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ZHAOXIANG CHEN RECEIVES 2026 UNSUNG HERO AWARD

SPF Public Schools

Zhaoxiang Chen, a senior at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School, was honored with the 2026 Unsung Hero Award during the Union County School Board Association awards celebration on March 13, 2026.

The Unsung Hero Award is given out annually by the Union County School Board Association in coordination with the New Jersey School Boards Association. The award recognizes one graduating senior from each high school in Union County who has made outstanding contributions to their schools and community.

Eight years ago, Chen and his family moved from China to the United States. Chen soared through the Multilingual Learners program in Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools and demonstrated exceptional perseverance, determination, and compassion, SPFHS Principal Dr. Warren Hynes said.

Chen has helped his family through challenges in the United States, from navigating doctors appointments and tax forms to family illness.

Despite these challenges, Chen has excelled academically while remaining deeply involved in the school community. He is an active member of Student Council, the volleyball

program, and the Mandarin Club. Chen and his brother created a group chat for ESL students to share helpful information and support those adjusting to a new environment.

Chen also serves as one of the coordinators of the school's Peer Tutoring program, providing academic support to fellow students during lunchtime. Through his leadership, the program expanded to ensure all students have access to extra help outside the classroom without the need for paid tutoring.

"Zhao has demonstrated the true qualities of a hero," Hynes said. "We are incredibly proud of the dedication, empathy, integrity, collaboration, and excellence Zhao has brought to the classrooms and hallways of SPFHS."

Given his passion for helping others succeed, it may come as no surprise that Chen aspires to become a teacher one day. Chen will attend Boston College in the fall.

"After that, SPF is requesting first dibs in interviewing him for a teaching job," Hynes joked in a speech at the awards ceremony.

Chen was supported at the ceremony by his parents, Hynes, and Superintendent Dr. Joan Mast, as well as members of the Board of Education, including Dr. Karen Kulikowski, Sonali Barve, Stephanie Suriani and Amy Boroff.

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(above) SPFHS senior Zhaoxiang Chen honored with Unsung Hero Award

Courtesy Photo

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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.

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THE STRANGE "PILL" A BERKELEY HEIGHTS GYM IS GIVING THEIR CLIENTS OVER 40 — AND WHY THEY SWEAR IT'S MAKING THEM FEEL 6 - 26 YEARS YOUNGER

The "pill" isn't a pill at all. It's a barbell. A set of dumbbells. A kettlebell that feels impossibly heavy on day one and strangely light eight weeks later. And the gym is Gabriele Fitness in Berkeley Heights — guilty as charged — because what they've been doing with their 40+ year old clients really does feel like cheating.

Here's what nobody tells you about life after 40: the exhaustion, the stiffness in your lower back when you stand up from the car, the weight that seems to settle around your middle no matter what you eat, the flight of stairs that leaves you slightly winded — none of that is "just getting older." It's the predictable result of losing muscle. After forty, adults lose roughly 1% of their muscle mass every single year if they don't fight for it. Every month you wait, a little more slips away. By sixty, that compounds into something that feels a lot like aging but is actually something much more fixable.

Lifting weights reverses it. When clients start training, the first thing they notice isn't the number on the scale — though that changes too. The first thing they feel is vitality. They start sleeping deeply through the night. They feel strong and see muscles they didn't know they had. Posture improves. The nagging knee and back pain quiets down because the muscles are finally doing their job. Blood pressure numbers their doctors have been nagging them about for years finally start to move. Energy returns — the kind of energy that makes you volunteer to chase the grandkids around the yard instead of watching from the porch.

The science is almost unfair. Strength training rebuilds the muscle that protects your joints. It revs a slowing metabolism. It triggers the hormones that govern mood and sleep. It rebuilds bone density and sharpens the mind. One behavior, dozens of benefits — stacking on top of each other, week after week.

Most people over 40 come in with something — a bad shoulder, a tweaky knee, a

back that went out once and never quite forgave them. That's normal, and it's not a reason to stay on the sidelines. A good program works around those things, not through them. The movements get adjusted, the load gets scaled, and the body gets stronger in the positions it actually lives in. What usually happens over a few months is the opposite of what people expect walking in: the aches they'd written off as permanent start to quiet down.

