

Scotch Plains NJ

WHAT'S HAPPENING MONTHLY

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\$50,000 IN GRANTS, STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League
The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League (FSPSL) is pleased to announce that the organization recently awarded a combined total of \$50,000 in student scholarships and grants to 18 Union County community organizations. Included in the donations were awards to our local Scotch Plains and Fanwood libraries, rescue squads and firefighters; the Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA; Resolve Community Counseling Center; and the Center for Hope Hospice & Palliative Care.

Scholarships totaling \$17,000 were presented to six deserving high school seniors at the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Scholarship Awards Night on May 28. The following students were selected based on a combination of their academic records and service to the community:

- Tess Coffey, who will attend Boston College to study Management and prepare for a career in live events management, particularly within the music industry. Tess dedicated more than 750 volunteer hours at Mane Stream, a therapeutic horse program for children and adults.
- Isabella DeSanto, who will attend the University of New Hampshire to study Occupational Therapy, with an end goal of earning a Masters or Doctorate degree. She completed her Gold Girl Scout award and cites her time volunteering at Children's Specialized Hospital as the experience drawing her to work in Occupational Therapy.
- Samuel Duque Quintero, who will attend Rutgers University to pursue a degree in Finance. His goal is to apply his education toward building financial literacy programs for under-resourced Hispanic communities. Sam founded the Union Latina, a supportive structure for students navigating their immigration journey. Started as a small gathering, it now includes more than 160 student members.
- Griffin Hough, who will attend Indiana University with plans to pursue a degree in Finance with a minor in Mathematics. Amongst his many volunteer and leadership activities, Griffin cites working at the family soup kitchen housed at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church as his most rewarding experience.



(above) Christina Swaak, Chair of Scholarship Committee (center) is flanked by recipients of the League's 2026 scholarships. They are (l-r) Benjamin Sohmer, Tess Coffey, Isabella DeSanto, Aanya Wright, Griffen Hough and Samuel Duque Quintero.

Courtesy Photo

- Benjamin Sohmer, who will attend the University of Georgia. Ben hopes to pursue a path in Business that considers not only profit, but also environmental and humanitarian costs. He dedicated his volunteer time to helping children with special needs learn how to play soccer and swim.
- Aanya Wright, who will attend Rutgers University to pursue a career in Business and Analytics. Having navigated serious health-related hardships, Aanya feels drawn to help others face their challenges. Throughout her high school years she has volunteered as a facilitator with Imagine, providing support for grieving children.

Congratulations to all of the scholarship winners and to everyone in the community who helps The FSPSL fulfill its mission to "Help Us Help Others." All proceeds for grants and scholarships come from the generous giving of new and/or gently used items donated for sale to the FSPSL Thrift Shop at 1741 East Second Street. The store has been a staple in downtown Scotch Plains for decades, offering good quality, reasonably priced merchandise to customers in need of household goods, toys, clothing, and much more. As of 2026 the League has donated more than \$1.6 million to local community organizations and students.

To learn more about the FSPSL, the types of donations accepted and volunteer opportunities, please call the store at 908-322-5420. You can also visit the Scotch Plains Thrift Shop web site scotchplainsthriftshop.weebly.com, or search and follow the "Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League" on Facebook.



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Scotch Plains NJ

WHAT'S HAPPENING MONTHLY

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BALANCE AWARENESS VIA ZOOM EVERY FRIDAY

Scotch Plains Public Library

Yasmin Ofek will lead her Balance Awareness With Yasmin Ofek class every Friday in 2026 from 10 - 11 a.m. via Zoom. This is the third year that Yasmin has hosted this restorative and uplifting class, and it is a fun and healthy way to start the new year off right. Join in to discover a new approach to exercise.

All adults, and older adults in particular, are encouraged to take part in these classes, which are designed to address the loss of balance and strength that can occur as we age.

Yasmin Ofek's instruction emphasizes moving with awareness to allow your nervous system to discover easier, more efficient movement patterns. With her knowledge of anatomy and experience as a fitness trainer, Yasmin's classes can help you establish a better connection

between the brain and body, while also gently strengthening the muscles that keep your body upright.

All you'll need are a chair and sneakers to experience this gentle but effective approach to moving confidently throughout the lifespan. These classes have been wildly popular week after week and participants have expressed how much they enjoy and appreciate Yasmin's unique approach.

