

LOCAL TALK

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25¢

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

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER

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THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH & CHRONIC ILLNESS

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CONGRESSWOMAN LaMONICA McIVER CHARGED



NEWARK - Legislative representatives within and outside of "Local Talk" got mixed news from U.S. District Attorney-New Jersey District Alina Habba at about 9 a.m. May 20.

Habba, who was appointed by President Donald J. Trump in March, said she is dropping trespassing charges against Mayor Ras J. Baraka "for the sake of moving forward." Baraka, on May 15, pleaded not guilty in federal court but was directed to be photographed and fingerprinted there for the second time since his May 9 arrest by ICE at Delaney Hall.

The bad news is that Habba has filed charges of two counts of assaulting, resisting and impeding a federal law enforcement officer against Cong. LaMonica McIver. McIver (D-Newark) was with fellow Representatives Rob Menendez (D-Union City) and Bonnie

Watson Coleman and Baraka at Delaney Hall's gates May 9. "No one's above the law - politicians or otherwise," said Habba May 17-18. "It's the job of this office to uphold justice impartially, regardless of who you are."

Habba's criminal complaint involves her scuffling with a federal officer while they were handcuffing Baraka and drawing him back through Delaney's gates. A CNN reporter was told that Habba attempted to negotiate a plea deal with McIver between May 9 and 16 but McIver "declined."

McIver, the former Central Ward Councilwoman and Council President, countered that prosecutors "wanted me to admit to something I did not do. They mischaracterize and distort my actions and are meant to criminalize and deter

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NJTRANSIT AND B.L.E.T. TRAIN ENGINEERS SETTLE CONTRACT



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Turn
To
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Editorial
Dhiren Shah
Editor-In-Chief

Hello Readers,

I was on vacation. Now I am back. During this time, many big important news items came across the wire. I was in Lisbon, Portugal when a power outage and blackout occurred in three countries.

On April 28th, all of a sudden, the power went out in our hotel room. I called my son who was in another room, and the same thing happened. We went downstairs and not only did the hotel's power go out, but power went out in the whole city as we heard. Within minutes, we heard that the power went off in the whole country of Portugal, Spain and some parts of France. No power, no water, and everyone was getting panicky.

As we heard, power would not come back until next morning. So, we had to cancel our programs and started walking on the streets. One of our family friends who was a Portuguese citizen was with us. We went to some nearby places and luckily got some food from one of the restaurants, which was about to close. With no phone and no internet, it is harder to live these days.

The talk on the street was that a terrorist attack hit the electrical grid in Spain, which supplies the electricity to Portugal. The hotel got the message that due to a temperature change, the grid in Spain affected the whole mess. The hotel started serving food by lunch, some sandwiches, one to a person and some water. They asked us to save as much water and food as we could.

When we were walking out on the street, the traffic jam was so horrendous that we were walking faster than the traffic. Luckily, we found one bottle of water and one can of coke. After 2 to 3 hours, we came back to the hotel, as we were tired of walk-

ing. Everyone was trying to get some news. We heard many different things. Then after a few hours, the lights luckily came back on. All of the hotel guests were downstairs due to no lights and no A/C. Everyone started clapping and thanking the hotel staff for their good humanitarian service during this hard time.

After the massive power outage, Portugal started to think about their own power lines and power grid. The best part of the trip was that the people in Portugal, Spain and Morocco were so nice. Their economy is based on tourism.

President Trump stated to his daughter that negative news is also important, as by staying in the news it maintains popularity. Newark Mayor Ras Baraka did the same. Protests and get arrested and get popular. Congresswoman LaMonica McIver has been charged by ICE due to an altercation with an officer. Alina Habba, the U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey, accused U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver (NJ -10) of "assaulting, impeding and interfering with law enforce-

ment." McIver will be popular throughout the country among liberals. She has been supported by Baraka all the time. However, what will be the outcome, no one knows.

Trump talked about cease-fires between Russia and Ukraine and between Israel and Gaza. However, with both conflicts, nothing has been done. Trump seems to be losing control.

With the news that just came out, it looks as if former President Joseph Biden was lying the whole time. As per the medical report, Biden has Stage 4 prostate cancer. This cannot happen overnight. It usually takes years to develop. Biden and the White House under his control were lying. There will be an investigation into his medical condition. It is very important for people to know who was running the show while Biden had a serious health condition and memory loss. As we all know, he was speaking with a teleprompter and rarely had any press conferences.

