

LOCAL TALK

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

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER

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Photo By Marvin Chambers
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DEFROCKED CARDINAL McCARRICK DEAD AT 94

Theodore McCarrick (left) welcomed by President Bush upon resigning as Archbishop of Washington in 2006



By Walter Elliott

Defrocked cardinal and Archbishop of Newark Theodore Edgar McCarrick, 94, who Bishop of Metuchen James F. Checchio said whose life "was apparently lived in the brightest spotlights and in the darkest shadows of the Church," has died April 3.

McCarrick, who once had the ears of world leaders while archbishop and cardinal at Washington, D.C. and was laicized by Pope Francis in 2018, had died in a hospital near Dittmar, Mo., some 47 miles southwest of St. Louis. Francis, in his Sept. 28, 2019 sentencing, directed McCarrick to a secluded life of prayer and penance in a Catholic Kansas treatment center of substance and sexual abusers.

He had reportedly been diagnosed with dementia Aug. 30, 2023.

His death has triggered memories from those who remember him while Newark archbishop 1986-2000, as first Metuchen bishop and elsewhere. Some of those memories, however, are of sexual abuse of seminary students and altar boys here and earlier that led to a canonical trial and pending sentencing in 2023-25.

Stories of abuse by McCarrick reverberate here in the Archdiocese of Newark - and in South Orange's Seton Hall University, where questions are being asked of its current president of what and when he knew while as

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Editorial

Dhiren Shah
Editor-In-Chief

Hello Readers,

After a small market crash for three days, the market seemed to be going back up. However, on Tuesday afternoon, it fell again. The market is up and down. It's not steady due to the uncertainty of President Donald Trump's tariff announcements and policy changes. However, some of the economists said that the tariffs are not consistent with our policy. On the other hand, being one of the highest trade partners in the world, and one of the highest importers of world goods, we want to make sure that the policies of other countries are at the same level as ours. With that said, we should make sure that

US consumers are not hurt by raising the costs of basic items for their day to day living.

Once again, I commend Cory Booker for breaking the record of speaking for more than 25 hours on the Senate floor, breaking the old mark of Senator Strom Thurmond, who spoke for over 24 hours in 1957. He spoke for that long without a break, except whenever another senator asked a question. Standing for that long itself is a record and speaking with determination and vocabulary is amazing. We have seen him for a long time since he was a Newark City Council member and Newark City Mayor. I wrote a few times that when guests gathered against him, he entered the room and spoke about the subject, with the charisma to change people's opinions. Most of the time when he leaves, the majority of the people would end up supporting him. I am always an admirer of

Cory Booker. In my office there are two photos, one with Cory Booker and one with the son of a leader in my heart Martin Luther King Jr. His son Martin Luther King III was with us on a trip for finding out the facts about Israel and Palestine in 2007.

The world needs some mental relief. War and injustice have become a part of life. To unite the world with peace, JETO (Jain International Trade Organization) has organized chanting of the Jain Religion's Navkar Mahamantra in 108 countries. Millions of people will chant Navkar Mahamantra for three and a half hours all over India and all over the world. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the people from their central event and may explain the benefits of Navkar Mahamantra. Navkar Mahamantra is for seeking blessings for the eradication of sins.

On April 9, 2025 which is around when "Local Talk" goes

to print, this chanting will take place. The central event will be at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. It is a good start, uniting people for world peace. Positivity must conquer Negativity to have peace in the world. Money and Politics are trying to control the world. The majority of the rich and powerful do not think about the working middle and poor class.

Religions were for peace within for all its followers. However, some religious leaders are for power and money. I am not talking about one religion. It is about all the religions of the world. The more organized the religion, the more they are about having more money and more control. I hope that people who have power can think about the working class people more than their own and their group's benefits.

Have a wonderful week.

I'll talk to you next week.

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WEATHER FOR THE WEEK

THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Cloudy	Rain	Rain	Morning Rain	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy
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The Doctor Is In



OP-ED By Adil Manzoor

Personalized Nutrition and its Role in Preventing Chronic Diseases: An Internal Medicine Perspective

Working as a doctor for many years has revealed to me the astonishing influence diet can have on a person's well-being. Every patient has different needs, but there is a general piece of advice that is offered that is considered "healthy" by many. Personalized nutrition is different from this. It is not merely a healthy diet; rather, it focuses on relieving and accommodating your body's specific requirements. This precise methodology is particularly useful for people who are at risk of developing chronic diseases.

Consider two individuals who suffer from hypertension. One of them may have a salt sensitivity, while the other may have an insulin resistance issue. These two clearly require different diets. This is where personalized nutrition comes into play. It looks at the person's family history, metabolism, gut flora, or even the culture's food preferences and designs an individualized plan for every single person. This is a more proactive approach rather than reactive. Personalizing a diet and acknowledging risk factors early allows for preventative methodology instead of reactive, which involves medications later on.

As an example, I have had patients who were complaining of extreme fatigue, yet they still managed to eat what they believed was a healthy diet. Upon evaluation, we discovered their meals included refined carbs that

resulted in high blood sugar and crashes afterward. Incredibly, their energy and focus improved tremendously when they began incorporating more proteins and healthy fats into their diet. Another patient diagnosed with chronic digestive disorders found relief by removing some foods from her diet based on gut microbiome test results.

But how did we come about the whole concept of personalized nutrition?

Emerging research shows that our bodies process food differently based on genetics and microbiome composition. Certain individuals will do well on low-carb diets, while others will start to develop energy crashes. Some people are slow metabolizers of caffeine and are prone to high blood pressure. Aside from this, gut bacteria also regulate the absorption of vital nutrients and modulate inflammation.

We don't have to wonder any longer what may work because we have tools that help us make better dietary choices for every individual. These tools comprise genetic testing and microbiome analysis. Research revealed that two people can have very different blood sugar responses even though they are eating exactly the same meal. This would mean that statements such as "Don't eat white rice" can be misleading. People respond differently; for some, white rice is a reasonable carbohydrate option, while others experience troubling blood sugar levels. Personalized nutrition helps uncover these individual responses, allowing for truly tailored diet plans.

Diet accounts for the development of most chronic diseases. Personalized nutrition presents an active means of managing risk factors before they become overt conditions. A few of them are:

- **Diabetes:** Rather than recommending a low-carb diet in general, individualized nutrition determines which foods raise blood glucose levels in each person.
- **Heart Disease:** An individual with a genetic susceptibility to high cholesterol may do wonderfully on a Mediterranean-type diet with lots of omega-3s, whereas another will require additional fiber to enhance lipid profiles.
- **Obesity:** Certain individuals



easily gain weight on high-fat diets, whereas others have no control over portions on high-carbohydrate diets. Understanding how your body reacts enables you to create an effective weight control program.

- **Autoimmune Diseases:** Certain foods can trigger inflammation in individuals with autoimmune diseases. Personalized nutrition helps identify and eliminate causative agents and maintain nutritional adequacy.

