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FREE INITIATIVE FOR VETERANS AT THE YMCA

Last year, The Gateway Family YMCA launched a new Veterans Wellness Initiative, offered at the Wellness Center Branch in Union, NJ and at the Elizabeth Branch in Elizabeth, NJ. Beginning this Spring, the free Veterans Wellness Initiative program will continue with new sessions in Union and Elizabeth and will expand to include an additional session at the Rahway Branch, 1564 Irving Street, Rahway. Each program will meet weekly for in-person exercise and wellness, led by a wellness coach, as well as virtually, online to discuss their health in mind, body and spirit.

Open to active military, military veterans, and their spouse or partner, the free 12-week Veterans Wellness Initiative program provides participants access to health and wellness opportunities, as well as meaningful social connection with those who share the bond of military service. Participants benefit from 24-hour access to the YMCA360 virtual platform, an adult couple membership to the Y during the 12-week session, and an additional six-month individual adult

membership following successful completion of the program.

"I have seen first-hand the impact this program has had on our veterans and their families," shared Susan Butler, Director of Community Wellness. "I am excited to continue to expand the Veterans Wellness Initiative throughout our YMCA branches."

The Veterans Wellness Initiative began as a way to create community and wellness opportunities for veterans. During the 12-week course, classes will focus on balance, nutrition, tai-chi, mental health, working out with tension bands, stretching and the circuit course, as well as other weight machines. Small group discussions will build bonds and provide support. To join the interest list for participation in the program, please visit: tgfymca.org/contact-us

To learn more about The Gateway Family YMCA, visit tgfymca.org or contact the Wellness Center Branch 908-349-9622 or veterans@tgfymca.org for more information.



(above) The Gateway Family YMCA has expanded their Veterans Wellness Initiative.

Courtesy Photo

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SNAKE MAN BRINGS FUN TO CLEVELAND SCHOOL

Rahway Public Schools

It was a scales-and-tails kind of morning at Grover Cleveland Elementary School today, as the preschool department traded their storybooks for a hands-on encounter with some of nature's most misunderstood creatures. The school hosted the renowned New Jersey Snake Man, an expert herpetologist known for bringing wildlife education to life through interactive demonstrations.

The visit, held in the school's multipurpose room, allowed Rahway's youngest learners to move beyond the classroom curriculum and get up close with a variety of reptiles, including corn snakes, pythons, and lizards.

The program focused on "bravery and biology," teaching students the importance of respect for wildlife and the vital role reptiles play in the local ecosystem. While some students were initially hesitant, the NJ Snake Man's gentle approach soon had many preschoolers eagerly lining up to touch a snake's scales or watch a tortoise traverse the floor.

"At this age, children are natural scientists—they are curious, observant, and unafraid to ask 'why,'" said Principal Garvin. "Bringing an expert like the NJ Snake Man into our halls transforms a standard lesson into a core memory. Seeing that spark of wonder in their eyes when they realize a snake isn't 'scary' but actually quite fascinating is what education is all about."

The event is part of Grover Cleveland



Elementary's ongoing initiative to provide diverse, sensory-based learning experiences for the preschool program. By introducing environmental science early, the school aims to foster a lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

Vice Principal Dr. Lee-Ellis noted the positive impact on student engagement: "We strive to create an environment where our students feel bold enough to explore the world around them. Today wasn't just about reptiles; it was about overcoming fears and building confidence. Our preschoolers handled the visit with incredible maturity, and the buzz in the hallways afterward was electric."

Photo by Rahway Public Schools



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EDWARD WEHRENBURG NAMED MEMORIAL DAY PARADE GRAND MARSHAL

Rahway American Legion

Edward Wehrenberg, who was named 2026 Grand Marshal for Rahway Memorial Day Parade. He was born in Hillside, NJ and grew up



(above) Edward Wehrenberg, Grand Marshall of the City of Rahway Memorial Day Parade for 2026.