*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
Rain	Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy
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The Doctor Is In



OP-ED By Adil Manzoor

The Intersection of Mental Health and Chronic Illness: A Holistic Approach

If you've ever managed a chronic illness or supported someone who has, you probably know that treating the physical symptoms is only part of the story. What often gets brushed under the rug, sometimes even in clinical settings, is how closely mental health is tied to chronic physical conditions. And I mean closely.

Being a physician, I have had my fair share of experiences with patients who had diabetes, cancer, arthritis, and even heart disease. Surprisingly, a majority of these patients were taking their medications, yet they were experiencing serious health decline. What could be the reason for that? Living with chronic illness takes a psychological toll that isn't addressed.

Today, I want to talk frankly about this intersection between mental health and chronic illness. More importantly, I will touch on why a holistic approach might just be the missing link in effective long-term care.

Let's clarify definitions first.

Chronic disease is any persistent health condition that does not fully heal and continually necessitates medical attention. Some examples are hypertension, diabetes, lupus, cancer, chronic pain syndromes, asthma, fibromyalgia... the list goes on. Such health conditions usually

transform over a period of time, some of them having a detrimental impact on the individual's quality of life.

Mental health, on the contrary, is the ability to control one's emotions, feelings, acts, and even social interactions. In essence, mental health encompasses how a person perceives and reacts to situations in different contexts. Well, here is the catch: mental health disorders and chronic illnesses tend to co-exist. And the connection is not incidental. It's biological, behavioral, and deeply human.

Here's what tends to happen: you get diagnosed with a long-term condition. Maybe it's manageable, maybe it's not; but either way, you're now dealing with a lifetime of medications, lifestyle changes, doctors' appointments, flare-ups, and uncertainty.

That emotional weight can be quite enormous. A lot of individuals begin to become anxious, overwhelmed, or even depressed. And once that occurs, the motivation to keep up with medications, eat healthily, or even get out of bed can drop. Then the chronic disease gets worse, which causes more emotional stress... and the cycle continues.

Research has continually demonstrated that those with chronic diseases are two to three times more likely to develop depression or anxiety. For example:

- As many as 1 out of 3 individuals with diabetes develop depression.
- Chronic pain patients have a higher probability of developing mood disorders.
- Cancer survivors undergo a plethora of psychological complications that last well beyond remission.

And there is more. Mental illness also predisposes you to chronic disease. Depression, for example, has been linked to increased inflammation, insomnia, poor diet, and lack of exercise. Each of these elevates risk for



chronic disease.

So, what do we do with all this information? We go holistic.

A holistic approach implies that the whole person is treated, and not the disease alone. It recognizes that mental and physical health are inseparable and that caring that is significant must take account of both.

The following is what a comprehensive model would entail:

Here's a picture: You go to a clinic where your endocrinologist, psychologist, nutritionist, and physical therapist all read each other's notes and actually speak to one another. That's the gold standard. Unfortunately, it's not always the reality. But integrated care systems where mental health professionals are embedded into chronic illness care are slowly gaining ground, and they show better outcomes.

Mental health check-ins should be as standard as blood pressure measurements. Particularly for chronically ill patients, an earlier assessment for signs of depression or anxiety can profoundly alter the treatment process. Occasionally, all a patient actually needs is for someone to say, "How are you managing these problems?" and show concern.

Let's get realistic. Healthcare can be empowering. When patients are aware of their disease, know what to anticipate, and feel in control of their treatment regimen, they fare better. But emotional empowerment is equally important. Therapy, support groups, and even mindfulness training can help patients feel as though they're not just existing

with their disease but living with it.

We physicians like to say, "Exercise more!" and "Eat better!" Yes, those are important. But when one is depressed or anxious, even small things can seem overwhelming. That's why lifestyle changes must be individualized and kind. Behavioral therapy can assist patients in creating small, attainable routines that will slowly build confidence and consistency.

I had a patient, Mrs. T, who had rheumatoid arthritis. Her inflammatory markers were under control, and her medications were okay. But something felt off. She was missing appointments, stopped engaging with her physical therapy, and reported constant fatigue. On deeper questioning, it turned out she was severely depressed but never brought it up because, in her words, "This is just my life now."

We connected her with a therapist, adjusted her care plan to include mental health support. In a little over six months, her outlook and her physical condition dramatically improved. That experience stuck with me.

The beauty of a holistic model is that it empowers both doctor and patient. For us doctors, it means we don't have to view chronic illness through a narrow biomedical lens. And for patients, it offers a more compassionate, realistic way to manage a lifelong condition.