For more information or to register, go to scotchplainslibrary.org, email library@scotchplainslibrary.org, or call (908) 322-5007 x 204.

The Zoom link will be sent to your email, and we will send it again as a reminder before each week's class. Please register once to attend any classes in 2026.

MLK PLANNING COMMITTEE NEEDS YOUR HELP

The SPF MLK Planning Committee is seeking community volunteers to help organize next year's Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

The committee is seeking new members to assist with the development and execution of the annual event, which honors the civil rights leader's legacy through community action. Organizers are specifically seeking individuals with expertise in project registration and

management, fundraising, social media, and graphic design.

The opportunity is open to all community members, including high school students. Student volunteers are eligible to receive community service hours for their participation.

Those interested in joining the planning committee are encouraged to contact organizers via email at spfdayofservice@gmail.com.



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GLP-1 FAILED THIS NEW PROVIDENCE MOM...BUT THEN SHE DROPPED 80 POUNDS AND RAN HER FIRST 5K.

There's something nobody tells you when you start GLP-1. The medication can help you eat less. It can move the scale. For a lot of people, it's a genuine tool that opens a door that felt permanently closed.

But it can also quietly take something you can't afford to lose. Research shows that for many people, 25 to 40 percent of the weight lost on a GLP-1 isn't fat at all — it's muscle. The very tissue that keeps you strong, steady on your feet, and independent as you age.

So here's what Cristina Montero learned the hard way: The medication is not the transformation. It's just the beginning of one — if you do the other parts right.

Cristina is 52, a mom from New Providence, and she's down nearly 80 pounds. Her inflammation markers (the culprit for almost every disease) are finally normal. She runs, carries five-gallon water jugs up the stairs and crossed the finish line of her first 5K without walking a single step.

But she'll be the first to tell you: the shot alone didn't do that. This is her story... and if you're over 40 and currently taking GLP-1, or thinking about it, it may be the most important thing you read this year.

GLP-1 WASN'T ENOUGH ON ITS OWN

Before she started this journey, Cristina was ashamed... and she hid under her clothes.

"I knew how I felt and looked was my fault but I needed help," she said. "I always had an excuse for why I couldn't walk, exercise, or take the stairs. I felt tired and achy often. My doctors would tell me to lose weight and I'd say sure, I'm trying — but never really started. I functioned, yes. But I never realized how much my body missed feeling really great."

The frustrations ran deep. Looking in the mirror and hating how her clothes fit. Her chest size felt unmanageable, leading to upper back pain every single day. After gaining close to 100 pounds during her son's pregnancy, her health had taken a serious turn — arthritis in her knees, autoimmune issues, hypertension, and chronic inflammation that no medication seemed to touch.

"My energy — well, if I was in the middle of the mall and they only had stairs, I'd look for an elevator or just sit and wait," she said. "I was so out of shape for the last 25 years. Always tired, almost every morning waking up with a new pain."

There were moments that were quietly humiliating — the ones she didn't talk about much. If something fell on the floor, she had to ask her kids or husband to pick it up because kneeling caused excruciating knee pain. There were times her back spasms were so severe she got stuck on the floor.

She tried everything. The 3-day tuna diet. Nutrisystem. A staple in her ear. Atkins. Weight Watchers. Paleo. Gluten-free. 21 Day Fix. Factor. Orangetheory. Private trainers. Get In Shape Women. Zumba. Some of them worked temporarily. None of them lasted.

"I was successful in some of them but it never lasted," she said. "I'd start to lose a little weight, then go back to normal habits — and always gain it back and more."

Then came GLP-1.

The first time she tried it, she thought the injection alone would do the work. No meaningful diet changes. No exercise. Just the medication.

"That failed miserably," she said plainly. "Injecting and continuing to eat normal junk didn't move the scale like I expected. It only made me feel sick."

She stopped GLP-1. A few months later she tried again... this time with a completely different mindset. This time, she was mentally ready to include something she'd always avoided: A fitness program with people that knew what they heck they were doing.

THE CONVERSATION THAT CHANGED THE PLAN

Cristina's son, Andres, had been talking to her for years about what lasting change actually requires. When Cristina restarted her GLP-1 journey he helped her understand something that most people on the medication never hear: the drug can reduce your appetite and help with weight loss, but without weight training, a significant portion of what you lose won't be fat — it'll be muscle. As much as 25 to 40 percent of it, according to the research.

