

LOCAL TALK

NEWARK • IRVINGTON • EAST ORANGE • ORANGE • WEST ORANGE • SOUTH ORANGE • MAPLEWOOD • BLOOMFIELD • MONTCLAIR & MORE

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25¢

“LET’S TALK FOR THE BETTERMENT OF OUR COMMUNITIES”

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER

ESSEX COUNTY • EAST ORANGE • ORANGE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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NEWARK HOSTS INVESCO QQQ LEGACY CLASSIC



Newark native and actor Michael B. Jordan sharing his excitement for the basketball showcase. Photo By Rich Graessle

SEALS V. GROUNDHOG



Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. (center) with Lady Edwina of Essex, Essex County Turtle Back Zoo's resident groundhog, Commissioner Len Luciano (left) and animal keeper Valerie Rapaglia. (Photo by Glen Frieson)

A VOICE FOR ORANGE



The residents in Orange will contemplate three major elections in 2024. One for Mayor and Council, another for the Primary and District Leaders, and the final, President of the United States.

As of January 29, 2024, I have been certified to be positioned on the ballot as a candidate for Mayor for the City of Orange. Many of you

may be wondering why, and my answer is simple. Orange deserves better. The history, the families, the future of our children and businesses, have all been neglected for years.

As a council member, I have fearlessly pushed against the norm and the “business as usual” politics. I

(Continued on page 13)



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To
**PAGE
16**



Editorial
Dhiren Shah
 Editor-In-Chief

Hello Readers,

President Biden has not had any strong opponent as far as the Democratic primaries are concerned. He won the first primary, South Carolina, in the country by a landslide or I would say nearly 100%. So, there is no opposition.

The Grammys on Sunday, Feb. 4 was more unusual than all the other Grammy shows. Taylor Swift was the talk of the town, and winning her 4th Album of the Year made her the sole record holder at the Grammys. In the other part of Grammys, Killer Mike was handcuffed and arrested after winning three Grammys at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.

Killer Mike's real name is Michael Render. He was arrested at about 4 pm for a physical altercation at Chick Hearn Court and transported to the LAPD

central division. However, due to the Grammys, he was released temporarily with a phone call request of Grammys' Chief Harvey Mason Jr. One minute, Mike was on top, but due to his own actions, the next minute he was on the bottom.

George Stephanopoulos, a well-known interviewer, asked a question to Sen. J.D. Vance, R-Ohio, whether the president must abide by legitimate Supreme Court rulings on ABC News. Because he was unwilling to accept Vance's answers, he cut off the interview. That's not good journalism in my opinion. When we as journalists take an interview, we are the mirror and whatever the answer is we have to accept it. Agreeing with something and accepting it are two different things. I understand that sometimes, if the person you are interviewing is being vague, you may wish to adjust the questioning, but you do not cut off the interview. Our job is to get the truth from a source, not dictate whether or not other people should believe something based on our own bias, whether political or otherwise. Senator Vance has his own pride as well.

He became senator because the majority of the voters trusted him.

The way more and more immigrants are entering in the United States, I have some predictions of my own. I have predicted in a 2005 editorial that there would be street demonstrations within next 10 years. We have seen and experienced street demonstrations in the past 10 to 15 years now. Similarly, I predict that the Spanish language will be one of the dominant languages in another 10 to 15 years. I wouldn't be surprised in 40 to 50 years, Spanish may be the primary language of the United States and English might be the secondary language. So, everyone will have to learn Spanish slowly and gradually. By that time, when someone visit the USA from England, they will have to look for a language translator from English to Spanish.

On Feb. 6 a jury convicted Jennifer Crumbley, a mother of a school shooter, for involuntary manslaughter in Michigan. It was the first of its kind and an unusual verdict. However, that was necessary to set an example for the parents who train their children and buy guns without any fear. Her child was responsible for the

deaths of four students in 2021. As a mother, Crumbley has responsibility for raising her son. Mr. and Mrs. Crumbley were called for a parents meeting when Ethan Crumbley drew a gun picture in a math class. However, the parents did not take him home, and after few hours, Ethan showed up in the school with a gun. The father has been charged also in a separate case. Ethan was sentenced to prison without the possibility of parole. This will give a strong statement for parents who raise their children to be violent without any fear.

Former President Trump lost a case where the court said that he was not immune from prosecution for actions taken while he was in office for the Jan. 6 case. He will likely want the Supreme Court to intervene. While a president should not have blanket immunity, it would be best if the trials were pushed until after the election. Many voters find the timing suspicious, which may be why Trump's lead in the polls is growing.

Have a wonderful week.

I'll talk to you next time.

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WEATHER FOR THE WEEK

<u>THURSDAY</u>	<u>FRIDAY</u>	<u>SATURDAY</u>	<u>SUNDAY</u>	<u>MONDAY</u>	<u>TUESDAY</u>	<u>WEDNESDAY</u>
Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	PM Rain	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy
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ESSEX COUNTY HONORS FIVE FOR MUSLIM HERITAGE MONTH

By Walter Elliott

NEWARK - The Essex County Board of Commissioners, by honoring four civic-minded local men and women here and paying tribute to a fifth Jan. 25, has set a high recognition bar in their inaugural Muslim Heritage Month Celebration here.

The Commissioners, in their first in an annual Muslim Heritage Month service, presented recognition awards to former East Orange Jimmy Small, Newark restaurateur Younis Moheisen, Irvingtonian Baseemah Annette Beasley and Newarker Hassan Abdus-Sabur.

County elders, at their Hall of Records chamber here that Friday, started with a moment of silence for the late Imam Hassan Sharif.

"The Board of Commissioners (is) proud to concur with the Governor and the (State) Legislature to commemorate the monumental achievements of the Muslim community and to recognize January as Muslim Heritage Month," said Commission President Carlos M. Pomares (D-

Bloomfield). "Muslim residents have directly contributed to the positive growth and diversity of Essex County in all aspects of culture and society. Our honorees exemplify and are a reflection of the outstanding people in our Muslim community."

2024 is the first year New Jersey governmental agencies could hold a Muslim Heritage Month. Gov. Phil Murphy (D-Rumson) signed a joint State Senate and General Assembly bill, making January Muslim Heritage Month, April 28 during Ramadan month's ending Eid festival.

"New Jersey greatly benefits from the patriotism, philanthropy, advocacy, civic engagement, business and culture of Muslim Americans and Muslim American organizations in our state," said Murphy.

The Senate and Assembly passed SJR 105/AJR 194 by respective unanimous 39-0 and 76-0 votes Feb. 2 and March 30, 2023. The joint bill was sponsored by Assemblywomen Shannique Speight (D-Newark) and Mila Jasey (D-South Orange) among 24 of their colleagues.