When mental health is integrated into chronic disease management:

(Continued on page 5)

NJTRANSIT AND B.L.E.T. TRAIN ENGINEERS SETTLE CONTRACT

NEWARK - The 450 BLET union train engineers, as of press time, are reviewing the contract its leadership and New Jersey Transit executives had tentatively agreed to May 18 - while helping to bring NJT's eight commuter rail line operations back to normal May 20.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and NJTransit announced that they had reached a tentative collective bargaining agreement at 8 p.m. May 18 - 68 hours after NJTransit's first strike in 42 years took effect at 12:01 a.m. May 16.

By "tentative," BLET members from its Newark, Hoboken and Dover divisions have to approve or reject the contract by electronic vote. NJTransit's Board of Directors are to vote up or down at their June 11 meeting.

The ratification should not be taken for granted. About 87 percent of union members on April 15 rejected a contract respective leadership had agreed to. This rejection happened 30 days before the 12:01 a.m. May 16 strike deadline.

Please note that, when 12:01 a.m. Friday's deadline had passed, engineers who were still operating commuter trains continued to the end of their run. Those "Night Owl" runs who start after Midnight did not.

NJTransit's Ticket Vending Machines stopped selling commuter rail tickets and passes until after 12:01 a.m. May 20. Existing valid rail passes and tickets were cross-honored on NJTransit Light Rail (their engineers are under the Bus Division and a different union) and Buses for the strike's duration.

The public carrier's ABC alternative plan - taking rush hour commuters from five designated rail stations on buses to earmarked PATH, bus and ferry stations - was only implemented Monday.

Municipal rush hour jitneys meanwhile picked up and dropped off riders at designated stops. Maplewood's jitney, for example, ran to the Irvington Bus Terminal so riders could transfer to or from the No. 107 bus to the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

The Port Authority of NY and NJ and Amtrak did not cross-honor but added their trains' frequency. The PA added 15 min. free shuttle buses between Newark Penn Station and Newark Liberty International Airport's monorail stop. Amtrak had more of its trains stop at the EWR transfer station.

Coach USA Community 77, Yankee's Boxcar and other private bus carriers did not cross-honor but had extra buses on standby. NJT hired Academy to run Monday's ABC shuttle buses.

MTA Metro North cross-honored their Pascack Valley and Port Jervis riders' tickets and passes on their Hudson and Harlem lines - once they got there. NJTransit operated those Metro North's "West of Hudson Service" but were also struck.

"Local Talk" presumes similar arrangements were made by SEPTA and PATCO absorbing additional riders at Trenton, West Trenton and Camden County stations.

The above said were to help absorb 20 percent of what NJTransit estimated 100,000. NJTransit's bus divisions were



left to shoulder some of the rest where "work from home" could not apply.

"Local Talk" found Friday, May 16 and Monday, May 19 having a weekend-like feel. There were some additional bus, light rail and PATH riders those days - but about all of NJTransit's Morris & Essex and Montclair-Boonton line stations and parking lots were vacant.

A union picket line of 15 people - and about 10 media members - were consistently seen alongside the Market Street side of NJTransit's new headquarters. "Transit" moved from One Penn Plaza, east of Newark Penn Station, over the winter.

Newark Penn Station, owned by Amtrak, was an exception. It was strange to see its destination boards reading only Amtrak trains.

"Local Talk" was on a No. 25 bus along Springfield Avenue Monday morning when the bus garage dispatcher made a radio announcement to drivers - and

was overheard by riders. Drivers were reminded to count, when full, standees and riders left behind by overcrowding.

Both sides said that Monday, May 19 was needed for systemwide track inspection and preparing train sets. "Local Talk" was aboard the 8:57 a.m. M&E departure from Newark Broad Street to East Orange Station. A pizza box had remained discarded on the overhead rack and a "No Trains This Platform" sign remained in place at one of East Orange's stairways.

The job action had been a long time coming.

The engineers had not had a new contract since 2019. Both sides had gone through several "cooling off" periods and two Presidential railroad boards. They were called back to the table by federal mediators in Washington, D.C. May 12 - where they stopped negotiations May 15 and resumed talks at 10 a.m. May 17 and 1 p.m. May 18.

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THE DOCTOR IS IN (Continued from page 4)

- Medication adherence improves.
- Hospitalizations and emergency visits decrease.
- Quality of life metrics go up.
- Patient satisfaction soars.

We all win. Let's stop treating the body and mind like separate entities, because they never were. Stay safe, and take care of your whole self.

This article was written by Dr. Adil Manzoor, DO, MBA/MS, a Board-Certified In-

ternist; Board certified Pediatrician who works as a Hospitalist 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. Has also completed his 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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UNITED STATES



BIDEN HAS CANCER

On May 18, the citizens of the United States of America heard shocking news about their former leader.

