

CRANFORD MONTHLY NJ

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FOLLOW THE PARADE TO THE CEREMONY

Submitted by Janet Cymbaluk Ashnault, Gold Star Family Member, Cranford 86 Project and Memorial Day Parade Committee Member.

This Memorial Day we invite every grateful resident to "Follow the Parade to the Ceremony" to honor America's fallen military. Your presence there is an outward show of support to the Gold Star Families in attendance.

Since 1921, Memorial Day in Cranford has given generations of residents, as either participants or attendees, the opportunity to show respect to our fallen military on the one day of the year set aside for this very important observance. The VFW color guard leads an orderly procession of our veterans, first responders, bands, civic groups, scouts, sports teams and more, in our yearly Memorial Day Parade, as it meanders through the streets of the township. The parade ends at our Memorial Park on Springfield Avenue, and this is where the most meaningful part of the day's events occurs.

The current Memorial Day Ceremony contains all the traditional features which long-time residents remember from their youth, the precision movements of the honor guard, the laying of the wreaths, the poignancy of the playing of "Taps" and the roll call of Cranford's fallen. The soothing but powerful selections sung by Cranford High School's Madrigal Ensemble and the high school band's uplifting and patriotic instrumentals punctuate the program.

A new element to the morning, added in recent years, is the presence of Gold Star family members from out-of-town. The families which will be highlighted this year are: The family of 2nd Lt. Bruce Nostrand which will be joining us from Pennsylvania and New Jersey.



(above) Sixteen members of 2nd Lt. Robert Tuttle's family marched in our parade. Everyone got a chance to hold Uncle Robert's flag.

From South Carolina, we will welcome the daughter of Captain Joe Whelan, Charlotte Whelan Stilwell. She will be accompanied by her immediate family, Charlotte was only 18 months old when her father died in Vietnam.

Also in attendance, will be many other members of Cranford's Gold Star Families who faithfully choose to return and spend this solemn occasion with us in Memorial Park. They can be easily identified as they will all be wearing buttons with their loved one's image. Behind the scenes, the local families of Jimmy Roberts (WWII), Eugene McGarry (WWII) and Ray Ashnault (Vietnam) are always there to lend a hand with Memorial Day preparations, placing banners in the park, assembling flags and helping out wherever needed.

Parade steps off from the Community Center on Walnut Avenue at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, May 25, 2026. It turns left on North Avenue, follows Eastman Street to Central Avenue, and on to the park. Follow the Parade to the Ceremony which takes place between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. at Memorial Park on Springfield Avenue.

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(above, left) Katherine Steers (with Bruce) listens to the story of her uncle who she never knew. (above, right) Richard and Kenneth Mager, sons of WWII infantryman Pvt. Steven Mager. Richard was an infant and Kenneth was not yet born when their father died in Europe, they both are retired teachers. They wore their new Cranford 86 T-shirts as they posed for a proud picture under their father's street banner.



Photo by Andrew Feldman.

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EXPLORATION MERIT BADGE EVENT

CRANFORD MONTHLY NJ

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Scout AJ Scorese, Troop 80 Cranford

Many Scout troops from the Patriot Path Council attended an Exploration Merit Badge event with about 145 Scouts in attendance. The event, held on March 26, 2026, was hosted by The Explorers Club. The Explorers Club is a well-known organization where explorers, scientists, and adventurers share discoveries and support exploration around the world. Being there felt exciting and made the event feel important from the start.

We heard directly from real explorers who shared their experiences, research, and adventures. Listening to them made exploration feel real and showed that there are many different ways Scouts can explore the world.

Myself, and Scout Amelia from Troop 26G spoke about our own Scout explorations in caving and scuba diving. We described team and patrol training in New York State for caving, along with local SCUBA training and check-out dives in Florida springs to earn our SCUBA Merit Badge and dive certification. We emphasized the importance of teamwork, training and how we earned the Exploration Merit Badge.

Steven Schwankert presented on using AI for exploration and research. Benjamin Ringe spoke about documenting a 600+ mile sailboat race and highlighted teamwork. Greg Morrissey shared Scout exploration stories, including mapping a canoe route from Canada to New York City. Roberta Kravette discussed citizen science and a

wolf study. Jeff Bozanic spoke about Scout expeditions, including a scout trip to Antarctica.

The event was unforgettable and inspiring. We are left motivated by the many ways people explore—through science, sailing, canoeing, wildlife research, and travel to remote places. It showed us that exploration is still happening today and that Scouts can be part of it.

Troop 80 is chartered by the First Presbyterian Church of Cranford, which is located at 11 Springfield Ave. The troop meets on Mondays from 7:30-8:30 p.m. and organizes monthly camping and hiking trips for the weekends. If you have an interest in learning more about Scouting, please come by, or email us at troop80registrar@gmail.com.



(above) Scouts from Troop 80 Cranford attended a Exploration Merit Badge event.

Courtesy Photo

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GRAND MARSHALL - CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4 GUINEVERE PHERSON

Cranford VFW Post #335 has announced that NJ Army National Guard Assault Helicopter Pilot, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Guinevere Pherson has been chosen to be this year's Cranford Memorial Day Parade Grand Marshall. A

Cranford resident, a member of the National Guard since 1997, Chief Warrant Officer Pherson is a lifetime member of the Cranford VFW as well.

"It is quite an honor to name Chief Warrant Officer Pherson as the Grand Marshall for our 2026 Parade. She being our first female Grand Marshall in memory, is the perfect representative for our town and Post. Our membership is so proud of her," VFW Post Commander Michael Gregory exclaimed.

Pherson has quite a detailed history to her enlistment. She was deployed not once but twice to Iraq, 2004-2005 and 2009-2010, serving as a

Blackhawk Pilot, which is a heavily armed attack-oriented helicopter. Also, during her service to our country, she saw duty in Bosnia, Panama and Okinawa as well. She has been awarded the Air Medal twice, the Army Achievement Medal twice, the Iraqi Campaign with the Campaign Star, the NATO Medal and many other deserving awards.

The Chief Warrant Officer currently serves as an instructor pilot with the NJ National Guard and works full time as a Defense Department Pilot as well. She has deep roots in Cranford as her parents both grow up in town. "We have always been proud 'Southsiders' where I currently live with my son, Sean", Pherson said. "I do so much look forward to our parade", she added, "it is such a great day for our hometown!"

MEMORIAL DAY PARADE

Cranford's Memorial Day Parade will be held on Monday, May 25th, and the lineup for the parade begins at 8:30 a.m. at the town's Community Center with the march commencing at 9:00 a.m. The traditional Memorial Day Ceremony will be held at the parade's end at Memorial Park on Springfield Avenue between Riverside Drive and Central Avenue at approximately 10:00 a.m. Should there be inclement weather the Memorial Service only, will be held inside the Community Center at 10:00 a.m.



(above) Cranford resident Guinevere Pherson, NJ Army National Guard Assault Helicopter Pilot, Chief Warrant Officer 4, is the 2026 Cranford Memorial Day Parade Grand Marshall.

Courtesy Photo





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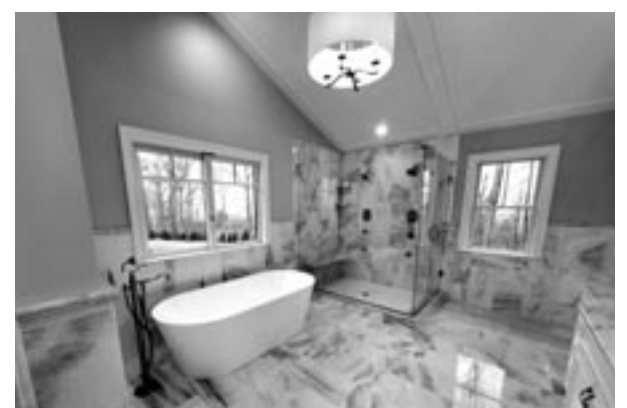
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2026 RELAY FOR LIFE AT ORANGE AVENUE SCHOOL - JUNE 5

Submitted by Kristen Shave

Relay for Life is an annual fundraising event for the American Cancer Society. Cranfordians, as a town, Relay for our loved ones, our communities, and our ultimate goal: a world without cancer.