And muscle isn't just about looking toned. It's the tissue that protects your bones, keeps you strong, and decides whether the next twenty years of your life are spent independent or needing help. Lose muscle and everything gets harder. Your metabolism slows. You feel weak.

"My son opened my eyes to incorporate weight training and cardio," she said. "That was the piece I'd always been missing."

NOT THIS



THIS



That's when she walked into Gabriele Fitness, a small personal training gym in Berkeley Heights that had a 19 year stellar reputation for helping adults over 40 get in the best shape of their lives. As trainers that always stay on the cutting edge... they knew exactly how to help someone taking GLP-1 maximize their results.

WALKING INTO GABRIELE FITNESS FOR THE FIRST TIME

She arrived embarrassed, scared but quietly hopeful. Like many adults over 40 she was afraid of making her knee pain even worse and was convinced she wouldn't be able to do most of the exercises. And after years of fitness programs that hadn't worked, she was bracing herself to be disappointed again.

What she found was something different than anything she'd experienced before.

She started two days a week. The coaches didn't hand her a generic program and wish her luck. When her knee barked, they modified it. When her back felt it, they adjusted in real time — often before she said a word...because they were watching her face, her movement, the subtle signals her body was sending. And every session was building the one thing the medication couldn't give her back: strength.

"They know when to push and how much," she said. "They recognize when it's an off day and work with me to keep me moving. No more excuses."

For the first time in 25 years of trying, she didn't feel lost in a gym and instead was filled with hope.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GLP 1 AND PERSONAL TRAINING WORK TOGETHER

Once the training clicked alongside everything else, the results that had been stalled for months began to move — and they didn't stop.

Nearly 80 pounds gone. Inflammation markers, elevated for over a decade despite multiple medications, are finally normal. Her doctors, who had been telling her for years to lose weight, are looking at her bloodwork with something close to disbelief.

"Years of taking so many meds could have been avoided with a prescription to a gym with a great group of caring personal trainers"

But the numbers only tell part of the story.

"My clothes fit better and I actually don't hide under them anymore," she said. "I've lost inches throughout my entire body. Occasionally when I'm with my husband and kids, I love showing them how I notice a muscle — how my quads are actually forming. It truly is amazing. It's a change I never thought I'd see."

She's simply a happier person. After she posted a picture recently, a friend reached out to congratulate her for looking so happy and confident — and then told her she'd motivated her to start as well.

"I feel more confident in my clothes and in my own persona," Cristina said. When people see me in person, they tell me I look like a completely different person. A happy and confident woman."

She can kneel now without pain. The woman who used to ask her kids to pick things up off the floor because she couldn't bend down now carries five-gallon water jugs in each hand up the stairs. She hops into her husband's truck without struggling. She wears three-inch stiletto heels. She walks into any store she wants and does a celebration dance in the fitting room when things fit.

These aren't just cosmetic wins. They're the quiet markers of a body that's going to stay strong and independent for decades — getting off the floor on your own, carrying the load, catching

yourself when you stumble. That's what muscle buys you, and it's the one thing no injection can.

And this past September, she stood at the starting line of a 5K, knowing she never had run that far in her life. She was nervous and worried she wouldn't make it.

She crushed it, and didn't stop once. Not even on the hill. "Crossing that finish line without stopping was one of the proudest moments of my life," she said

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM CRISTINA TO ANYONE ON GLP-1 — OR THINKING ABOUT IT

"GLP-1 is a tool. But it's not the secret fix the media is making it out to be. I learned that the hard way the first time around. The gym — real coaching, real structure, real accountability — is what made everything actually work."

I'm not getting any younger, and I want to live long enough to see my grandkids. Most importantly, I don't want to be a burden to anyone. That's what finally got me serious.

Get Started before you feel ready. You don't need to know what you're doing or get in shape on your own BEFORE you hire a trainer... that's what they're for. Just show up and the right gym will take it from there. For me, it's Gabriele Fitness and that one decision changed everything for me. You'll start to feel better than you have in years. Slow and steady works, if you stay consistent.

We all start nervous. Stop waiting for the perfect time and just get up and start."