The joint resolution was the result of five years' effort by the Muslim Heritage Month Coalition of NJ. The bill recognizes the contributions of some 300,000 New Jerseyans who identify themselves as Muslims. They make up one of the largest concentrations of Muslims among the 3.5 million across the U.S.

Five of Pomares' fellow nine commissioners were present Jan. 25, including Commission Vice President Tyshammie Cooper (D-East Orange) and members Romaine Graham (D-Irvington), A'Dorian Murray-Thomas (D-Newark), Wayne Richardson (D-Newark) and Patricia Seabold (D-Livingston). (More than half of the nine commissioners present at a public event may trigger the need to past advance public hearing notices.)

County Surrogate Alturick Kenny (D-Newark) and Imam Wahy-ud Deen Shareef of Irvington were also among the witnessing audience. Shareef, imam of Masjid Waarith ud Deen of Irvington, offered prayers.

The event started with a moment of silence for Imam Shareef. Shareef was shot dead after opening Masjid Muhammad in Newark for 6 a.m. Fajr prayers Jan. 3. Three men have been arrested and charged with weapons possession. (The Essex County Prosecutor's Office, as of press time, have not charged any of them or any fourth person for murder.)

Hassan Abdus-Sabur is founder of the Historic Black College and University Scholarship Bike Ride. Around 25 riders pedal three days from Newark to Washington, DC with stops in Philadelphia, Pa. and Aberdeen, Md. It has raised over \$250,000 in scholarships and helping 35 students to matriculate in HBCUs.

The fourth generation Newarker and father of four is an aide to Newark Council President Lamonica McIver. He is a member of the Believe in Newark Foundation, the Newark Public Library and the Newark Parking Authority.

Baseemah Annette Beasley is perhaps best known as an Irvington Public Schools Board of Education member and wife of the late councilman and Irvington

Democratic Committee. Chairman D. Bilal Beasley. The 25-year Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield retiree succeeded her husband as Irvington Democratic Committee Chairperson.

The Newark Southside (now Malcolm X Shabazz) High School graduate works as an aide for State Sen, Renee Burgess and founded the Shahid F. & D. Bilal Beasley Memorial Scholarship Fund. The fund started in tribute to son Shahid, 17, who was killed in 1991. The mother of five, grandmother of eight and great-grandmother of 15 awards Irvington High School graduates with scholarships and promoted IPS Eighth Graders with books and gift certificates.

Younis Moheisen is best known for owning and operating King's Family Restaurant and Catering in Newark, specializing in Halal Southern Style Cuisine. He had opened King's in 1992 and has since expanded the restaurant and catering hall.

Moheisen came here by way of his native Palestine and emigrated to Paterson. The Rutgers University English class student trained as a computer technician and worked several part-time jobs before applying his love for cooking with King's.

The married father of three sponsors free HIV testing every third Saturday of the month as part of his partnership with Hyacinth AIDS Foundation. He has received awards from Newark civic elders for his working with school activities, feeding the homeless and community health fairs.

Jimmy Small is perhaps best known as a two-term East Orange City Councilman and a seven-year East Orange School District member - with two years as its Board of Education President. He is also President of the Muslim League of Voters in NJ and is an East Orange Democratic Committee district leader.

The EOSD product - EOHS Class of 1971 graduate - served in the U.S. Navy and Reserve 1979-92. The Rutgers-Newark political science and public administration grad started Brothers in Science and Success and Sisters in Science while as a 30-year science teacher in the Newark Public Schools.

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SPORTS WRAP

By William Hathaway, Jr.

This past weekend in the city of Newark, the third annual HBCU Invesco QQQ Legacy Classic took place at the Prudential Center in front of a sellout crowd.

The first game of the doubleheader saw Grambling State win the battle of Tigers over Jackson State 70-62. The GSU Tigers were powered to the win by Tra'Michael Moton's 19 points on 7-14 shooting and 4 rebounds. Leading Jackson State was Ken Evans with 15 points. JSU was stymied by GSU's defense, only shooting 35 percent while Grambling was 46 percent. Jackson State did outrebound Grambling State 38-36.

In the second game of the doubleheader, Hampton University broke a long losing streak and beat rival Howard 63-61. Jerry Deng led the Pirates to victory with 21 points, dominating the 2nd half with some key baskets. Deng was also 4-6 from 3 point land. Jordan Nesbitt add-

ed 17 points on 8-13 shooting and hitting some clutch free throws late.

Leading the Bison in a valiant effort was Don Campbell with 18 points and 10 rebounds on 7-15 from the field. Bryce Harris with 16 points and 14 rebounds, and Marcus Dockery with 11 points and 6 rebounds.

In the post-game news conference, head coach Kenny Blakley said he gave credit to the Hampton basketball team for the victory, and that they came ready to play. Bryce Howard a player on the Hampton basketball team said, "It was a great honor to play in this game."

The legacy classic hosted by actor and Newark native Michael B. Jordan. Throughout the weekend, he addressed the student-athletes and fans at the game.

This year on the concourse at the Prudential Center, there were information tables with resources for students of all HBCU schools. The game was broadcast live on TNT Network.



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**UNITED STATES
DOJ CLEANS HOUSE
AT NYCHA**

In the largest number of federal bribery charges on a single day in DOJ history, 70 current and former employees of the NYCHA Have Been Charged with allegedly accepting cash payments from contractors in exchange for awarding NYCHA contracts.

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York; Jocelyn E. Strauber, the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (“DOI”); Ivan J. Arvelo, the Special Agent in Charge of the New York Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”); Rae Oliver Davis, the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Inspector General (“HUD OIG”); and Jonathan Mellone, the Special Agent in Charge of the Northeast Region of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (“DOL-OIG”), announced the unsealing of bribery and extortion charges against 70 current and former employees of the New York City Housing Authority (“NYCHA”).

Sixty-six of the 70 defendants were arrested Feb. 6 in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and North Carolina. Defendants who were arrested in the New York area were scheduled to appear before U.S. Magistrate Judges Stewart D. Aaron, Sarah L. Cave, Valerie Figueredo, Sa-

rah Netburn, Katharine H. Parker, Gary Stein, and Ona T. Wang in Manhattan federal court later.

According to the allegations in the Complaints and publicly filed documents in these cases: NYCHA is the largest public housing authority in the country, providing housing to 1 in 17 New Yorkers in 335 developments across the City and receiving over \$1.5 billion in federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development every year. When repairs or construction work require the use of outside contractors, services must typically be purchased via a bidding process.

However, at all times relevant to the Complaints, when the value of a contract was under a certain threshold (up to \$10,000), designated staff at NYCHA developments could hire a contractor of their choosing without soliciting multiple bids. This “no-bid” process was faster than the general NYCHA procurement process, and selection of the contractor required approval of only the designated staff at the development where the work was to be performed.