I've seen patients who, after changing to a diet that was tailored to their genetic profile and metabolic needs, reversed prediabetes, reduced joint inflammation, and even clarified mental fog. The right diet can be as potent as a drug. But it does require shifting from blanket guidelines to individualized strategies.

Innovators are creating new technologies that allow diets to be personalized to individual needs and make lifestyle decisions much simpler. CGM wearables track an individual's glucose levels in real time, allowing them to observe the impact of different foods on their metabolism. Some genetic testing reveals precise deficiencies of nutrients, and microbiome testing provides an image of gut health. We already have dozens of artificial intelligence-based applications that can analyze what is consumed and recommend personalized food. But there are some issues to be addressed.

There is no doubt that all these technological innovations do not come cheaply, and not everyone will be in a position to access them. Genetic and microbiome testing is expensive, and

such services are not typically included under insurance coverage. Additionally, the tests might not be useful to everybody because not all physicians have the expertise required to interpret the information. But with the growth in research and technology alongside falling costs for personalized diets, it will quite certainly be much more affordable.

So where do you begin? You need to take notice of how your body responds to foods. Pay attention to how your meals impact your energy, your digestion, and your general feeling of well-being. For instance, do certain meals make you weak? Does a specific food make you feel bloated? This approach, as simple as it might look, can help you discover what is optimal for you. Make sure you keep a healthcare professional within reach while doing this. A doctor or a licensed dietitian can aid you with laboratory work, intolerance testing for foods, and even genetic testing. The tests can potentially reveal deficiency, intolerances, or susceptibility to these chronic diseases.

The cornerstone of effective personalization remains layered with good nutrition, such as lean protein, wholesome fats, fiber-rich carbohydrates, and vegetables. Ultra-processed foods are unhealthy no matter how much you try to personalize them. There is no reason for you to change your diet completely within a single day. Change made small but consistent enough leads to sustainable outcomes. If you find out that you are not able to digest dairy well, instead of cutting it out completely, replace milk with lactose-free alternatives. Nutrition is not

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HUMAN SERVICES LAUNCHES NEW LOCK FEATURE ON EBT CARDS TO PROTECT AGAINST BENEFIT THEFT

TRENTON - Human Services announced a new security feature that allows individuals who receive cash and food assistance benefits to lock their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards to protect against the national problem of skimming.

Residents who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) benefits can use the new EBT Lock/Unlock tool on the NJFamiliesFirst.com website or the ConnectEBT app to lock their EBT cards when they are not in use. Choosing the "Lock My Card Everywhere" option blocks all purchases while your card is locked. Residents will still receive benefits or refunds - even if their card is locked - but no online or in-store purchases can be made.

"With this new tool, residents can now proactively safeguard their benefits from scammers. This feature ensures that, between purchases, cards are secure and protected from potential theft. I encourage all residents who receive SNAP or WFNJ benefits to start using this feature immediately," said Commissioner Sarah Adelman.

"This new feature is a vital

step in protecting the benefits of those who rely on them," said Deputy Commissioner for Social Services Michael J. Wilson. "By giving residents the ability to instantly lock their cards after every transaction, we can help reduce the risk of theft and provide a greater sense of security for families who depend on these critical resources."

Theft of SNAP household benefits has been on the rise nationwide. This feature is part of a broader effort by Human Services to enhance card security and protect households against electronic benefit theft. The Fiscal Year 2025 budget also includes \$1.7 million to provide households with new EBT cards that have embedded microchips.

Benefits can be electronically stolen through skimming, which involves illegally attaching a device to a point-of-sale machine to steal EBT card information or a PIN; cloning, which involves copying stolen EBT card information to a new card; or scamming, where individuals are convinced to disclose their EBT card information, often through fraudulent phone calls or text messages that appear to be from an official government

agency (commonly known as phishing).

To lock their cards on the ConnectEBT app, individuals should click on "Lock/Unlock Card," select "Lock My Card Everywhere," then tap "Ok."

To lock their cards on the NJFamiliesFirst.com website, individuals should click on "Lock/Unlock Card" in the top right corner, select "Lock My Card Everywhere," and click "Submit."

"This simple yet effective feature provides an extra layer of security that can be activated on the go. We are glad we can make this available to residents so they can avoid falling victim to scammers," said Assistant Commissioner Natasha Johnson, who directs Human Services' Division of Family Development, which is responsible for the SNAP program.

On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act into law, allowing states to replenish lost benefits. Prior to this law being signed, states had no authority to replace benefits that had been stolen from a SNAP household. The program to replace electronically stolen bene-

fits was launched in New Jersey in July 2023. The program allowed for the replacement of benefits stolen since October 2022 through the end of September 2024.

The Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 revised the end date of the benefit theft period from Sept. 30, 2024, to Dec. 20, 2024. The American Relief Act, 2025 did not extend this authority for benefits stolen beyond December 20, 2024. As a result, New Jersey is unable to use federal or state funds to restore SNAP or WFNJ cash assistance benefits stolen on or after December 21, 2024, unless federal funding and spending authority is reinstated.

Since the replacement program started in New Jersey, \$11 million in electronically stolen benefits have been replaced in response to about 23,000 claims.

As of February 2025, there are around 817,000 New Jersey residents enrolled in SNAP.

You can apply for SNAP online, in-person or by calling your local County Social Services Agency or through a SNAP Navigator. For more information about SNAP, visit NJSNAP.gov.

US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CANCELS MILLIONS IN SCHOOL AID

By *Walter Elliott*

NEWARK - Officials at Newark Public Schools, the East Orange School District and the Robert Treat Academy Charter Schools are figuring out whether or how to complete their infrastructure projects since the United States Department of Education had abruptly turned off one of its funding spigots March 28.

The \$85 million in leftover COVID pandemic aid that 20 New Jersey school districts that they thought that day had until 2026 to spend was abruptly canceled by the USDOE at 5 p.m. that Friday. The federal agency had similarly denied extending an overall \$3 billion to districts in 40 other U.S. states and the District of Columbia that Friday.

The districts had been on "liquidation extensions" that were to last into 2026 that U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon had rendered null and void. They were funds from the \$130 billion that Congress had approved in March 2021 as part of the America Rescue Plan Act.

The allocation was to fund projects that would improve student health and safety until Sept. 30, 2024. The said 20 New Jersey districts were granted extensions to Jan. 30, 2025 and were on the then-current extension until March 30, 2026. They said they made the extension requests to help pay down contracts.

"Local Talk" has asked Newark, East Orange and Robert Treat officials about what projects are affected and funding alternatives April 7.

Some of the projects involve HVAC upgrades and electrical work.

By failing to meet the clear deadline in the regulation, you ran the risk of that the Department would deny your extension request," said McMahon that Friday. "Extending deadlines for COVID-related grants, which are in fact taxpayer funds, years after the pandemic ended isn't consistent with the Department's priorities and thus not a worthwhile exercise of its discretion."

