

LOCAL TALK

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"LET'S TALK FOR THE BETTERMENT OF OUR COMMUNITIES"

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER

ESSEX COUNTY • EAST ORANGE • ORANGE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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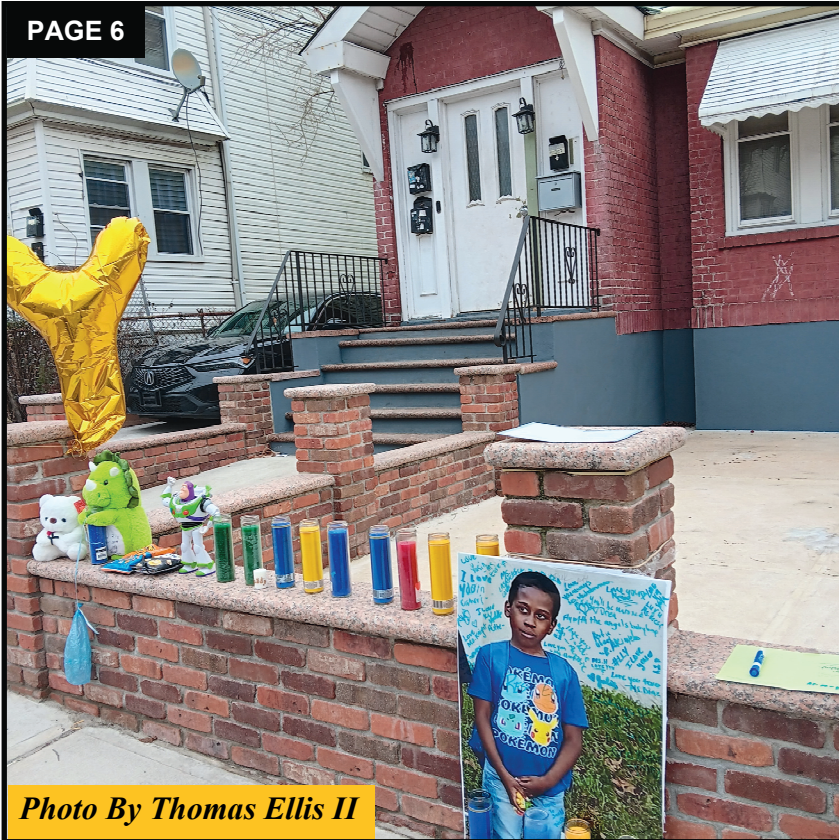


Photo By Thomas Ellis II



The old Star-Ledger building in downtown Newark

GROUNDHOG MAKES PREDICTIONS FROM TURTLE BACK ZOO



Photo Courtesy Essex County

IRVINGTON WELCOMES NEW ADDITION TO COUNCIL



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Editorial
Dhiren Shah
 Editor-In-Chief

Hello Readers,

For small businesses, my main concern is to work on different taxes and forms. In a year, smaller businesses must fill out and pay taxes while filling out about 15 to 20 forms. The majority of small businesses str working hard to make ends meet and take home some of the profits and salary. However, they are the backbone of the economy and can be found in small and large towns and cities, as well as travelling destinations. If they fail to fill out the forms, they will be penalized, and that creates even more work for them.

We all tend to have a small bodega (delicatessen) in each area we live or visit. They fill daily or temporary needs from groceries to breakfast, lunch or dinner. Ice cream stores, bakeries and places that provide entertainment. Our representatives, assembly people, senators, congresspersons, mayors, governors and more are adding more burdens to small businesses, rather than letting them grow.

I, Dhiren Shah, suggest some changes to the filing system for the smaller business. If the business is under \$500,000 (gross revenue during the calendar year) and making less than \$150,000 net profit, they should be allowed to file 4 forms a year. Every quarter, one form which combines the taxes for the federal government, state government,

county, city or township. I know this is not easy, but our representatives should search, study and prepare some resolutions to solve this problem for our small business community.

Elon Musk has made the system to oversee the government to cut down inefficiency in all the departments. This might be necessary, but we all want to make sure that Musk does not become a powerbroker. If he wants to help the people of America and do it the right way to cut down inefficiencies in the government, that is fine.

The White House is preparing an executive order for President Trump to abolish the federal Department of Education. It was his campaign promise. However, many unions have opposed this and will fight his executive order

in a court of law. According to the law, it must be passed in congress by a simple majority, but with 60 votes in the Senate. It will be very difficult to accomplish this without the House and Senate.

Yasin Morrison, an autistic and nonverbal and innocent child, was shot to death while coming out of an Uber at Osborn Terrace in Newark, near St. Barnabas Medical Hospital. He was going to his grandparents and travelling with his sister and dad. He was the victim of a crossfire between two groups, who were shooting at each other. What a tragedy.

Have a wonderful week.

I'll talk to you next week.

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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>
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STAR-LEDGER PUBLISHES FINAL PRINT EDITION

By Walter Elliott

NEWARK - New Jersey's largest city, as of Sunday, Feb. 2, shares a dubious distinction with the likes of Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Salt Lake City and Youngstown, Ohio.

All five, indeed, have at least one professional sports team - but the answer to today's "trivia" question is that none of them now have a daily printed newspaper.

Advance Local - parent of Newark Morning Ledger Co., NJ Advance Media and the Evening Journal Association - announced on Oct. 30 that the "Star-Ledger" will become electronic edition-only as of Feb. 3, 2025.

Four other daily newspapers - "The Times of Trenton," "South Jersey Times," "The Easton (Pa.) Express-Times" and, after Jan. 30, the "Hunterdon County Democrat" weekly - will also only be found on nj.com.

A sixth publication, "The Jersey Journal," after 157 years, was completely stopped Feb. 1. Its former readers and subscribers will have to do with nj.com's Hudson County pages.

"We fought as hard as we could for as long as we could," mourned David Blomqvist - "The Journal's" last editor and publisher to Advance Media.

NJ Advance Media President Steve Alessi, on Oct. 30, cited decreasing readership, declining demand for print and inflation for folding the Ledger and the other five paper editions. Alessi tried to focus on nj.com's electronic editions.

Alessi's news was not a lightning bolt out of the blue.

The Ledger and Jersey Journal had stopped printing Saturday editions for the last couple of years. Both papers, like many others, became slimmer and slimmer over time.

Some of us may remember when The Sunday Ledger, like

"The Sunday New York Times," were the size of telephone directory books. (Phone books are still around but they are also smaller and harder to find.) After risking a hernia lifting the Sunday paper, one can then spend the day reading between 10 and 14 sections plus the comics, advertising circulars, a radio/television guide and maybe a Sunday magazine.

The Ledger, in the 1990s-2010s, had separate county sections. Even then, there would be "Jerseyana" and Govs. Brendan Byrne and Tom Kean, Sr.'s point-counterpoint in the editorial section.

There were sports columnists specializing in high school athletics, bowling, track and field, fishing, aviation and local and national auto racing. "The Ledger," for a while, had daily changing full pages devoted to one sport or another.