The defendants, all of whom were NYCHA employees during the time of the relevant conduct, demanded and received cash in exchange for NYCHA contracts by either requiring contractors to pay up front in order to be awarded the contracts or requiring payment after the contractor finished the work and needed a NYCHA employee to sign off on the completed job so the contractor could receive payment from NYCHA.

As alleged, the defendants typically demanded approximately 10% to 20% of the contract value - between \$500 and \$2,000 depending on the size of the contract - but some defendants demanded even higher amounts. In total, these defendants demanded over \$2 million in corrupt payments from con-

tractors in exchange for awarding over \$13 million worth of no-bid contracts.

These prosecutions are part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (“OCDETF”) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles criminal organizations using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

These cases are being handled by the Office’s Public Corruption Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jerry J. Fang, Jacob R. Fiddelman, Meredith Foster, Catherine Ghosh, and Sheb Swett are in charge of the prosecutions.

The charges contained in the Complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

If you believe you have information related to bribery, extortion, or any other illegal conduct by NYCHA employees, please contact OIGNYCHA@doj.nyc.gov or (212) 306-3356. If you were involved in such conduct, please consider self-disclosing through the SDNY Whistleblower Pilot Program at USANYS.WBP@usdoj.gov.

MASS SHOOTING UPDATE

Information recent as of 2-6-2024 at 12 p.m.

2024 Mass Shooting Stats: (Source: Mass Shooting Tracker, <https://www.massshootingtracker.site/data/?year=2024>)

- Total Mass Shootings: 47
- Total Dead: 90
- Total Wounded: 136
- Shootings Per Day: 1.27
- Days Reached in Year 2024 as of Feb. 6: 37

**UNITED KINGDOM
KING CHARLES III
BATTLING CANCER**

One of the world’s most famous and sometimes controversial people is facing a fight for his life.

On Feb. 5, Buckingham Palace issued the following statement regarding King Charles III:

“During The King’s recent hospital procedure for benign prostate enlargement, a separate issue of concern was noted. Subsequent diagnostic tests have identified a form of cancer.

“His Majesty has commenced a schedule of regular treatments, during which time he has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties. Throughout this period, His Majesty will continue to undertake State business and official paperwork as usual.

“The King is grateful to his medical team for their swift intervention, which was made possible thanks to his recent hospital procedure. He remains wholly positive about his treatment and looks forward to returning to full public duty as soon as possible.

“His Majesty has chosen to share his diagnosis to prevent speculation and in the hope it may assist public understanding for all those around the world who are affected by cancer.”

Upon his diagnosis, he was soon joined by sons William and Harry, the former of which is the immediate successor to the throne. By rule, the line of succession continues with William’s children, and not Harry as some often misunderstand.

While there were some warm wishes from around the world, not all of it was love. Upon his mother Queen Elizabeth II’s death, at soccer (football) matches, there were chants of “Lizzie’s in a Box!”

Although the Palace did not give any indication that the King was in grave danger, one must

(Continued on page 7)

February is American Heart Month

Opinion-Editorial by
Alexandra Mizrahi
*Family Engagement & Suicide
Prevention Coordinator*
Family Support Organization of
Essex County

As a survivor, I experienced the impact of *heart disease* and *stress* firsthand. I understand the significant relationship between these two elements. Stress can have a detrimental effect on heart health and increase the risk of developing heart disease or exacerbating existing conditions.

When we experience stress, our bodies release stress hormones, like cortisol, which can raise blood pressure and increase heart rate. Prolonged exposure to high levels of stress can lead to chronic inflammation, damage to blood vessels, and an increased risk of developing conditions, such as hypertension, heart attacks, and strokes.

Personally, I have learned the importance of managing stress as a crucial aspect of maintaining heart health. Here are some strategies that have helped me:


- **Prioritizing Self-Care:** Taking time for self-care activities, like exercise and engaging in hobbies, can help reduce stress levels and promote relaxation. I began crocheting and it has been the best choice for me.
- **Building A Support System:** Surrounding myself with a network of supportive friends, and family, has been invaluable in managing stress.
- **Seeking Professional Help:** If stress becomes overwhelming, it is important to seek professional help. You can learn effective coping mechanisms for managing stress.
- **Engaging In Regular Exercise:** This is a great one! Sadly, a recent knee and foot injury limits me to certain exercises.
- **Eat A Heart-Healthy Diet:** A nutritious diet plays a signifi-

cant role in maintaining heart health and managing stress. It includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats in your diet. You must limit the intake of processed foods, sugary snacks, and beverages.

Raising awareness about heart disease among parents of children with mental health or developmental challenges is important to us. At the Family Support Organization of Essex County, we promote the parents' self-care and overall family well-being. By considering awareness education and understanding the increase of risk (*especially* among women) is a beginning. Conversations about prevention and making some lifestyle changes is a step toward better health. When we foster collaboration between mental health professionals, primary care physicians, and cardiologists, it ensures a comprehensive approach to wellness.

Participation in support groups that recognize the emotional or stressful impact of raising a child with mental health challenges can promote your wellness. I strongly encourage you to visit our website (www.fsoec.org) for valuable information about our organization, support groups, and workshops. You can also use our *Warmline* service, to receive guidance about how to achieve your family vision or to link you to family resources. In addition, community engagement can improve your quality of life, because some community organizations and advocacy groups focus on both mental health and heart health.

Remember, everyone's stress management strategies will vary. It's important to find what works best for you. By proactively managing stress and prioritizing your heart health, you can reduce the risk of heart related problems. Stay Healthy, Stay Connected.



**American Heart
Health Month**

Family Support Organization of Essex County offers events and support groups for caregivers of children with special needs. We invite you to join us throughout the month.

**You Don't Have to
Take This Journey Alone!**

FEBRUARY 7 & 21: **New Family Welcome Group** meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 1st and 3rd Wednesdays is for caregivers to learn their guided journey. We introduce our organization, team, and services.

FEBRUARY 13: **Let's Talk — Parent Support Group** meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 2nd Tuesdays to help parents and caregivers learn new strategies that effect positive change.


FEBRUARY 22: **Better Together Dads** meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 4th Thursdays to give fathers a safe place for connection with other passionate dads. Starting this month, we invite male caregivers to join our *8 Dimensions of Wellness Workshop* series with Dr. Henry Clay.

FEBRUARY 6: **Nurtured Heart Approach** meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 1st Tuesdays for bilingual parents to help develop long-lasting relationships and focus on positive behavior.

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WORLD NEWS (Cont. from pg 6)

hope that his fight goes better than that of country star Toby Keith, who passed away from stomach cancer at 62.

**WORLD
"F1 GOAT" TO JOIN
FERRARI IN 2025**

By Walter Elliott

LONDON - Formula One racing is still reverberating from Lewis Hamilton's surprise Feb. 1 announcement that he will leave his longtime Mercedes AMG Petronas team to Scuderia Ferrari in 2025.