That evening, a release through the office of former President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. announced to the nation that he had an "aggressive" form of prostate cancer, but that it was treatable.

"Last week, President Joe Biden was seen for a new finding of a prostate nodule after experiencing increasing urinary symptoms... On Friday (May 16) he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, characterized by a Gleason score of 9 (Grade Group 5) with metastasis to the bone.

"While this represents a more aggressive form of the disease, the cancer appears to be hormone-sensitive which allows for effective management... The President and his family are reviewing treatment options with his physicians."

"Cancer touches us all. Like so many of you, Jill and I have learned that we are strongest in the broken places. Thank you for lifting us up with love and support," Biden posted on X (fka Twitter).

"Melania and I are saddened to hear about Joe Biden's recent medical diagnosis. We extend our warmest and best wishes to Jill and the family, and we wish Joe a fast and successful recovery," current President Donald J. Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

While Trump is not a close ally of the former POTUS, other

former high ranking officials that are a part of his circle chimed in with words of support.

"Doug and I are saddened to learn of President Biden's prostate cancer diagnosis," Harris posted. "We are keeping him, Dr. Biden, and their entire family in our hearts and prayers during this time. Joe is a fighter - and I know he will face this challenge with the same strength, resilience, and optimism that have always defined his life and leadership. We are hopeful for a full and speedy recovery," Biden VP Kamala Harris posted on X.

"Michelle and I are thinking of the entire Biden family. Nobody has done more to find breakthrough treatments for cancer in all its forms than Joe, and I am certain he will fight this challenge with his trademark resolve and grace. We pray for a fast and full recovery," Biden's former boss President Barack Obama posted on X.

"My friend Joe Biden's always been a fighter. Hillary and I are rooting for him and are keeping him, Jill, and the entire family in our thoughts," 42nd POTUS Bill Clinton posted on X.

In 2015, Biden's eldest son Beau died of cancer. The Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot initiative, championed by his father, is named after him.

MASS SHOOTING UPDATE

Information from 5-20-2025

2025 Mass Shooting Stats: (Source: Mass Shooting Tracker, <https://www.massshootingsntrackersite.com/data/?year=2025>)

- Total Mass Shootings: 138
- Total Dead: 188
- Total Wounded: 537
- Shootings Per Day: 0.99
- Days Reached in Year 2025 as of noon May 20: 140

MIDDLE EAST



AID FINALLY RETURNS TO GAZA...

Aid is trickling into Gaza after nearly three months of blockade, but it remains far from enough to meet the soaring hu-

manitarian needs, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said on May 20. He stressed that the assistance must be delivered swiftly and directly to those most in need.

Dujarric told journalists in New York that UN humanitarian workers were sending flour, medicines, nutrition supplies and other basic items through to the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing - a day after they managed to bring in baby formula and other nutrition supplies.

"The first trucks of vital baby food are now inside Gaza after 11 weeks of total blockade, and it is urgent that we get that assistance distributed. We need much, much more to cross," he said, speaking from New York.

In the face of mounting international objections over the total blockade imposed on March 2 - and condemnation over the risk of widespread famine - Israel started to allow a handful of aid trucks to enter Gaza on May 19, while simultaneously intensifying its military offensive.

The aid blockade has pushed the entire population, more than two million people, to the brink of famine, amid ongoing bombardment and recurrent displacement orders.

The UN humanitarian affairs office OCHA said Israel cleared nine aid trucks to cross the Kerem Shalom border on Monday, but only five were allowed in.

Mr. Dujarric said Israel requires supplies to be offloaded on the Palestinian side of Kerem Shalom. Items are then reloaded separately once the authorities secure humanitarian teams' access from inside Gaza.

"Only then are we able to bring any supplies closer to where people in need are sheltering," he said.

On May 20, one of the UN teams waited for several hours before being given the green light.

"So, just to make it clear, while more supplies have come into the Gaza Strip, we have not been able to secure the arrival of those supplies into our warehouses and delivery points," he said.

UN humanitarian workers have received permission from Israel for "around 100" more aid trucks to cross into the Strip, but they said

the scale of relief efforts allowed remains entirely insufficient.

"Not enough. Five trucks, nowhere near. Not enough," said Louise Wateridge, a spokesperson for the UN Palestine refugee agency UNRWA, in reference to the trickle of aid.

She was speaking to journalists in Geneva from a warehouse full of ready-to-be-delivered supplies in Amman, Jordan, with enough food to feed 200,000 Palestinian civilians for an entire month.