The Ledger, in recent times, had "Bracket Boy" reappear dur-

ing the NCAA Men's basketball March tournament. Summers meant following "The Munchmobile's" cross state adventures.

There are columnists, reporters, reviewers and editorial cartoonists who I want to name - but I would risk leaving your favorites out. Let us say that your "Ledger" memories may vary.

When the decline began is hard to say.

One remembers when "The Newark Star-Ledger" had competition from "The Newark Evening News." A months-long strike in 1972 and labor costs caused the sometimes missed "News" to fold in 1973.

The "Jersey Journal" was meanwhile bringing its former rivals into its fold, including "The Bayonne Times" in 1971 and "The Hudson Dispatch" in 1991. It launched, "El Nuevo Hudson" en Espanol in 1995.

(Continued on page 7)

IRVINGTON APPOINTS NEW WEST WARD COUNCILMAN

By Lev D. Zilbermintz

Irvington's City Council has appointed a new West Ward Councilman.

Luis Antilus, a long-time resident of the Township of Irvington, was appointed as an interim West Ward Councilman on January 27, 2025. Mr. Antilus graduated from Frank H. Morrell (Irvington High School) Class of 1993. He later enrolled at Bloomfield College and graduated with a dual Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Criminal Justice.

In the summer of 2010, Mr. Antilus received his master's degree in public administration with an emphasis in Performance Measurement Concentration from Rutgers University (Newark, NJ). In June 2013, Mr. Antilus was awarded a Certified Public Manager (CPM) certificate from the State of New Jersey Civil Service Commission and Rutgers University School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA).

Mr. Antilus served as a board member on the Irvington Board of Education for over 10

years. During that time, Luis was chair of the Bylaws and Policy Committee and Negotiation Committee. In addition, Mr. Antilus was a member of the Finance, Building and Grounds Committee as well as the Athletic Committee.

Luis Antilus is the Chairman of Haitian Political Conferences (HPC); a former member of American Society for Public Administration Review (ASPRA); member of United States Chess Federation (USCF); former member of New Jersey and New York Department of Banking and Insurance (NJ Real Estate License) and a former member of the Security Exchange and Commission (SEC). Mr. Antilus is an active member of the Communications Workers of Americas (CWA) local 1037 and a member of L'Eglise Baptist De La Nouvelle Jerusalem (New Jerusalem Baptist Church) located in Irvington, N.J.

Mr. Antilus has an extensive professional background. In the fall of 2000, he started his professional career as a College Placement Advisor for the Federal Trio Programs at Essex



County College in Newark, N.J. Mr. Antilus was responsible for identifying and providing services for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These included low-income students and first-generation college students who progressed academically from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs.

In the summer of 2001, Mr. Antilus started working as a Financial Consultant for Quick and Reilly Brokerage Firm in New York City. The company was later acquired by Fleet Bank through merger. In the summer of 2004, Mr. Antilus decided to

leave the private sector. He joined the public sector as an Investigator for the State of New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), formerly known as Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). Mr. Antilus has since received numerous promotions. Mr. Antilus currently is a Supervisor for a Local Office. He enjoys being a public servant and assists others that are affected by social crises.

Mr. Antilus has been married for over twenty years to his lovely wife. God blessed their union with three children.

FORMER U.S. SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ SENTENCED TO 11 YEARS IN PRISON

NEW YORK - On Jan. 29, former U.S. Senator Robert Menendez, Wael Hana, a/k/a "Will Hana," and Fred Daibes, were sentenced to 11 years, more than eight years, and seven years in prison, respectively, for bribery, foreign agent, and obstruction of justice offenses.

Menendez, Hana, and Daibes were convicted on July 16, 2024, following a nine-week jury trial before U.S. District Judge Sidney H. Stein, who imposed the sentences.

U.S. Attorney Danielle R. Sassoon said, "The sentences imposed today result from an egregious abuse of power at the highest levels of the Legislative Branch of the federal government. Robert Menendez was trusted to represent the United States and the State of New Jersey, but instead he used his position to help his co-conspirators and a foreign government, in exchange for bribes like cash, gold, and a luxury car. The sentences imposed today send a clear message that attempts at any level of government to corrupt the nation's foreign policy and the rule of law will be met with just punishment."

According to the Superseding Indictment ("Indictment"), the evidence at trial, and public filings: Menendez, at the time the Indictment was unsealed, was the senior U.S. Senator from New Jersey and the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee ("SFRC"). Shortly after Menendez began dating his now-wife Nadine Menendez, then known as Nadine Arslanian ("Nadine Menendez"), in 2018, Nadine introduced Menendez to her long-time friend Hana, who is originally from Egypt. Hana lived in New Jersey, and maintained close connections with Egyptian officials. Hana was also a business associate of Daibes, a New Jersey real estate developer and long-time donor to Menendez, and Jose Uribe, who worked in the New Jersey insurance and trucking business.

Between 2018 and 2022, Menendez and Nadine Menendez agreed to and did accept hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of bribes from Hana, Daibes, and Uribe. These bribes included gold, cash, a luxury convertible, payments toward Nadine Menendez's home mortgage, compensation for a low-or-no-show job for Nadine Menendez, home furnishings, and other things of value.

In June 2022, the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") executed a court-authorized search warrant at the New Jersey home of Menendez and Nadine Menendez. During that search, the FBI found many of the fruits of this bribery scheme. Over \$480,000 in cash - much of it stuffed into envelopes and hidden in clothing, closets, and a safe - was discovered in the home. Some of the envelopes contained the fingerprints of Menendez or Daibes. Agents also found home furnishings provided by Hana and Daibes, the luxury vehicle paid for by

Uribe parked in the garage, as well as over one hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold bars in the home, which were provided by either Hana or Daibes.

In exchange for these and other things of value, Menendez agreed and promised to use his power and influence as a Senator to seek to protect Hana's, Uribe's, and Daibes's interests and to benefit foreign countries. Through this corrupt relationship, Menendez agreed to take a series of official acts. First, Menendez took actions to benefit the Government of Egypt and Hana, including by improperly seeking to pressure an official at the U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA") in an attempt to protect a business monopoly granted to Hana by Egypt, and by secretly representing the interests of Egypt by, among other things, ghostwriting a letter for Egypt to be provided to his own Senate colleagues and providing non-public information and assistance to Egypt.

Second, Menendez took actions seeking to disrupt a criminal investigation undertaken by the Office of the New Jersey Attorney General ("NJAG") related to Uribe and his associates. Third, Menendez recommended that the President nominate a U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey whom Menendez believed he could influence to disrupt a federal criminal prosecution undertaken by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey ("USAO-DNJ") of Daibes, and took actions to assist Daibes by acting for the benefit of the Government of Qatar. Finally, Menendez conspired and endeavored to obstruct justice in connection with the federal investigation into this scheme.

Promised Actions to Benefit Egypt and Pressure the USDA

Shortly after she began dating Menendez in 2018, Nadine Menendez worked with Hana to introduce Egyptian government officials to Menendez. Those introductions helped establish a corrupt agreement in which Hana, with assistance from Daibes, provided bribes to Menendez and Nadine Menendez in exchange for Menendez's agreed and promised actions to benefit Egypt and Hana, among others.