The last time the sports world was rocked by a similar move would be perhaps when quarterback Tom Brady's leaving the NFL New England Patriots in 2020 for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He and the Buccaneers won Super Bowl LV in 2021, adding a record

seventh victory to his six with the Patriots before retiring in 2022.

Hamilton - considered the best current F1 driver who needs an eighth World Driver Championship to become the Greatest of All Time - will be leaving the engine manufacturer where he scored all 103 Grands Prix with and the factory team where he had won the bulk of his races since his 2007 series debut.

"This is the hardest decision I've ever had to make," said Hamilton on Instagram Thursday. "After an incredible 11 years with Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team, the time has come for me to start a new chapter in my life and the chance to fulfill another childhood dream."

The second-generation Grenadian-Briton, 39, until his Thursday announcement, appeared to be ending his career

(Continued on page 11)

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SEALS V. GROUNDHOG

Essex County's Resident Groundhog Does Not See Her Shadow, Predicts Early Spring Weather and the Chiefs Winning the Super Bowl

WEST ORANGE - Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. announced that Lady Edwina of Essex, Essex County Turtle Back Zoo's resident groundhog, did not see her shadow and is predicting spring weather to arrive early. Lady Edwina made her prediction during Turtle Back Zoo's annual Groundhog Day Celebration. This is the third time she has made a prognostication since taking over for her cousin Essex Ed. Essex Edwina also predicted the Kansas City Chiefs would defeat the San Francisco 49ers in Super Bowl LVIII.

"I'm not a fan of cold weather, so I appreciate Lady Edwina forecasting an early arrival for warmer, spring weather," said DiVincenzo. "It may still be winter, but Turtle Back Zoo is open and it's a great time to come out and Experience Essex, and our wonderful Turtle Back Zoo and South Mountain Recreation Complex. Waiting for Essex Edwina on Groundhog Day creates excitement about Essex County's Turtle Back Zoo and highlights its role as an educational resource," he added.

Essex Edwina's prediction is as follows:

*Happy Friday my friends! Welcome to the Zoo,
We're open all year, so there's still tons to do!
Our Alligator Peaches can be seen, in his new warm winter digs,
You can see penguins & sting rays & kunekune pigs.*

*But enough about the NOW, let's look to the future to see,
Snow boots or rain boots, do you think all us groundhogs will agree?*

*I am happy to report, sun is coming in fast,
SPRING will be early, Winter will be part of the past.*

*As for the game, I'll join the Chiefs' wolf pack for the day,
Then maybe at the game, I can hang out with Tay!*

This is the third year that Essex Edwina has made mid-winter and Super Bowl forecasts. Her predecessor, Essex Ed, had been predicting the mid-winter forecast since 1997 and the Zoo had various other groundhogs predict before him dating back to the 1970s. New Jersey weather is not always in

line with Pennsylvania's after all, and Ed could easily see his shadow while Punxsutawney Phil does not or vice versa. In the mid-2000s, Essex Ed started adding Super Bowl predictions to his prognostication.

Legend has it that if a groundhog sees his shadow on February 2nd, the winter chill will continue. If the weather is cloudy and he doesn't see his shadow, we can expect warmer temperatures and an early spring.

Of course, we have to get a reaction from "Local Talk" Content Editor Kristopher Seals, who has a bone to pick with groundhogs that make weather predictions.

"Breaking news - I STILL do not subscribe to the notion that a groundhog can accurately forecast the weather," said Seals. "It didn't see its shadow? What a shock! Who would have thought that you wouldn't be able to see your shadow... ON A CLOUDY DAY WITH NO SUN!"

"When it comes to the game, unless this rodent will pay the vig on your gambling debt, I suggest you get your action from somewhere else. SPOILER ALERT: She was wrong about the Eagles last year. (For what it's worth, 'Local Talk' had it right, since we had the Chiefs winning 42-34. I snuck it in the weather forecast. It was 38-35, but we had the winner though.)

(Continued on page 13)



DISCLAIMER: The following items are primarily drawn from first responders. Responders' accounts may not be their full activity range. Grand juries hand down indictments when evidence presented them warrant a trial. Named suspects/defendants are innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

NEWARK - The family of an Arts High School cheerleader and her school community are praying for her recovery from critical injuries here at University Hospital while ECPO and Newark Police Division detectives are looking for the car and driver who hit her in front of AHS Feb. 4.

The 18-year-old senior was getting off a school bus parked in front of 550 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. at about 10:15 p.m. Sunday. She was crossing the street to take a contracted Uber ride when a northbound car struck her while it went around the school bus - and kept going. The school bus driver said that he had the flashing red lights on and its stop sign on at the time.

Three of the local news outlets gave the victim's name as Chiara Jones as given by her self-identified aunt Renee Simmons. Simmons said that Jones had suffered a critical head injury.

She and her AHS Jaguars squad were coming back from RWJBarnabas Health Arena in Toms River. They had placed first in that day's Impact Dance and Cheer Challenge there. Their victory secures a place in the upcoming Universal Cheerleading Association High School National Championships at Orlando, Fla.

Authorities said that they are looking for "a dark colored sedan" Feb. 5 and are reviewing street video cameras. Counselors made themselves available to the Arts High community Feb. 5.

IRVINGTON - Two of the men recently listed by the FBI-Newark Field Office on its Most Wanted Fugitives in New Jersey are suspects in separate 2017 and 1983 murders here. Both are considered armed and dangerous.

Dennis M. Cunningham, 44, for example, has had a federal arrest warrant from the U.S. Department of Justice-New Jersey District on him since Sept. 8, 2017. He, if or when he is rearrested, will face a federal charge of unlawful flight to avoid prosecution to avoid imprisonment.

Cunningham also has a state arrest warrant on him since June 15, 2017 plus being convicted on felony murder and unlawful possession of a firearm by a felon. An N.J. Superior Court-Newark jury had found him guilty of shooting Dino Bermudez, 33, while the latter sat on his front porch along the 300 block of Myrtle Avenue May 12, 2017. Bermudez died May 14 in University Hospital.

Cunningham had been released while pending sentencing but skipped that hearing. The 200-220-lbs., 6-ft., 2-in. African American has brown eyes, a tattoo on his left arm and a scar on his left forearm. He also goes by Dennis Brown, Muhammad Cunningham, Dennis Muhammad and Dennis M. Thomas and may be bald.

Wilfredo Rodriguez is meanwhile wanted for the June 7, 1983 murder of one of his relatives here, stabbing the latter 17 times after an argument. Rodriguez, who uses either a 1961 or 1963 birthdate, was arrested, stood trial, found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

The Lajas, PR native was released on bail while making a conviction appeal but failed to surrender when his appeal was denied. A state and a federal bench warrant were Oct. 6, 1987 and May 8, 1988. He is to serve a sentence for murder, hindering apprehension, two weapons possession charges and unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

Rodriguez - who weighs around 130 lbs., and stands 5-ft., 8-in. - also goes by Wilfredo Santana, Chari Wilfredo and Roberto Ortiz. Categorized as a "white Hispanic," he has dark

brown hair and bears a tattoo on his upper right arm.