"Everything around me is aid that is supposed to be in the Gaza Strip right now," she explained, as warehouses and distribution centers lay empty in Gaza.

"Look at what the UN could do," she continued. "We've done it: the ceasefire, the bombs stopped, the supplies went in. We reached every area of the Gaza Strip. We reached people who needed it most. We reached children. We reached the elderly. The supplies went everywhere."

Meanwhile, hundreds have been killed in attacks in recent days, according to the Gaza health authorities.

They also report that the Indonesian Hospital was attacked on May 19, damaging electrical generators and forcing the facility to suspend services. Fifty-five people were there as of that day, including patients and medical staff, with critical shortages of water and food.

Furthermore, an Israeli airstrike reportedly hit a school in An Nuseirat area, killing seven people and injuring others. Two UNRWA staff members were among those killed. Their deaths push the total number of agency personnel killed during the war to over 300.

In other developments: Israel issued another displacement order on Tuesday, affecting 26 neighborhoods in northern Gaza. Overall, some 80 percent of the Gaza Strip is now either subject to displacement orders or located in Israeli-militarized zones.

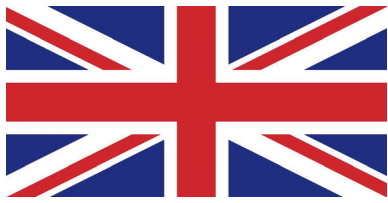
UN partners estimate that more than 41,000 people were displaced following the evacuation order on Tuesday. They further estimate that since May 15, more than 57,000 people were displaced in southern Gaza and more than 81,000 were displaced in the north due to intensified

(Continued on page 7)

WORLD NEWS (Cont. from page 6)

hostilities and recurrent displacement orders.

UNITED KINGDOM



...BUT NOT EVERYONE IS HAPPY WITH ISRAEL

In response to the persistent cycle of serious violence undertaken by extremist Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank, the Foreign Secretary has announced new sanctions May 20.

The measures target 3 individuals, including prominent settler leader Daniella Weiss, as well as 2 illegal outposts and 2 organizations that have supported, incited and promoted violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

These individuals and entities are now subject to measures including financial restrictions, travel bans, and director disqualifications, and will follow 18 other individuals, entities, and companies already sanctioned relating to serious violence against communities in the West Bank.

The measures follow a dramatic surge in settler violence in the West Bank, with the UN recording over 1,800 attacks by settlers against Palestinian communities since Jan. 1, 2024.

In a statement to Parliament, the Foreign Secretary is also set to announce the formal pause of free trade agreement negotiations with Israel, effective immediately. While the UK government remains committed to the existing trade agreement in force, it is not possible to advance discussions on a new, upgraded FTA with a Netanyahu government that is pursuing egregious policies in the West Bank and Gaza.

His statement will address latest developments on the ground in Gaza, making clear the UK's complete opposition to the IDF's new, extensive ground operation through Gaza, the threat of starvation for the Gazan population, and the UK's condemnation of the Israeli government's plans to drive Gazans from their homes into a corner of the Strip. The Foreign Secretary will also repeat UK demands that Hamas release all the hostages immediately and unconditionally and reiterate that Hamas cannot continue to run Gaza.

The new steps follow a joint statement issued by the Prime Minister along with the leaders of France and Canada, setting out their strong opposition to the expansion of Israel's military operations in Gaza and to illegal settlements in the West Bank. They also made clear that if Israel does not cease this action, further action will be taken in response.

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en in response.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said, "I have seen for myself the consequences of settler violence. The fear of its victims. The impunity of its perpetrators.

"The sanctioning of Daniella Weiss and others today demonstrates our determination to hold extremist settlers to account as Palestinian communities suffer violence and intimidation at the hands of extremist settlers.

"The Israeli government has a responsibility to intervene and halt these aggressive actions. Their consistent failure to act is putting

Palestinian communities and the two-state solution in peril.

"The announcement comes as Minister for the Middle East Hamish Falconer summons Israel's Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office over the expansion of military operations in Gaza.

Minister for the Middle East Hamish Falconer said, "Today I will set out to Ambassador Hotovely the government's opposition to the wholly disproportionate escalation of mil-

(Continued on page 12)

SPORTS WRAP



By William Hathaway, Jr.

The East Orange Recreation Department this past Sunday hosted its annual National Tennis Day at Elmwood Park.

Youth and their parents enjoyed the day along with East Orange Mayor Ted Green and East Orange Councilman Sammed R. Monk, who is also the chairperson of the Arts and Recreation and Culture Affairs Committee. Also attending this event was Howell Jordan, the tennis program coordinator.