As part of the scheme, Menendez, among other things, provided sensitive, non-public U.S. government information to Egyptian officials and otherwise took steps to secretly aid the Government of Egypt. For example, in or about May 2018, Menendez provided Egyptian officials with non-public information regarding the number and nationality of persons then serving at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. Although this information was not classified, it was deemed highly sensitive because it could pose significant operational security concerns if disclosed to a foreign government or made public.

Without telling his professional staff or the State Department that he was doing so, on or about May 7, 2018, Menendez texted that sensitive, non-public embassy information to his then-girlfriend Nadine Menendez, who forwarded the message to Hana, who forwarded it to an Egyptian government official. Later that same month, Menendez ghost-wrote a letter on behalf of Egypt to other U.S. Senators advocating for them to release a hold on \$300 million in aid to Egypt. Menendez sent this ghost-written letter to Nadine Menendez, who forwarded it to Hana, who sent it to Egyptian officials.

At various times between 2018 and 2022, Menendez also conveyed to Egyptian officials, through Nadine Menendez, Hana, and/or Daibes, that he would approve or remove holds on foreign military financing and sales of military equipment to Egypt in connection with his leadership role on the SFRC. For example, in or about July 2018, following meetings between Menendez and Egyptian officials, which were arranged and attended by Nadine Menendez and Hana, Menendez texted Nadine Menendez that she should tell Hana that Menendez was going to sign off on an almost hundred-million-dollar weapons sale to Egypt. Nadine Menendez forwarded this text to Hana, who forwarded it to two Egyptian officials, one of whom replied with a "thumbs up" emoji.

In exchange for Menendez's agreement to take these and other actions, Hana promised Nadine Menendez payments, including from IS EG Halal Certified, Inc. ("IS EG Halal"), a New Jersey company that Hana operated with financial support and backing from Daibes. IS EG Halal had no revenue until the spring of 2019, when the Government of Egypt granted IS EG Halal a monopoly on the certification of U.S. food exports to Egypt as compliant with halal standards, despite the fact that neither Hana nor his company had any experience with halal certification. The monopoly generated revenue for Hana, through which he paid Nadine Menendez as promised.

Because the monopoly harmed U.S. interests, including revoking the ability of multiple U.S. companies to certify meat and resulting in increased costs for U.S. meat suppliers, in or about April and May 2019, the USDA and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo contacted the Government of Egypt and sought reconsideration of its grant of monopoly rights to IS EG Halal. After being briefed on the USDA's objections to IS EG Halal's monopoly by Hana and Nadine Menendez, on May 23, 2019, Menendez called a high-level USDA official, the Undersecretary of Agriculture for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs ("Official-1"), and insisted that the USDA stop opposing IS EG Halal's status as the sole halal certifier.

(Continued on page 6)

NEWARK MOURNS CHILD LOST TO VIOLENCE

Photos By Thomas Ellis II



By Thomas Ellis II

This past Friday, a 9 year old was shot and killed by a stray bullet on Yates Avenue and Osborne Terrace. Yasin Morrison was being dropped off at his grandmother's house along with his little sister by their father when the gunfire rang out. Yasin was rushed to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

During this tragic shooting, a man was also shot on Yates so it possibly could have been two shootings that night. The New-

ark Police Department and Essex County Prosecutor's Office are investigating. The ECPO have set up a \$10,000 reward for the capture of the killer.

Yasin's grandmother said she heard several shots, and looked out her window only to see the boy and his father lying on the ground.

You can just imagine how devastating this is for the family members to know that they will never get a chance to see Yasin grow up because of someone recklessly firing a gun at another

person.

Nine year old Yasin had autism and was nonverbal, so you can just imagine the hurt and pain his sister, father, mother, grandmother and other family members are going through right now.

Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka sent out a statement urging the shooter to turn himself in to the police.

The next day on February 1, the family and community held a memorial for Yasin with candles, cards, and the releasing of

balloons. The family set up a GoFundMe page in his honor.

The other male that was shot will recover from his wounds. We all hope that he says something that can shed a little light on this murder.

As of deadline, the killer has not been caught nor have he turned himself into law enforcement.

Let's pray one or the other happens because the shooter is more dangerous now than ever.

MENENDEZ (Cont. from page 5)

When Official-1 attempted to explain why the monopoly was detrimental to U.S. interests, Menendez reiterated his demand that the USDA stop interfering with IS EG Halal's monopoly. Official-1 did not accede to Menendez's demand, and sought to reassure his staff against the pressure Menendez attempted to apply, but IS EG Halal nevertheless kept its monopoly.

After financially benefitting from IS EG Halal's monopoly, Hana, at times with the assistance of Daibes, provided payments and other things of value in furtherance of the scheme. For example, in or about July 2019, after the mortgage company for the residence of Nadine

Menendez initiated foreclosure proceedings, Hana caused IS EG Halal to pay approximately \$23,000 to bring the mortgage current. Hana did so after a series of discussions with Nadine Menendez, as well as Uribe and Daibes, about various options for bringing the mortgage current.

Later in 2019, Hana and Daibes caused IS EG Halal to issue three \$10,000 checks to a "consulting" company Menendez helped Nadine Menendez create as supposed payment for a low-or-no-show job. As the scheme continued, including through the additional actions described below, Menendez and Nadine Menendez received additional bribes, including gold and cash.

Promised Actions Seeking to Disrupt the NJAG Criminal Case

Also in 2019, Hana and Uribe offered to help buy a new Mercedes-Benz C-300 convertible worth more than \$60,000 for Menendez and Nadine Menendez. In exchange, Menendez agreed and sought to interfere in the NJAG's criminal insurance fraud prosecution of an associate of Uribe and a related investigation involving an employee of Uribe. On multiple occasions in 2019, Uribe, Hana, and/or Nadine Menendez briefed Menendez regarding the NJAG's insurance fraud prosecution and investigation. Following those briefings, and in exchange for the promise of the luxury con-

vertible, Menendez contacted the then-New Jersey Attorney General ("Official-2") at least twice.

During those communications, Menendez attempted to pressure Official-2 to resolve the prosecution more favorably to Uribe's associate. Official-2 considered Menendez's actions inappropriate, did not agree to intervene, and did not pass on that Menendez had contacted him in order to insulate his staff against any outside influence from Menendez. Ultimately, in the regular course, the prosecution was resolved with a plea allowing for no jail time for Uribe's associate and the investigation never resulted in any charges against Uribe's employee.

In exchange for Menendez's
(Continued on page 12)

STAR-LEDGER (Cont. from page 4)

The 1787-founded "Elizabeth Daily Journal" left a reverberation when it ceased publication in 1992. A later study for the now-Union County Commissioners found that other dailies and weeklies tried to fill a vacuum but left a lack of a county-wide voice. The study recommended establishing a daily paper there along with reviving passenger rail service along the old CNJ Main Line.

Internet access and World Wide Web's late 1990s advent made researching, keyboarding and filing easier. Advertisers followed the eyeballs from print to electronic mediums, upsetting traditional media's business model to this day.