EAST ORANGE - A city man, any appeal notwithstanding, awaits a March 18 sentencing after a State Superior Court jury found him guilty Jan. 25 on second-degree weapons possession from a 2019 incident.

The jury returned a guilty verdict on Cedric Hickman, 42, of East Orange, to Superior Court Judge Arthur Batista after an hour's deliberation.

East Orange police detectives said they had encountered Hickman while on a proactive patrol along South Munn Avenue May 23, 2019. They said that Hickman was with a group of men who were trespassing on an avenue property when he dropped a bag before attempting flight.

The detectives had shortly apprehended Hickman, who said that there was a handgun in the bag - which was found. They and ECPO attorneys considered Hickman's statement as a confession.

Hickman, who has been convicted twice before, is facing up to a maximum 10-year sentence in a state prison on March 18.

ORANGE - To say that Orange Acting Fire Chief Derrick E. Brown had a red letter day Jan. 26 here at Bethel Baptist Church would be an understatement.

Brown - before city officials, community members and firefighters from here and three neighboring departments - was sworn in as Orange Fire Department's first Fire Chief.

Mayor Dwayne Warren administered the oath of office to Brown, who had been provisional or acting chief since Feb. 24, 2022, with mother Annie Brown holding the Bible. The promotion is the height of Brown's 25 years on the force.

Trenton Fire Director Kenneth Douglas, who was Orange's director 2015-2021, came to witness Brown's promotion. He was fire director when he promoted him and Joseph Trezza to deputy chief rank Aug. 2, 2021.

Members of the Orange, East Orange and West Orange departments - current and recently retired - also filled the church pews. The certified and award-

winning firefighter became one of Orange's bravest March 6, 2000 and had since been promoted up to Captain by May 4, 2017.

"This moment is not just about me; it's about opening doors for future leaders," said Brown as a full-fledged chief. "I'm committed to serving this community with dedication, integrity and a focus on the safety and well-being of our residents.

Brown had been Orange's fire chief for a moment when he dropped to one knee. He presented an engagement ring to fiancée Venus Watkins and proposed marriage to her.

WEST ORANGE - ECPO and West Orange Police detectives are looking for the Nissan driver who pulled out of TIRS Recovery Services' impound lot at 28 Lakeside Ave - and leaving the driver of a Subaru SUV parked curbside fatally shot - at 12:22 p.m. Sunday.

Neighbors told arriving WOPD officers and, later ECPO Homicide/Major task Force detectives that they heard five or six gunshots at that time. The first officers arrived five minutes later.

The officers found the Subaru's driver's side window shattered, a bullet hole in the passenger side door and its driver with multiple gunshot wounds. The victim, who remains unidentified, was declared dead at the scene at 12:42 p.m.

The victim's vehicle was parked in front of a vehicle yard to the west of 28 Lakeside. The yard and two-story 1928 building is used by TIRS Recovery & Towing, of Flemington, who acts as a repossession tower, and AAA Fencing to its east. The building was constructed between the Erie Railroad Orange Branch to its east and a siding yard to its west for Thomas A. Edison Industries/McGraw-Edison until the 1970s.

Several witnesses said that there was a man arguing with the Subaru driver minutes before he got his Nissan out - and before shots were fired.

Neither the victim's identity nor a description of the wanted Nissan driver, were given out as of press time.

(Continued on page 14)



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Watch the Essex County College *Community Education Forum* TV Series, hosted by Alfred Bundy on and

WORLD NEWS (Continued from page 7)

with Mercedes. He and Mercedes Team Principal Toto Wolff had signed a two-year contract extension Aug. 31 with a 2025 sabbatical leave option.

"When we signed the contract with Lewis, we went for a shorter term, so the events weren't a surprise, maybe the timing," said Wolff Feb. 2. "How he framed it to me was perfectly understandable; that he needed a new challenge, that he was looking for a different environment and that maybe it was the last possibility to do something else."

Wolff is meanwhile faced with who he will put in Hamilton's car alongside George Russell for 2025 onwards. The Briton had won the 2022 Brazilian GP and scored nine top five finishes last year. Hamilton finished in the top five 12 times, including three second places.)

One of F1's most storied drivers, instead, will be joining F1's most storied team.

Ferrari, who missed only three of F1's

1,076 races since 1950, holds a record 15 World Drivers Championships and 16 World Constructors Championships. Michael Schumacher is the Maranello, Modena, IT outfit's most successful driver - winning 72 of his overall 92 GPs with them and securing five drivers titles and four constructors crowns 2000-2004.

The retired Schumacher, who won seven drivers titles with Benetton-Ford and Ferrari, has since had his most GP wins, top three finishes, most pole positions and most points records surpassed by Hamilton. The German still holds the most fastest race laps over Hamilton. Hamilton, ironically, succeeded Schumacher on the Mercedes-AMG team when the latter retired at the end of 2012.

Ferrari Racing Director Frederic Vasseur, on Friday, decided to keep Charles Leclerc as his lead driver and give Hamilton Carlos Sainz, Jr.'s car for 2025.

The son of four-time Dakar Rally winner Carlos Sainz, Sr., ironically, won last year's Singapore GP for Ferrari, keeping the other-

wise dominant Red Bull-Hondas of reigning champ Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez from winning all 22 GPs last year.

"News about my future will be announced in due course," said Sainz Thursday from Madrid. "We still have a long season ahead of us and, like always, I'll give my absolute best for the Team and for the Tifosi all around the world."

One open question is whether Hamilton's experience will help Ferrari match Red Bull's performance. He may build his team around him like Schumacher did in his prime.

Ferrari, in 2022-23, had suffered several tactical pit stop and tire management mis-cues that cost Sainz and Leclerc several victories or high finishes. Both Ferrari and Mercedes have been working hard to balance their cars' handling compared to Red Bull since the 2022 return of ground effects aerodynamics.

The 2024 F1 season, at a record 24 GPs, is to open with the Bahrain GP on the Sakhir Int'l Circuit March 2.

BLACK LIVES, ANIMAL LIVES, ALL LIVES MATTER



By Michelle Lowe

We are all in this new year, and time only pushes forward. What was done in the past we have to leave in the past and come in a better way for the new beginning. Remember I said that folks. M.L.

One thing I've learned in life is in order to move forward, you

must forgive, but you will never ever forget. That is a very true saying.

Then on another note we work hard, I know I surely do, and things just seem to not be moving the way it seems. Possibly not enough recognition. But I will continue to get pushing until one day it does, and I advise everyone to do the same. Remember I said that folks. M.L. Because no one out in this world is perfect. Don't one forget that.



