-edge aerospace exploration. Her work contributes to missions that push the boundaries of science and engineering, inspiring the next generation of STEM leaders.

**Steven Edwards** is a distinguished professional known for leadership, community involvement, and contributions to his field. He currently serves as President of the New Jersey Hall of Fame and remains connected to Union through volunteer initiatives and programs that support youth development and academic growth.

**The Honorable Glenn A. Grant** is a distinguished Union High School alumnus whose career in public service and the judiciary reflects a lifelong commitment to justice, leadership, and community. He served as the Acting Administrative Director of the New Jersey Courts, overseeing the operations of one of the nation's largest state court systems and playing a critical role in advancing access, efficiency, and fairness within the judicial process. Widely respected for his integrity and thoughtful leadership, Grant's work has had a lasting impact on the legal system across New Jersey. His professional accomplishments and dedication to public service exemplify the values instilled at Union High School and continue to inspire future generations.

**Dr. Michael Lodato** is a leading molecular biologist and assistant professor at UMass Chan known for his groundbreaking research on somatic mutations in the human brain. A recipient of the NIH Director's New Innovator Award, his work is advancing understanding of aging and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. His research continues to shape the future of brain science and medical discovery.

**Dr. Andrew Meltzoff** is a world-renowned developmental psychologist and co-director of the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences (I-LABS). His pioneering research on infant learning, brain development, and social behavior has influenced educational practice and policy worldwide.

**Dr. Amy Simon** is an internationally recognized Senior Scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and a leading expert in planetary atmospheres. Her research has contributed to major NASA missions, including the Hubble Space Telescope and the James Webb Space Telescope, and advanced scientific understanding of planetary systems across the solar system. Her achievements continue to inspire students to pursue careers in science, engineering, and exploration.

**Linda Simensky** is a groundbreaking leader in animation and children's media, with influential roles at Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and PBS Kids. Her work has shaped iconic programming and driven innovation in educational storytelling and creative development for children worldwide. Simensky continues to give back by returning to Union High School to share her experiences with current students, offering insight, encouragement, and inspiration.

### COMMUNITY LEADERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

**Ronald Manzella** is a respected community advocate whose decades of service and dedication to supporting students and families have had a profoundly positive impact on the Township of Union. He served as a member of the local Board of Education and spent 17 years as the Township's Business Administrator, playing a key role in strengthening township operations and community partnerships.

Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony The Hall of Fame Class of 2026 will be formally celebrated on May 7, 2026, at the DMK Theater, located inside the Union Public Library. The ceremony will begin at 6:00 p.m. Additional event details, including program information and guest details, will be shared soon. We look forward to welcoming families, graduates, staff, students, and community members to honor this outstanding group of inductees.

Statement from District Leadership Quote from Dr. Gerry Benaquista, Superintendent of Schools: "The Class of 2026 highlights the extraordinary people who make Union a place of pride and excellence," said Superintendent Dr. Gerry Benaquista. We are excited to bring the TUPS Hall of Fame back after its return since the early 2000s. These inductees remind us of what is possible when talent, service, and perseverance come together, and their legacies continue to inspire our students every day."

Quote from Ron Zieser, President of the TUPS Hall of Fame: "We are proud to bring the Hall of Fame back to the Township of Union Public Schools under the leadership of Dr. Benaquista. The Class of 2026 represents excellence in every sense, and their achievements, character, and service have strengthened the foundation of our schools and our community. Their stories continue to inspire our students, our families, and all who call Union home."

## FEBRUARY EVENTS AT THE UNION PUBLIC LIBRARY

Adult Services(908)-851-5450 extension 3 • Vauxhall Branch at (908)-851-5451 • [uplnj.org](http://uplnj.org)

Main Library at 1980 Morris Avenue • Vauxhall Branch at 123 Hilton Ave.

### **Think Before You Share: Making Sense of the Media (Main Library)**

*Mon. February 2nd @ 6:00 pm*

Today, digital news coverage is widespread and accepted and many of us use digital sources or even social media to get our news. Join journalist Kim Predham for a discussion about how to spot “fake news,” find reliable sources for information online and think critically about the content you see posted on social media.