"The Ledger," for example, printed separate free news, sports, business and classified sections that were distributed in blue curbside newspaper boxes in the early 2010s. It had tried to follow the alternative weekly newspapers' free distribution supported by advertising and subscription model.

Some of the "Ledger's" traditional orange boxes were repainted to herald its "ED Electronic Edition" - nj.com.

"The Ledger," by 2014, had dropped "Newark" from its title in an attempt to become New Jersey's newspaper. It had tried to compete with the "Bergen Record," "Asbury Park Press," "The Press of Atlantic City," the "Philadelphia Inquirer" South Jersey edition and six other Jersey dailies at the time.

Advance Media/Newhouse had left behind a Newark office in Gateway Center - but otherwise vacated Newark. Its editorial office and printing press here at Court and Washington streets, built in the mid-1960s, was seen as the paper's faith in Newark. The building now houses an art auction house.

The Ledger had been printed from Woodbridge but, in later years, out of Morris County's Montville. That press' mounting costs was one of its final nails.

We at "Local Talk" get a "there but the grace thereof go I" moment when we remember when Advance media came calling to Our Founder in 2015. They had wanted to buy the publication and make it a special member of their family.

Our Founder declined Advance's offer - which may be why "Local Talk" is still here.

Indeed, our Eastern Essex County reading territory is now being covered by an overlapping patchwork of weekly and monthly newspapers and websites whose coverage and editorial quality varies greatly.

One weekly group, owned by a daily,

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are "ghost papers." They have easily written articles, sometimes from out-of-the-area, and are propped up by shared advertisers.

Another group, fearing the potential loss of governmental public notices, largely publishes "positive news." Hard news is only posted when unavoidable.

Our pledge is that we will not flinch from difficult or hard news. We will never be mistaken for an echo chamber.

Our commitment, since Nov. 1, 2000, is, "Let's Talk for the Betterment of Our Commu-

nities." We will strive to cover people, places and events that others may or will not cover.

We will do our best - but we cannot do it without you. If you think we are missing something, let us know.

Patronize our advertisers and marketing partners. Tell them "I saw you in 'Local Talk.'"

Consider joining us in getting your story, your product and/or service's word out.

In this climate, it is more important than ever - and that is not trivial.

SPORTS WRAP



Photos By Felicia Laguerre Owens



By William Hathaway, Jr.

This past weekend, the Prudential Center in Newark hosted the Winter Warfare boxing event sponsored by Prime Sports. Many local boxers from the tri-state area were on the card.

Those in attendance were treated to a women's bout, in which Miyo Yoshida defeated Beata Dudek. In men's action, Irvington resident Jean Pierre Valena beat Brooklyn native Dmitry Noskow in a 4 round junior middleweight bout. Fellow Irvingtonian Ghandi Romain defeated Benjamin Lampley in 2 rounds.

Brick City's Keith "Tsunami" Colon Rodriguez hit Angelo Ramos with a 2nd Round TKO to win their cruiserweight division fight. In a four round welterweight battle, John Vallojo won a decision over Rommell Toran. In another welterweight fight, Emmanuel Etienne scored a 2nd Round TKO over Kevin Torian.

The main event for the evening saw 6'8" heavyweight Damian Knyba put his 14-0 record on the line against Andrzej Wawrzyk. In the third round, Knyba improved to 16-0 after scoring a knockout in the bout scheduled for 10 rounds.

In basketball action, this past week on the Seton Hall campus, the Lady Pirates continue their winning ways in a blowout over Butler 71-48 before a packed crowd at Walsh Gym. Faith Masonius scored 12 points, Savannah Catalon had 15 points, and Jada Eads added 11 points. They also won a big game on the road against DePaul 72-55. Masonius had 21 points, Catalon scored 15, and Eads dropped 18.

At the Prudential Center, the SHU men's team had their struggles continue. Despite a strong comeback, the Pirates fell short to Providence 69-67. The Hall got 19 points from Prince Aligbe, 13 from Garwey Dual and Dylan Addae Wusu each. SHU is 6-15 on the season.

In Essex County high school basketball, I had a opportunity to check out the Orange High girls basketball team host an Essex County Tournament game. The Tornadoes beat Irvington 51-27. Sophomore Shamia Fryer led Orange with 22 points in the game along with 10 rebounds. OHS is 10-7 on the year with key wins over West Side, Technology and even Shabazz and Barringer. However, they would lose in the tournament to Science Park 70-30.

In boys action, Orange lost to Seton Hall Prep 79-48. Leading orange was Kysir Green with 22 points, with six 3-pointers. Seton Hall Prep got 18 points from Daniel Beazer while Anthony Gonzalez had 15 points and 8 rebounds. Despite the loss, OHS is 6-1 in the Super Essex Conference, including a 58-57 win over Columbia this past week. In other action, it was Arts High school beating Millburn 77-58, and University beating Central 80-36.

Finally, the NBA is reeling after big trades that saw Mavericks superstar Luka Doncic to the Lakers for Anthony Davis, and Kings star De'Aaron Fox shipped to the Spurs in a three team deal that had Zach LaVine sent to Fox's former team and Kevin Huerter traded to the Bulls.



Photo By William Hathaway, Jr.

Photo By William Hathaway, Jr.

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GROUNDHOG MAKES PREDICTIONS FROM TURTLE BACK ZOO

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 on Groundhog Day and is predicting spring weather to arrive early. She also predicted the Philadelphia Eagles would defeat the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LIX.

Lady Edwina made her prediction during Turtle Back Zoo's annual Groundhog Day Celebration. This is the fourth time she has made a prognostication since taking over for her cousin Essex Ed.

"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 her role as an educational resource," he added.

Essex Edwina's prediction is as follows:

*Here we are once again, to look forward... not back
Should we replace those old mittens? Do we have shorts to unpack?*

*Well look, I'm over this winter and ready for spring
I want flowers, and picnics, not the touch of wind's sting.*

*So today, I'm happy for clouds, no shadows to be found
Spring is much closer, and I am done underground.*

*That's right get out those flip flops, the sun's ready to shine
But before this is through, I have one more thing to divine.*

*I picked Eagles last time and the Chiefs took the day
But I'm doubling down, now it will go Eagles' way.*

*So, with no bad blood between us, I'll look to the sky,
And with visions of touchdowns, cheer fly Eagles fly.*

This is the fourth 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.

"Once again, the powers-that-be are still invested in the possibility of a rodent being the second coming of Nostradamus," said "Local Talk" Content Editor Kristopher Seals. "I've said it before and I'll say it again, if a groundhog can predict the weather - or even a Super Bowl winner for that matter - then I'm going to marry Scarlett Johansson."



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 - How soon tenants here at 440 Washington St. will get their sorely missed heat back may hinge on three conditions between now and March 3.

Municipal Councilman Carlos Gonzalez, as the elders' Tax Abatement Committee chairman, had granted 30 days on Jan. 30 for 440 Washington's owner, BRP Properties, to restore heat and make other corrections on the former St. James Towers' substandard conditions.