Save the date! This year's Relay for Life will take place on Friday, June 5th, at Orange Avenue School.

The event will officially begin at 6 p.m. with inspiring speeches from community members, caregivers, and survivors sharing their journeys with cancer.

Following the opening ceremony, the first survivor lap will honor those who have battled cancer. From there, the night will continue with activities such as Zumba classes, themed laps, performances from Cranford High School's performing arts programs, and much more!

Throughout the night, teams take turns walking to symbolize that cancer never sleeps - and neither does the fight against it.

Funds raised through Relay for Life support the American Cancer Society and its mission to improve the lives of people with cancer and their families. Donations help fund groundbreaking

cancer research, provide free resources such as rides to treatment and lodging for patients, offer 24/7 support services, along with education and prevention efforts in communities across the country.

More than just a fundraiser, Relay for Life is a powerful reminder of the strength of community and the impact we can make when we come together for a cause that affects so many.

This year's theme is Illuminate the Night! Dress in neon, glow in the dark, and decorate with all things bright to help us light up the night.

The event concludes at midnight, but participants are welcome to join at any point throughout the evening.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Relay for Life's fundraising efforts are done primarily through teams, and the good news is, anyone can start one! Reach out to your friends, family, classmates, or teammates. Even if they can't attend the event in person, their donations

will still count towards your team's total.

On the night of Relay, teams will set up tents and lawn chairs along the perimeter of the track to participate and show support throughout the evening.

If creating or joining a team isn't for you, no worries! You can still make donations to the American Cancer Society through Cranford's Relay for Life link (see: right).

Last year, Cranford was awarded 3rd place in the state for fundraising over \$80,000 for the American Cancer Society! Let's keep the momentum going and set a new record this year - every step, every cheer, every dollar makes a difference. Let's do this, Cranford!

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SEEKING CHS CLASS OF 1976 FOR 50TH REUNION

This year, as our country looks to celebrate 250 years as the United States, the CHS Class of 1976 is holding its 50th reunion, on Friday, October 23, 2026, at the Westwood in Garwood. The reunion committee is actively looking to find classmates to invite to the reunion. If you are a CHS Class of 76 graduate, or know someone who is, please contact Vicky Smith Goski at vickygoski5295@gmail.com or Jana Polsky Deneroff at jana.polsky@yahoo.com.

CRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL 1976 GRADUATED DURING THE BICENTENNIAL

It was 1976, and the township of Cranford was celebrating the Bicentennial of our country.

There was a full-size sculpture of a pipe and drum trio from the Continental Army, placed in the rotunda of Cranford High School.

The Board of Ed decided that for graduation, high school seniors would be given red, white and blue tassels for their graduation cap, instead of the traditional blue and gold, Cranford colors. There was immediate push back from the student body. Petitions were circulated. Letters from students and parents were sent. But to no avail. The tassels would be red, white and blue to honor the country in the year of its bicentennial.

As it turned out, blue and gold tassels were given to the students as well, but not until after commencement, so the red, white and blue would not be swapped out for the traditional blue and gold.



(above) A sculpture of a pipe and drum trio from the Continental Army, was placed in the rotunda of Cranford High School in 1976.

Courtesy Photo

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF COMING IN MAY

The final production of the 107th season at CDC Theatre in Cranford will be the wonderful musical Fiddler On The Roof. The multi-award-winning tale of Tevye the Dairyman and his family's struggles in a changing Russia is a true musical theatre "tradition."

Premiering on Broadway in 1964, it became one of the longest-running shows of its time. Featuring memorable songs like "Tradition," "If I Were A Rich Man" and "Sunrise, Sunset," this beloved work explores the universal human struggles of tradition and change, family love, generational conflict and displacement and migration. Using strong cultural storytelling to blend serious social issues with music and humor, Fiddler on the Roof is a poignant exploration of family, community, and the enduring human spirit in the face of adversity.

Director Emma Taylor Schwartz, a Cranford native, shared "This is my fifth production of Fiddler, and I only love it more and more each time. You could call me a superfan. What a gorgeous show that is both classic and contemporary, with nuance in every scene. It is a non-traditional love story, one that features romantic love, but also love of culture, love of community, love of family and love of identity. I've always resonated with the story and find that anyone of any background can find something to relate to. You don't have to be Jewish to connect with it on a deep level. If you have or had a parent, a child, a family, or a community,

you'll relate to these characters."

Continuing a new program at CDC Theatre, the final performance on May 17th will feature a talented quartet of ASL interpreters. ASL interpreters in theatre do more than translate dialogue; they bring the emotional and artistic essence of a performance to Deaf audiences, making live theatre a truly inclusive experience. While making the performance accessible to Deaf and hearing-impaired audiences they are also performers in their own right, contributing artistically to the performance and we are pleased to welcome them back to CDC Theatre.

The show will run from May 1st through the 17th with 8pm curtains on Fridays and Saturdays and 2pm matinees on Saturday the 9th and Sundays May 10th and 17th.

The company will be led by Larry Brustofski as Tevye and Elle Michaeli as his wife Golde. Their older daughters will be played by Gabrielle Traub (Tzeitel), Katherine Hope Stelma (Hodel), and Nina Randazzo (Chava). Mark Zebro Jr is Lazar Wolf, Bill Geltzeiler, Max Kopla and James Hahn will portray Motel, Perchik and Fyedka. Lori Travers and Rachel Love, Fruma Sarah and Grandma Tzeitel with Gloria Schnure taking the part of Yente.

Visit cdctheatre.org for more details and ticket information. These performances are made possible by funds from the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.



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I LOVE MY LIBRARIAN AWARD HONORS CHS CHRISTINE SZELUGA



(above) I Love My Librarian Award winner
Christine Szeluga

The American Library Association (ALA) has announced the 2026 winners of the annual I Love My Librarian Award including Christine Szeluga from Cranford High School. The highly-prestigious award recognizes the outstanding public service contributions of librarians working in public, school, college, community college or university libraries across the country. Christine, along with other honorees, will be formally celebrated at the I Love My Librarian Award Ceremony at the 2026 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago from June 25-29, 2026.

Christine Szeluga – THE HEART OF OUR SCHOOLS AWARD

Between overseeing the school’s newspaper and literary magazine and advising student council and podcast club, Christine Szeluga stays busy supporting the 1,200 students at Cranford High School in New Jersey. And under her leadership as the school’s librarian, the library has flourished as a dynamic hub for academic support and student engagement.

Since joining Cranford High School in 2019, Szeluga has transformed learning and engagement in the library, securing grant funding to support the addition of a makerspace, local history archive, and podcast studio—spaces that encourage students to explore new technologies, engage in creative projects, and develop digital skills. Her efforts to modernize the library have also increased circulation rates in the library by

300%.

In 2024, Szeluga spearheaded the Cranford Dixie Giants project, a local history initiative where students researched Cranford’s semi-professional, all-Black baseball team that played in the early 20th century. What began as a simple research project bloomed into a community-wide effort to honor the team and uncover its hidden history. Guided by Szeluga, students wrote articles and produced podcasts for the school’s news platform, raising awareness of the team’s historic legacy and laying the groundwork for a larger commemoration honoring their resilience and talent in the face of racial discrimination. The project was recognized nationally with the Roald Dahl’s Miss Honey Social Justice Award from the American Association of School Librarians in 2025.

“The library is the heart of our school community,” one of her nominators wrote, “and Mrs. Szeluga is at the center. As a leader in the school, she inspires students through her love of learning, and her infectious enthusiasm for reading often helps to see themselves as lifelong readers.”



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MEET CAPTAIN JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN, GREEN BERET, VIETNAM CONFLICT, ONE OF CRANFORD'S 86

Written by Janet Cymbaluk Ashnault. Research by Janet Cymbaluk Ashnault, Vic Bary and Don Sweeney.