There were about 20-40 kids that took part in this tennis program in East Orange. Howell said he was excited about the occasion. Also in attendance was longtime coach Mrs. Evelyn Alfaro of the Bowser Tennis Club, who came with her students to play.

The Tennis program has about 15 kids, with ages ranging from 3rd grade through 5th grade. National Tennis Day in East Orange was supported by the United States Tennis Associ-

ation, in which the Bowser Tennis program recently got a grant to support the youth that participate in the program.

Mayor Green said the United States Tennis Association has been working with the City of East Orange.

"Tennis is a popular sport in East Orange. The community supports this program. The parents and the youth support the program. It's a good feeling and it's exciting for the youth," Green said.

Columbia High School Senior Micah McMillion also came out to the event. McMillion is a coach and said it's really enjoyable to help the youth.

I also got the opportunity to talk with Isaiah Kissoon, a 4th grade student at Bowser Elementary School. He said that he enjoys taking part in the Tennis Program.

East Orange Recreation has tennis for youth as young as 6 years old and also has senior citizen participation in its year round program.

Photos By Felicia Laguerre Owens





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McIVER CHARGED (Cont. from pg. 1)

legislative oversight. I look forward to the truth being laid out clearly in court."

McIver, Menendez and Coleman Watson came to Delaney Hall May 9 to inspect conditions in Delaney Hall, which has been used by ICE, HHS and the GEO Group to detain potential deportees.

GEO and the feds said they had to make an appointment; the Congress members said they did not need to as federal legislators. The trio were eventually let in to inspect later May 9.

McIver becomes the first sitting Congress member to be criminally charged during Trump's second administration - and she may have company. US DOJ has contemplated bringing similar charges against Menendez and Coleman Watson since May 9 - but, as of 3 p.m. May 20, has not.

"We actually have body camera footage of these members of Congress assaulting these ICE enforcement officers," said DHS spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin May 10, "including body slamming a female ICE officer."

Some of federal officials' comments tend to fall into a line that Baraka and Congress members were "storming" Delaney Hall.

Representative Earl "Buddy" Carter (R-

Ga.), over May 10-11, introduced a resolution that would strip McIver, Menendez and Watson-Coleman of their committee assignments.

"The radical left have lost their minds - they would rather raid an ICE facility to defend criminal illegal immigrants that represent their own constituents," said Carter. "This behavior constitutes an assault on our brave ICE agents and undermines the rule of law."

Rep. Watson Coleman Statement on Charges Against Congresswoman McIver

Today (May 19), after the Trump administration announced it was pursuing criminal charges against Congresswoman LaMonica McIver, Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman issued the following statement:

"This case is an assault on civil liberties and an attempt to silence political opposition. I was with Congresswoman LaMonica McIver and Congressman Rob Menendez at Delaney Hall and I saw what happened. These allegations are simply incorrect and inconsistent with the facts. We were present to exercise our oversight responsibilities and in my view, the ICE agents needlessly chose to create a tense and dangerous situation by arresting Mayor Baraka.

"This prosecution is wrong and alarming, as it is just one more example of the Trump administration ignoring the rule of law and attempting to run roughshod over the other branches of government - here, the Congress. Everyone who values democratic principles should join me in demanding that the U.S. Attorney withdraw these baseless charges."

Sen. Booker Statement on DOJ's Charges Against Rep. LaMonica McIver

This evening (May 19), U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) issued the following statement:

"These charges are clearly unfounded. Representative McIver was exercising her legally protected authority as a member of Congress to conduct oversight of a detention center that receives millions of taxpayer dollars. Federal officials unnecessarily escalated what should have been a run-of-the-mill inspection of the facility. In fact, Representative McIver's actions were so unremarkable that she was invited back inside to finish her tour that day, after these events took place.

"Pursuing this case against Representative McIver will divert considerable resources away from serious matters of public safety. The Department of Justice should drop these charges immediately."



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

NEWARK - The FAA held productive talks with airline representatives from May 14-16 to address flight delays and congestion at Newark Liberty International Airport.

Acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau addressed the group, explaining that aging equipment, staffing shortages, ongoing runway construction and severe congestion at the airport necessitate schedule modifications.

He pointed to the immediate action the FAA is taking to accelerate air traffic control staffing and new technology at Philadelphia TRACON, which handles the airspace around Newark.

Air carriers included United Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Jet-Blue Airways, American Airlines, Alaska Airlines, Spirit Airlines and Allegiant Air. Their representatives worked in one-on-one meetings with the FAA to find a balance between reducing their operations at the airport and meeting the needs of each individual airline.