Some districts appealed on grounds that

they did not get McMahon's cancellation memo until 5:03 p.m.

McMahon did not totally shut off the \$85 million but is making its access constricted. State level school officials must now send a letter explaining why an extension is "necessary to mitigate the effects of COVID on American students' education" and why "the Department should exercise its discretion to grant your request." USDOE, said McMahon, will consider extensions "on an individual project-specific basis."

Gov. Phil Murphy (D-Rumson) said on April 1 that he will ask the state's Congressional delegation to try to get access to the \$85 million back.

"These cuts are reckless and irresponsible, allowing us very little time for contingency plans," said Murphy. "New Jersey is proud of our best-in-the-nation public school system. We'll do everything we can to restore this funding and maintain our reputation for excellence in public education."



UNITED STATES



TITLE IX SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS TEAM ANNOUNCED

On April 4, amid a staggering volume of Title IX complaints, the U.S Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announce the Title IX Special Investigations Team (SIT) to ensure timely, consistent resolutions to protect students, and especially female athletes, from the pernicious effects of gender ideology in school programs and activities.

The Title IX SIT will streamline Title IX investigations by creating a specialized team of investigators from across ED and Department of Justice offices. The establishment of the Title IX SIT will allow personnel to apply a rapid resolution investigation process to the increasing volume of Title IX cases and also enable ED and the Justice Department to work together to conduct investigations that are fully prepared for ultimate Justice Department enforcement.

"Protecting women and women's sports is a key priority for this Department of Justice," said Attorney General Pamela Bondi. "This collaborative effort with the Department of Education will enable our attorneys to take comprehensive action when women's sports or spaces are threatened and use the full power of the law to remedy any viola-

tion of women's civil rights."

"Today's establishment of the Title IX SIT will benefit women and girls across this nation who have been subjected to discrimination and indignity in their educational activities," said Secretary of Education Linda McMahon. "From day one, the Trump Administration has prioritized enforcing Title IX to protect female students and athletes. Traditionally, our Office for Civil Rights (OCR) takes months, even years, to complete Title IX investigations. OCR under this Administration has moved faster than it ever has, and the Title IX SIT will ensure even more rapid and consistent investigations. To all the entities that continue to allow men to compete in women's sports and use women's intimate facilities: there's a new sheriff in town. We will not allow you to get away with denying women's civil rights any longer."

The Title IX SIT includes:

- ED Office for Civil Rights investigators and attorneys
- DOJ Civil Rights Division attorneys
- ED Office of General Counsel attorneys
- ED Student Privacy and Protection Office case workers and an FSA Enforcement investigator

President Trump's Executive Order Keeping Men out of Women's Sports articulates United States policy, consistent with Title IX, to protect female student athletes from having "to compete with or against or having to appear unclothed before males." President Trump's Executive Order Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism states the truth that "The erasure of sex in language and policy has a corrosive impact not just on women but on the validity of the entire American system."

MASS SHOOTING UPDATE

Information from 4-8-2025

2025 Mass Shooting Stats:

(Source: Mass Shooting Tracker, <https://www.massshootingtracker.site/data/?year=2025>)

- Total Mass Shootings: 89
- Total Dead: 120
- Total Wounded: 340
- Shootings Per Day: 0.91
- Days Reached in Year 2025 as of April 8: 98

ASIA



AFTERMATH OF QUAKE CONTINUES

In earthquake-shattered central Myanmar, people are sleeping in the streets in fear of buildings collapsing, facing early monsoon rains and the risk of waterborne diseases, the UN warned April 8.

Ten days after a 7.7 magnitude quake levelled buildings and buckled bridges across central Myanmar, the latest death toll has passed 3,500 and is "likely to rise", said Titon Mitra, UN Development Program (UNDP) Regional Representative in the country, speaking from the devastated city of Mandalay.

He said that the response has moved into a "tragic phase" shifting from rescue to recovery efforts.

Well over 4,000 people have been injured in the quakes last week and more than 80 percent of buildings were damaged - especially in the major townships of Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway.

"The health system is completely overwhelmed, hospitals are unable to cope with the number of patients they're dealing with," Mr. Mitra said, adding that medicines and healthcare items are in "incredibly short supply."

According to the UN humanitarian affairs coordination office (OCHA), more than 500,000

people across the country have been left without access to life-saving health care.

UNDP's Mr. Mitra also stressed that the risk of waterborne diseases is very high because urban water pipe systems are broken and water storage facilities are damaged.

"Sanitation is now becoming a big issue as people who have been forced out of their homes are resorting to open defecation," he warned.

The disaster has been compounded by intense rainfall which started earlier than expected last week in Mandalay, impacting the response and worsening the living conditions of homeless survivors.

Myanmar's meteorology department forecasts rain and strong winds in large parts of the country through the weekend.

Mr. Mitra said that shelter is a major issue. People are "fearful" to go back into their damaged homes and are sleeping on the streets at night, "often without any sort of cover," he told journalists in Geneva via video link.

Food is also in huge demand as markets are "severely disrupted" in Sagaing and Magway, people don't have incomes and there are "signs of hyperinflation in place," he said.

Mr. Mitra said the UN system is mobilized and has conducted initial rapid needs assessments. UNDP is also evaluating the integrity of buildings to determine if they are safe to use.

This uncertainty has impacted a hospital in Sagaing where "all the patients are in the car park in 40°C heat", he said. "If we consider the building can accommodate them, then we want to move them back as quickly as possible."

Hostilities have not stopped entirely but he expressed optimism that aid can reach all those in need, following the ceasefire announced days after the disaster by the military and resistance groups.

It remains the case that the military authorities control many

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WORLD NEWS (Cont. from page 6)

affected areas and coordinate the provision of support.

“With an active civil war, we have to make sure that the aid, if it's coordinated by military authorities, is going to areas which may be in resistance control,” he insisted.

The earthquake disaster – second only to Cylone Nargis in 2008 that killed more than 130,000 people - has compounded chronic and “very deep vulnerabilities” in Myanmar, the UNDP official said.

AFRICA



THOUSANDS FLEE CONGO VIOLENCE

Some 41,000 refugees have crossed from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) into Uganda since January, many of them having witnessed killings, “sexual violence and other traumatic experience during their flight,” said the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) on April 8.

Every day since the end of last month, around 600 Congolese have been crossing the border into Uganda - which hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa - bringing the total sheltering there to nearly 600,000, out of a total of 1.8 million.

This “risks overwhelming the country’s capacity as it also responds to the needs of over 70,000 Sudanese refugees who have arrived fleeing the two-year long war in Sudan,” says UNHCR.

Many of the new arrivals - mostly women and children - come by foot or local transport, while there have been “increasing reports of men traveling separately from their families to avoid being forcibly recruited by armed groups,” said UNHCR.

Children are particularly vulnerable, with many arriving in “a weakened state amidst a high prevalence of malaria and malnutrition.”