Joseph Vincent Whelan was born on February 1, 1942 in Bayonne, N.J. He was the fourth child and only son of parents Joe and Lillian. The Whelans moved to Cranford two months after Joe's birth. Arriving in town at such a young age, Joe most definitely grew up as a "Cranford kid", in the family's home at 126 Makatom Drive. He attended St. Michael School before moving up to Cranford High School, from which he graduated in 1959.

Cranford High School alumni who knew Joe were eager to speak with us about him and we were bombarded with an array of adjectives which created such a pleasant description of their classmate. Mary Grace Grall Killmer, CHS '59, had one of the earliest memories. She was a neighbor to Joe in preschool days and stated that "Joe was kind and friendly, a true friend to all who were fortunate enough to know him".

Searching through the Cranford Chronicle archives gave us a picture of Joe's early years in Cranford. He was a member of Cub Pack 178 and at age ten, the future Cougar defenseman was awarded an "all-American day and night football" for selling subscriptions to the Chronicle. His presence was noted in athletics all throughout his young life in Cranford, beginning with Little League baseball and recreational basketball. In high school, Joe weighed in at 205 and was the heaviest player on the varsity football team. The Class of '59 Cougars had a slow start to their football season, but went on a winning streak for their last four games. In one of those wins it was noted that Whelan "sparkled" and not once, but twice broke through tackle to block the extra point. In the pre-Thanksgiving game analysis, Coach Grayson indicated that Joe Whelan was one of the players who was "expected to see a lot of action" in Cranford's traditional holiday game against Jefferson. The Cougars won this one, 14-2. We spoke with '59 football teammate, Dave Boyd, who remembered that Joe was "never



(above) We consider ourselves very fortunate when a family can produce an official military portrait. This is possibly the best image that we have had the honor to accept from a Gold Star Family.



(above) Joe and Dorothy dressed for a formal military affair. What a special event this must have been for this



(above) These two lovely ladies are Joe's girls, wife Dorothy and daughter Charlotte. Just 18 months old when her dad died in Vietnam, Charlotte has no real memories of him, and she depends on stories told to her by her mom, and others who knew Captain Joe. They live near each other in South Carolina.



without a smile". Joe Whelan lettered in football and golf and in May of '59 the Cranford Chronicle noted that as a golfer, he was currently undefeated in high school play.

JOE MAKES A DECISION

"Future plans undecided" is what it says under Joe Whelan's yearbook photo in the 1959 Golden C. But immediately after graduation, Joe made a choice and he joined the United States Army. In 1959, the Korean War was in the past, but instead, there existed a looming geopolitical tension between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies. We were in the midst of the Cold War. In Cranford, licensed public fallout shelters, affixed with distinctive yellow and black signs, were stocked with supplies and radiation detection devices. Periodic

air raid drills were conducted and compliance was expected throughout the township. In Joe's first army enlistment, he served at Thule (pronounced Too-lee) Air Base in Greenland, 700 miles above the Arctic Circle. Our military serving in this harsh, inhospitable locale, experienced temperatures that could plunge to minus 76 degrees Fahrenheit, 89 mile-an-hour winds, intense snowstorms, and months of total Arctic darkness. Midway over the top of the world between Moscow and Washington D.C., Thule had the ability to intercept bomber attacks from northeast approaches to America, and it played a key role in air defense against the Soviets during this time.

BACK TO CIVILIAN LIFE

In May of 1962, Joe Whelan completed his commitment to the army. He came home to Cranford and lived for a while in nearby Garwood. Joe found employment with the Elizabethtown Gas Company and his smiling face was once again seen around town as he renewed his high school friendships.

Sue O'Connor Kenny, CHS '60, entertained us with a great story of her connection to Joe. Throughout the 1960's, although you were old enough to enter military service, it was still against the law for anyone under the age of 21 to purchase an alcoholic beverage in New Jersey. That was not the case in nearby Staten Island, and many, many young adults from New Jersey, age 18-20, drove over the bridge to check out the New York City bar scene. Sue and her girlfriends did this, and immediately upon arrival began to worry, "What if someone we know sees us?"

(continued on page 12)



JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN
Joe . . . even-tempered . . . a nicer guy you couldn't meet . . . C.H.S. football player . . . will always remember the day he passed geometry . . . seen with Dick Safavy . . . future plans undecided.
Football 9, 12; Basketball 9; Baseball 9; Golf 11, 12.



Joe Whelan, Jim Kelly, Chris Hamlin, Mike Keller, Rich McFadden, Mr. Martin

(above) Classmate Chuck Johnson, CHS '59, told us that the description above was spot on, "a nicer guy you couldn't meet". Chuck added that Joe was polite, honest, fair and kind. Cookie Castaldo Williams, also CHS '59, called him a "special guy, pleasant to be around, a gentleman".

CAPTAIN JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN (continued from page 11)

Wouldn't you know it, but into the bar, walked Joe Whelan with his friend, Bob Kenny. Sue still remembers, when Joe spotted them, he walked over and with his hands on his hips and a big grin on his face, he said, "Well, well, well...what are you ladies doing here?" Sue said that they saw the guys later at the Cranford Diner, and that night, Bob asked her out on a date. Bob and Sue married in 1962 and Joe was a groomsman in their wedding. Sue described Joe as kind, caring, patriotic and protective. It is perhaps some of those qualities that led Joe to turn back to military life and re-enlist in the army.

OCS, AIRBORNE TRAINING AND BEYOND

1965 marked a turning point for U.S. involvement in what was happening in Vietnam. Up until now, we had only played an advisory role in the conflict. March of '65 brought boots on the ground and sustained bombing against North Vietnam. By mid-year, the U.S. would now find itself engaged in a full-scale war.

Joe Whelan's return to the army during this time led him to Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. To meet the growing needs of an escalating war, Joe and his fellow candidates would be fast-tracked through their training to lead a combat unit and be commissioned as second lieutenants. With Fort Sill as the U.S. Army's main field artillery center, training here concentrated on large, land-based, indirect fire weapons. The OCS program was demanding, rigid, and unapologetically harsh. After almost six months of training, Second Lieutenant Whelan graduated from OCS on August 8, 1966. Between 1965 and 1967, the number of officers graduating from Fort Sill, doubled, and then tripled in those three years, an ominous indication of where things were heading.

Training for our Cranford soldier continued. Joe traveled to Fort Benning in Georgia to earn his Parachutist Badge, silver wings encircling an open parachute, also known as "Jump Wings". The three weeks of jump training were both physically and mentally exhausting. By design, trainees were instilled with such intense instincts that veteran jumpers report, 60 years later, if they find themselves falling, they immediately assume the PLF (parachute landing fall) position before they hit the ground.

**"ONE-HUNDRED MEN THEY'LL TEST TODAY,
ONLY THREE WIN THE GREEN BERET."**

The above song lyric reflects the odds of a U.S. soldier becoming a member of the United States Army Special Forces, commonly referred to as Green Berets. At this time in Joe's military career he had the qualifications required to be considered for Special Forces, which included high scores on intelligence testing, the ability to meet the Army's highest physical fitness standards, and Jump Wings. A final step to eligibility was passing the "very strange" Special Forces Qualification Test, which was said to be reminiscent of an episode of the 1960's television show Mission: Impossible. The test consisted of "tape-recorded instructions, exotic scenarios, photos to study, then a series of questions offering only imperfect answers". As with every hurdle that the army had put before Joe Whelan, he cleared this one and was heading for his most demanding training experience yet, one which was designed to weed out all but the army's most elite fighting men.

Special Forces in Vietnam extended the reach of the American military into remote areas of the battlefield, including far behind enemy lines. The self-sufficient 12-man "A-Teams" used

unconventional warfare methods on missions regularly involving reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and the locating and surveillance of enemy camps. Their activities surrounding the Ho Chi Minh Trail disrupted the flow of North Vietnamese troops and supplies being moved into South Vietnam. Picture everything that you have seen in the movies Delta Force, First Blood and The Green Beret, and then some.