A final determination on arrival rates at Newark will come on or after May 28.

Proposed Arrival Rate

The FAA is proposing a maximum arrival and departure rate at Newark of 28 aircraft an hour until the runway construction of Runway 4-Left/22-Right

is complete. That daily construction will end on June 15, 2025, and continue on Saturdays until the end of the year.

Outside of that construction period, the maximum arrival rate would be 34 aircraft an hour until October 25, 2025.

How the FAA is taking action:

- Adding three new, high-bandwidth telecommunications connections between the New York-based STARS and the Philadelphia TRACON. This will provide more speed, reliability and redundancy.
- Replacing copper telecommunications connections with updated fiberoptic technology that also have greater bandwidth and speed.
- Deploying a temporary backup system to the Philadelphia TRACON that will provide redundancy during the switch to a more reliable fiberoptic network.
- Establishing a STARS hub at the Philadelphia TRACON so that the facility does not depend on a telecommunications feed from the New York STARS hub.
- Increasing controller staffing. Philadelphia TRACON Area C, which directs aircraft in and out of Newark, has 22 fully certified controllers, 5 fully certified supervisors, and 21 controllers and supervisors in training. Ten of those 21 controllers and supervisors are receiving on-the-job training. All 10 are certified on at least one position in Area C and three are certified on multiple positions. This means they can work those positions without supervision from an instructor. We have a healthy pipeline of controllers, with training classes filled through July 2026.

IRVINGTON - City inspectors, the county arson squad and the state fire marshal, as per standard operating procedure, are tracing the source of a May 13 house fire near the township center that displaced around 25

people and injured a firefighter.

The first Irvington Fire Department units arrived at a house on Howard Street off Clinton Avenue at 1 a.m. that Tuesday to find heavy smoke and flames coming out of the 2.5-story wood frame house. They entered the building and found that flames had reached parts of the second floor.

The fire was brought under control but not without an IFD firefighter suffering "non-life-threatening injuries." It is not known whether that firefighter was treated at the scene or taken to a local hospital.

Between 20 and 30 residents, including four children, were evacuated. The American Red Cross chapter provided them with clothing and temporary shelter.

Howard Street is a three block residential lane between Clinton Avenue and May Street/Irvington Park. There has been no report released of the house's damage or whether it is slated for demolition.

EAST ORANGE - City elders had mixed feelings on honoring former Senior Services Director Dr. Catherine Willis in hindsight, having dedicated a community room after her almost a full year before her May 3 death.

Mayor Theodore "Ted" Green and the City Council dedicated the "Catherine Willis Community Room" in the Edward T. Bowser Senior Center here at 90 Halsted St. May 13, 2024. Willis, who has served the city for 50 years, was instrumental in renovating the center in 2010.

"Catherine Willis was a woman of great fortitude and her passion for helping others defined her life's work," said Green in his May 4 statement. "She grew strength from her unwavering faith and belief that, 'Through God, all things are possible.' Last May, the city honored her contributions by naming the senior citizens center community room after her.

Willis, 85, died May 3. She had also been the city's Planning and Economic Development Di-

rector and Democratic Committee Chairperson, Essex County's first Director of Community Action and a Board of Taxation commissioner and on the state's Department of Human Services Welfare Reform Task Force.

Catherine Franzzelle Willis, who was born Oct. 26, 1939 in New London, Conn., came here via New Rochelle, N.Y., Nashville and New York City. She got her degrees in social work from Fisk University and Bank Street College.

Willis became a longtime member of the First Ward's St. Mark AME Church, serving as choir member, steward, trustee and administrator. Essex County Commissioners and the Orange City Council added to her roster of awards with posthumous proclamations May 5 and 20.

George Britt, Pastor of Elizabeth's Mt. Teman AME Church, is among her survivors. Visitation and life celebration were held at Orange's St. Matthew AME Church, followed by entombment at Newark's Fairmount Cemetery, May 15-16.

ORANGE - A husband and wife, who proclaim themselves as pastors here, have been detained by the U.S. Department of Justice - New Jersey Division since their May 7 arrest on forced labor and sex trafficking charges.

Both Treva Edwards, 60, and Christine Edwards, 63, said U.S. Attorney Alina Habba May 10, were indicted by a federal grand jury April 25 for conspiracy to commit forced labor. T. Edwards was further indicted for sex trafficking by coercion, force, fraud and forced labor. Their indictments were unsealed early May 7 and were arraigned the next day before U.S. Magistrate Andre M. Espinosa.