### **Black Panthers: A Film & Community Discussion (Vauxhall Branch Library)**

*Mon. February 2nd @ 6:00 pm*

The Black Panthers were a black power political organization founded by college students Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in 1966 in Oakland, California. The organization's aims were to serve oppressed people and fight injustice.

Please join us as we watch a documentary on the story of a pivotal movement that gave rise to a new revolutionary culture in America. A community discussion will follow afterward.

### **The Power of HBCU's w/ Dr. Levon T. Esters (Virtual on Zoom)**

*Wed. February 4th @ 6:00 pm*

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) play a pivotal role in promoting social and economic mobility for African Americans and in mentoring the next generation of Black leaders. Dr. Levon t Esters, author and Dean of Penn State Graduate School, will discuss the remarkable impact and contributions of these significant institutions.

### **The Harlem Hellfighters: A Film & Community Discussion (Vauxhall Library)**

*Sat. February 7th @ 1:00 pm*

The Harlem Hellfighters were a celebrated African American infantry unit in World War I. They gained fame for their combat prowess and resilience, spending more time in continuous front-line service than any other American unit. Please join us for a film on these brave men and a community discussion afterward.

### **Adult Sew It! Workshop (Main Library)**

*Sat. February 7th @ 2:00 pm*

Stop in to learn a whole new technique or pattern with Ellen Brown, instructor and owner of Sew It! You'll learn to use a sewing machine and create a unique new pattern. All supplies and equipment are provided. No previous sewing experience required. Come practice your sewing, or learn a whole new craft!

### **The Tuskegee Airmen - America's First Black Pilots (Vauxhall Branch Library)**

*Mon. February 9th @ 6:00 pm*

The Tuskegee Airmen were a group of primarily Africa-American military pilots and airmen who fought in World War II. They were the first African-American military aviators in the U.S. armed forces. The presentation will cover the history of the formation of the Tuskegee Airmen, the unit's wartime accomplishments.

### **Zentangle Workshop (Vauxhall Branch Library)**

*Tues. February 10th @ 6:00 pm*

In a 90 minute color Zentangle class with Mimi, you will explore meditative drawing with the use of different color options, such as: gel pens, toned papers colored pencils, watercolors, and charcoal pencils to give vibrancy and 'pops' of color to your Zentangle creations. Registration is limited.

### **Adult Board Game Night (Vauxhall Branch Library)**

*Wed. February 11th @ 6:00 pm*

Are you a board game enthusiast? Do you want to meet new people? Join us as we play classic board games for a fun and relaxing night.

### **The Beauty of Blackness: A Film & Community Discussion (Vauxhall Branch Library)**

*Sat. February 14th @ 1:00 pm*

In 1973, Eunice Johnson, the founder of Ebony and Jet, noticed a problem: Black women had to mix their own foundation in order to find a color that matched their skin. To tackle the problem, Johnson launched Fashion Fair, the first national cosmetics company that focused entirely on Black women. A discussion will follow after the film

### **Build Your Balance (Main Library)**

*Wed. February 18th @ 10:30 am*

It's more important than ever to avoid the risks of falling as we age. Through gentle strength, exercises, and stepping strategies, learn to keep your body balanced in different situations.

### **Sankofa: Black History is World History w/ Emmanuel Kulu (Virtual on Zoom)**

*Wed. February 18th @ 6:00 pm*

Journey with African Historian Emmanuel Kulu, Jr. as he embarks on uncovering the untold truth of Black History and its connection with the origin of all Humanity. Join us for this enlightening talk that will expand our community knowledge in DEI, Cultural awareness, and African Historical Re-awareness.

### **Vauxhall Vinyl Music Club: Marvin Gaye's What's Going On (Vauxhall Library)**

*Sat. February 21st @ 1:00 pm*

Do you collect records? Are you an avid music fan? Please join us for our inaugural first meeting of the Vauxhall Vinyl Music Club. Not only will we play the music, but we will go in depth on important tracks and the making of an album. February's selection will be Marvin Gaye's rallying cry for peace on Motown Records What's Going On.