Green Beret training is among the top levels of the world's most intense and difficult military training. In the 1960's, its scope was exceptionally broad, and formation of an A-Team required skills in weaponry, demolition, communications, medical trauma and engineering. For each team member, mastery in a particular role was required, as well as cross-training in all of the others. A Special Forces candidate may have entered training thinking, "What will we blow up first"? Instead, to their disappointment, their first week of training was probably MOI, methods of instruction. In order to multiply the force of their A-Team, they would be training indigenous forces, the Montagnards, who would be under their command. Part of MOI training included cultural awareness and foreign language classes. If you did not have the ability to teach, Special Forces could not use you. In his training at Fort Bragg, Joe Whelan and his fellow candidates were pushed to their limits. It was during a field exercise that they discovered they would receive no more canned C-rations. Instead, the candidates were handed a live animal, which they needed to kill, clean and cook. Soon it became second nature to prepare a meal of chicken, rabbit or goat. The candidates slogged through miles of mud, endured extreme weather

(continued on page 13)



(above) In what we believe was an appearance in a play or pageant at St. Michael School, Joe is dressed as a parish priest.



(above) Sporting the traditional white shorts and sport coat and with bible in hand, Joe is ready for his First Holy Communion at St. Michael Church.



(above) The Stilwell family, Charlotte with her husband, Major General Robin Stilwell; daughters Eli and Dee; and son Joseph Whelan Stilwell. Photo is from Joe's graduation from the Citadel in 2025.

CAPTAIN JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN (continued from page 12)

conditions and were deprived of sleep to the point of hallucinations. At times they were given false hope that the end of a training exercise was near, only to have another 15 miles tacked on. When the going got tough and the candidates were using every ounce of their remaining strength to complete their assignment, pushing one shaky leg in front of the other, the instructors were always there to taunt them. “We’ve got a hot meal, cold drink and a hot shower waiting for you. Why would you take this abuse when you can just quit”. Many soldiers took that option and only those who really wanted it were able to don their green berets at training’s end.

SOMEONE SPECIAL ENTERS JOE’S LIFE

During our research, we had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with Joe’s daughter Charlotte Whelan Stilwell and her mom, Dorothy Gillespie Whelan Starrett, both South Carolina natives. We were so grateful for their participation as we gathered information for our tribute to Joe Whelan.

Dorothy was not shy when she told us about first laying eyes upon Joe. During the early days of Joe’s Special Forces training, Dorothy was visiting her sister, who was a nurse at Fort Bragg. The ladies were invited to a house party off base. When Dorothy walked in, Joe was standing near the fireplace. At over six feet tall and physically fit from his military training, seeing him made Dorothy quietly say to her female companions, “Hands off, he’s mine”. The couple met that night, dated, and towards the end of Joe’s training they were married at Fort Bragg. Dorothy remembered that the first dinner that she served to her new husband was lasagna. The newlyweds had six months together before the inevitable happened, in August of 1967, Dorothy’s Green Beret was sent to Vietnam.

JOE GOES IN COUNTRY

Now a member of the 5th Special Forces Group, Joe was ready to apply the knowledge and skills he had gained throughout his many months of his Green Beret training. The majority of his tour of duty would span over the first eight months of 1968, the most violent year of the Vietnam War. Joe, most likely, was assigned to a remote Special Forces outpost, also known as a CIDG camp (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) where small groups of Green Berets turned Montagnard tribesmen into soldiers. The Americans ate, slept and fought alongside the “civilian irregulars” or Montagnards, and a strong bond developed between these two groups of people. In Joe Whelan’s case, he even considered bringing a Montagnard child back to the U.S.

1968 began with the Tet Offensive, a deadly, surprise attack by the North Vietnamese, which occurred during the scheduled 36-hour ceasefire for the Lunar New Year holiday. The Cranford Chronicle states that the Special Forces outpost at which Joe was serving, possibly Lang Vei, was overrun by North Vietnamese troops during the Siege of Khe Sanh, which occurred during Tet. Joe was wounded twice during this tour of duty and also awarded a Bronze Star for Gallantry. Our team is still looking for additional details on each of these events.

TIME SPENT AS A FAMILY

In August of 1968, when Joe returned back to the states, a very important introduction awaited him. Miss Charlotte Ashley Whelan had been waiting six months to meet her dad. While Joe was fighting battles on the other side of the world, his daughter had been born in Greenville, South Carolina. Joe, now having attained the rank of captain, was stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, where he served as a Company Commander (Commanding Officer/CO) in the 4th Battalion, 1st Training Brigade. Dorothy and Charlotte lived in a nearby rental. A CO’s job started in the early morning and finished late, but Joe was able to go home to his family every night. For the present time he could continue his role as a husband and start yet another training session, that of being a new father.

We were very fortunate to connect with former Captain Michael Bergin, who served with Joe at Fort Bragg. Both were Company Commanders in the same training brigade during the first half of 1969. Each man had a goal of ensuring that his entire company, of about 200 trainees, would successfully complete eight weeks of basic training. The CO directed a layered team of officers (planners), NCO’s (trainers), specialists (instructors of specific skills) and an administrative staff, to quickly turn civilians into combat-ready soldiers, most likely destined for Vietnam. On multiple occasions Michael Bergin, a bachelor at the time, was invited to Joe and Dorothy’s home for dinner. He described Joe as low key, approachable and friendly.

JOE’S FINAL MISSION

(continued on page 14)



(above) Most of Joe’s Special Forces training took place at Fort Bragg. He went through a lot in order to be able to don that special headgear.



(above) In his own handwriting Joe described a 3x3 snapshot that was sent back to NJ, “this is where I lived in Phu Bai”, a combat base in central Vietnam. These simple barracks were known as “hooches” to the soldiers serving in Vietnam. They were thin-walled, simple accommodations.



(above) Captain Joseph Whelan kneels in front of a line of twelve Special Forces packs while “in country” in one of his deployments. We believe that this non-descript uniform is representative of what was worn behind enemy lines during covert actions.



(above) Joe Whelan and his M-16 rifle, the standard issue of an American soldier serving in Vietnam. Note the mortar shell gripped in his hand.



(above) In order to multiply the force of their 12-men A-Teams, Green Berets trained South Vietnamese indigenous soldiers, called Montagnards, to defend their own country. Here in Joe’s own script, he describes San Bi as a “tuff little guy”. After Joe was mortally wounded in an ambush, his unit of Montagnards defeated the combatants that struck down their beloved mentor.



(above) Captain Whelan is buried at our nation’s most sacred shrine, Arlington National Cemetery. When our Cranford scout troops visit Arlington, they pay their respects to Captain Joe (Section 36 Grave # 2604) and the other Cranford servicemen buried there.

CAPTAIN JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN (continued from page 13)

Speaking to family and friends of Joe Whelan made us aware of his strong sense of duty. In September of 1969, Joe returned to Vietnam to again lead missions with the Montagnards. Once the boy next door from Cranford, N.J., Captain Joseph Whelan, age 27, was now a member of a highly classified unit which conducted its missions, deep behind enemy lines. This was MACV-SOG, Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group, a misleading name for this clandestine, high-risk operation. SOG uniforms were generic, without names, ranks or insignias, as were the helicopters which inserted the teams into hostile territory. Before a SOG mission, all personal effects of each participant, dog tags, wallets, ID cards and class rings, were locked away in the unit's safe. SOG missions were exceedingly dangerous and of great strategic importance.

Just three weeks into his second tour of duty, Captain Joe Whelan was commanding a platoon of 45 men, Americans and Montagnards, on what was planned to be a week-long reconnaissance-in-force in Laos. Reconnaissance-in-force meant that if conditions called for it, the unit was prepared to react to what they observed. It should be noted that the North Vietnamese, as well as having the home turf advantage, also had elite intelligence and combat forces.