This week I'm discussing the meat factory and slaughterhouses. It's just so horrible, omg. People, do you really know what

those animals go through? I mean my whole soul just left out my body. Every year, it just gets more brutal and is a disgrace. I'm against the hunting seasons too. The torture, when will it stop? I want you all to read this check it out - <https://sentientmedia.org/category/agriculture/> - to see the harsh reality of how meat is made.



Now yes, we have to survive. We all must eat, but nothing deserves to be killed like that just to feed another mouth. I love animals. They are my happiness and my joy, and mainly they are very loyal and are excellent friends. Innocence of life folks, treat our little fur balls with love.



Before I leave you all, just remember we might not have to answer to anyone for your life decisions and choices. We don't live forever, and that day will come for everyone, when we will have to answer to the great God almighty. And as said before, I close out to remember there are people's love ones that are not here and trust, they are very well missed. ...



ADVERTORIAL

NJ POLICE LICENSURE ACT TAKES EFFECT

TRENTON - A new state law went into effect last month requiring New Jersey's approximately 40,500 police officers to hold valid, active licenses issued by the Police Training Commission (PTC) in order to serve as law enforcement officers.

Signed by Governor Phil Murphy in July 2022, the Police Licensure Act (P.L. 2022, c. 65) became effective on January 1, 2024. The law is designed to ensure that police license holders are in good standing with their employers, meet certain uniform professional standards, and receive ongoing training in best practices in the field, in order to become and continue to serve as officers.

The law makes policing a licensed profession in New Jersey, with the aims of improving officer development and safety and bolstering trust between law enforcement officers and the public. With the launch of the police licensing program at the beginning of year, New Jersey joined over 40 states across the country that require police to be licensed.

"When I signed the police licensing bill into law in 2022, I did so recognizing the importance of maintaining a law enforcement force consisting of highly trained and skilled officers who fulfill their duties with honesty and integrity," said Governor Murphy. "The police licensing program assures us that those who are hired to protect and serve the communities of our state are held to the high standards we expect of our law enforcement officers."

With the Police Licensure Act, existing officers, who were already on the job and beyond the probationary period of their careers as of the beginning of this year, have been issued initial licenses valid for one, two,

or three years. Officers were randomly assigned to one of those three groups that will renew at different future dates, to avoid the need to renew every officer in the state at the same time.

Going forward, after the first renewal, all licenses will be effective for three years. Officers must reapply 90 days before their licenses expire and provide supporting documentation. Police chiefs will be required to certify to the PTC that each renewing officer they employ is of good moral character, meets the standards to be a law enforcement officer, has completed required training, and has not engaged in any conduct or been the subject of any action that might lead the PTC to deny the renewal request. If a license renewal application is still pending after a license expires, the law allows officers to continue working until the commission reaches a decision.

The PTC, which facilitates the education and training of officers in an effort to enhance professionalism, transparency, and accountability, voted unanimously in June 2020 to create a statewide police licensing program.

Any individual seeking to become a law enforcement officer in New Jersey will need to meet certain professional standards and maintain those standards in order to maintain their license. Those who fall short of the standards could face suspension or revocation of their license, which could temporarily or permanently prevent them from working as officers. Suspension and revocation make it tougher for officers with a track record of disciplinary problems to move from police department to police department and evade

accountability.

The PTC on August 10, 2023, formally adopted the process by which the commission would grant, renew, and if needed take action against licenses.

Chief law enforcement officers must notify the PTC of any separation from employment with their agencies or any change to an officer's employment status, any pending criminal charge or a conviction of any crime, disorderly persons or driving while intoxicated offense. The PTC also must be advised about agencies' imposition of major discipline, and of sustained findings that an officer used excessive force, was unfit for duty, or engaged in fraudulent conduct.

Most of the employment-related actions for which notification to the commission is required are those for which public safety is at risk or those that result from a sustained finding.

The new rules also stipulate that law enforcement agencies must terminate, suspend, or refuse employment to any individual whose license has been denied, revoked, or suspended.

Appeals to adverse license actions will be heard by a hearing officer, who will make recommendations to the PTC's Licensing Committee. That committee will then make recommendations to the full PTC regarding any adverse action.

The police licensing program is among a series of recently launched policing innovations with the support of Governor Murphy and under the leadership of Attorney General Platkin, designed to further strengthen the

(Continued on page 13)

A VOICE FOR ORANGE

(Continued from page 1)

our local government.

Let's address the health disparities, cultural and social representation, businesses, and education. You should ask yourself, how often do you discuss the progress within your community? This should compel us to dig deeper on the issues that affect us locally, and who would be the effective choice in leadership.

The main issues in our community are taxes, parking, infrastructure, and community health. We need to introduce more homes and condo options. We need ADA modifications and sensory-friendly environments. We need in-house social services for our senior citizens, veterans, and the unsheltered. We need a senior center, recreation center, and medical facilities to restore the foundation.

Our communities have seen minor improvements in the last decades. The recent projects called for tax abatements and little to no community benefits. Yet, urban communities are still allowing a 5% rent control ordinance in a post-pandemic world. Where is the abatement or relief for our constituents? Many are living on fixed income and others will never receive a significant salary increase to afford a comfortable lifestyle.

Like my neighbors, I found a way to survive and teach myself new skills and trades to provide for my family. I know many can relate to this because a lot of the hustle we do on a day to day, was born out of necessity. The problem is that if you live in a city where the local leadership is not representing or listening to your concerns, all of the hustle and strife you endure to live the "right way" goes unnoticed, and you could easily find yourself pushed out of a community that you can no longer afford or enjoy.

Currently, I am the only Council member who has voted no on PILOTs. I do believe that all communities deserve development; however I am confident that if we diversify the construction and work with our local en-

trepreneurs and advocates, we could create a society that everyone could be proud to call home.

To quote a trusted colleague, we have to put the "neighbor" back into the neighborhood.

Your experiences help shape the community. I want to ensure that our community thrives and contributes meaningful milestones for many generations to come.

Let's talk about affordability, or the dwindling units available to our hard working families. We have witnessed an acceleration in apartment buildings with their luxury price tags, but no additional parking. We need an organized parking plan and solutions.

Supposedly, the theory here is that increasing the population will improve our streets and homes. In my opinion, it sets the pace for a turnover and displacement. Orange, like our neighbors to the east and the west, is home to many entrepreneurs, educators, spiritual and social community leaders. Our Main Street and Central Valley districts are not reflective of the family owned business, and community vision.

The impact studies are generalized and don't speak to the concerns in the community. We should be demanding different types of housing such as condos that would give more home ownership opportunities and balance the tax burden. We should be negotiating the development of Orange Memorial Hospital. My administration would implement a Community Benefits Policy and established a Community Participatory Budget Committee.