### **The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Main Library)**

*Mon. February 23rd @ 6:00 pm*

Take a journey through history as we explore Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's life and legacy, beyond his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech. Come learn about his childhood, education, mentors and influences, as well as the most important events of his career in activism, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Greensboro Sit-In, and Selma to Montgomery March.

### **Union Public Library's Silent Book Club (Main Library)**

*Mon. February 23rd @ 6:00 pm*

Union Public Library's Silent Book Club. There's no assigned reading. All readers are welcome to join in, from fiction and non-fiction to ebooks and more! Bring your own book and join us as we read in quiet camaraderie.

### **Selection Bias: How the Baseball Hall of Fame Botched the Election of Negro Leaguers (Hybrid: Vauxhall Library & Zoom)**

*Mon. February 23rd @ 6:00 pm*

The Baseball Writers Association of America rules for election to the Baseball Hall of Fame are tantamount to a color line reminiscent of the National Association of Baseball Players ban of 1867. Moreover, BBWAA and Hall of Fame electors exploited shoddy record keeping to stonewall and deny segregation era players' election. Please join us as baseball enthusiast, David Shuffler, talks about this issue and shares with attendees the speech he did on the subject at the Baseball Hall of Fame.

### **ESL Conversation Group (Main Library)**

*Tues. February 24th @ 5:30 pm*

English is a major barrier to health for many within our community. This ESL-adjacent program offers monthly, 2-hour group sessions to support English speaking, writing, and listening skills. While loosely structured, sessions are informal and use ESL books, games, audio lessons, and role play to build proficiency with the English language.

### **Sweet Potato Pies w/ Chef Lamont Williams (Vauxhall Branch Library)**

*Sat. February 28th @ 1:00pm*

The sweet potato pie is a recipe that was born from a place of strength, resilience, and determination. Please join us as Newark chef, Lamont Williams of Yums for the Soul, demonstrates how to prepare this important dessert of cultural significance

### **Meditation (Virtual on Zoom)**

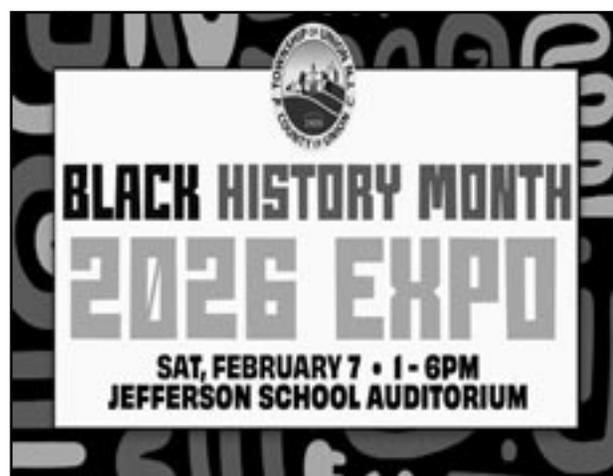
*Mondays @ 6:30 pm*

Join Bindu Bhatt for any of her virtual evening meditation sessions. No prior experience is necessary. Bindu has practiced meditation for over 30 years and wants to share her insight.

### **Chair Yoga (Main Library)**

*Tuesdays in February @ 9:15 am*

Take a deep breath with friends and stretch! From beginners to professionals, join this popular class as a weekly series. Presented by the Gateway Family YMCA. Space is limited, please register to secure your chair!



# JACKLYN CASSANDRA

We Are Proud Of   
UHS Class of 2026



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*NEXT STOP:*

INTEGRATED BIOLOGY/PRE-MED TRACK

## SENIOR SPOTLIGHT JACKLYN CASSANDRA TO ATTEND HARVARD

Source: Facebook:

Township of Union Public Schools

Township of Union Public Schools

We're excited to kick off our Senior Spotlight by celebrating Jacklyn Cassandra, whose hard work, dedication, and commitment have earned her a spot at Harvard University this fall.