Transit is overwhelmed, with Nyakabande, one of the main transit centres, reaching six times its capacity. Critical shortages of bathing facilities and latrines are putting people at dire risk of deadly

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diseases, with most already suffering poor health.

Since January, up to nine children under five have reportedly died from malnutrition-related anemia in Nyakabande and Matanda transit centers.

The funding crunch is significantly impacting the humanitarian response, with UNHCR having to scale back on some standard protection activities, such as legal aid for refugees, in order to prioritize the most critical needs.

While the Ugandan authorities, UNHCR, and partners are working to strengthen support to the newly arrived refugees, vital services across the country have had to be deprioritized, including health facility closures and the loss of some 250 health workers.

“Urgent funding is critical” in order to allow Uganda to maintain and expand these services, the agency said.

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SPORTS WRAP



Photo Courtesy
UConn Lady Huskies



By William Hathaway, Jr.

This past weekend saw college basketball crown its National Champions for the 2023-24 season.

First, the Women's Final Four took place in Tampa, Florida. Defending champ South Carolina defeated Texas 74-57 in one semifinal. Joyce Edwards led with 27 points in the game. Meanwhile, Connecticut defeated UCLA 85-51, shutting down Bruins star Lauren Betts. Sara Strong led with 26 points.

The National Championship game was the matchup everyone wanted: recent juggernaut South Carolina versus legacy juggernaut UConn. Unfortunately, the game itself was not even close. The Lady Huskies won their 12th title, all under Geno Auriemma, taking the crown from the Lady Gamecocks 82-59.

UConn's big three were the key to the victory. Freshman Sara Strong led the team with 24 points, 15 rebounds, 5 assists and 2 steals, all while setting an NCAA tournament record for points by a freshman. Likely #1 WNBA pick Paige Bueckers scored 17 points and 6 rebounds, while Azzi Fudd put in 24 points and 5 rebounds. Leading was Joyce Edwards with 10 points and 5 rebounds and Tessa Johnson with 10 points and 3 rebounds.

Connecticut dominated the entire game, shooting 48 percent while holding the Gamecocks to just 34 percent. This marked the

first National Title for UConn since 2016.

On the other side, the men's Final Four games took place in San Antonio, Texas. Florida defeated fellow SEC team Auburn 79-73 in comeback fashion. Walter Clayton, Jr. dominated with 34 points for the Gators, while Alijah Martin had 17 points. Johni Broome had 15 points and 7 rebounds for the Tigers in the loss. Then, in an upset, the Houston Cougars beat the Duke Blue Devils 70-67. Leading Houston was LJ Cryer with 26 points. Likely #1 NBA pick Cooper Flagg had 26 points, but missed a key shot late. The Cougars' stingy defense was the main star, as Duke only had 1 field goal in the last 10 minutes of the game.

In other sports, it was the New York Red Bulls defeated the Chicago Fire 2-1. Leading the Red Bulls was Noah Eile and forward Serge Ngoma. NY took the lead in the 2nd minute of the first stoppage time. The Red Bulls have won three of their first four home matches at Sports Illustrated Stadium in Harrison. Goalkeeper Carlos Cornel recorded his 50th Career win in MLS. The New York Red Bulls are 3-2-2 on the season.

Finally, there is a new all time goal scorer in the National Hockey League, as Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin passed Wayne Gretzky with his 895th goal in a game at the New York Islanders.

FLORIDA WINS NCAA MEN'S NATIONAL TITLE

Photos By Marvin Chambers
4.0 Sports Media & Entertainment



By William Hathaway, Jr.

On April 7, the men's NCAA basketball National Championship was decided in San Antonio, Texas at the Alamodome. Two #1 teams with 35-4 records went head to head to decide the crown.

The Florida Gators entered their 4th national title game, winning two of the previous three, while the Houston Cougars had never won a championship, famously coming up short with Phi Slamma Jamma.

At halftime, Houston led Florida 31-28, all while keeping star guard Walter Clayton, Jr. in check. Clayton scored 34 points in the win over Auburn that got them to the title game. Florida turned the ball over 8 times in the first 20 minutes. Despite that, Will Richards kept the Gators in it with 14 points.

The second half saw the

Cougars open up a 12 point lead, with key baskets from LJ Cryer and Javier Francis. Then, Alijah Martin hit a key 3 pointer to cut the lead to 45-39. With the game tied 48-48 with 7:54 left in the game, both teams exchange leads several times going down to the wire.

After a late turnover by Houston, Florida went to the foul line and made it 65-63. In the final seconds, the Cougars were unable to get off a shot, ending their hopes of winning their first national title and handing the Gators their third.

Despite the rocky first half, Clayton ended up with 11 points and 5 rebounds. Houston was led by LJ Cryer's 19 points.

Todd Golden has won his first ever championship game for Florida, with the other two in school history belonging to Billy Donovan in 2006 and 2007.



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GOVERNOR MURPHY SIGNS BILL TO PROTECT NEW JERSEY BUSINESSES AGAINST RETAIL THEFT

NORTH BRUNSWICK - Governor Phil Murphy signed A4755/S3587, which establishes and upgrades certain crimes related to retail theft, provides that repeat offenders can be sentenced to extended prison terms, addresses gift card fraud, and requires the Attorney General to take actions to combat organized retail theft.

“No business owner or retail worker should have to fear for their safety or endure the financial loss caused by organized retail theft,” said Governor Murphy. “Over the past few years, we have worked to crack down on organized retail theft, which threatens livelihoods and public safety. With today’s bill, we are taking decisive action to combat this growing threat and protect businesses and workers statewide.”

To impose stricter penalties for these crimes and establish a dedicated effort to combat organized retail theft, the bill specifically:

1. Upgrades any simple assault to an aggravated assault when committed against a retail employee engaged in the performance of their duties
2. Upgrades to a second-degree crime the failure to pay a tax, fee, penalty, or inter-

est due if accrued through conduct as a leader of an organized retail theft enterprise

3. Establishes fostering the sale of stolen property as a disorderly persons offense
4. Provides that the value of merchandise involved in a shoplifting offense may be used to upgrade the offense
5. Provides that a person may be sentenced to an extended prison term for repeat convictions related to retail theft
6. Requires merchants that sell gift cards to ensure that the gift cards are enclosed in secure packaging and that they display a consumer notice related to gift card fraud provided by the Division of Consumer Affairs
7. Requires the Attorney General to undertake steps as deemed appropriate to effectively investigate, prosecute, and deter organized retail theft, which may include establishing a retail theft unit, task force, or other office or initiative

“We look forward to working with our law enforcement partners to continue fighting sophisticated organized retail theft rings using the tools provided by the Legislature and Governor Murphy,” said Attorney

General Matthew J. Platkin. “This new law upgrades and, in some circumstances, provides for extended terms of imprisonment for certain retail theft crimes, as well as addressing gift card fraud. It will give us additional ways to better protect New Jersey retailers, their employees, and their customers from victimization.”