Courtesy Photo



SUNDAY, MAY 24

The City of Rahway Memorial Day Parade will be held on Sunday, May 24, 2026 stepping off at 1:30 p.m. from Rahway City Hall, residents are invited to line the parade route thru downtown Rahway. Randy Wahl will serve as the Grand Marshal. Randy is a lifelong New Jersey resident, born in Elizabeth and raised in Linden. He enlisted in the Army at the age of 17, serving during the Vietnam War era for two and a half years as an Armored Unit Supply Specialist in the 1st Calvary Division 1st Team of the 27th Maintenance Battalion. Randy has been married to Nancy for 33 years; they raised 2 sons. He joined the American Legion Post 5 of Rahway NJ when his family moved to Rahway. He has been a member of Rahway Post 5 for 32 years, holding multiple positions of leadership with the American Legion including serving as commander. Currently, he is the vice president of the Rahway Honorary PBA Local #31. As well as employed by the City of Rahway in the Special Improvement District.

in Iselin in the 50's and 60's.

He served 2 years in the Army, one of which was in Viet Nam. He was in artillery and was a truck driver. When discharged from the Army he worked for Shop-Rite as a switcher for 30 years and retired in 2000.

Ed has been married for 56 years to his wife Sharon and has lived in Colonia since 1970. Ed and Sharon have 2 children, Sheila who resides in Brookfield, WI, and a son Eddie who lives in Somerville, NJ. Sheila has 2 boys, Malcolm is 27 and Cole is 25. Eddie has a daughter Carmella, 18 years old, and a son Declan who is 13. Ed's family is first and foremost in his life.

Ed is an avid member of the Rahway American Legion Post #5. Helping with functions and events they have through out the year and a life time member of the VFW post 6061, NJ. He is a supporter for veterans applying for the benefits they truly deserve. He has been a life time member of the DAV since 2003.

Ed started working in 2001 with "Christmas in April" now called "Tooling around Town", which led to where he is today, volunteering to build handicap ramps through out the year for Woodbridge Township and the American Irish Association. He finds it very rewarding to see how thankful and grateful the families are knowing they have the ability to get out of the house and how it makes there lives easier for them to get around.

Ed has also helped refurbish the newly acquired American Irish Bar, the clean up of Shaughnessy Park, and installing Christmas Trees at St. James Church in Woodbridge. He is also ready to help when and where ever needed. In his free time, Ed likes to go fishing, and vacationing with his family.

Ed would like to sincerely thank the Rahway American Legion and their members for the great honor of being named 2026 Grand Marshal.



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"Then & Now" Movie

Friday 5/1 @ noon

feature Dial M for Murder (1954) in the Library Auditorium.

Trinket Exchange

Saturday 5/2

Trade your trinkets with other collectors at 2:00 p.m. . For ages 18 and over.

STARLAB

Saturday May 2 through Thursday May 7

STARLAB, an inflatable planetarium experience will be shown at the Rahway Public Library from Saturday May 2 through Thursday May 7 with a special dedicated date of Tuesday 5/5 for SENIORS & Disabled @ 1:00 p.m. (Registration is required for ALL dates & times)

Crochet Club

May 4 & 18

in the Library Discovery Studio at 6:00 p.m. Bring your own projects or learn a new pattern! Recommended for ages 16+.

Gel Printing art class

Monday 5/11

Gel Printing art class hosted by Joy Lara at 5:30 p.m. Bring an old shirt to cover your clothes is highly recommended! For ages 16+. Registration is required.

"Our Voices" Book Group

Wednesday 5/13

"Our Voices" Book Group Discussion of "The Color of Water" by James McBride @ 6:00 p.m. in the Discovery Studio.

"Then & Now" Movie

Friday 5/22 @ noon

"Then & Now" feature of Perfect Murder (1998) in the Library Auditorium.

Spring Skincare

Saturday 5/23

Spring Skincare Hands- on DIY Body Scrub Making Class at 2:00 p.m. in the Library Auditorium. Registration is required.