For Those Who See Themselves... or are worried about someone that would resonate with Cristina's Story — Read This:

Gabriele Fitness has opened 13 spots for local residents to experience their personal training program FREE for 14 days. You'll get 14 days to experience what Cristina found when the missing piece finally clicked into place.

This offer expires soon and is limited to 13 people. To get the full details and see if any spots are still available, scan below or call 908-464-4441



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P.S. Many people reading this article will be inspired by Cristina yet still feel hesitant to try the program. With anything new, there's always uncertainty — especially with something like a new fitness routine. But if you're not working out right now, or you've been inconsistent (like most people) you've read the exact article you needed to read today because...

Gabriele Fitness has helped thousands of people in this community over the past 19 years. For some, the program has had a life-changing effect, and many members have stayed for nearly two decades.

A large number of them are now in the best shape of their lives (...and 2 decades older) — but they all started in the same place as anyone reading this and considering starting their fitness journey. Because living longer only matters if you stay strong enough to enjoy it.

If you're still hesitant, the link below shares an ocean of success stories from people just like you... who've transformed their lives... and in some cases, the lives of everyone in their family. This is powerful stuff.

<https://gabrielefitness.com/results/>

To get the full details about the Free Personal Training Program and to see if any of the 13 spots are still available scan below...



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NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

Become a member of this life-saving organization



Courtesy Photo

The Scotch Plains Volunteer Rescue Squad was founded in 1937 by a group of local residents who wanted to be there for their friends, neighbors, and family in times of crisis. It's one of the longest-serving and volunteer-only squads in the state.

Today, the squad has a cohesive group of dedicated members from various backgrounds. While some are already in the medical field, others are IT specialists, teachers, students, retirees, and stay-at-home parents. Whatever your background, all you need is a willingness to learn critical life-saving treatments, and of course, a passion for serving others.

Becoming a volunteer EMT is one of the greatest ways you can help your community, and anyone over 16 years of age is eligible. Obtaining your initial EMT certification is often accomplished by taking a semester-long class at a local community college. These classes can be taken during the day, in the evening, and even on weekends, and are paid for by the state of NJ as long as certain criteria are met.

Keeping your certification up to date is also necessary and can be accomplished by taking short, interesting, and relevant classes offered on various days and times. Again, these can be completed at no cost and usually take place at the rescue squad building or at a nearby location.

Once accepted as a member of the Scotch

Plains Volunteer Rescue Squad, all uniforms are provided, and a duty crew of four to five hours a week will be scheduled at a mutually agreed-upon time. There are daytime, evening, and overnight crews available.

Members are also expected, when possible, to take part in the many community activities where an ambulance is requested, such as football games, charity walks, and Scotch Plains Day. These provide wonderful opportunities for members to meet their neighbors and share what they do and why.

Although members of the squad are not paid, a pension account (LOSAP- Length of Service Award Program) is offered.

Those looking to be part of the rescue squad without obtaining EMT certification, and who are at least 14 years of age, are welcome to become a member of our Auxiliary. This amazing group supports the organization by holding fundraisers, assisting at special events, promoting squad interests, and so much more.

Join the Scotch Plains Volunteer Rescue Squad and serve with others who 'Ride for Pride, Not Pay'. For more information, and/or to fill out an application, go to ScotchPlainsRescueSquad.com.

*Contributing Author: Susan Baldani,
a life member of the Scotch Plains
Volunteer Rescue Squad.*



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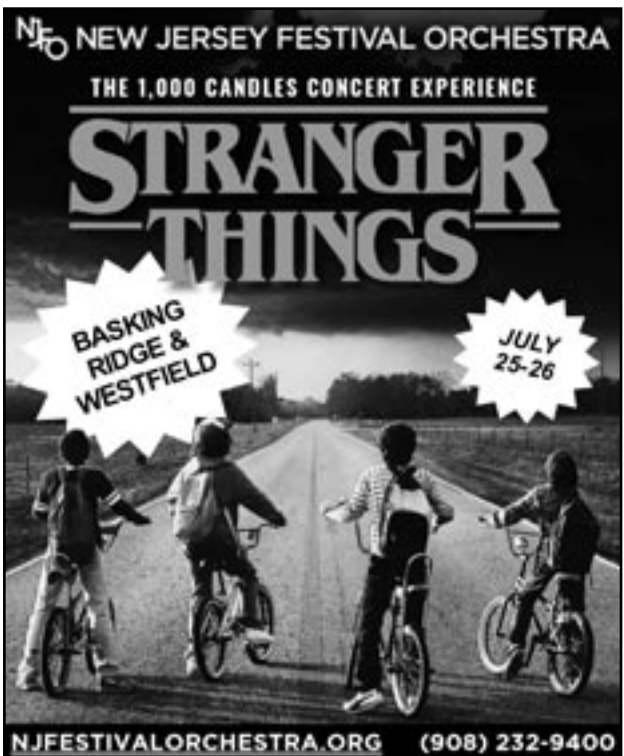
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NJFO PRESENTS STRANGER THINGS: THE 1,000 CANDLES CONCERT EXPERIENCE