Here's what separates Gabriele Fitness from the other guys: our clients are busy. They don't have time to figure out what they should be doing in the gym, and they shouldn't have to. They want to show up, have someone tell them exactly what to do, and know it's safe, effective, and dialed in to meet them right where they are that day.

People training on their own or grinding through large group cardio classes don't get that. They either get a workout built for the masses, or they don't get the accountability they need to keep showing up. Neither is what adults over 40 need. They need programming built around their schedules, their training histories, their goals, and the joints they've been using for four or five decades. Every minute of every session is watched by a coach — which means every exercise has a purpose, and every workout has them leaving feeling better than when they walked in.

That's why they keep showing up. Not because they love working out — most of them didn't when they started. They keep showing up because they can feel it working. Because the "pill" is real. Because five, ten, sometimes fifteen years seem to peel off their bodies in the process — and for the next two weeks, we're letting 13 new people feel it for themselves, free.

Don't take our word for it. The faces below belong to accountants and teachers and grandparents and business owners — your neighbors, basically. Read what they say in their own words, then decide if it's your turn.



I feel better at 40 than I did at 26!

I feel better at 58 than I did at 45!

I feel better at 56 than I did at 47!

I feel better at 41 than I did at 35!

I feel better at 56 than I did at 35!

I feel better at 57 than I did at 45!



I feel better at 47 than I did at 40!



I feel better at 50 than I did at 40!



I feel better at 72 than I did at 60!



I feel better at 46 than I did at 38!



I feel better at 51 than I did at 25!

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MEMORIAL DAY EVENTS TO HONOR OUR NATION'S WAR FATALITIES

GEORGE BECKER NAMED GRAND MARSHAL

Scotch Plains-Fanwood has named Korean War veteran George Becker as the Grand Marshal for this year's Memorial Day Parade. Becker, a dedicated community member, was selected to lead the procession in honor of his military service and his ongoing commitment to local veterans.

The annual parade serves as a unified tribute to those who served and sacrificed. Residents are invited to line the route to salute Becker and join in the community's day of remembrance.



Courtesy Photo

Memorial Day Parade Committee

Memorial Day pays tribute to those American military personnel of all wars who made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in service to their country. These fallen heroes will be honored with several events in Scotch Plains and Fanwood on Memorial Day.

On Monday, May 25, observances will begin with a memorial service at 8:00 a.m. at American Legion Post 209 at 237 Park Avenue at Sunset Place in Scotch Plains.

At 9:00 a.m., there will be a memorial service and presentation of wreaths at the Fanwood Memorial Library at 5 Forest Road. A memorial tribute and laying of wreaths will take place at 10:00 a.m. at the War Memorial at Park Avenue and Front Street in downtown Scotch Plains.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Memorial Day Parade will follow this ceremony. The theme for this year's parade is "Freedom Is Not Free."

George Becker, U.S. Army veteran of the Korea War, will serve as the Parade Grand Marshal. The parade will recognize the service, commitment and sacrifice of members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have defended our nation and continue to protect our country.

Starting at 10:45 a.m. at the gazebo in downtown Scotch Plains, the parade will proceed along Park Avenue, move down Martine Avenue into the center of Fanwood and end at La Grande Park in Fanwood.

The parade is an exciting event, especially for the younger spectators and participants. However, let us not forget the meaning of Memorial Day and the solemnity of the occasion. On this special day, take some time to remember those men and women who died in service to America to preserve the freedoms which we enjoy today.

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Looking for a great gift at a small price for all of the special women in your life? Moms, grandmothers, aunts, and other female family members/ friends will be pleased to receive a Mother’s Day gift from the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League Thrift Shop.

Do you like bright, uniquely patterned Vera Bradley handbags? A wide range of newly-displayed Vera Bradley bags and accessories in all shapes and sizes will be available for purchase starting Tuesday, May 5. How about placing a rose into a beautiful vase from a new display of everything Lenox, including candy dishes, plates and other signature pieces? Or, find a Mother’s Day mug filled with candy, a pretty teacup filled with artificial flowers, or insert your own favorite photo into a Mom’s Day frame.