Upon insertion into the designated landing zone, the platoon began receiving enemy fire. As they advanced, they were shot at from all sides with automatic weapons and rockets. It was an ambush, and the platoon was outnumbered at least three to one. A group of the Montagnard



(above) Sixty years have gone by, but we still can easily see how this pretty lady stole Joe Whelan's heart. Dorothy Gillespie Whelan Starrett, was just 24 when she lost her hero. As a single mom, she raised their daughter and brought her through an era of anti-war sentiment. Both women deserve our empathy and gratitude for all that they have sacrificed.

soldiers was out in the open, stunned by the ferocious, surprise attack. Captain Whelan left cover to organize and lead the Montagnards, and along with the rest of the team they rushed towards fortified enemy positions on a nearby hilltop. Despite being knocked down by grenades multiple times, Captain Whelan courageously got back on his feet to continue leading his men through rank after rank of enemy soldiers. Joe kept up this brave advance until he received a direct hit from a rocket propelled grenade. His men fought on and routed the North Vietnamese from their defensive positions. Captain Whelan's gallantry in this mission was in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army. It earned him a Silver Star, but sadly, it cost him his life.

Throughout his military service, it seems that each time, Joe chose the harder path to quietly reach his full potential as a soldier. Then, he went to where he felt that he was needed the most. The example set by this well-liked Cranford kid, who had what it took to become one of our military's finest, will always be a source of pride for our township, and all Americans.

Joe Whelan left behind his wife Dorothy, age 24 and his daughter Charlotte, 18 months. He was mourned by his parents, his three sisters Joan, Geri and Theresa and their families, as well as the large number of admiring friends that he had made throughout his life. Joe was remembered at church services in Cranford and Bayonne and buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

HONORING JOE AND HIS BROTHERS-IN-ARMS IN CRANFORD

It wasn't until 1983, that the men from Cranford who fell in Vietnam, were memorialized with a plaque. This endeavor was promoted by Cranford committeeman, Dick Salway, a lifelong friend of Joe Whelan. Dick also noted that although Joe spent the great majority of his life in Cranford, his address of record was listed as Garwood, and his name was omitted among the names of our fallen military spoken in Cranford

each Memorial Day. Dick Salway kept Joe in his heart throughout his life, and in the early days of the Cranford 86 Project, Dick was one of the first to sponsor a street banner, that of his friend Joe Whelan. On Memorial Day 1982, the first time Joe Whelan's name was recited as one of Cranford's fallen, Dick Salway spoke about his friend, "he believed strongly in the need to preserve our freedom and volunteered to return to help". In 2026 Dick's wife, Karen Croushore Salway added to her husband's feelings about their friend. She said that Joe "would always do the right thing and really cared about people". Karen credited the existence of her marriage to Dick to Joe Whelan. Her courtship with Dick was a little rocky at times, and it was their friend Joe that brought them back together each time they grew apart. The Salways had two children and 59 years together until Dick's passing in 2025. Joe was the best man at their wedding.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As amateur military historians, learning and writing about the Green Berets made us wonder, how did the risks taken by these elite warriors make a difference? Special Forces intelligence gathering and unconventional warfare must have prevented larger conflicts. Their indigenous training programs surely reduced the need for large U.S. deployments in remote regions, and it seems evident that reconnaissance efforts made U.S. airstrikes far more precise and effective. While we could not find an official estimate, we think it is reasonable to say that the bold actions of Captain Joe Whelan and his fellow Green Berets in Vietnam prevented the loss of many U.S. and allied lives over the course of the war.

Our conversation with Joe's widow Dorothy and daughter Charlotte was emotional, and even after so many years, the pain of their loss is evident. When asked what she wanted everyone to know about her husband, Dorothy paused for a long moment and said "He was a hero, to me and his countrymen". Dorothy raised Charlotte as a single mom and didn't remarry until 1999. She made sure that her daughter did not lack for anything of true worth. Charlotte graduated from the University of South Carolina and Clemson University. She is the wife of Major General Robin B. Stilwell, who is the Adjutant General for the State of South Carolina. Together they have three adult children, Eli, Dee, and Joseph. In addition to being a Gold Star child and a military wife of 31 years, Charlotte is also a military mom. Son Joseph Whelan Stilwell, is currently a First Lieutenant serving in the infantry at Fort Stewart, Georgia.

"Because he died when I was a baby, I never had a chance to know my dad, Captain Joe. What I do know is his service and his sacrifice -- and from that, I understand the kind of man he was. He gave his life in service to our country, something I carry with me always. I am proud to be his daughter." - Charlotte Whelan Stilwell

Joe Whelan's last mission was documented in the book *Secret Commandos* by John L. Plaster. Plaster served with MACV-SOG and his book was extremely helpful to us in understanding and explaining U.S. Army Special Forces.



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THE SCALE IS GOING DOWN - BUT AT WHAT COST?

Most women on weight loss medications want to be lighter and stronger. Without strength training, the medication may make you lighter and weaker instead - here's what you need to know.

Women make up the majority of GLP-1 medication users. And for many of them, the results have been genuinely meaningful — weight they've struggled with for years finally moving in the right direction. But there is something important that most women on these medications haven't been told.

Not all of what you're losing is fat. Studies show up to 39% of total weight lost on GLP-1 medications can be muscle — and for women over 40, already losing muscle due to hormonal changes, that loss is not just a cosmetic concern. It is a direct path to frailty.

LIGHTER AND WEAKER IS NOT THE GOAL

Muscle is what keeps you strong, stable, and independent. It protects your joints, supports your bones, powers your metabolism, and allows you to live the life you want at 60, 70, and beyond. When medication strips it away along with the fat, you may step on the scale and feel like you've won — while your body has quietly lost something far more important.

Frailty doesn't announce itself. It creeps in as a little more difficulty on the stairs, a little less confidence on uneven ground, a little more hesitation before a hike or a grandchild's birthday party. The women who avoid it are the ones who protect their muscle while they lose the weight.

*“The goal isn't just a lower number.
It's a stronger, more capable body -
lighter and stronger, not lighter and weaker.”*

- Kim Musikant, Co-owner, Active Life Fitness

THE PROBLEM WITH JUST WATCHING THE SCALE

GLP-1 medications suppress appetite so powerfully that many women enter a severe calorie and protein deficit without realizing it. The scale moves fast — and that feels like success. But the scale can't tell you whether you're losing fat or muscle.

That's why at Active Life Fitness, every member gets a body composition analysis using the InBody 270 — a clinical-grade scanner that measures fat mass, muscle mass, and body water separately. Not just total weight. When you can see exactly what you're losing, you can protect what matters before it's gone.

• MUSCLE LOSS & FRAILTY

Every pound of muscle lost makes daily life a little harder. Over time, unchecked muscle loss leads to frailty, falls, and loss of independence — the very things women on these medications are trying to avoid.

• BONE DENSITY LOSS

Women can lose up to 20% of bone density after menopause. GLP-1s without strength training accelerate this further, raising fracture risk significantly.

• REBOUND WEIGHT GAIN

Less muscle means a slower metabolism — making it harder to keep the weight off long-term and easier to regain it all when the medication stops.



“Training has made me really strong and has helped me to be more active as I age. I just learned today that my bone density is ‘perfect’ at age 60 - I owe that to consistently working out with weights. ALF makes me want to keep coming back.”

- Gretchen K., Cranford

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

1. START STRENGTH TRAINING NOW

Don't wait until you've lost the weight. Resistance training 2–3x per week signals your body to preserve lean muscle even in a caloric deficit — and stimulates bone density, critical for women over 40.

2. PRIORITIZE PROTEIN

GLP-1s reduce how much you eat — but your muscles still need protein to survive. Even on a suppressed appetite, hitting your daily protein target is essential to preserving the muscle you need.

3. TRACK WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS

Every ALF member gets regular InBody 270 body composition scans — measuring fat, muscle, and water independently. So you always know you're losing fat, not the muscle that keeps you strong and independent.

4. GET EXPERT GUIDANCE

At Active Life Fitness, we specialize in women over 40. Every program is personalized around your medication, your stage of life, your injuries, and your goals — coached by certified experts every session.

*“Love this gym!! I feel so much stronger!
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more than a few months! No turning back.”*

- Robin I., Garwood

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OPA! NJ GREEK FEST RETURNS TO WESTFIELD MAY 29-31

Pop Star Evangelia Turns Up the Excitement as Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Hosts a Weekend Serving A Taste of Greece Right in Your Backyard

Area residents look forward each year to immersing themselves in the vibrant culture of Greece at NJ Greek Fest, hosted by Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Westfield. And this year, the event - known for delectable Greek cuisine, a Mega 50/50 raffle and many other family-friendly activities - turns up the excitement, welcoming the sensational Evangelia, the Greek-American pop star and Eurovision finalist.