Jacklyn's achievement is a reflection of years of perseverance and academic excellence, and we couldn't be prouder to celebrate this incredible milestone with our TUPS community. This is just the first of many amazing senior stories we look forward to sharing on our Facebook page: Township of Union Public Schools

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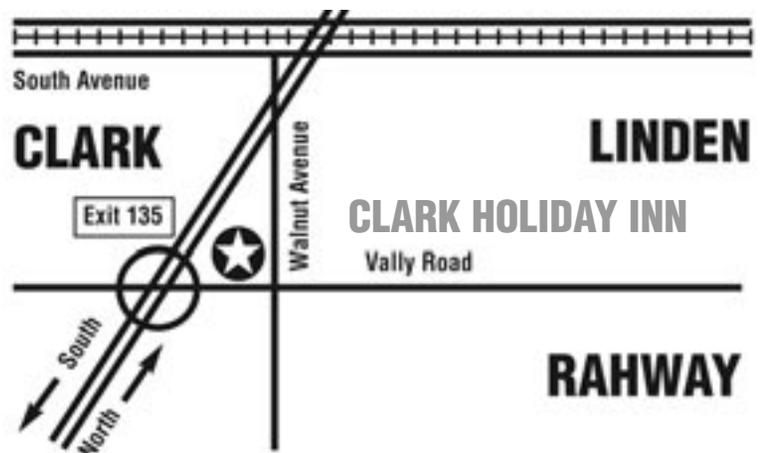


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- Pocket Watches

**BUYING ALL DIAMONDS**

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**EstatesRoadshow.com**

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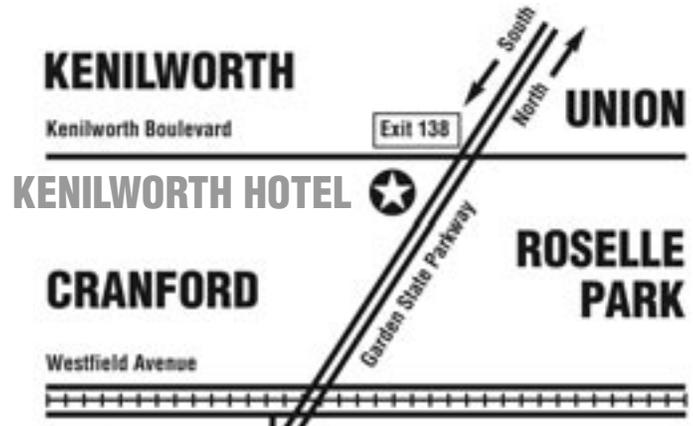


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## **FEBRUARY 2025 SHOW @ KENILWORTH HOTEL!!**

**FEB 23RD TO 27TH 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**



**60 S 31st Street, Kenilworth, NJ**

**No Appointment Necessary. • FREE Appraisals • FREE Admission**  
**Speak to the company's owner: Marshall Smoller: 609-781-6559**

# ELKS DELIVERED BASKETS FOR THE THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS

Using an Elks National Beacon Grant, Union Elks Lodge delivered baskets for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays to 25 families in Union and Kenilworth. We also delivered food to the Connecticut Farms Food Pantry. The Union Elks Lodge, located at 281 Chestnut St. in Union, draws members from Union and surrounding towns.

## FIRST ANNUAL TRICKY TRAY

Our first annual Tricky Tray event will be held on March 20th. It is open to the public. Call Brenda for tickets and more information 908-305-4110.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE) is an American fraternal organization based around charity and community service.

Our efforts are focused on special needs children and veterans. NJ Elks are compassionate, touching lives, changing tomorrows. The BPOE is 100% non-profit and relies on grants or private and public fundraisers.

For more information about membership email [unionsec1583@gmail.com](mailto:unionsec1583@gmail.com), or call 908-686-1583.



## ELKS CLUB TRICKY TRAY SET FOR MAR 20

Our first annual Tricky Tray event will be held on March 20th. It is open to the public.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE) is an American fraternal organization based around charity and community service. Our efforts are focused on special needs children and veterans. NJ Elks are compassionate, touching lives, changing tomorrows. The BPOE is 100% non-profit and relies on grants or private and public fundraisers to obtain the funds for our charitable works.

Anyone interested in donating prizes, purchasing tickets or reserving a table can call Brenda at 908-305-4110.