There’s an excellent chance that you will find

a great Mother’s Day gift for the special women in your life at the all-volunteer Thrift Shop, 1741 East Second Street, Scotch Plains. The shop stocks either new or gently-used merchandise donated by members of our community, with all sale proceeds outside of store operating expenses donated to local, non-profit organizations and/or used for student scholarships. That’s a win for the environment, for de-cluttered closets, for savvy shoppers and for recipients of grants and college funds.

Operating hours at the Thrift Shop are Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. To learn more about the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League, volunteer opportunities and types of donations accepted and sold at the shop, please call the shop at (908) 322-5420 during regular business hours.

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OSBORN CANNONBALL OPEN HOUSE - MAY 3

The Osborn Cannonball House Museum, located at 1840 Front Street in Scotch Plains, will be open to the public from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 3rd, 2026.

The museum is currently presenting a Civil War exhibit featuring gowns from the mid 19th century. Although Scotch Plains was not the site of a Civil War battle, many residents fought in the four year conflict and the town participated in national events to support Union Troops. New Jersey supplied over 88,000 soldiers throughout the war and New Jersey soldiers were present in every major battle.

Costumed docents will be available to give

tours of the c. 1750 house once owned by the Osborn family whose sons fought locally in the American Revolution. Come visit our town's Revolutionary War era museum and hear stories of the exciting early history of Scotch Plains and its role in the founding of our great country.

As always, there is no fee to attend. The Osborn Cannonball House is open for tours on the first Sunday of each month (except January and February) and by appointment by calling (908) 322-6700, Ext. 230. If you are interested in volunteering at the museum, please email us at Info@HistoricalSocietySPFNJ.org. No prior experience required.



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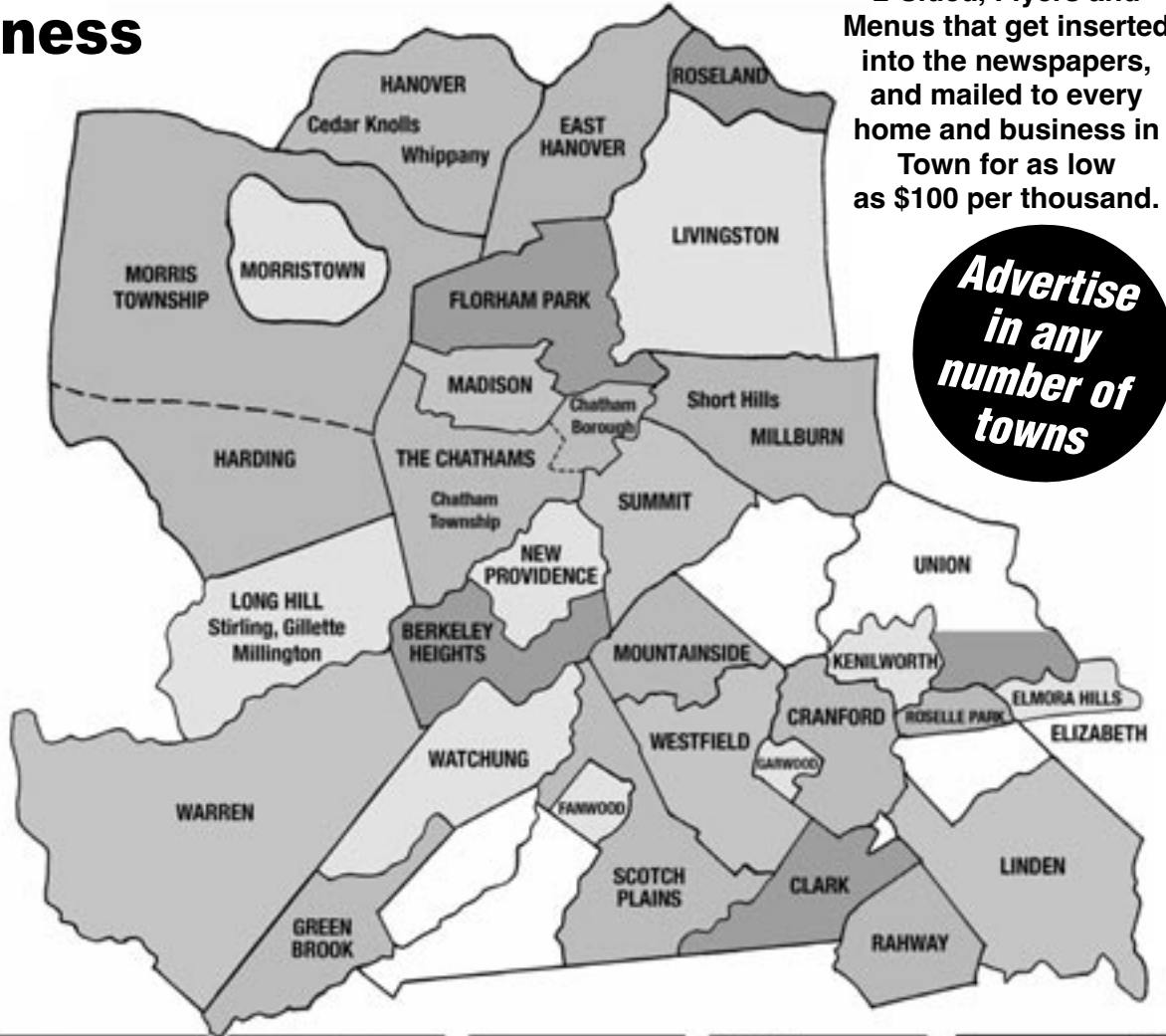
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6 Units	6.5"x6.25" or 10"x4"	320	760	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	2400	2600	2800
9 HALF PAGE	6.5"x9" or 10"x7"	360	860	1300	1600	1900	2200	2400	2600	2800	3000	3200
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EASTER EGG HUNT DRAWS HUNDREDS TO LA GRANDE PARK