Enjoyed by generations for over half a century at the church, located at 250 Gallows Hill Road in Westfield, the festival this year will take place from Friday, May 29 to Sunday, May 31. Free shuttle service will be provided from the nearby UCNJ parking lot. Highlights of this year's festivities include:

- The Greek-American Pop Star Evangelia, whose music blends modern pop with Greek sounds, returns to her Garden State roots for a live performance at the Saturday "Big Night Out." A variety of ticket options are available for the performance, including standing front stage single tickets, as well as high-top and front-row tables, both of the latter including food and drink. Tickets are selling fast, so secure your spot now for an unforgettable evening.
 - Authentic Greek Cuisine: Indulge in mouthwatering gyros, souvlaki, spanakopita, baklava, loukoumades and other traditional homemade Greek delicacies.
 - Kids' Activities: Keep the little ones entertained with games, face painting and other fun activities designed just for them.
 - Mega 50/50 Raffle: Win up to \$10,000 in our Mega 50/50 Raffle. Purchase a raffle ticket for 7 chances to win up to half of the total amount collected from ticket sales. Only 1,000 tickets will be sold at \$50 each, maximizing your odds of winning!
 - Church Tours: Tours of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, founded in 1965, will be given during the festival. The tours of the church, currently under the spiritual guidance of Fr. Peter Delvizi, offer a glimpse into the sanctuary and Orthodox faith.
 - Live Music and Dance Performances: Throughout the festival, enjoy live performances of Greek music and traditional dance, featuring vibrant costumes and energetic routines that celebrate Greece's rich cultural heritage.
 - Marketplace: Responding to popular demand, event organizers will for the first time be offering NJ GreekFest merchandise such as sweatshirts, T-shirts and hats. Event guests also can browse the emporium offering Greek-themed arts, crafts, jewelry and souvenirs, perfect for taking home a piece of the southeastern European country.
- "We are excited to welcome the community to our annual NJ Greek Fest, where everyone can experience the warmth and hospitality of

Greece right here in Westfield," said Fr. Peter Delvizi, presiding priest of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. "It's a wonderful opportunity for people of all backgrounds to come together, enjoy delicious food and lively music, and celebrate our cultural traditions."

Admission to the festival is \$3. A portion of the festival proceeds will benefit Holy Trinity's community outreach programs.

Join us in celebrating Greek culture, heritage and community spirit at the annual Westfield Greek Festival. For more information and updates, please visit njgreekfest.com and

follow @njgreekfest on Instagram and Facebook.

About Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church: A cornerstone of the Westfield community and surrounding area, Holy Trinity, founded in 1966, is dedicated to enriching lives through faith, fellowship and service. Our annual NJ Greek Fest is one of the many ways we connect with our neighbors and celebrate our shared values.

For media inquiries, please contact: Jeannie Arida, Media Liaison, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, (908) 233-8533.



Westfield, NJ

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Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

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LIBRARY MAY PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

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Romance Readers Book Club

Monday, May 4, at 7pm

Join us for our Romance Readers Book Club. Visit our website for this month's book. If you don't want to read that book, or for some reason can't find a copy, feel free to come anyway to discuss whichever romance you've recently read.

Movie Night

Wednesday, May 6, at 7pm

Join us the first Wednesday of the month for a screening of a recently released DVD! Please visit our website or contact the library for film titles.

Wednesday Morning Adult Craft

May 6, at 10am

Join us for crafts! Visit our website to register and for more information about this month's craft. Sponsored by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library.

Junk Journaling

Thursday, May 7, at 6:30pm

Join us at our new monthly program to create and add to your very own junk journal! Please visit our website for more information.

Lit Cafe

Saturday, May 9, at 10:15am

Literary Café is a book chat program. The format is simple: Bring a few of your recent favorite books and tell the other members of the group what you like about them. There is no required reading, and you will have the opportunity to learn about books recommended by other group members. Admission is free and all are welcome. Light refreshments provided by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library. Attend in person or on Zoom (contact library for link).

International Film

Monday, May 11, at 12:30pm and 7pm

Join us for an International film screening. The same film will be shown at 12:30pm and 7pm.

Please contact the library for the film title.

Adults Create

Tuesday, May 12, at 7pm

Join us the second Tuesday of the month for crafts! All supplies will be provided! Space is limited; please visit our website to register and for more information about this month's craft.

Sponsored by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library.

Florian Schantz Jazz Combo

Thursday, May 14, at 7pm

Join us for another energetic concert with the Florian Schantz Jazz Combo! No registration needed. Sponsored by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library and in partnership with the Township Rev250 Committee!

Theater Project

Saturday, May 16, at 2pm

The Friends of the Cranford Public Library invite everyone to attend a live theatrical performance! New Jersey's own Theater Project will present a reading of an original short play. The reading will be followed by a question and answer session with the audience, director, playwright and cast. This program has been made possible by funds from the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Funds have also been provided by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library. No registration needed.

Books and (Coffee) Brew

Monday, May 18, at 2pm and 7pm

Join us for our monthly book discussion at The Morning Roast! Coffee and non-alcoholic beverages will be available for purchase. Registration is recommended and can be done through the Library website.

Readers' Forum Book Club

Monday, May 18, at 7pm

All are welcome to join this book club! Additional copies are available at the Circulation Desk.

Trivia Night

Wednesday, May 20, at 7pm

Join us for another fun evening of trivia! This free event is hosted by the Friends of the Cranford Public Library! Join us in the Community Room on the first floor of the Community Center! Feel free to bring your own snacks and (non-alcoholic) drinks. Prizes awarded to the winning team. Please visit our website or contact the library to register.

Senior Tech 1:1 Appointments

Tuesdays, between 1 and 2:30pm

Sign up for a 15 or 30 minute session and ask one of our librarians your tech questions! Feel free to bring your phone, tablet or other device.

In partnership with Cranford Community Center. Registration is required and can be done through our website or calling the Library Reference Department.



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TWO FAMILIES HONOR 9 YEARS SINCE A LIFESAVING GIFT

NJ Sharing Network

April is National Donate Life Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about the lifesaving power of organ and tissue donation. According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) and NJ Sharing Network, more than 100,000 Americans — including nearly 4,000 New Jerseyans — are currently waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant. One organ and tissue donor can save up to eight lives and enhance the lives of over 75 others.

During this time, two New Jersey families are coming together to raise awareness and honor a remarkable bond — one that began with tragedy but continues through the gift of life.

In 2017, Caitlin Nelson of Clark, NJ, a vibrant 20-year-old, passed away. In the days that followed, an outpouring of love and support surrounded the Nelson family, as many came together to honor Caitlin's life and the extraordinary person, she was.

Through organ and tissue donation — a decision she had openly shared with her family — Caitlin's legacy lives on through Brick resident Sonia Carlen, who celebrated the 9th anniversary of her double-lung transplant on April 4.

Together, Sonia and Caitlin's family share their story to encourage others to register as organ and tissue donors.

A Life of Compassion and a Lasting Legacy

Caitlin was known for her kindness, energy, and commitment to helping others. She was studying social work and dreamed of becoming a pediatric oncology social worker. She dedicated much of her time to service through her church, school, and community. A highlight of this work was her time at Sister Pat's Kids Camp, where she supported children with cancer and related blood disorders. She also served as a counselor at Camp Sea Stars North, a program dedicated to supporting children from the Newtown and Sandy Hook communities following the 2012 elementary school tragedy. That compassion extended to her strong belief in organ and tissue donation.

"She had told me that if anything ever happened to her, she wanted to donate her organs. She'd say, 'you can't take them with you' and someone else could use them to live on," said Rosanne Nelson, Caitlin's mother. "That was who she was — always thinking of others, even in unimaginable circumstances."

Following her passing, Caitlin's final act of generosity saved and enhanced the lives of dozens. Through organ donation, she gave the gift of life by donating her heart, lungs, kidneys,



(above, left) Caitlin Nelson of Clark gave the gift of life through organ and tissue donation, leaving a lasting legacy that continues to inspire others.