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# FIRST ANNUAL Tricky Tray

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## YOU ARE INVITED TO A WEDDING AT CDC THEATRE

A modern musical farce with heart, *It Shoulda Been You*, at CDC Theatre, 78 Winans Ave in Cranford, NJ, invites you to a wedding day where nothing goes as planned. Chaos, secrets, and laughs abound as two families, one Jewish, one Catholic, collide in a whirlwind of love, identity, and unexpected twists. Her mother is a force of nature. His mother is a tempest in a cocktail shaker. And, when the bride's ex-boyfriend crashes the party, the perfect wedding

starts to unravel. It's up to the bride's sister to turn a tangled mess into happily ever after in this musical comedy for anyone who has ever had parents.

This fast-paced ensemble comedy celebrates acceptance, forgiveness, and the true meaning of family. At the Steinberg wedding, nothing is what it seems; religions collide, Machiavellian plots are revealed, promises are broken, secrets are exposed and hope springs from the most unlikely

of places. The charming, funny musical, *It Shoulda Been You*, invites you to a wedding day that you'll never forget, with blushing brides, nervous grooms, overbearing moms, unexpected guests and plenty of crazy twists and turns. Anything that can go wrong does, and love pops up in mysterious places.

Performances are Fridays and Saturdays from February 13th- 28th at 8pm, and Sundays February 22 and March 1 at 2pm.

CDC Theatre is happy to announce that as part of a new pilot program, the February 22nd matinee performance will be ASL interpreted. For tickets and more details, visit [cdctheatre.org](http://cdctheatre.org).


**CDC Theatre**     78 Winans Ave. Cranford, NJ



**Fri+Sat Feb.13-28 8pm / Sun. Mar 1 2pm/ Sun. Feb.22 2pm**  
**ASL Interpreted Perf.**

Made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

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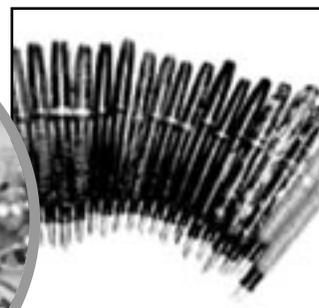
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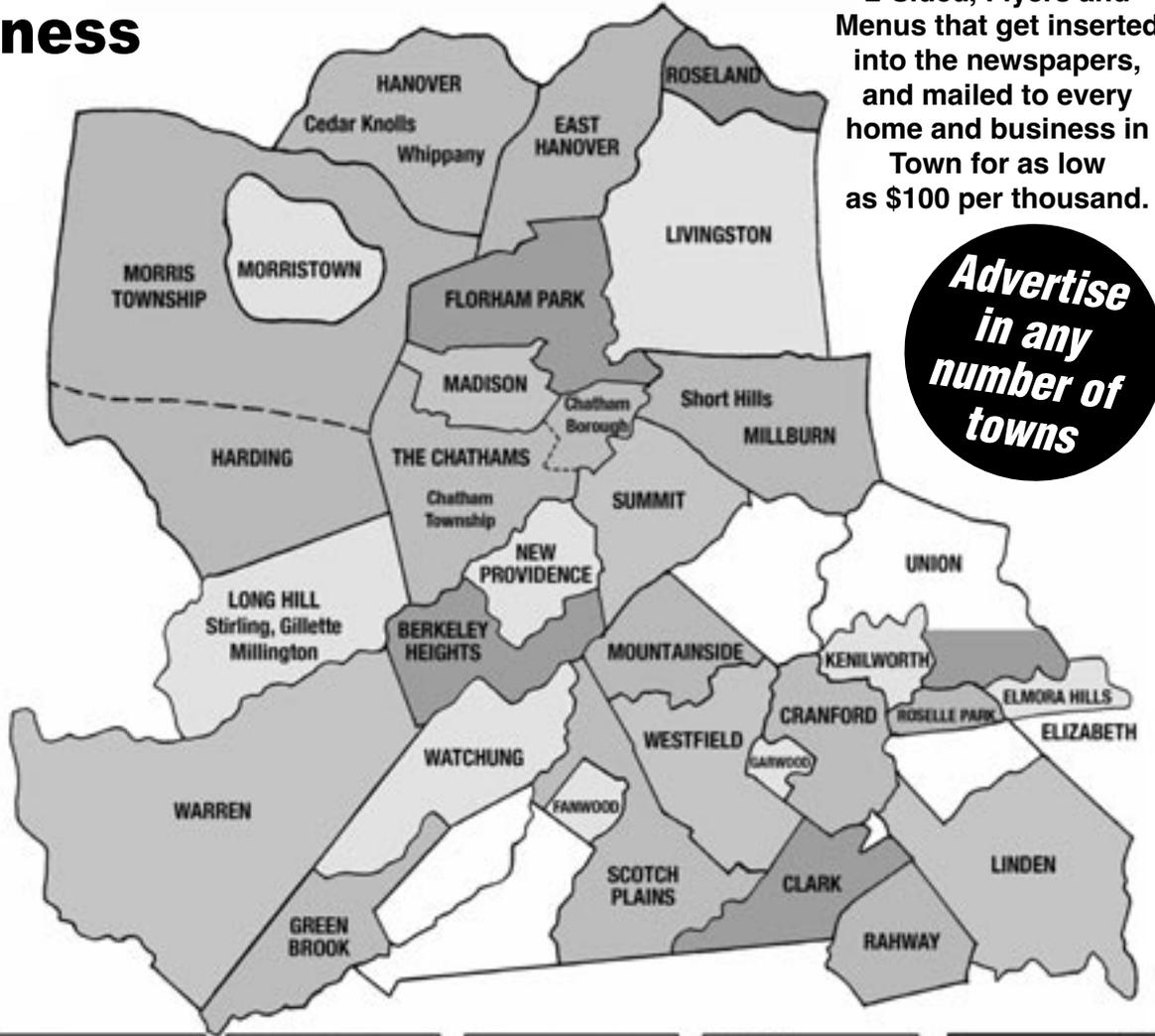
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# SHARP-SHINNED HAWK RELEASED BACK TO WILD