BRP's co-founder, Meridith Marshall, promised Gonzalez and the panel that his company will replace GRC Management, with a new managing company as early as Feb. 2. GRC had abruptly vacated their ground floor office in December without collecting January's rent.

Gonzalez, as of Jan. 29, had held off taking the city's tax abatement status from the 1970s-constructed tower pending on how much progress BRP makes. The tax abatement - along with state tax credits, rental subsidies from US HUD and \$11 million from BRP itself plus St. James AME Church - was granted as part of a 2018-19 renovation.

City Business Administrator Eric Pennington meanwhile has a Superior Court judge's phone number on speed dial. Pennington, on Jan. 23, said he is waiting for the Council's nod to take BRP to court and have the judge assign a building receiver. The receiver will be the one collecting rent and assigning contractors to make urgent repairs and

bring the 200-unit building up to code.

Pennington, that Wednesday, told Newark's elders that a team of code enforcers, engineers and other city officials confirmed Jan. 9-10 that conditions are as bad as the tenants have said they are: sub-50-degree heat, no security guards or maintenance workers, holes in the wall, irregular trash pickup et. al. They issued code violation tickets to BRP by the hundred.

BRP said its first New Jersey property has suffered from decades of deferred maintenance and neglect when they came aboard in 2015. The New York City company bought 75 percent ownership from St. James.

IRVINGTON - A township man has a February date with the South Orange-Maplewood Municipal Court to answer to two burglary charges lodged against him by the latter's police department since Jan. 5.

MPD officers, according to the township's Jan. 22 blotter, were called to a Millburn Avenue business on a commercial business' break-in and ransacking on Jan. 5. While the officers were confirming the front door burglary, the owner of a nearby avenue business approached the investigators. The owner said that his business had also suffered front door damage.

Off. Christopher Beischer brought the surveillance recordings and noticed the same suspect breaking in or attempting to break in both businesses. He then identified the suspect as Michael Damiano, 59, of Irvington. How, where and when Damiano was arrested was not disclosed on the MPD blotter.

Damiano was arrested and charged on a pair of burglary counts and released with a court date. The identity of the two burgled Millburn Avenue businesses were left off the report.

It is not clear if the suspect was the same Michael V. Damiano who was Irvington's police director before he was succeeded by Joseph Santiago in September 2008. Director Damiano, along with then-Police Chief Michael Chase and Mayor Wayne Smith, welcomed the only PROJECT VISION Gang Prevention Program in Northern New Jersey at the Grove Street Elementary School Jan. 11, 2006.

EAST ORANGE - It is to the understanding of "Local Talk" that the East Orange School District's Board of Education intends to have community members on its next 2025-26 school budget committee.

The promise was made by EOSD School Superintendent Dr. Christopher C. Irving and BOE President Andrea D. McPhatter before a near capacity audience at the Administration Building Conference Room Jan. 27 - the first board meeting after 93 employees were laid off or transferred to lesser positions to fill a \$25 million deficit in the current budget Dec. 12. The previous superintendent and board had passed the current \$220,103,828 school year budget on March 28.

Dr. Irving, who came aboard as EOSD Superintendent last summer, informed the public and the New Jersey Department of Education the first month into the 2024-25 school year. McPhatter, a former two-term First Ward Councilwoman, was appointed to a four-year BOE term by Mayor Theodore "Ted" Green in 2024. (The six-member public school board is the last mayor-appointed panel in "Local Talk" land.)

What remains unanswered is whether NJDOE will loan the district \$25 million, repayable through a 30-year municipal bond issue. The Trenton-based educators had done so for \$7 million in March for Nutley and Belleville for \$4.2 million in 2014. Both loans came with a state-appointed monitor who supervises and has veto power over those school districts' budgets.

No one has uttered "T," as in "Takeover," by the state of EOSD.

No one has said how the community member-added budget committee will be implemented - but their training time will be short. Their goal is to introduce a proposed 2025-26 budget March 24 after the board's scheduled Feb. 24 and March 17 regular meetings.

ORANGE - City residents who are concerned about the future of the Orange Memorial Hospital site have been invited to the municipal town hall meeting here at Shiloh Baptist Church, 424 Main St. (the for-

mer First Presbyterian Church of Orange) 6-7:30 p.m. Feb. 19.

Mayor Dwayne D. Warren and his administrators are to unveil the hospital and former Ippolito Funeral Home site's redevelopment, including this project's overview, scope and projected timeline. City elders are hoping that this third redevelopment proposal since Orange Memorial Hospital's 1993 closing will really happen.

The current proposal - as presented to the Orange Planning Board by redeveloper SYMREC Orange JV LLC at their Nov. 22 and Oct. 23 meetings - calls for the former Mary Austin Hall nursing school dormitory along Henry Street be turned into the new City Hall. The present City Hall at 26 No. Day St. dates back to 1871 as the second Orange High School. While providing space for a new City Hall made the SYMREC project a public-private partnership, whether the city will pay rent to SYMREC remains unclear as of press time.

The Boiler Plant & Power House off the southwest corner of South Essex Street and Central Avenue be converted into apartments. The modifications will adhere to the New Jersey and Federal Registers of Historic Sites restoration standards. All buildings are to have asbestos, lead and any other hazardous material remediated and removed prior to conversion or demolition.

Five other buildings on the block bordered by Henry, South Essex, Matthew and South Center streets, Central Avenue and Ivy Court - including the main 1929 building - will be demolished. SYMREC will replace those buildings with 1,005 new apartment units, 30,000 square feet of retail space, an ice skating rink and an amphitheater. A spokeswoman for the developer Oct. 23 said that the other buildings' patient rooms are too small to be made into dwelling units.

A majority of OPB members approved the SYMREC plan Nov. 22, 7-0, with member Enoch Faustin abstaining. Most of the 24 residents who spoke at Dec. 18's meeting public speaker segment, however, questioned the application's traffic management plan and to what degree the projected new tenants will add to

(Continued on page 13)

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ARREST MADE IN FATAL STABBING AT NEWARK SHOPRITE PARKING LOT

Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II and Newark Public Safety Director Emmanuel Miranda announced on January 29 the arrest of a suspect in connection with the death of 56-year-old Rodney J. Mayes in Newark.



56-year-old Julius Gaines, also of Newark, is charged with fatally stabbing Mayes in the Shoprite parking lot at 206 Springfield Avenue following a verbal dispute on January 27, 2025. Gaines has been charged with 1st degree murder, unlawful possession of a weapon and possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose.

These allegations are merely accusations. All defendants are presumed innocent unless and until they enter a guilty plea or are found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Anyone with information regarding this case is asked to contact the Essex County Prosecutor's Office tips line at 1-877-TIPS-4EC or 1-877-847-7432. All calls will be kept confidential.

ARRESTS MADE IN HOME INVASION

Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II, along with West Caldwell Chief of Police Dennis A. Capriglione, Jr., North Brunswick Chief of Police Joe Battaglia, US Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent in Charge Ricky Patel and Middlesex County Prosecutor Yolanda Ciccone announce the arrest of three suspects in connection with an armed home invasion in West Caldwell on Tuesday January 28, 2025.