This site is the future of Orange. It is a community asset.

My goal for 2024 is to become the leader that includes my community in decision making. Not treat them like an afterthought. All projects should have a creative space to empower the residents to contribute.

It's time the voters say no to mindless urban planning that creates a dense population with no efforts to increase quality of life. A lot is at stake here. This is a critical time

for Orange, and this election could very well seal our fate and bring forth the "g word" - gentrification - that has plagued our neighbors in New York and Hoboken.

There's a lack of historical data or references that can prove this will improve Orange. My recommendation: Bring in a business that will provide employment to your residents, and help them afford to live in these new developments. Imagine the revenue to a city from a 5-10 year lease with a reputable retailer or firm.

Bring creativity and design back to the community. It's time we return to governing in the community's best interest.

Orange needs more than buildings. We need commercial space for new businesses and medical practices. We should never remove single family homes from the tax map.

Good leaders look where others don't. They bring out the best in people and amplify their voices and qualities. I am confident that I am a passionate, reliable, and innovative leader that will put Orange first without a question, and restore us to a community. I am committed to increasing strategic partnerships with businesses who are equally committed to develop a sustainable and an equitable home for Orange residents.

These are just a few reasons why I have chosen to run for Mayor for the City of Orange. I am extremely grateful for the people who have supported me in this journey, and I humbly ask my neighbors to consider electing me on May 14th.

Make your vote count and remember that voting is your voice. If you choose to remain silent, then you accept the same lack of quality of life and the same status quo. If you choose to use your voice, then you are demanding change for a better quality of life, better education, better public safety, better services, and a better community, for yourself, your family and everyone.

*Yours truly,
Councilwoman Quantavia L. Hilbert*

ADVERTORIAL

SEALS V. GROUNDHOG *(Continued from page 9)*

"Finally, as far as that little hairball hanging out with Taylor Swift goes, if her cat bites the dust, then maybe she'll want something else to pet and feed.

"I'm thinking about filing a case against that rodent, because in America, you can sue anyone for just about anything. Better yet, maybe its socials contain something unscrupulous!

"Then again, maybe a lawsuit wouldn't be a good idea, since it's hard for a groundhog to survive in this economy like the rest of us. Plus, if I were to engage in cancel culture, then I would be no better than those lames that have no lives of their own to concentrate on.

"Still, my stance remains the same from the last time I discussed this: If this friendly neighborhood rodent can predict the weather, then I predict I'm going to marry Scarlett Johansson!"

POLICE LICENSES *(Cont. from page 12)*

professionalism and effectiveness of law enforcement in New Jersey:

- A November 2022 directive requiring that law enforcement agencies annually report to the Attorney General and publish on their websites more types of conduct prompting disciplinary action, including charges of discrimination or bias, excessive force, filing a false report or involvement in domestic violence.
- A 2022 policy geared toward improving the efficiency of agency responses to requests for internal affairs records, requiring the disclosure of a summary of the allegations, factual findings, and final discipline imposed in certain cas-

es, upon request by a member of the public or the press.

- The expansion to all 21 New Jersey counties, in December 2023, of Alternative Responses to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation (ARRIVE), which addresses behavioral health crises using alternative emergency responses involving mental health professionals in addition to, or in lieu of, police officers.
- The issuance in August 2022 of guidelines to make policing a more accessible career path for women and improve the diversity of New Jersey's law enforcement ranks, by safeguarding the workplace rights of pregnant and breastfeeding officers at law enforcement agencies.

The Observation Booth



OP-ED By Andrea Dialect

WALK

It happened again yesterday, not a few days ago. I was to prepare an article for submission that never happened, and the dragging of my feet was a testament but not one of laziness this time because it just wasn't to be.

During my travels this week, as so many weeks passed, passersby, as well as children, have been a forced focus for some reason. Monday, I was a bit behind schedule, and I was slowed by a fire alarm that forced all the little ones out of their classes and many paces away from their school into my eyes view. All that day, children showed up as focus.

Something's brewing and bound to show up. It's coming,

sure nuff, just like this one showed up very early a.m. This morning, when I was in the thick of it as rearing the five, I wrote this piece, and the people here are random muses that I captured during the drive-by practice sessions I exercise daily. People, places, or things yank my nose often, and I'm forced to freeze them quickly. These images are fitting because they encompass this subject thoroughly.

"Walking" is my subject. Their life strut supports us today as so many passersby are caught in our eyes' view. Please remember that your walk inspires us, motivates us, and moves us every day. Mainly when you don't even know that we're watching. You are a great benefit to us all.

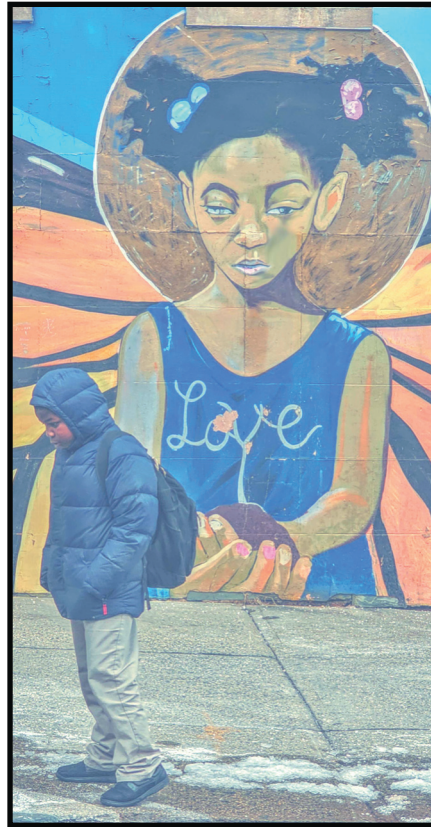
So, continue doing us proud, and KEEP ON WALKING!



Photos By Andrea Dialect

Procession

*In this fairly new, tiresome life of mine
There be bottles and bottles*



*of aged tears
Always in a constant simmer
Suppressed by shame to hide my fears
But yet I march in this parade
And in this fairly new weary heart of mine
Is kept footage of my many, many sorrows come
Still, my feet lift in sync with the rise of my breath
And my arms sway in rhythm with life drum
As I march for you, this parade*

*Northward bound this life
Procession
Playing masquerade as run-*



*ning this race
With a painted grin upon my face
My eyes life towards the heaven high
Somehow, I manage to hide my cries
Surely, because of God's grace
I march for you this parade ...*

Read this article in its entirety at www.localtalkweekly.com and type The Observation Booth in the search bar. Send questions or comments to localtalkandrea@gmail.com.

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 10)

SOUTH ORANGE / MAPLEWOOD - The NJSIAA issued its Jan. 26 ruling on the Columbia High School basketball player's Jan. 12 beaded hair disqualification - and the South Orange-Maplewood School District superintendent issued his response that same Friday.