This feisty Sharp-shinned Hawk was admitted on 12/22 after being found in a yard in Warren following a window strike. On intake, the hawk had bloody nares and mouth, consistent with head trauma often seen after collisions. The nares are a bird's nostrils, located near the base of the beak, and bleeding there often points to head or facial trauma from collisions.

With supportive care and time to heal, this "Sharpie" as we call them, made great progress and was moved to an outside flight cage on 12/28/25. After proving strong, steady flight and good awareness, the hawk was successfully released back to the wild on 1/2/2026.

Sharp-shinned Hawks are incredibly fast and agile forest hunters, built to weave through dense trees while chasing small birds. That same speed and focus, however, can make them especially vulnerable to window strikes when reflective

glass looks like open sky or habitat.

Remember, small changes matter, adding window decals is a simple way to help protect avian wildlife.

### ABOUT THE RAPTOR TRUST

The Raptor Trust is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located at 1390 White Bridge Rd., Millington, NJ. They provide free care and assistance to injured, sick, or orphaned wild birds. They offer educational programs to the public about wild birds, especially birds of prey. They strive to provide a human example for others. For more information, or to make a donation visit [info@theraptortrust.org](mailto:info@theraptortrust.org). To report an injured bird call 908-647-2353.

### RAPTOR TRUST SUMMER SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Each year from mid-May through August, The Raptor Trust receive hundreds of injured, orphaned, or displaced nestling and fledgling



songbirds found by citizens. We see this time as a perfect opportunity to provide experience and education to students who wish to learn about wildlife care and rehabilitation.

**APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY FEB 6TH, 2026.**

To apply, please submit an application, resume, and cover letter through our website at [theraptortrust.org/summer-scholars-program](http://theraptortrust.org/summer-scholars-program). A selection of 2-3 references whom we may contact is optional.

If you have any questions, please contact Amanda Cannizzo at [acannizzo@theraptortrust.org](mailto:acannizzo@theraptortrust.org). If you are interested, Visit [theraptortrust.org](http://theraptortrust.org) or email [volunteers@theraptortrust.org](mailto:volunteers@theraptortrust.org)

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