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THE THIRD BATTLE OF SPANKTOWN A CHRONOLOGY OF THE REVOLUTION (PART V) JUNE, 1777

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

The first half of 1777 had been a disappointment for the British. Not only had they lost control over much territory, but they were also losing many troops and the possibility of bringing the war to a quick end. The British high command felt the time had come to go on the offensive to crush General Washington and his rag-tag army. During the month of June, a plan was developed under the direction of Major General William Howe that called for an attack on Washington's fortress in the Watchung Mountains at Middlebrook where he was camped with 8,000 troops. Their reasoning was that with a commanding victory in Central Jersey, the British army could shift its focus to capturing Philadelphia, the rebel capital.

General Howe left Perth Amboy on June 13 with 11,000 troops not knowing his plan would turn out to be a dismal failure. Washington, with information received from his network of spies, was made aware of the British troop movements and decided to remain in his advantageous position and not be coaxed into a battle on lower grounds. Howe, realizing that attacking up-hill would lead to disaster, was unable to lure Washington down. A frustrated Howe would remain in the lower fields under a hot June sun for five days until finally withdrawing.

Upon viewing the British evacuation, Washington decided to move to another strategic location and sent a detachment of 2,500 troops to the fields below to protect his left flank against a counter attack. The detachment was under the command of Brigadier General William Alexander, who was more familiarly known as the self-styled Lord Stirling. By Thursday, June 26 Howe had become apprised of Washington's movements and launched a two-pronged attack against Lord Stirling's troops. One of the columns moved through Short Hills and met the continentals at Ash Swamp in the area of Scotch Plains. Lord Stirling was forced to retreat towards

Westfield as a result of the strength of the British numbers and a heavy cannon barrage. As the day wore on, however, the British, who were suffering under the extreme heat and the constant harassment of rebel militia snipers, ended their pursuit allowing the American troops to return to the mountain fortress in good order.

The redcoats spent the evening in Westfield plundering the village and laying waste to much of the countryside. The next morning, they began their trek back to Perth Amboy and Brunswick marauding as they went. The British troops, however, were not without company, for in pursuit was a body of Lord Stirling's light infantry sent to follow the retreat and, as Washington had instructed, "to inflict all the annoyance possible." The road they were travelling took them directly to Rahway/Spanktown.

As news of the British approach reached the village, the local militia, a paramilitary force comprised of civilian members that numbered over 200, prepared to meet them.

The enemy troops arrived at the junction of St. Georges Avenue and Ross Street intent on reaching Woodbridge before nightfall. From here, they followed the length of a rugged trail that is now Linden Avenue under the constant firing of militia rifles. The citizen soldiers

harassed the redcoats all the way to the Monroe Street Bridge. After a sharp fight at the bridge, the British troops were pushed south on Main Street to the point where it diverges with New Brunswick Avenue.

The redcoats were soon joined there by the second column of British troops that had set out on the 26th and were returning to Perth Amboy via Lake Avenue. With these unexpected reinforcements, the British turned on the rebels and engaged in a two hour battle. The rebels were once again successful and forced the enemy to retreat into Woodbridge. A final skirmish took place in the area where the New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles complex stands today.

This ended the serious fighting in the Rahway/Spanktown area. Although the three battles in 1777 (January 5, February 23, and June 27) may seem insignificant, in the larger sense of the war, they were important for several reasons. First, the important victories in Central Jersey denied the British the control over this critical area. Second, the morale of the American colonist was continually tested throughout the war, and victories such as these did much to keep it high. Finally, by withstanding the might of the British regulars, Washington's army and the local militias proved that perhaps independence could actually become a reality.



In the Rahway Cemetery there are graves of 78 men who fought in the Revolutionary War each marked with military plaques. These brave men fought in either General Washington's Continental Troops or the local militia.

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EASTERN REDBUD TREES

Eastern Redbud (*Cercis Canadensis*) is typically found in open woodlands, thickets, woodland margins, and along streams and bluffs, often on limestone soils. It blooms before and as the leaves emerge, with rosy-pink, pea-like flowers that are borne in fascicles of four to eight. The flowers are held close to the branches, and even bloom along the trunks, covering almost every inch in bloom. Trees may be trained to a single trunk or grow multi-stemmed. Eastern redbud has a flat-topped to rounded growth habit and large heart-shaped leaves.