Borough of Fanwood

A cold Saturday morning did not deter crowds of children and parents from coming out to La Grande Park for the Borough's annual Easter Egg Hunt. The park venue changed this year as Forest Road Park was unavailable due to construction of a new playground.

Children made the mad dash to find eggs filled with candy and prizes, more than 2,000 of them. Contests included jellybean counting, chocolate egg counting, egg decorating, and bunny drawing. Families and kids also had the opportunity to pose for pictures with the Easter Bunny.

The playground was divided by age into five different egg hunt areas with each hunt taking less than a minute as children scrambled to fill their

baskets with as many eggs as possible. Each egg contained candy or a prize. The hundreds of plastic eggs were filled by Recreation Commission volunteers.

The annual event is a production of the Fanwood Recreation Commission. Recreation Director Bob Budiansky acted as master of ceremonies, while commission members and volunteers assisted at the contest and prize tables. Recreation Commissioner Bruce Zakarin manned the "Bunny Chute," which dispensed candy to waiting kids. He was assisted by Councilwoman Patricia Walsh. Councilwoman Gina Berry assisted with keeping the line moving for the prize table. Councilwoman Erin McElroy Barker and Councilman Anthony Carter also were on hand.



(above) Recreation Commissioner Mike Lowenthal, Councilwoman Gina Berry, the Easter Bunny, Councilwoman Erin McElroy Barker, Councilwoman Patricia Walsh, and Councilman Anthony Carter.

Photos by Paul J. Peyton

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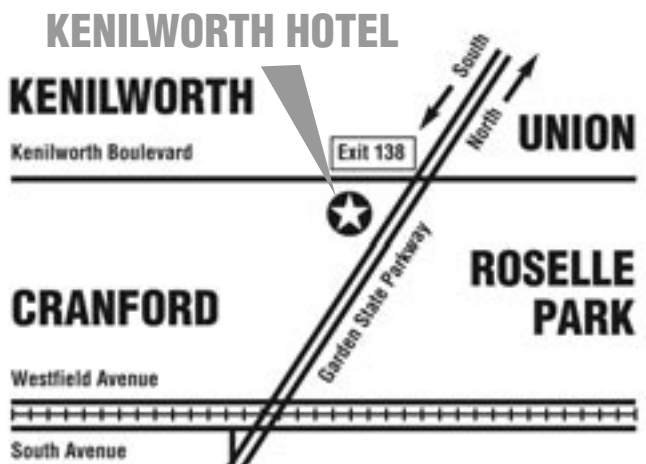


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