The New Jersey Festival Orchestra (NJFO) invites audiences to step into the world of Stranger Things this summer with Stranger Things: The 1,000 Candles Concert Experience, a one-of-a-kind candlelit event combining the excitement of live music, beloved television themes, and the unforgettable sounds of the 70s, 80s, and 90s.

Performed by a live string ensemble and narrated by Maestro David Wroe, this immersive concert experience celebrates the nostalgia and atmosphere of the hit Netflix series while showcasing iconic pop and rock classics that defined a generation. Audiences will hear music inspired by the show's haunting soundtrack alongside recognizable favorites from the decades that shaped its distinctive sound and style.

Illuminated by the warm glow of candlelight, the performance offers a unique blend of cinematic storytelling, nostalgia, and live music, creating an unforgettable evening for fans of Stranger Things, music lovers, and newcomers alike.

"This concert is designed to bring people together through music they know and love," said Maestro David Wroe. "Whether you're a

longtime fan of the series, grew up with the music of the 70s, 80s, and 90s, or are simply looking for a memorable night out, this experience offers something for everyone."

Perfect for family outings, date nights, multigenerational gatherings, and summer entertainment, Stranger Things: The 1,000 Candles Concert Experience welcomes audiences of all ages. To encourage younger attendees to experience live music, NJFO is offering \$25 student tickets for patrons age 21 and under.

*The concert will be presented
in three performances:*

Saturday, July 25, 2026

at 5:00 PM and 7:00 PM

The Presbyterian Church Chapel

140 Mountain Avenue, Westfield, NJ

Sunday, July 26, 2026 at 2:30 PM

Sieminski Theater

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(above) Scotch Plains Rescue Squad Chief Dan Sullivan presents an award to EMT Chang Yaramothu.

Courtesy photos



(above, l-r) Police Chief David Lavery, with award recipient Officer Michael Ceceri and Captain James Richie.

FIRST RESPONDERS AWARDED SHIELD AWARDS

Scotch Plains Township

Scotch Plains First Responders were honored at the annual Father Nelligan Chapter of the Knights of Columbus annual Shield Awards held on April 28th, 2026. The awards recognizes first responders from Fanwood and Scotch Plains, including police, fire, and EMS, for exemplary

community service, dedication, and bravery. Those Scotch Plains First Responders honored were Fire Department: Captain Ryan Edwish, Firefighters Nicholas Hueschkel, Giacomo Pares, and Matthew Adams. Police Department: Officer Michael Ceceri and Captain James Richie. EMS: Chang Yaramothu.



(above, l-r) Battalion Chief Brendon Canavan presented the awards to Captain Ryan Edwish, Firefighters Nicholas Hueschkel, Giacomo Pares, and Matthew Adams.

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OPERA AT FLORHAM ANNOUNCES NEW SEASON

Opera at Florham is delighted to unveil its 2026–2027 season, offering audiences an exciting journey through beloved Operas, festive traditions, legendary performers, and emerging vocal talent.

The season opens on **Sunday, July 19, 2026**, with a special celebration of **America's 250th Anniversary** featuring a repertoire honoring the great American Opera singers whose artistry has shaped the nation's musical heritage. Come see this special performance at The Mansion at Fairleigh Dickinson University (285 Madison Ave, Madison, NJ 07940).

On **September 13, 2026**, audiences will be transported to Paris with **La Vie en Bohème**, an engaging exploration of Puccini's beloved masterpiece and the captivating lives of four struggling artists and the women who transform their world. At The Mansion at Fairleigh Dickinson University

The magic continues on **November 8, 2026**, with **Fantasy in Opera** at **The Church of Saint Philomena in Livingston** (386 South Livingston

Avenue, Livingston, NJ 07039), showcasing enchanting selections from Operas filled with wonder, imagination, and the supernatural.