The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, after listening to SOMSD and CHS Athletic Director Richard Porfidio's complaint, ruled that the Lady Cougar player's first quarter disqualification by one of its referees was made with "No bias intended" NJSIAA Executive Director Colleen McGuire said that game video of that day's varsity practice and the junior varsity game while wearing the beads.

The referee disqualified the player during the Columbia-Caldwell game for the first quarter on grounds that the beads were not

securely fastened. The ref reversed the ruling at AD Porfidio's request. The Cougars lost to the Caldwell Chiefs 46-37.

SOMSD had complained that the first quarter disqualification was a violation of the state's 2022 Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair Act. It had also called for the state Attorney General's Office Division of Civil Rights to investigate.

NJSIAA had sent copies of its Jan. 26 ruling to Caldwell Public Schools, the respective athletic directors and the Division of Civil Rights.

"We're very disappointed with the NJSIAA's conclusion and disagree with the organization's findings," said Acting Superintendent Dr. Kevin Gilbert. "We stand behind our student-athlete and her right to compete as her best self as well as her family. We also stand behind our Columbia Girls basketball Team coaches who brought this matter to the District and worked to promote the understanding of the intentions of the CROWN Act and the importance of protect-

ing our young people from discrimination."

The Division of Civil Rights, as of press time, are continuing its investigation.

BLOOMFIELD - Six former Bloomfield College NCAA Division II interscholastic teams will be suspended for at least the 2024-25 school year and their six part-time coaches' contracts not renewed as of July 1, 2024.

Men's and Women's Cross Country and Track and Field teams and Women's Bowling and Soccer squads - some going back to when they were "The Demon Deacons" in the 1990s - are facing economic re-evaluation by the Bloomfield College of Montclair State University administration.

Administrators have not given a decision date on whether the said teams will resume as "Bloomfield Bears" or "MSU Red Hawks" or become history. They had stressed that those student-athletes on scholarships will have their full scholarships hon-

(Continued on page 15)

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 14)

ored. BC athletes have the option of trying out for MSU's NCAA Division III teams for 2024-25.

Bloomfield College's track and field and bowling teams were in the NCAA Central Atlantic Conference in 2016 and 2018. Cross country teams were formed in 2001 and women's soccer in 1996.

The six BC teams' suspension and evaluation is part of MSU looking to make their newly acquired campus more cost effective. MSU, a state public college, absorbed the private-turned-public BC July 1, 2023. The latter school was facing an existential financial crisis at the time.

BC was originally established as the German Theological Seminary in Newark by the Presbyterian Church in 1868. It moved to the Bloomfield Green/Town Centre area in 1872 and became a four-year college in 1923. It had meanwhile absorbed the Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing in 1912.

MONTCLAIR - It has been disclosed Jan. 29 that Mayor Sean Spillar, on advice of his personal attorney, invoked the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination during his witness deposition Jan. 4 over the Township CFO's whistleblower and harassment suit.

Montclair CFO Padmaja Rao had filed her whistleblower and harassment suit against the Township government last year. Rao claims that then-Town Manager Timothy Stafford had created a hostile work environment and had retaliated against her after she had questioned the Mayor and the Township Council's qualifications for the New Jersey State Health Benefits Program.

Stafford, who the council fired last summer, remains a respondent in Rao's suit.

Spillar and his attorney, Frank Arelo, said that his harassment suit testimony may be self-incriminating in light of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office's investigating her whistleblower suit.

In the whistleblower suit, Rao said that she found that Mayor Spillar and four of the seven the Township Council members did not log in or work at least 35 hours a week to qualify for NJ SHBP. She also found what she said was time records fraud in the Montclair Fire Department and the no-bid law contract for O'Toole Scrivo LLC.

GLEN RIDGE - The Borough Council is asking for the public's input at their Feb. 12 meeting regarding their proposals to install 3- and 4- way stop sign intersections at two locations.

The Hillside Avenue and Clark Street intersection, they propose, would stop

signs on all four corners. Also, Highland Avenue and Baldwin Street intersection would be reconfigured for three stop signs.

Drivers at the intersection, by state law, must yield to the motorist to his or her right hand side.

The ordinance amendment will be introduced Feb 12. A second reading and public hearing may be scheduled for as early as Feb. 26.

BELLEVILLE - The Belleville Public Schools may have to seek other financing means of its own or return to the drawing board after the Township Council's Jan. 29's denial of authorizing its \$3.75 million bond issue.

BPS Superintendent of Schools Dr. Richard Tomko presented the proposed bond issue's features, including: \$1.5 million for a sports turf field; \$1.0 million for furniture upgrades; \$500,000 for an "E-Theater" for student E-sports; \$500,000 for maintenance vehicles and "other equipment."; \$250,000 for contingencies.

Tomko noted that the district anticipates 625 more students entering the public school system in the next decade. An estimated 258 are anticipated to come from the new housing development that are being built around the township.

By passing Ordinance 02-24, noted Tomko, the township would be co-signing the bond issue - which would be comparable to cosigning a car loan. Belleville Township would be liable only if BPS defaulted.

The council, on a 4-3 vote, turned down the ordinance on its introduction. Deputy Mayor Naomy DePena and councilman Vincent Cozzarelli and Thomas Graziano favored the authorization. First Ward Councilwoman Marie Strumolo-Burke, councilmen Steve Rovell and John Notari and Mayor Michael Melham voted against the bill.

First, unlike the municipality, school districts cannot bond," explained Melham. "They receive their annual apportionment of tax revenue and that's all they get. If they need more, they need to go to the voters and get a referendum passed."

Melham said that the proposal included a "3.7-percent interest rate subject to change." BPS has the referendum avenue or can go to the Essex County Improvement Authority to issue bond notes for the equipment.

NUTLEY - Maria Hamlin became the first candidate to toss her hat into this year's 1st November Nutley Board of Commissioners May 14 Election campaign ring here Jan. 30.

The question becomes, "Which one of Hamlin's hats?" Was it her USAF full dress hat or her Nutley VFW Post hat?

The retired 26-year Chief Master Sergeant is VFW Post No. 493's webmaster and, for three years, post commander.

Did Hamlin toss in her Nutley Police Department badge instead? She is a retired NPD detective who started the Nutley Junior Police Academy and its annual Trunk or Treat event.


All five Commissioners' seats are up for voters' choices in the May 14 nonpartisan municipal election. Those seats are held by Joseph Scarpelli, Mauro Tucci, Alphonse "Al" Petracco, Thomas Evans and John V. Kelly IV.

Hamlin had placed sixth among a 12-candidate field in the May 12, 2020 special election. (The election, due to COVID-19 social restrictions, combined what would have been the Newark and Irvington April school, board and budget elections with Orange, Montclair and Belleville's mayor and/or council elections.)

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