32-year-old Joel Llanes, 30-year-old Israel Ruiz and 25-year-old Louis Ramirez of North Brunswick face charges of first-degree robbery, first-degree home invasion, and first-degree kidnapping. The suspects also face multiple weapons and conspiracy charges.

These allegations are merely accusations. All defendants are presumed innocent unless and until they enter a guilty plea or are found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Anyone with information regarding this case is asked to contact the Essex County Prosecutor's Office tips line at 1-877-TIPS-4EC or 1-877-847-7432. All calls will be kept confidential.



MENENDEZ (Cont. from page 6)

agreed and promised actions, Uribe provided Nadine Menendez with \$15,000 cash for the down payment on the luxury convertible in April 2019. Thereafter, Uribe made monthly payments to Mercedes-Benz for the convertible between 2019 and June 2022. Uribe only stopped making those monthly payments after the FBI approached Menendez, Nadine Menendez, and Uribe in connection with this investigation.

Promised Actions Seeking to Disrupt the USAO-DNJ Criminal Case and to Benefit Daibes and the Government of Qatar

In October 2018, the USAO-DNJ charged Daibes with federal criminal charges for obtaining loans under false pretenses from a New Jersey-based bank he founded. Between December 2020 and 2022, Menendez agreed and promised to attempt to influence the pending federal prosecution of Daibes in exchange for cash, furniture, and gold bars that Daibes provided to Menendez and Nadine Menendez.

In furtherance of this aspect of the scheme, Menendez recommended that the then-President nominate an individual ("Official-3") as U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey whom Menendez believed he could influence with respect to Daibes's case. Menendez requested a political advisor contact Official-3 in an attempt to influence the outcome of Daibes's case.

Menendez's political advisor did not contact Official-3 regarding Daibes's case, and USAO-DNJ did not treat the case any differently as a result of Menendez's actions. The parties to Daibes's case agreed to resolve the case with a plea agreement that provided for a probationary sentence. In exchange for Menendez's participation in the bribery scheme, Daibes provided Menendez and Nadine Menendez with multiple things of value, including two one-kilogram gold bars.

In addition, in exchange for some of the gold and other

things of value from Daibes, Menendez knew that Daibes also expected Menendez to take action to benefit the Government of Qatar, and thereby benefit Daibes, who was seeking millions of dollars in investment from a fund with ties to the Government of Qatar.

Among other things, Menendez made multiple public statements supporting the Government of Qatar and provided Daibes with these statements so that Daibes could share them with Qataris officials connected to an investment fund with which Daibes was looking to do business. For example, on or about August 20, 2021, Menendez used an encrypted messaging application to send Daibes the text of a press release in which Menendez praised the Government of Qatar, and several minutes later texted Daibes, "You might want to send to them. I am just about to release."

Obstruction of Justice and Attempts to Cover-Up the Scheme

In or about 2022, following service of subpoenas issued by a federal grand jury sitting in the Southern District of New York on Menendez, Nadine Menendez, Uribe, and IS EG Halal, Nadine Menendez met with Uribe. At that meeting, Nadine Menendez and Uribe agreed that if law enforcement asked about the payments Uribe had made for the Mercedes-Benz convertible, they would falsely say those payments had been a loan.

Later, in or about December 2022, Menendez and Nadine Menendez sought to return both the bribe money that Hana had caused IS EG Halal to pay to the mortgage company in July 2019 to avoid foreclosure on Nadine Menendez's home and the payments Uribe made for the convertible, and, in doing so, Menendez and Nadine Menendez falsely characterized the return of the bribe money as repayments for loans in documents that were produced to the grand jury.

The next year, in September 2023, in an attempt to avoid charges being brought, Menen-

(Continued on page 13)

TOWN WATCH (Cont. from pg. 10)

the Orange Public Schools system and received limited answers.

The SYMREC application, however, needs approval from the State Historic Preservation Council to proceed - but the Department of Community Affairs office does not have it on its Feb. 21 meeting agenda. Preservation New Jersey Executive Director Kelly Ruffel, on Jan. 25, urged that such a Section 106 review be held before any shovel be turned.

WEST ORANGE - West Orange High School Junior Erin Feeney more than received a prestigious rank of Cadet Captain from a Dec. 17 local Civil Air Patrol ceremony.

Feeney, 16 and two of her fellow Curtiss-Wright Composite Squadron New Jersey Wing cadets received that rank as part of being bestowed CAP's Amelia Earhart Awards at the North Caldwell Fireman's Community Center. CAP said that only five percent of its 32,000 cadets nationwide. She was also awarded the 2024 Cadet of the Year.

Feeney, who is also co-captain of the WOHS Mounties swim team and a softball team member, is the only "Local Talk" area awardee. She received the award in the presence of State Sen. John McKeon (D-West Orange).

The Earhart Award is bestowed after a cadet has completed 11 achievements and has successfully passed a "comprehensive exam on aerospace topics, leadership and staff duties." The award and rank promotion allows Feeney to enlist with the USAF as E3 Airman First Class.

The honor commemorates the pioneering efforts of Amelia Earhart (1897-1937), including her completing the first solo transcontinental flight by a woman at the then-Newark Municipal Airport in 1932.

Prospective Earhart awardees are to first receive the Gen. Billy Mitchell Award for "excellence in aerospace, character, fitness and leadership." Mitchell (1879-1936) demonstrated that aircraft can bomb naval ships and advocated a separate air force branch. Feeney received the Mitchell Award Nov. 7, 2023.

The CAP Curtiss-Wright Combined Squadron has 52 cadets and 21 adults mainly

from West Orange, Caldwell, Cedar Grove, East Hanover, Fairfield, Livingston, Morristown, Parsippany, Roseland and Wayne. The squadron - named after former rivals Glenn Curtiss and the Wright Brothers - and their combined company - flies out of West Caldwell's Essex County, Lincoln Park and Morristown airports.

SOUTH ORANGE - Village police officers said on Jan. 27 that they have identified and are seeking protestors who defaced a synagogue, among other crimes, the day before.

Members of the Oheb Shalom Congregation and witnesses said that the pro-Palestinian party of around 10 were demonstrating on the sidewalk in front of 170 Scotland Rd. Jan. 26. That Sunday was the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day - the 80th anniversary of when Soviet troops liberated the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

Rabbi Abigail Treu said they were holding a presentation by two members of the Israeli Air Force Search and Rescue Unit plus their regular Hebrew Sunday school. There was an SOPD squad car packed some 50 feet up the driveway for crowd control.

Several neighbors said that they were harassed by the marchers, including being shouted at with "baby killers." One protester was seen throwing red liquid, presumably fake blood, at a passing vehicle. Parents said they had problems picking up their school children.

One of the protestors wrote "Terrorists This Way" and an arrow in chalk on the driveway. A neighbor washed away the writing with a garden hose after the group had left. The on-duty SOPD officer, when alerted by the temple's cantor, found a briefcase holding chalk left behind.