“This bill is a major step forward in our fight against organized retail theft,” said Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police. “By imposing stricter penalties, protecting retail employees, and cracking down on gift card fraud, we are sending a strong message that these crimes will not be tolerated. Governor Murphy’s leadership ensures law enforcement has the tools to hold offenders accountable and safeguard New Jersey businesses, employees, and consumers.”

With the signing of this bill, Governor Murphy brings New Jersey in line with surrounding states, including New York and Pennsylvania, that have already taken similar measures to combat organized retail theft.

The prime sponsors of this bill, which passed unanimously in both chambers, are

(Continued on page 12)



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 - New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin said, on March 27, that he is drafting "Joseph's Law," after slain NPD Sgt. Joseph Azcona with his family's support.

"Joseph's Law," said Platkin, would give state prosecutors the permission to try suspects 14-years-old and under in adult petit criminal court on specific felony charges. Azcona's mother, Nerri-da Vargas, had started an online petition to change the current juvenile law.

A minor 14 years and younger, by current law, is currently tried for charges like murder and weapons possession as a juvenile in Family Court. The suspect's identity and legal proceedings are shielded. A convicted juvenile could be released from serving time at a fraction of a similar sentence served by an adult felon and be released when he turns 18.

The 14-year-old boy at the center of Sgt. Azcona's March 8 fatality has been charged and held on murder, attempted murder and illegal weapons possession counts. Witnesses said that the shooter fired on Azcona while he was still in his patrol car on Broadway and Carteret Street that Friday night. He and his partner, who was shot and injured, were investigating an illegal gun trade at the time.

"Anyone who assaults an officer or, God forbid, kills an officer," said Platkin, "should be

held accountable to the fullest extent of the law - period."

The AG's bill would go before the State Legislature for consideration and, if passed, signed by the Governor. While "Joseph's Law" would take effect upon signing, it would be too late in being applied in Azcona's murder case.

IRVINGTON - That vacant two-story building which had been the site of at least two fires in 10 years that sits at the northeast corner of Springfield Avenue and East 22nd Street, thanks to a March 27 Irvington Planning Board site plan approval, will more than be demolished.

748 Springfield Ave. plus the two vacant lots to its east at 740 and 734 Springfield are to be the site of a six-story, 156 unit apartment building as approved by IPB at that Thursday's Zoom meeting. That passed resolution is to be memorialized at the board's April 24 session.

Developer 21st Street Urban Renewal LLC is to follow plans as drawn by Taylor Architect & Design of North Plainfield. It will be built in the township's East Ward/East Springfield Avenue Redevelopment Plan - Springfield Avenue District.

734-748 Springfield will hold all-ADA adaptable 66 one-bedroom, 85 two-bedroom and five three-bedroom units. There will be 140 on-site covered parking spaces and 11,000 square feet of storefront commercial/retail space. The "amenity-rich building" includes a game room, a package room, a fitness center, co-working space, resident storage and a community kitchen and lounge.

The approved project will replace the long standing vacant lots and the corner building that used to hold a daycare center, two other stores and five second floor apartments. 740 Springfield is municipally owned while 734 and 748 are owned by two separate but 21st Street UR LLC-related companies from New York City.

748 Springfield was already boarded up when all Irvington Fire Department hands, with Newark, Orange and Maplewood mutual aid, extinguished a blaze

there June 19, 2020. The pre-dawn blaze detoured NJTransit 25 and 70 buses and brought a unit each from East Orange, South Orange and Bloomfield to cover Irvington's stations.

EAST ORANGE - Relatives and friends of Lois Scott, 76, are making her funeral arrangements while the ECPO Homicide Task Force and Orange police are investigating the circumstances of her being fatally struck at one of the latter city's main intersections April 2.

Orange police officers, who responded to a 911 "pedestrian hit" call at about 10:55 a.m. that Wednesday at the intersection of Main and Jefferson streets. They found a woman lying in a westbound Main Street lane - and two plainclothes EMS technicians applying CPR.

The medics and witnesses said that a "charcoal gray Jeep Wrangler" was attempting to turn left from South Jefferson Street onto westbound Main Street when it hit Scott while she was walking north in Main Street's crosswalk. The driver, who remained at the scene and cooperated with authorities, has not been ticketed or charged as of April 3.

The medics braved the intersection's traffic, which Orange police began to cordon off, until Orange Fire Department's EMS crew arrived. They rushed Scott to University Hospital - where she died of a severe head injury at 11:30 a.m.

Scott's obituary has not been posted as of April 8. Main Street is Essex County Road No. 510 in Orange and West Orange.

ORANGE - City police officers, medics and county detectives converged on a North Ward intersection 6 p.m. March 27 on what became an accident fatal to a Montclair motorcyclist.

They found the motorcyclist lying by the intersection of Thomas Boulevard and Hayward Street and a stopped vehicle. EMT medics rushed the man - identified as Mark Elder, 52, of Montclair to University Hospital - where he was declared dead at 8:30 p.m.

A preliminary investigation,

which ECPO detectives took the lead on, had determined that the vehicle was traveling north on Thomas Boulevard when it attempted to make a right-hand turn onto eastbound Hayward - and struck Elder's cycle.

Thomas and Hayward, redesigned by an early 1960's urban renewal project, is fronted by Rosedale Cemetery, Washington Dodd Apartments, a house and a General Plumbing Supply showroom and warehouse. Northbound Thomas leads to the convergence of the Orange, Montclair, Glen Ridge and East Orange borders.

Elder's homecoming service was held in East Orange's Divinity Missionary Baptist Church April 7. His obituary has not been published to date.

WEST ORANGE - Township zoning board members are still mulling on whether to permit a conjoined Popeyes-International House of Pancakes built to replace the long closed China Gourmet here at 470 Eagle Rock Ave as proposed by MPB Realty March 20.

MPB, on March 20, has kept its Popeyes, along with 24 dining seats and a drive-through window, from its original December 2022 application and as heard from its May 18, 2023 site plan application hearing. Gone, however, is the Sonic drive-in with outdoor seating.

IHOP has replaced Sonic on MPB's March 20 application and as a sit-down-only place. While IHOP is proposed to operate between 6 a.m. and Midnight daily, the attached Popeyes will be open 10:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Sundays-Thursdays and until 11:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

MPB, like it had in 2023, is asking for code variances in landscaping, signage, lot apron distance from curbing and lighting. March 20 public speakers questioned traffic volume to/from Eagle Rock Avenue and proper lighting and tree shading for its Rosney Terrace neighbors.

Traffic studiers Consulting & Municipal Engineers addressed having drive thru customers park while waiting for their orders -

(Continued on page 14)

LOCAL TALK

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RETAIL THEFT (Cont. from pg. 9)

Senator John Burzichelli and Assemblyman Joe Daniels. Other primary sponsors include Senator Holly Schepisi and Assemblymembers Alex Sauickie and Heather Simmons.