The holiday season arrives on **December 6, 2026**, with the annual **Holiday Spectacular: Jingle Jingle and Mingle Mingle All the Way**, a joyful musical celebration at St. Margaret of Scotland R.C. Church in Morristown (6 Sussex Ave, Morristown, NJ 07960). This performance is at 3:00 pm.

On **February 14, 2027**, Opera at Florham presents **Operatic Villains You Love to Hate**. A Valentine's Day program featuring some of Opera's most memorable and delightfully wicked characters. Back at our home at The Mansion at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey.

The spring season continues on **April 4, 2027**, with **An Afternoon with the Šebec Tenors: A Tribute to Luciano Pavarotti**. Acclaimed tenor Christian Šebec joins his sons, Zachary and Eric, for an unforgettable afternoon celebrating the legendary tenor through Operatic favorites and family harmony. At The Mansion at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey.

The season concludes on **May 23, 2027**, with the **37th Annual International Vocal Competition in Honor of Violetta Dupont**, where audiences can experience the extraordinary talent of tomorrow's Opera stars as they compete for top honors. At The Mansion at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey.

Opera at Florham invites music lovers of all ages to join us for a season filled with passion, artistry, storytelling, and unforgettable performances.

Tickets are \$35 for General Admission, with discounted tickets available for students. **Become a season sponsor for just \$180!** All 7 concerts for less than the price of 6! Over a 25% discount! Visit operaatflorham.org for tickets and more information.

Founded in 1982, **Opera at Florham** is northern New Jersey's premier Opera company, presenting annual concerts, the International Vocal Competition, and Opera Talk educational series.

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PASSING THE TORCH AT 250: HOW NORTH JERSEY'S NEWEST ENLISTEES CARRY AMERICA'S LEGACY FORWARD

*Martha Papson Garcia, Ed.D. (U.S. Army)
Director of Veterans Services, ROTC Liaison,
Fairleigh Dickinson University*

Veteran organizations often serve as the backbone of community support for those who have served in the military. Yet, one group is uniquely transforming how America honors its newest service members—before they even don the uniform. While traditional groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion focus primarily on veterans returning from conflict, Our Community Salutes (OCS) dedicates its mission entirely to the next generation of patriots: high school seniors stepping into the U.S. Armed Forces.

As communities across the nation prepared for Fourth of July celebrations and looked forward to America's milestone 250th birthday, the work of Our Community Salutes of North Jersey stood as a powerful reminder of what local support truly meant.

Founded in 2009 by educator and Army veteran Dr. Kenneth Hartman, OCS was created to fill an important gap in community recognition. While college-bound seniors receive enthusiastic decision-day applause and student-athletes draw local headlines for signing with sports teams, military enlistees often quietly slip away to basic training without public acknowledgment. Our Community Salutes ensures these young men and women are the first to hear a collective "thank you" from their hometown.

The organization operates on a three-pronged

support model. For enlistees, public recognition ceremonies provide resources, mentorship, and a sense of pride to ease their transition into active duty. For families, educational tools, community connections, and peer networks that help parents and siblings navigate the military journey. For communities, a collaborative platform uniting local business leaders, veterans, educators, and elected officials to honor local defenders.

Each spring, the North Jersey chapter of OCS brings this essential mission into focus. Recently, the group hosted its 10th Annual Enlistee Recognition Ceremony at Fairleigh Dickinson University's Florham Campus in Madison, New Jersey.

At this high-profile event, more than 90 high school seniors from across northern New Jersey were honored as they committed to enlist in the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or National Guard. Surrounded by active-duty military leaders, veterans, local dignitaries, and emotional families, these young patriots received a formal send-off recognizing their induction into the elite "less than 1% club" of Americans who wear the uniform. To further support families, OCS introduced programs like OCS Connect, designed specifically to build community for those at home during their loved ones' military journey.

As America approaches its Semiquincentennial—its 250th birthday—the thread connecting these North Jersey enlistees, today's veterans, and the original patriots of the

Revolutionary War becomes profound. It is an unbroken chain of everyday citizens choosing extraordinary sacrifice.