Public officials - from Mayor Sheena Collum and Police Chief Ernesto Morillo up to Cong. Mikie Sherrill (D-Montclair) have decried the incidents - which the ECPO Special Victims Unit and the N.J. Attorney General's Office are treating as a bias case. News of the defacement has since traveled to Israeli media.

Oheb Shalom started out as an Orthodox temple in 1860 on Price Street and High Street (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) but became a Conservative syna-

conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud, honest services wire fraud, conspiracy to commit obstruction of justice, obstruction of justice, tax evasion, and wire fraud. Sentencing for Uribe is scheduled for April 24, 2025.

Charges remain pending against Nadine Menendez, who is presumed innocent and is scheduled to go to trial on March 18, 2025.

Ms. Sassoon praised the outstanding investigative work of the FBI. Ms. Sassoon also thanked the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation for its invaluable assistance on the investigation and the Depart-

ment of Justice's National Security Division, Counterintelligence and Export Control Section for its support of the case.

MAPLEWOOD - The South Orange-Maplewood Adult School will celebrate the life of Eva Samo, 103, here at The Woodland March 24 during their "Likely Stories" biennial event. Her funeral was held at South Orange's Cong. Beth El Jan. 13.

Samo, who pioneered several SOMAS programs in her 51 years with them, died in Winchester Gardens Jan. 10. She helped create the Children's Summer Program in 1974, the After School Program in 1983 and, into the 2010s, the South Orange-Maplewood First Night celebration.

Samo, who an adult school trustee called "an idea engine," held various positions through 1996, including registrar, executive secretary, assistant director and associate director. She and her late husband Harvey jointly received the Maple Leaf Award for community service in 1993.

Born Nov. 1, 2021, Samo and husband Harvey moved into 35 Washington Park in 1961. Eva had retired to Winchester Gardens in 2002, after Harvey's passing.

The adult school had also renamed its lecture series after her in 2020. The almost annual series began here in 2014.

BLOOMFIELD - Township police detectives are working with their East Orange and Belleville colleagues and U.S. Postal Inspectors in pooling circumstantial information of a stolen car, armed robbery of a USPS van and a collision Jan. 25 and 29.

Patrolling Bloomfield officers were informed by the Belleville police dispatcher at about 11:45 a.m. Jan. 29 that a Nissan used in the stickup of a postal van in their township may be coming their way. BPD Chief George Ricci said that one of his detectives soon noticed the speeding suspect car - and that it matched the description of one reported as stolen here in Jan. 25.

"One of my detectives saw the car in Belleville and tried to pull it over and the suspects took off," said Ricci. "Our officers were entitled to chase, given that this was a felony (armed robbery of a USPS worker)."

BPD officers pursued the wanted car into
(Continued on page 14)

MENENDEZ (Cont. from pg. 12)

dez caused his then-counsel to give a presentation at the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York in Manhattan falsely stating that Menendez had been unaware of the mortgage and car payments until receipt of the subpoenas in 2022, and that these payments from Hana and Uribe were loans, even though Menendez knew such statements to be false.

Uribe, 57, of Clifton, New Jersey, previously pled guilty pursuant to a cooperation agreement to conspiracy to commit bribery,

ment of Justice's National Security Division, Counterintelligence and Export Control Section for its support of the case.

This case is being handled by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Eli J. Mark, Paul M. Monteleoni, Lara Pomerantz, Daniel C. Richenthal, and Catherine Ghosh, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Christina Clark, are in charge of the prosecution, with the assistance of Paralegal Specialists Arjun Ahuja, Jayda Foote, and Braden Florczyk, and former Paralegal Specialists Connor Hamill and Rachel Wechsler.

The Observation Booth



OP-ED By Andrea Dialect

STRIKE 2

Observers, let me reintroduce you to this week's **Page Jacker** and the newest Andre Dialect\$ **Geek Squad** inductee, **Raiden Pipkins**. With an intriguingly sharp political mind and a geek streak that slices through the noise, Raiden has a knack for breaking down the chaos of politics like no other. Buckle up - For this week, take over.

Check out the draft below and get the 411. Visit **Localtalk-weekly.com** to read the full story in the Entertainment section. While you're at it, check out the archives and get familiar with all things Andrea Dialect. Follow my daily Andrea Dialect Portal sessions on Facebook and my **msdialect on Instagram**, and

let's grow out loud together! Like, follow, and share.

CHINA STRIKES AGAIN!

By Raiden Pipkins
www.linkedin.com/in/raiden-pipkins-173326263

Dep. of Treasury and Phone Calls Compromised!

The United States Treasury Department stated on December 8th that the Chinese Government hacked them by compromising third-party security vendor "Beyond Trust". The APT (Advanced Persistent Threat) group behind the attack was determined to be Volt Typhoon of the Chinese Government and China's Ministry of State Security (China's version of CIA and NSA). This group has been active for years and has been conducting similar attacks on many other countries worldwide. In 2017 the FBI charged 4 people acting on behalf of the Chinese Military for hacking Equifax and being responsible for the mass data theft of 145 Million Americans.

Ukrainian hackers are currently wreaking chaos for Russia in the war, Israel's notorious 8200 division is one of the greatest and most capable hacking groups on the planet. Despite all of this China still spends more on their cyber capabilities than both of these 2 countries combined. This shouldn't come as



too big of a surprise considering the PRC (People's Republic of China) has mastered the art of corporate espionage, stealing secret information, and intellectual property over the last decade.

In August 2024, news broke that the hacking group Salt Typhoon of the Chinese State Ministry hacked into major US Telecommunications providers such as Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile. 9+ telecom companies have been suspected of being hacked into by the Chinese Government as of late December. According to investigators, the telecom hack dates back to 2022, so for 2 years Salt Typhoon has had access to the Service Providers and gone undetected. If you have Verizon, T-Mobile, or AT&T just know there is a legitimate possibility China had access to all of your phone records and might've used said infor-

mation to compromise your accounts or the organization(s) you work for.

It is logical to suspect the reason behind the Telecom attacks was targeting top government officials and politicians. Kamala Harris and her team were targeted, Donald Trump's Campaign Team along with his family members were also believed to have been targeted by Salt Typhoon. In the simplest words: to spy and gather as much information as possible on them and their future plans.

Why is the Telecom hack a problem for us, if you are pro-privacy then you don't want ANYONE seeing your data, not the government, not the NSA, and not China. At least the US has rules and laws it has to follow. But none of that applies to a foreign country. Staunch Privacy Activists and Security/Technology Expert, Mental Outlaw says aside from listening to private conversations with loved ones, the Hackers know of the potential to bypass the 2-factor authentication SMS method. ...

Read this article in its entirety at www.localtalkweekly.com and type *The Observation Booth, Andrea Dialect and/or Entertainment Section* in the search bar. If you are interested in participating in a challenge, project sharing a topic, news or if you have any questions, comments or concerns, send them to localtalkandrea@gmail.com.

TOWN WATCH (Cont. from pg. 13)

Newark and East Orange neighborhoods until the pursued car crashed into two others along the latter city's Summit Street. While it is not clear whether the struck cars were parked or occupied in the accounts, there were no reported injuries.