Fall foliage color is variable, but can be a good, clear yellow. Eastern redbud is in the legume family (*Fabaceae*) so the fruits are brown to black pods typical of that family. While most members of the legume family are able to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere, eastern redbud lacks the nodules and bacteria necessary for that process.

Eastern redbud grows 20 to 30 feet tall and 25 to 35 feet wide, making it a suitable choice for small landscapes. It grows best in full sun to part shade and evenly moist, well-drained soils, but is adaptable to most soils as long as drainage is good. It is also tolerant of acid or alkaline soils. Eastern redbud is hardy in USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 4-9.

In addition, redbud trees support native wildlife. The flowers bloom in March and April and are rich in both nectar and pollen, thus providing a valuable food source for early bees at a time when food is scarce. Bees that visit these flowers include honey bees, bumble bees, mason bees, cuckoo bees, long-horned bees, mining bees, and sweat bees. Redbuds are also host plants for the larvae of several butterflies and moths. Flat brown seed pods are borne in autumn and are eaten by squirrels and some birds.

Use as a specimen, patio or lawn tree, in small groups or naturalized plantings. Eastern redbud is excellent with spring-flowering bulbs such as daffodils and tulips that are in bloom at the same time.

REDBUDS AND THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Native American tribes including the Cherokee, Alabama, Delaware, Kiowa, and Oklahoma used the Eastern Redbud for food, medicine, and cultural rituals.

Tribes ate the flowers raw, fried and cooked in their food. The young seed pods were used as food.

Tribal Medicine men used the bark for treating illnesses like whooping cough and fever.

In the Spring families brought blooming branches indoors to "drive winter out". It was common for the children to eat the blossoms at this time.

The following are quotes from Michael A. Dirr, the highly respected author of *MANUAL OF WOODY LANDSCAPE PLANTS*.

"Very handsome with its gracefully ascending branches; a native tree with a touch of class"



(left) The simple heart shaped leaves are pleasant to look at all season long. They turn yellowish to bright yellow in the autumn.

Flowers: Perfect, reddish purple in bud, opening to a rosy-pink with purplish tinge. Flowers open in March and April and are effective 2 to 3 weeks. Often flowers are produced on old trunks.

Effective as a single specimen, in groupings in a shrub border, especially nice in woodland and naturalized situations.

"One of my favorite eastern United States native plants."

EASTERN REDBUD IN NEW JERSEY

While it is common and widespread in other parts of the United States, it is considered rare and threatened in its natural New Jersey habitat. Its status is due to the loss of natural, wild habitats from development.

Unfortunately the Eastern Redbud is listed as endangered in. It is actively disappearing from its native habitats in New Jersey. It is also of "special concern" in Connecticut.

New Jersey is on the northeastern edge of its native range, contributing to its scarcity.

While wild populations are protected, they are popular, non-invasive, and often planted in urban/landscaped settings in NJ, helping to bolster their presence.

It is important to check the NJ Department of Environmental Protection for official threatened and endangered species lists for the most up-to-date information.

Heartfelt thanks to all the arborist, scientist and environments contributed information used in this article: Penn State University, Edge Of The Woods Native Plant Nursery, The Smithsonian, Michael A. Dirr, *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*