In 1776, the Continental Army was built by farmers, blacksmiths, and tradesmen who swapped civilian tools for muskets to defend the ideal of freedom. Many marched through northern New Jersey, known as the "Crossroads of the Revolution," enduring hardships such as brutal winters in Morris and Bergen counties. Today's veterans have inherited the responsibility of maintaining peace through decades of global conflict. Now, these high school enlistees—stepping onto the same historic Jersey soil—carry forward that legacy by voluntarily safeguarding American liberty. Just as only about 3% of colonists fought for independence, today's service members represent a committed minority protecting the majority.

Many historical battles that were won long ago are celebrated on the Fourth of July. But organizations like Our Community Salutes remind us that freedom is an active, ongoing relay race. By honoring the new generation of military enlistees, OCS ensures that the legacy of American liberty remains vibrant.

The act of honoring veterans isn't just about looking back - it is an investment in the future of the nation. Through grassroots support and community recognition, these young patriots receive a powerful message: their sacrifice is valued, their service is celebrated, and their legacy is America's ongoing story.



(above) Our Community Salutes of North Jersey 2026, High School Enlistees

Courtesy Photo

43RD ANNUAL LAW ENFORCEMENT SPECIAL OLYMPICS TORCH RUN

Scotch Plains Township Police Department

On June 5, 2026, members of the Scotch Plains and Fanwood Police Departments joined police officers and other community members from across the state to be Guardians of the Flame in the 43rd Annual Law Enforcement Torch Run to benefit Special Olympics of New Jersey. Over 3,000 Police Officers took to their local streets to raise funds and awareness for this incredible organization. They carry the "Flame of Hope" which officially leads into the Special Olympics Summer Games. This event helps raise awareness and funds to support year-round sports training and competition opportunities for thousands of athletes with intellectual disabilities throughout New Jersey.

ABOUT LAW ENFORCEMENT TORCH RUN®

The Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR), initiated in 1981 by Wichita Police Chief Richard LaMunyon, has grown into a worldwide



movement. What began as a humble initiative has transformed into a global beacon of hope and unity, driven by the collective efforts of law enforcement volunteers. Known as Guardians of the Flame, these dedicated individuals join hands with Special Olympics athletes to champion the cause of acceptance and inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The essence of LETR lies in its community-centric approach.

Law enforcement members from various levels, including federal, national, state, provincial, local, and even military sectors, come together to support this noble cause. Their collaboration extends beyond mere participation; it signifies a commitment to fostering a society where everyone, irrespective of their abilities, is embraced and celebrated.