"This law will help fight the retail crime rings that operate on a much larger scale than individual shoplifters who take products for personal use. These are professional shoplifters backed by criminal organizations that plan large-scale thefts and fence the products on the gray market, often selling across state lines or through the internet. It's grown into a billion-dollar criminal enterprise that costs the average family an estimated \$500 a year," said Senator Burzichelli. "The health and safety of consumers are put at additional risk when these gangs resell consumable items or medical products that were stored in compromised conditions or sold with altered expiration dates. This is a true consumer protection law that will help safeguard the public's health and save consumers money."

"The surge of organized retail crime has cost businesses billions, driven up prices for consumers, and has put employees' safety at risk as they face

growing threats of violence from organized theft rings," said Senator Schepisi. "We've witnessed an alarming rise in large-scale theft operations across the nation, especially here in New Jersey, where stolen merchandise is swiftly sold for illicit gains. With the Governor's signature, we can now impose tougher penalties to deter criminals and their theft organizations, and, most importantly, enhance protections for both retailers and their customers. At the heart of this issue is the safety of our communities. Retail employees shouldn't have to fear for their safety, and shoppers deserve peace of mind that the products they buy are safe and haven't been tampered with in any way."

"The signing of this legislation into law is a critical step in combating organized retail crime, including smash-and-grab thefts, which threaten businesses, retail workers, and consumers - especially in the pharmaceutical sector," said Assemblyman Sauickie. "By strengthening penalties and enforcement, this bill supports law enforcement efforts and safeguards hardworking employees. With neighboring states like New York and Pennsylvania already taking action, New Jersey must act now to prevent becoming a prime target

for these crimes. It ensures a safer retail environment and reinforces protections for both businesses and consumers across the state."

"The repercussions of organized retail theft in New Jersey are both tangible and far reaching," said Assemblywoman Simmons. "It's incumbent upon us as legislators to do what we can to quash criminal activity by ensuring law enforcement has the resources needed to fight this type of crime."

"I am grateful to Governor Murphy and the Legislature for taking action to protect our communities and local businesses," said Jason Ravitz, Vice President of Retail Operations, Ravitz Family Markets. "This measure will enhance the safety of our store associates and customers while helping to combat the financial impact organized retail theft has on businesses and the state. It's a win-win for everyone, especially for family-owned businesses like ours that cannot afford these losses."

"In recent years, retailers across New Jersey have been targeted by professional, highly organized criminal enterprises. And while retailers are experiencing a higher frequency of thefts overall, even more troubling has been the growing

threat of violence," said John Holub, President, New Jersey Retail Merchants Association. "This legislation not only addresses gift card fraud and prolific shoplifters, but also the safety of our employees. The legislation being signed into law today will go a long way in giving the Attorney General the necessary tools to combat these growing threats."

"NJBI thanks Governor Murphy for signing this important legislation into law, as well as the strong bipartisan sponsorship and support it received in the Legislature before reaching his desk," said Michele Sickerka, President & CEO, New Jersey Business & Industry Association.

"Organized retail crime is a serious issue that collectively costs businesses billions of dollars, increases product prices for consumers and sometimes even puts employees' safety at risk. Further, the investigations that go into prosecuting these cases are often a heavy draw on crucial enforcement resources. The increased penalties for these illegal operators, the added consumer protections and legal resources dedicated to prosecute and deter these crimes as part of this new law are a win-win-win

(Continued on page 13)

THE DOCTOR IS IN

(Cont. from page 4)

a single system. Your level of physical activity, amount of sleep, and stress management have great effects on food intake.

The one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition is gradually fading. The future is bound to become more individual-focused, and our health will definitely profit from it.

This article was written by Dr. Adil Manzoor, DO, a Board-Certified Internist; Board certified Pediatrician who works as a Hospi-

talist and Emergency Room Physician. He is also the current President of Garden State Street Medicine, a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to provide free preventive and acute urgent care services for the homeless.

He is also the co-founder of his own unique medical practice, Mobile Medicine NJ; House Call Doctors. He is also currently pursuing an Executive MBA and a Master's of Science in Healthcare Leadership at Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management and the Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences.

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McCARRICK

(Cont. from page 1)

university seminary president.

"I'm keenly aware of the trauma this news may reignite for those victimized by Mr. McCarrick," said Cardinal Joseph Tobin of the Newark Archdiocese April 4. "Having listened to many survivors, I recognize the deep pain and betrayal they have endured. I continue to offer my prayers in support as they navigate their journey toward healing."

The arc of McCarrick's life started with his July 7, 1930 birth in Manhattan and was ordained as a priest by New York Cardinal Francis Spellman in 1958. He came to Newark by way of being President of Puerto Rico Catholic University. Pope John Paul II appointed McCarrick as Washington's archbishop in 2000 and as cardinal then next year.

Before now-Saint John Paul II granted his appointments, McCarrick sent him a letter in 1999, saying that he had abused and disrespected no one and that stories of his misuse were false. A 2020 internal Vatican

investigation found that popes JP II and Benedict XVI knew of allegations reaching their offices. Intended transfers of McCarrick to Chicago in 1997 and New York in 1999 were abandoned.

Pope Francis called for a canonical investigation and trial after more direct allegations surfaced in the press in 2017. McCarrick had retired from the Washington archdiocese in 2006 after reaching 75 years old by then. Pope Francis removed him from public ministry June 20, 2018 - 37 days before accepting McCarrick's resignation as cardinal and his "penance" sentencing.

WORLD NEWS (Cont. from pg. 7)



A multi-billion-pound investment in a major new Universal theme park and resort in Bedford has been agreed between Universal, the government and the local council, in a move that represents a major vote of confidence in the UK economy and the future of partnerships between the UK and the US.

The theme park, which is set to be one of the largest and most advanced in Europe, will bring nearly 20,000 jobs during the construction period, with a further 8,000 new jobs across the hospitality and creative industries when it opens in 2031.

Supporting the government's Plan for Change to create economic growth and opportunities by getting people into well-paid, decent jobs across the creative, technology,

tourism and hospitality sectors, Universal has committed to working with local colleges and universities to train the next generation of its hospitality workforce, including through a range of apprenticeships and internships.

As well as generating significant opportunities, the new theme park and resort will bring significant local benefits - with approximately 80% of employees at the theme park expected to come from local areas - and support a stream of ongoing work to unleash the potential of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor through growth, infrastructure revitalization and further job opportunities.

Universal expects the site to generate nearly £50 billion for the economy by 2055, with 8.5 million visitors expected in its first year - becoming the largest visitor attraction in the UK. This will support the government to deliver its growth mission - creating higher living standards and putting more money in people's pockets.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said, "Today we closed the deal on a multi-billion-pound investment that will see Bedford home to one of the biggest entertainment parks in Europe, firmly putting the county on

the global stage.

"This is our Plan for Change in action, combining local and national growth with creating around 28,000 new jobs across sectors such as construction, AI, and tourism.

"It is not just about numbers; it's about securing real opportunities for people in our country. Together, we are building a brighter future for the UK, getting people into work and ensuring our economy remains strong and competitive."