(above, right) Sonia Carlen, a Brick resident and double-lung transplant recipient, is celebrating the 9th anniversary of her lifesaving transplant during Donate Life Month.

Photo courtesy of NJ Sharing Network

pancreas, and liver. She also donated many bone and tissue grafts.

"Knowing Caitlin's wish to donate her organs and tissue to help others brings us comfort," said Rosanne. "Even in our darkest moment, Caitlin gave others hope."

"My Prayers Were Answered"

At the same time, Sonia Carlen was fighting for her life. In 2015, at just 27 years old, Sonia began experiencing persistent shortness of breath that led to numerous doctor visits before she was ultimately diagnosed with a rare lung disease. Doctors explained that the condition was terminal and gave her a life expectancy of just three to five years.

"To hear that news was devastating," said Sonia. "I was healthy, I never smoked, and suddenly I was being told I only had a few years to live."

As her condition declined, she required oxygen around the clock and was placed on the

lung transplant waiting list.

"I tried to stay positive," said Sonia. "My husband, family, and friends were always my strength. I held onto hope every single day."

That hope became reality thanks to a double-lung transplant on April 4, 2017. Her organ donor was Caitlin.

"I call Caitlin my hero and my angel," said Sonia. "Because of her generosity and compassion for others, I am alive today. There are no words that can fully express my gratitude."

A Powerful Bond

In the years since, Sonia and Caitlin's family have formed a meaningful and lasting connection.

"Meeting Caitlin's family was one of the most emotional moments of my life," said Sonia. "They welcomed me with open arms. We share a bond that is incredibly special."

For Rosanne, seeing Sonia healthy has brought a sense of peace.

"Seeing Sonia live her life is a beautiful reminder of who Caitlin was," said Rosanne. "It shows us that her spirit and generosity continue to make a difference."

Inspiring Others During National Donate Life Month

Through their advocacy with NJ Sharing Network, both families are working to raise awareness during Donate Life Month.

"Organ donation gave me a second chance at life," said Sonia. "I hope our story encourages others to make the selfless decision to give the gift of life."

Rosanne added, "Registering as an organ and tissue donor is one of the most powerful ways to help others. Caitlin believed that, and we hope others will too."

As Sonia celebrates her 9-year transplant milestone, their shared story serves as an important reminder: even in loss, one decision can save lives — and create a legacy that lives on forever. To learn more or to register as an organ and tissue donor, visit NJ Sharing Network's website at www.NJSharingNetwork.org.

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FEAST OF ST. ANTHONY IN ROSELLE PARK, JUNE 4-7, 2026

The Church of the Assumption's annual St. Anthony Italian Feast returns for its 26th year! The Feast will feature rides, games, live entertainment, homemade cooking, food vendors, a beer and wine garden, and a SUPER 50/50 drawn Sunday, June 7th, at pm! The Feast, located on the Church grounds at 113 Coolidge Place, Roselle Park, NJ, begins on Thursday, June 4 and runs through Sunday, June 7. Feast hours: Thurs 6-10pm, Friday 6-10pm, Saturday 5-10pm and Sunday 2-7pm. On Sunday, June 7, there will be a 12 noon mass honoring St. Anthony, followed by a procession through Roselle Park beginning at 12:45pm.

THE FOLLOWING MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT IS BOOKED FOR THE FEAST:

Thursday, June 4:
Paper Statues and Deadlinez
(Valencia School of Music), 8pm-10pm
Friday, June 5:
Valentied, 730p-830p, Serenphoria, 9p-10p
Saturday, June 6:
Diamonds in Jupiter, 7pm to 10pm
Sunday, June 7:
Simply the Best, 4pm-7pm
Additional entertainment will be announced on the Church of the Assumption website as acts are confirmed.

Pay-One-Price Unlimited Ride wristbands are available for opening day, Thursday, June 4. Wristbands will be sold at the Feast for \$35. Visit the Church of the Assumption website at <http://www.assumptionrp.com/> for more information and sponsorship opportunities. If you would like to volunteer at the Feast of St. Anthony, scan here:



(above) Those interesting volunteering can use the QR code for more information.






Annual **2026** Feast of St. Anthony

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A special thank you to the Borough of Roselle Park for supporting our Feast!

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OPERA AT FLORHAM INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION
SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2026 AT 2:00 PM

Opera lovers won't want to miss this thrilling opportunity to experience the next generation of Opera stars before they take the world stage. Opera at Florham proudly announces its 36th Annual International Vocal Competition, a celebrated event that continues to attract exceptional talent from around the world. Established in 1987 in honor of the organization's benefactor and co-founder, Violetta DuPont, the competition reflects her visionary leadership and 25 years of unwavering dedication to the arts.

Each year, hundreds of aspiring Opera singers apply, with a select group advancing to live semi-final auditions in New York City. Finalists then compete before a distinguished panel of industry leaders, offering audiences a rare chance to witness rising artists at a pivotal moment in their careers.

Singers will compete for substantial prize money, including Grand Prizes of \$5,000, \$3,000, and \$1,500, along with encouragement awards recognizing exceptional promise. This directly aligns with Opera at Florham's mission to support and elevate young, up-and-coming Opera singers as they launch their professional careers.

This year's final competition will take place on Sunday, May 17, 2026 at 2:00 pm in Lenfell Hall at the Mansion at Fairleigh Dickinson University, located at 285 Madison Avenue,

Madison, NJ, 07940.

Join us for an afternoon of extraordinary vocal artistry and the excitement of the international Opera competition firsthand.

Don't miss this year's International Vocal Competition, because you will ...

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General Admission: \$30


Students (25 & under): \$10

FDU Students (25 & under): FREE



OPERA TALK: THE OPERATIC HARP
SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2026 - 2PM

Also, consider joining us on Sunday, May 3, 2026 at Hartman Lounge at The Mansion for Opera Talk: The Operatic Harp, given by Opera Lecturer Lou Barrella. 2:00 pm, Tickets \$10 at the door or online.

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STEP INSIDE WESTFIELD'S HISTORY: A TOUR OF NOTABLE HOMES CELEBRATES 250 YEARS OF AMERICA

In celebration of America's 250th anniversary, the Friends of the New Jersey Festival Orchestra, in partnership with the Westfield Historic Preservation Commission, invites the public to experience A Tour of Notable Homes, a self-guided journey through four of Westfield's most storied residences. This beloved community tradition offers a rare opportunity to explore architecturally significant homes while enjoying live music, refreshments, door prizes, and delightful surprises along the way.

This year's featured homes span decades of design and reflect the evolution of Westfield as a thriving suburban community:

The Victorian Jewel, one of the town's most striking homes, showcases the grandeur of the late 19th century. Originally built in the Italianate style and later transformed into a Queen Anne masterpiece, the home features exquisite woodwork, stained glass, and thoughtful modern updates—including a creatively repurposed dumbwaiter bar.

The Garden Retreat, built in 1910, blends Colonial Revival symmetry with emerging Craftsman influences. Its charming stucco façade and lush grounds, known for their beauty, have become a beloved outdoor setting for New Jersey Festival Orchestra performances.



(above) French Keelwr House

The Georgian Manor, a stately 1924 residence, reflects the elegance of Westfield's prewar housing boom. Designed for entertaining, the home features grand interiors, original architectural details, and a meticulously executed modern addition that honors its historic character.

The Classic Kit Home, built in 1926, offers a glimpse into the accessibility and charm of early 20th-century design. This Sears "Honor Bilt" Homewood model has been faithfully restored and thoughtfully updated, preserving its timeless appeal for modern living.

Guests are invited to wander at their own pace, taking in the beauty, history, and craftsmanship of each unique property while

celebrating the rich heritage of Westfield and the nation. Live music by the Garden State Musical Arts Club will add to the festive atmosphere throughout the tour.

For more information and tickets, please visit www.njfestivalorchestra.org/concerts or call (908) 232-9400.