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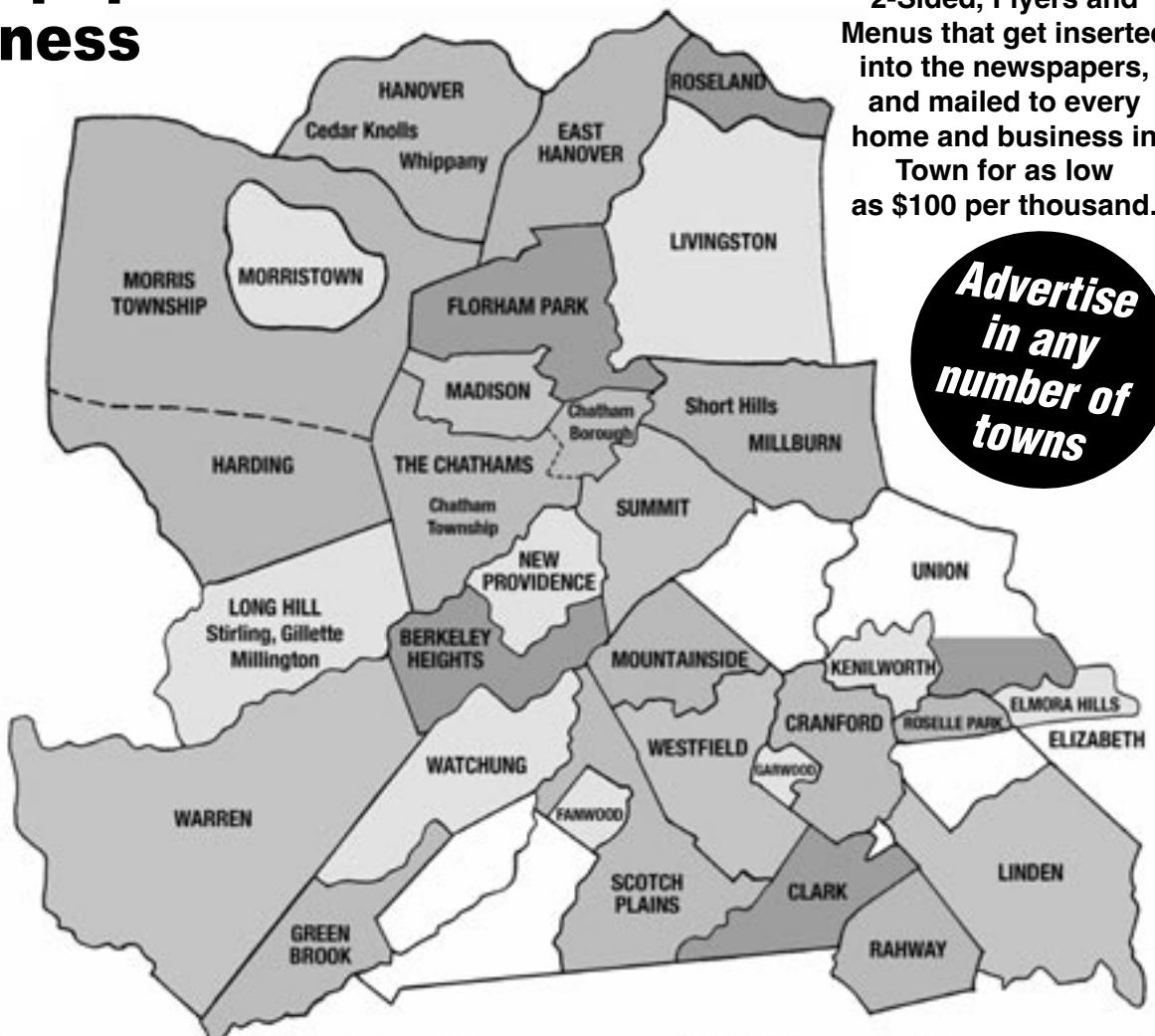
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up and ready for its new resident to move in.

Each Veteran Welcome Home Kit costs approximately \$1,800 and is purchased through fundraising events, donations, and grants from the Elks National Foundation. They are given to the veteran free of charge.

Nationwide, an estimated 40,000 veterans experience homelessness on any given night. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission has pledged to help end veteran homelessness by ensuring veterans have access to safe, stable housing.

Here in New Jersey, dozens of Veteran Welcome Home Kits have been delivered since the beginning of the year. And year round, Elks volunteers provide direct services to more than 1,000 veterans at VA facilities across the state and continue to connect with veterans and active military members in their local communities, offering assistance wherever it is needed.

Visit elks.org to learn more about the Elks, their charitable causes, and how to become a member.



(above) The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks - turning empty rooms into a home.

Courtesy Photo

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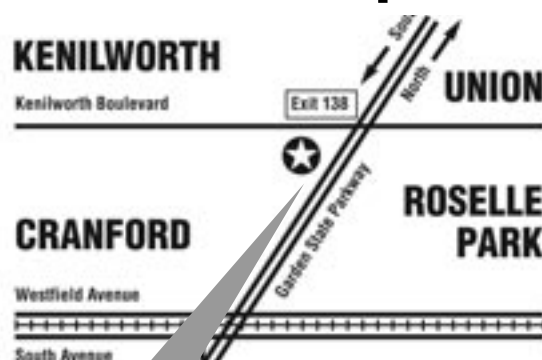
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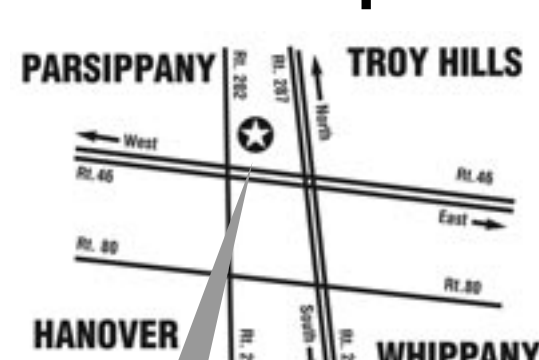


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