The development, working with Bedford Borough Council, will be the first Universal-branded theme park and resort destination in Europe and will be part of a larger 476-acre entertainment resort complex.

Proposed plans from Universal Destinations & Experiences, a business unit of Comcast, include a world-class theme park with several themed lands featuring Universal's distinct brand of immersive storytelling, thrilling rides, innovative attractions and exciting entertainment, all utilizing sophisticated and advanced technology. Initial resort plans also feature a 500-room hotel and a retail, dining and entertainment complex.

RETAIL THEFT

(Continued from page 12)

for all."

"We are pleased to join in this effort to fight to protect businesses, store employees and shoppers who depend on affordable, quality products that can be purchased safely and confidently. Together, under the leadership of Governor Murphy and Attorney General Platkin, we will drastically reduce the amount of organized retail theft that has become an epidemic in New Jersey," said Linda Doherty, President & CEO, New Jersey Food Council. "New Jersey is taking a defiant stance and recognizing that organized retail crime is not just petty shoplifting from the neighborhood grocer.

"We are fighting a behemoth operation of professional thieves that are methodically moving from one town to another in New Jersey, and across state lines, stealing merchandise off shelves and reselling them in the gray marketplace. With the Governor's signature, professional thieves will no longer see New Jersey as an 'opportunity' for organized retail crime enterprises. This new law signals there's a new sheriff in town."

"The signing of A4755/S3587 marks a crucial step in the fight against organized retail crime, which has significantly impacted the business community," said Christina Renna, President and CEO, Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey. "This legislation strengthens protections for both retailers and consumers, and the Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey applauds these proactive measures to create a more

safe and thriving economic environment."

"The Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey applauds Governor Murphy for signing this critical legislation to crack down on organized retail theft," said Chairman Luis O. De la Hoz and President & CEO Carlos Medina. "Fraud hurts all of us - but especially the small Hispanic-owned businesses that are the backbone of our communities and disproportionately targeted. We stand with our governor echo the law's directive: New Jersey stands with entrepreneurs, not criminals. We thank our legislators for recognizing the urgent need to protect our storefronts, employees and local economies."

"The passage of this legislation marks a significant step toward protecting New Jersey's small businesses and communities from the devastating impact of organized retail theft. By strengthening penalties and enhancing enforcement efforts, we are sending a clear message that these crimes will not be tolerated," said John E. Harmon, Sr., Founder, President & CEO, African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey. "The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey fully supports this bill and commends our legislators for their commitment to safeguarding the economic vitality of our state."

"The Punjabi Chamber of Commerce appreciates the commitment of our Governor and elected officials for providing enhanced penalties for retail theft and assault on retail workers. These protective measures are required to protect not only retailers and their workers, but the public at large," said Gurpreet Singh Pasricha, Founder & Trustee,

Punjabi Chamber of Commerce.

"The Fraternal Order of Police - New Jersey State Lodge supports A4755/S3587 passage into law that will enhance consumer and business protections from fraud and theft, while addresses a root cause of these criminal activities," said Robert W. Fox, President, Fraternal Order of Police - New Jersey State Lodge. "The FOP thanks the Governor and the legislative sponsors and leadership for addressing these needs, enhancing protections, and creating greater penalties for those who prey upon our citizens and businesses."

"Retail workers have faced growing challenges on the job, and this law gives them the recognition and support they deserve. Our members work hard to serve their communities, and they should be able to do so in a safe and respectful environment. We thank Governor Murphy and legislative leaders for taking this meaningful step to support retail workers across New Jersey," said Charles Hall, President, RWDSU-UFCW Local 108.

"Retail theft has become more organized, putting workers and everyday shoppers in harm's way, and hurting small businesses. We thank the Governor and leaders in the legislature for supporting this law that will strengthen our state's overall approach to the problem and sends a clear message that New Jersey is taking this threat seriously. Our troopers remain ready to support efforts that protect the public and hold offenders accountable," said Wayne Blanchard, President, NJ State Troopers Fraternal Association.

The Observation Booth



OP-ED By Andrea Dialect

PROJECT READ

Hood Chronicles

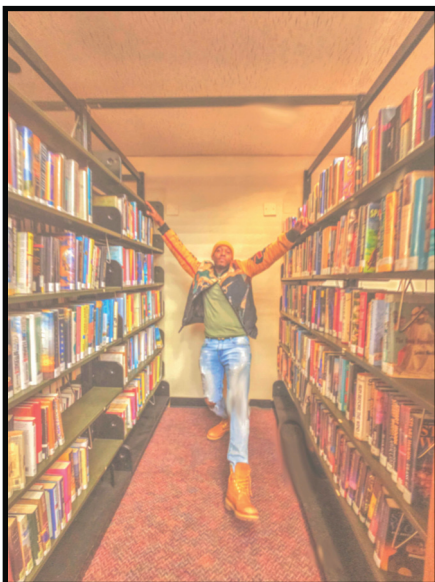
I am quite bookish, and I absolutely love bookworms. Those who pen those words? That goes without sayin'! Love, love, love those types. This article draft is dedicated to my daddy, Julious Brown, in its entirety, as are all things that make up Andrea - never excluding my mama, of course. I gained my love for reading and passed it along to my offspring as part of our lineage.

My father, sitting at that kitchen table every night, stumbling over his words and sounding them out with one of us youngins playing the role of teacher, is absolutely amazing.

He never penned a book, but he painted the imagery of several with pictures, as all that has been captured was eloquently demonstrated. Oh, how I miss your presence, Daddy; your life exemplified is a best seller. I shall always sing your praise for all you gave.

Reading is essential and fundamental because it funds the mental no pun intended. That's what my daddy taught me. Like his example, a picture speaks louder than words. Thus, I am grateful to my Muse, Sunny, for bringing my thoughts to life as lending his image to change. This was his very first boot camp, and I think that he did an amazing job. I work exclusively with certain clients, clay, muse, and features when developing. Being open-minded and teachable is law.

Sunny did an awesome job making the cut. I thought that the



Photos Courtesy Andrea Dialect

library was the perfect location to create content for our Hood files. Hood boys read. Don't let the tats and gear and container hue fool ya. That's what is said to me. Shoot me a message after you take that peek and let us know what those mind whispers told you and while you're at it join the Project Read movement and read, read, read.

Visit Localtalkweekly.com and check out the archives and the enjoyment of the Fine Artistry subjects that accompany my words, like Mr. Sunny here. Get familiar with all things Andrea Dialect. You'll also want to come along on my Andrea Dialect Facebook Lab live session. Buried treasures turn up every morning. Come and join me live as I develop my daily "PORTAL" sessions. I'll see you between 5-6 a.m. Set those notifications. Remember, everything I do on social is raw, home-



grown, and experimental mockups. Follow my msdialect Instagram, and let's grow out loud together! Like, follow, and share.