Happy Springtime,

James



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

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

Rahway Native Plant Rain Garden

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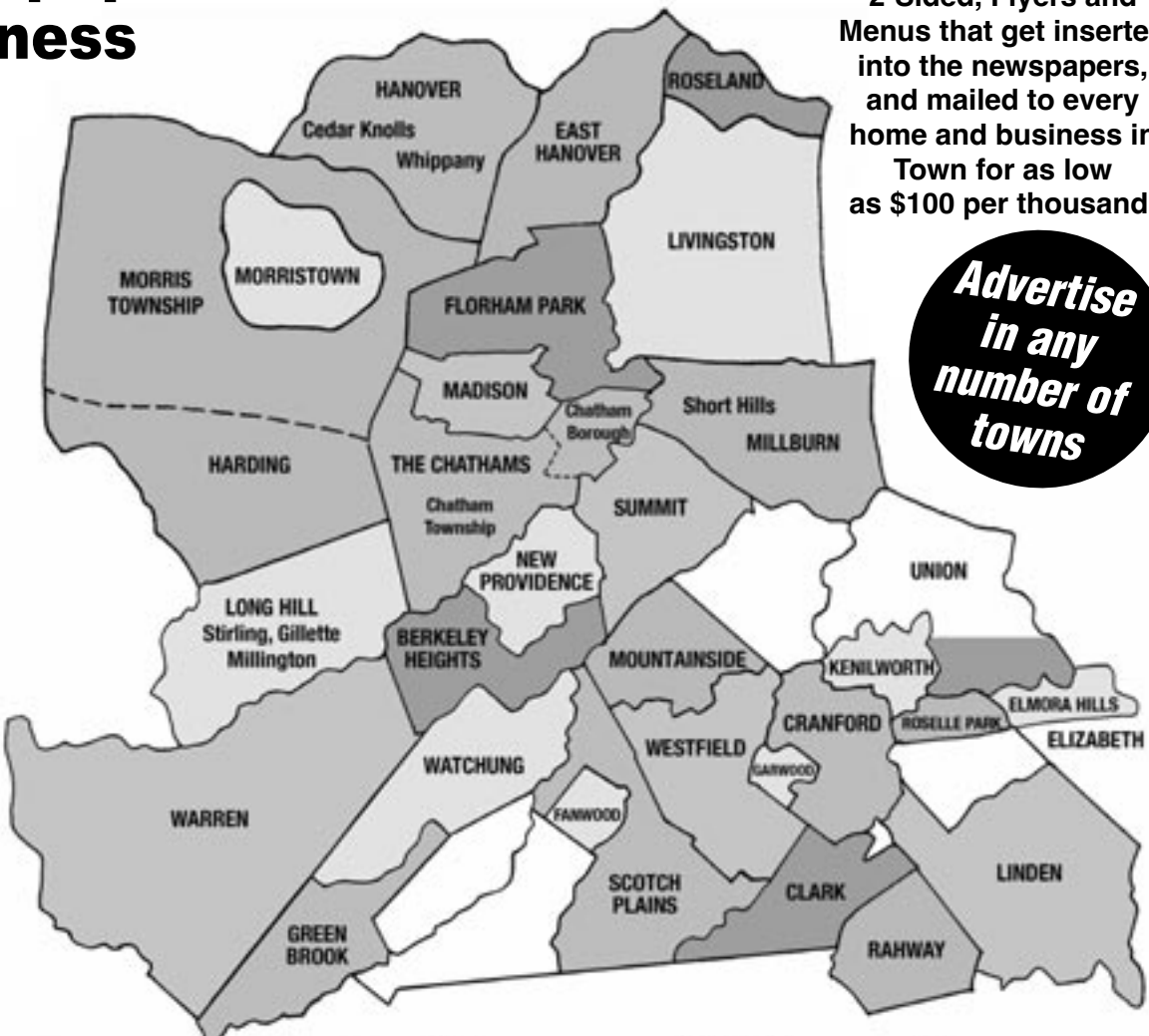
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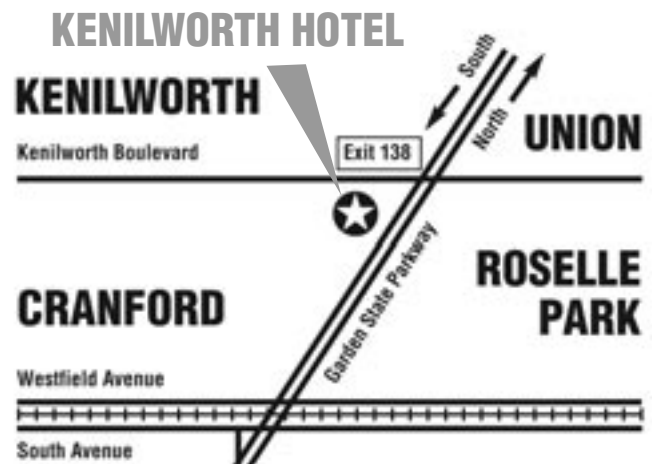
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