Four people then bailed out of the now-disabled car and fled on foot until they were apprehended. Ricci said one suspect was found while hiding between two other curbside parked cars.

The foursome have been so far charged with third-degree receiving stolen property and fourth-degree resisting: Tarik Dunbar, 23, of Newark; Shakir Tinney, 22, of North Greensboro, N.C.; Conna Richburg, 19, of East Orange and Jaylissa Varnor, 19, of Orange. Richburg and

Varnor have also been charged with second-degree eluding. It is not clear which pair are also being held on outstanding arrest warrants.

All four, as of press time, are also subject to being charged on federal counts of robbing a USPS carrier.

MONTCLAIR - Authorities are looking for the person or persons who called in a bomb threat during a Wellmont Theater concert here Jan. 6. The threat emptied the theater off Bloomfield Avenue and had its section between its Five Points and South Willow Street for an hour before the incident was deemed a hoax.

MPD Capt. Robert Romito said that the theater informed them of the called-in threat just after 10 p.m. that Saturday. Rapper-singer Destroy Loney was

performing at that time as part of his Forever tour.

MPD officers, with backup from the Essex County Sheriff Bomb Disposal Unit, told the theater to evacuate 5 Seymour St. and cut the concert short. Neither the agencies nor the theater said how many people were sent to Seymour's pedestrian plaza although the 1922-built performance space has a capacity of 2,500.

Mayor Dr. Renee Baskerville and Fourth Ward Councilwoman Aminah Toler put out and advisory, telling people to avoid the Wellmont Theater area until MPD could search for explosives. Traffic - including buses on NJTransit's 11, 28, 29 and 34 routes - were detoured.

MPD, unable to find a bomb, declared the object "a hoax" and informed Baskerville and Toler.

The two township elders posted an "All CLEAR!" notice at 11 p.m.

GLEN RIDGE - The older half of a former borough couple who owned an East Orange-based school bus company was sentenced to a five-year prison term and fined \$500,000 in a Newark courtroom Jan. 24, closing the six-year case of F&A Transportation and Smart Choice.

State Superior Court-Newark Judge Mark Ali sentenced Ahmed Maghoub, 66, to five years in a state prison, pay \$500,000 in profiteering penalties and is barred from doing business with the state or its administrative or political subentities for 10 years. The sentence is the result of a March 4 plea bargain Maghoub
(Continued on page 15)

TOWN WATCH (Continued from page 14)

struck with the OPIA Corruption Bureau. Maghoub, whose last address was in East Hanover, pleaded guilty to a second-degree count of false representation on a government contract. He had confessed to falsifying inspection records of T&A's school buses and for failing to make background checks on the school bus drivers and aides he had hired 2016-20.

Faiza Ibrahim, 51, Mahgoub's wife, is meanwhile serving a pretrial intervention program on a third-degree count of public records tampering. Ibrahim has also been barred from doing business with the state and its subdivisions for 10 years but is paying a \$75,000 fine.

Maghoub and Ibrahim were renting from a borough apartment building when they started the Smart Choice medical van company in 2013 and, later, T&A school busing from 134 Evergreen Place. in East Orange. They had \$3.5 million worth of school bus contracts from Newark Public Schools and other districts in Essex, Passaic, Morris and Union counties.

The spotlight first turned on the couple and T&A after one of its drivers had passed out and crashed a minibus with 12 special needs children aboard in Newark Feb. 20, 2019. Newark police had charged Lisa Byrd, 57, with DWI and endangering children's welfare. Maghoub claimed that Byrd was an aide and Byrd said she had a medical condition. NJMVC inspections in April and August that year failed almost the entire T&A fleet and found that criminal background and sobriety checks were not made on some of its drivers.

It is not clear whether Ibrahim remains in Glen Ridge or East Orange. All of Smart Choice and T&A's vehicles have been parted out. Miller Pipeline now uses their former lot at 134 Evergreen for vehicle and equipment storage.

BELLEVILLE - Count Mayor Michael Melham among those officials who are skeptical of President Donald J. Trump's Jan. 28 statement on the drones that have appeared in and around New Jersey airspace last month.

U.S. Press Secretary Karoline Levitt read the following statement, who said came directly from Trump before the White House Press Corps that Tuesday:

"After research and study, the drones that were flying over New Jersey in large numbers were authorized by the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) for research and various other reasons. Many of these drones were hobbyists, recreational and private individuals that enjoy flying drones. In time, it got worse due to curiosity. This was not the enemy."

There were up to a dozen drones flying at a time above various residential, public and private locations, including

several supposedly reported from Maplewood. Some of the sightings were encroaching on air lanes in and out of Newark Liberty International and Linden airports. Two of the sightings were near Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in Central New Jersey and Morris County's Picatinny Arsenal.

Trump, while President-Elect said that he would look into the drones and speculated that the outgoing Joseph R. Biden Administration "knows more about them." Melham, who first said that the drones may be linked to radioactive material missing from a Central New Jersey processing plant, said Tuesday that he still sees the drones flying "all over the place."

"Frankly, it was disappointing. It sounds like a cover story because they have no cover story," said the mayor. "You're flying around in urban areas, in densely populated areas, 100 feet above homes. You see red and green blinking lights when they get over you, they look like small aircraft; they're fixed drones."

Some critics, including Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden, asked why the FAA had not explained their authorization early in the sighting process. The FAA had issued drone flight bans Dec. 31 over 60 New Jersey and New York municipalities through Jan. 18 - including the Trump National Golf Course in Bedminster.

NUTLEY - A Clifton police officer's apprehending a Bloomfield shoplifting suspect by Park Oval here Jan. 23 almost made the tackle on Nutley High School's Tangorra Field. It was still impressive that CPD Sgt. Andrew Mulick followed the suspect some 1.5 miles south from the Nutley-Clifton border.

Sgt. Mulick was one of several CPD officers, said Lt. Robert Anderson Jan. 24, who responded to the report of a shoplifting at Kohl's at about 9:30 p.m. that Thursday. The store's loss prevention officer showed the officers a security recording of a man taking an estimated \$1,500 of clothing.

Mulick said that he had spotted someone appearing to be the suspect at Franklin Avenue and Kingsland Street in Nutley - about a block south of where Main Avenue becomes Franklin.

The sergeant followed the suspect on foot through backyards and alleys and scaling over fences until the suspect - identified as Daniel Battalie, 35 - surrendered by the oval.

Battalie was charged with shoplifting, given over to Passaic County Sheriff's custody and was remanded to that county jail in Paterson. It is not known whether Battalie had any of the stolen clothing on him. Mulick was meanwhile treated at a local hospital for hand cuts.

Battalie apparently is no stranger to Northeastern Essex County area police.

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Bloomfield police officers had arrested the then-Hackensack resident Jan. 30 on outstanding shoplifting warrants. He has been accused of boosting groceries and clothing from its Franklin Square shopping plaza Stop & Shop and Marshall's June 20 and 1, May 14, 13 and 8 and April 22. He was earlier arrested for stealing groceries Jan. 22, 2024 and Feb. 16, 2023 from Stop & Shop supermarket there.



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