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 have any questions, comments or concerns, send them to localtalkandrea@gmail.com.



TOWN WATCH (Cont. from pg. 10)

but had not considered potential traffic from the in-the-works African American Inventors Museum & Hall of fame and senior citizens housing that are to go up at the former Mayfair Farms banquet and catering hall at 481 Eagle Rock Ave. (Mayfair was open for business in MPB's original application.)

A memorialization of the zoning board's decision, as of April 7, had not appeared on their April 18 agenda.

SOUTH ORANGE / MAPLEWOOD - Both towns have been bereft of a motion picture theater since 6 p.m. March 30 when CinemaLab suddenly closed The Village Cinemas at

SOPAC. Both it and Maplewood's Maplewood Theater, which has been closed since the March 15, 2020 COVID-19 pandemic onset, face unknown futures.

Prospective moviegoers and commuter parking lot customers found a posted CinemaLab notice that Saturday night on the lobby door. The theater's latest operator, after four years, said it "will be moving from The Village, effective March 31, 2025."

"Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, various challenges have made it impossible for us to sustain the operation," continued CL's statement. "While this chapter may be ending, we're confident that SOPAC and the Township of South Orange will work diligently to rejuvenate the

cinema experience in the area. We look forward to seeing the community continuing to enjoy and celebrate the magic of the movies soon."

CinemaLabs' departure means that SOPAC is looking for its fourth independent cinema operator - which is what the latter's board of governors chairwoman Aida Jones said will do. SOPAC, in its FAQ release, confirmed that CinemaLabs had ended their lease and vacated the property.

"We view this transition as a tremendous opportunity to reimagine the cinematic offerings at SOPAC," said Jones that Sunday night. "Our goal is to create an enhanced movie-going experience that contemplates our diverse array of live performanc-

es and educational programs."

CinemaLabs reopened SOPAC cinemas July 22, 2021 after the five-screen theater was closed since November 2024. BowTie Cinemas had been running here until KO'd by the pandemic. It had floated bringing its boutique cinematic experience to the Maplewood Theater and Upper Montclair's Bellevue, the latter closed since late 2017, during its four years in "Local Talk" land.

Maplewood Mayor Mancy Adams, at the Township Committee's April 1 meeting, clarified that the North Village/ Movie Theater Redevelopment Area is a non-condemnable area in need of redevelopment and that the 10-lot single block area
(Continued on page 15)

TOWN WATCH (Continued from page 14)

allows for the reopening of the Theater and the then-Bank of America - but those uses is up to the would-be redeveloper, the planning board and Maplewood elders.

BLOOMFIELD - A pair of Halcyon Park brothers received uniform and volunteer help during and after a fire damaged their house here March 31.

All Bloomfield Fire Department hands converged at 217 Watsessing Ave. at 12:45 p.m. that Monday to find heavy fire from the 2.5-story house's second floor. Occupants of the 1904-built wood frame house had self-evacuated by then.

BFD - with help by mutual aid units from East Orange, Orange and Newark - extinguished the fire in an hour. Bloomfield police units were on hand to detour local traffic.

Units from Belleville, Nutley and Montclair covered Bloomfield's fire stations until the all clear was given. There were no reported injuries.

The two brothers were given an overnight stay at the Belleville Motor Lodge by the American Red Cross local chapter. Their April 1 appeal for clothing, food and temporary housing were met by neighbors.

MONTCLAIR - It took township police officers just under 24 hours - from report call to apprehension March 24-25 - to arrest a man for burglarizing the Montclair Film Festival headquarters and perhaps two earlier break-ins along South Fullerton Street.

Responding officers met an MFF employee at 505 Bloomfield Ave., who pointed to an unsecured door, at 11 a.m. March 24. The police and the employee entered the premises - and found that some \$6,000 worth of electronic equipment had been stolen from the festival's basement podcast studio.

MPD left with the building's security recordings - where they found a burglar entering at 1:40 a.m. and left with a messenger bag full of the items. Detectives identified the burglar as Max Collazo, 34, of Montclair.

Detectives found Collazo while he was waiting for a bus at a stop by Bloomfield and Maple avenues at 10 a.m. A later search recovered the stolen MFF items - which Collazo has been charged with third-degree burglary and theft for.

Further MPD investigation has linked Collazo to two South Fullerton break-ins that happened "just days earlier."

BELLEVILLE - Mayor Michael

Melham and the Township Committee's drive to make The Great Lawn at 520 Belleville Ave municipal property shifted into legal high gear by passing Ordinance 19-25 at its March 25 meeting.

The resolution green lights Belleville to purchase the 9.2 acres surrounding what started out as the Essex County Isolation Hospital that crowns The Great Lawn's hill from Alma Realty, of Long Island City, N.Y.

The land on Block 2501, Lots 1.01, .02, .03, 2 and 3 were separated from the building lot from a 1993 county auction - which Alma bought back in 2017. Alma had intended to convert the landmark SoHo neighborhood 11-story, 275-bed hospital into luxury apartments.

Passing the resolution underscores the mayor and council's 2023 "no build" open space policy. The resolution is listed as an amendment to "the former Essex County Geriatric Center Redevelopment Plan." That geriatric center moved away in 1990, making way for the Garden State Cancer Center - which went bankrupt in 2017.

Melham, earlier that Tuesday night, asked his colleagues about "caretakers at SoHo." The mayor was likely discussing the status of officially having Belleville DPW mowing The Great Lawn. The township had put "a clean and lien" on Alma last year; Alma, at the Feb. 25 meeting, countered that they had been maintaining the property since 2017.

NUTLEY - A Celebration Maas was held here at Grace Episcopal Church April 2 for long time resident and accident victim Lee Gilbert. Gilbert, 77, was declared dead at University Hospital 7:15 p.m. March 27 - 45 minutes after Nutley Police had responded to Franklin Avenue and Chestnut Street.

NPD told ECPO detectives that they had found a man lying in the intersection - and a car whose driver had parked nearby. A preliminary investigation determined that Gilbert was walking his dog when he was struck that Thursday night.

The driver, who cooperated with police, had not been charged as of March 28. The dog Gilbert was walking ran back to a curb and stood sentry.

Gilbert was the second dog walker in 15 months to be struck by a motorist at that crossroad. In October 2023, a woman and her dog - the latter wearing an orange vest - suffered non-life-threatening injuries. That driver was issued a failure to yield to a pedestrian.

Lee Thomas Gilbert, who was born Sept. 16, 1947 in New London, Conn, moved here while attaining a masters degree in marketing from Rutgers. He used his marketing education and his mechani-

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cal engineering bachelor's degree from the University of Connecticut while working for Telcordia, of Basking Ridge, until his 2006 retirement.

Wife Marcia, brothers Clay and Scott and Winston the canine are among the longtime Eastern New York MGA Club member. Internment was held at Clifton's Crest Haven Memorial Park. Memorial donations may go to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital (stjude.org) and/or Shriner's Children's Hospital (shrinerschildrens.org).



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