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CONCERT FEATURES RENOWNED SLOVAK GUITARIST

The New Jersey Festival Orchestra (NJFO) concludes its season with One Thousand and One Nights, presented in collaboration with the Slovak American Cultural Center (S-ACC). Showcasing international artistry and cultural exchange, the program features acclaimed Slovak guitarist Karol Samuelčík as guest soloist.

Performances will take place on Saturday, May 30, 2026 at 7:00 pm at The Presbyterian Church in Westfield, and Sunday, May 31, 2026



(above) Slovak Guitarist Karol Samuelčík

at 2:30 pm at the Sieminski Theater in Basking Ridge.

At the heart of the program, Samuelčík brings his artistry to Joaquín Rodrigo's *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, a work inspired by Spanish baroque dance traditions and celebrated for its elegance, lyricism, and expressive vitality.

"The Slovak-American Cultural Center is thrilled to partner—again—with the NJFO to introduce world-renowned guitarist Karol Samuelčík to American audiences," writes S-ACC Board Member and longtime NJFO supporter Tanya Pulver. "Performing Joaquín Rodrigo's celebrated *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, Samuelčík promises to enchant

listeners, pairing the concerto's historic elegance with his signature vibrant energy and technical brilliance."

Born in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, Samuelčík trained at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava, graduating with the institution's highest honor, the Prize of the Rector. He has performed throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas, appearing with leading orchestras and in renowned venues including London's Purcell Room and Shenzhen Concert Hall. A prizewinner of numerous international competitions, he is also an educator at the Academy in Bratislava, a recording artist, and a respected scholar, having published a landmark work on guitar technique in 2022.

The program culminates in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, a cornerstone of the orchestral repertoire inspired by the legendary tales of One Thousand and One Nights. With sweeping melodies and vivid orchestral color, the work evokes a world of distant voyages, mystery, and imagination, bringing these timeless stories to life.

Blending international collaboration with evocative repertoire, One Thousand and One Nights offers a richly imagined and memorable close to NJFO's season.

Tickets are available at njfestivalorchestra.org/concerts or by calling (908) 232-9400. Student discounts are available.

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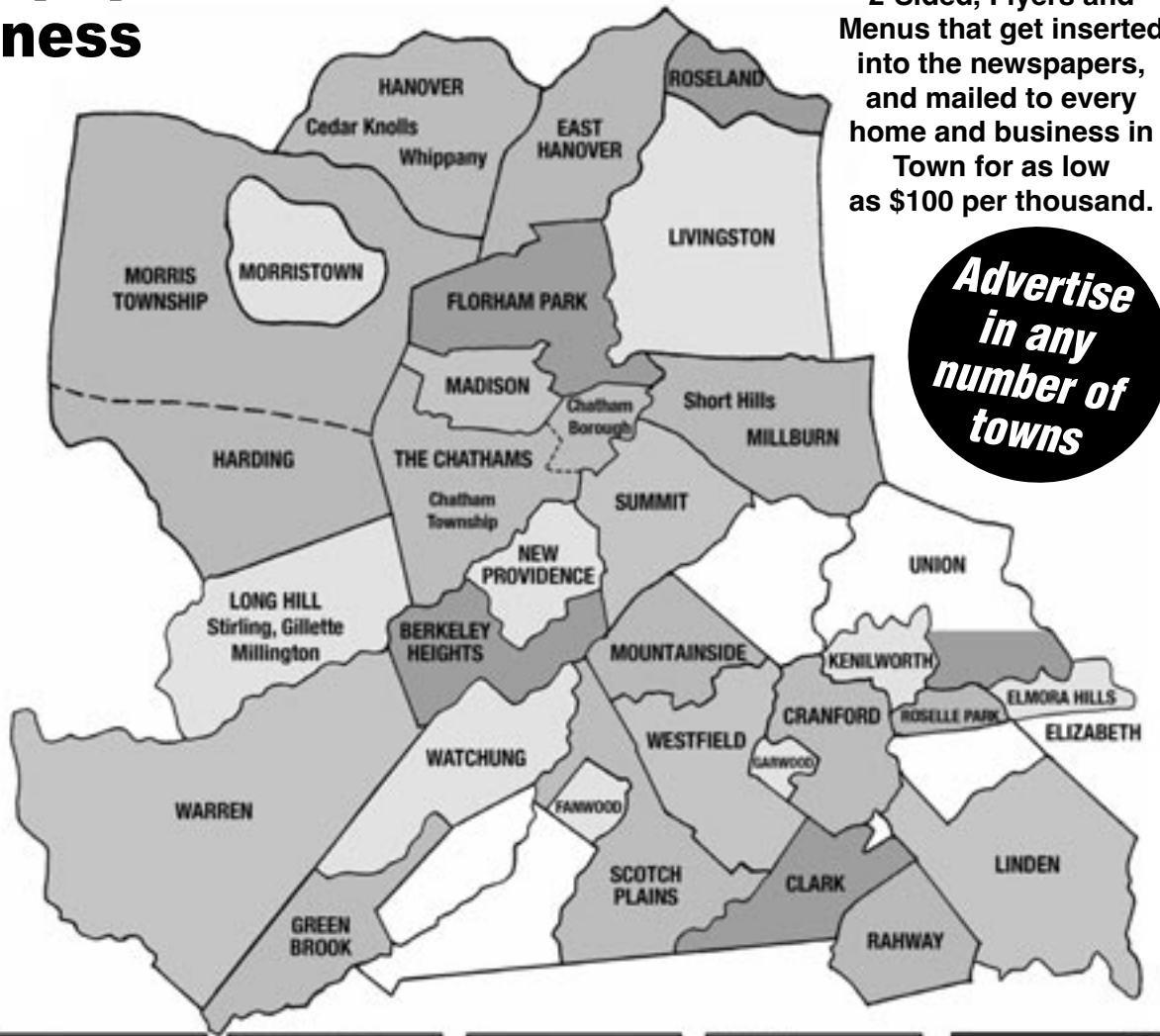
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NEW JERSEY VETERANS NETWORK

Michael D Boll, NJVN President

For the past 10 years the New Jersey Veterans Network (NJVN) has proudly marched on Memorial Day parades alongside our troops and veterans to honor those we have lost. While these events are deeply meaningful, our mission extends far beyond parades and ceremonies.

NJVN is a dedicated team of volunteers committed to actively reaching veterans in need and connecting them with life-changing—and often life-saving—resources. We have built a strong, statewide network focused on improving the quality of life for our veterans.

Our support includes essential services such as food, clothing, personal items, and transportation. However, our primary focus is on outreach programs and recreational therapy events designed to support mental health and overall

well-being.

Veteran mental health remains one of the most critical challenges facing our community. Tragically, veteran suicide continues to be an ongoing crisis, with numbers that have remained steady or increased each year. This is why outreach, connection, and mentorship are at the heart of everything we do.

We are always eager to collaborate with organizations that share our mission. Most importantly, we are in need of dedicated volunteers who can support our efforts on a regular basis.

If you are interested in joining our team, please contact us: Email:

NJVN1775@gmail.com;

Phone: (973) 332-1556.

To learn more visit njvn.org.



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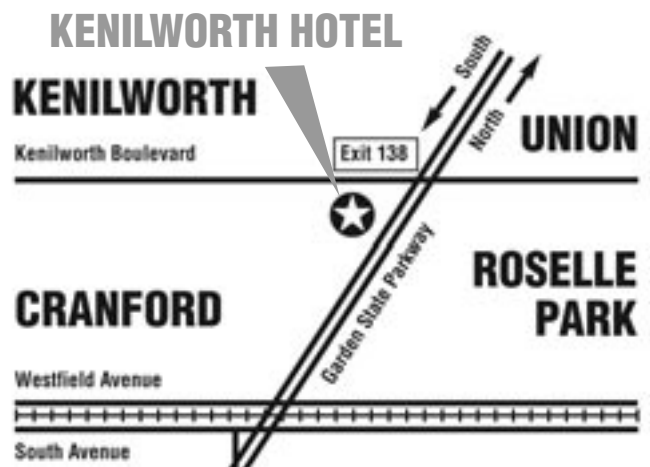
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