The Edwards are founders of "Jesus is Lord by The Holy Ghost" here at 3 S. Center St. While there are two marked minivans and a straight box truck parked in the neighboring lot May 20, neither the church's name nor the Edwards' names are above the doorbells of the four-story Victorian era apartment. (Continued on page 13)

LOCAL TALK

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STATE AG & DIVISION OF HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ANNOUNCE 'CLICK IT OR TICKET' CAMPAIGN

TRENTON - Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin and the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety (HTS) have announced the launch of the annual "Click It or Ticket" campaign, a coordinated statewide initiative focused on changing behavior as well as enforcement efforts to drive home the life-saving importance of wearing seat belts.

Running through June 2, the campaign provides grant funding to law enforcement agencies across New Jersey to enhance enforcement of the state's seat belt laws. This year, 105 agencies have received a total of \$600,740 from HTS to support increased patrols, seat belt checkpoints, and other enforcement activities to protect individuals on New Jersey's roads.

"Increasing seat belt use is one of the simplest and most effective ways we can reduce traffic fatalities," said Attorney General Platkin. "This campaign empowers our law enforcement partners to reinforce that message over the next few weeks. But this campaign is about more than just enforcement. It's about changing behavior and saving lives."



"Whether you're commuting during rush hour or heading down the shore for the weekend, wearing your seat belt should be second nature," said Michael J. Rizol Jr., Director of the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety.

"The numbers don't lie - seat belts save lives. It's a simple step that can mean the difference between life and death. Every seat, every ride, every time."

In 2023, 117 people killed in New Jersey crashes were not wearing seat belts, and unrestrained occupants accounted for 39 percent of all vehicle occupant fatalities. Among those unrestrained fatalities, nearly

one in four were between the ages of 16 and 24. Seat belt usage in New Jersey, once among the highest in the nation, has been gradually declining in recent years. Law enforcement and HTS are collaborating to reverse this concerning trend.

During last year's "Click It or Ticket" campaign, participating agencies issued 7,225 seat belt citations, 508 speeding summonses, and 809 cell phone violations.

The campaign also coincides with the beginning of the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day, when historically there has been a surge in crashes, injuries, and fatalities.

With increased travel during the summer months, police officers throughout New Jersey will be on patrol to improve safety and reduce roadway deaths across the state. Additional enforcement efforts, coordinated and funded by the Division of Highway Traffic Safety, will target speeding, impaired driving, and non-compliance with New Jersey's Move Over law over the next several months.

WORLD NEWS (Cont. from pg. 7)

itary activity in Gaza and emphasize that the 11-week block on aid to Gaza has been cruel and indefensible. I will urge Israel to halt settlement expansion and settler violence in the West Bank.

"Israel must abide by its obligations under International Humanitarian Law and ensure full, rapid, safe and unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza. The limited amount of aid entering is simply not enough.

"We must get an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages and a path to a two-state solution is the only way to ensure the long-term peace and security of both Palestinians and Israelis."

WORLD FIGHTING FUTURE PANDEMICS

After three years of negotiations sparked by the COVID-19 crisis, countries have adopted the world's first-ever international agreement to better prevent, prepare for, and respond to future pandemics. The new accord marks a major step towards ensuring stronger global cooperation to protect lives and avoid the devastating consequences of

future outbreaks.

The effects of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic are still being felt. Around seven million people died, health systems were overwhelmed, and the global economy was practically driven to a standstill.

The global turmoil prompted a stunned international community to pursue an agreement aimed at preventing such a catastrophic event from happening again - and ensuring the world is far better prepared in the future.

The landmark decision was made at the World Health Assembly, the annual meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Although the formal adoption was on May 20, the WHO's Member States overwhelmingly approved the agreement on May 19 (124 votes in favor, 0 objections, 11 abstentions).

This meant that, rather than a nail-biting vote with last-minute surprises (ahead of the conference, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, only felt able to express "cautious optimism"), the adoption by consensus had a celebratory feel.

"The agreement is a victory for public health, science and multilateral action," declared Tedros. "It will ensure we, collectively, can better protect the

world from future pandemic threats.

"It is also a recognition by the international community that our citizens, societies and economies must not be left vulnerable to again suffer losses like those endured during COVID-19."

The pandemic laid bare gross inequities between and within countries, when it came to diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines, and a core aim of the agreement is to plug gaps and treat any future pandemics in a fairer and more efficient way.

"Now that the Agreement has been brought to life, we must all act with the same urgency to implement its critical elements, including systems to ensure equitable access to life-saving pandemic-related health products," announced Dr. Teodoro Herbosa, Secretary of the Philippines Department of Health, and President of this year's World Health Assembly, who presided over the Agreement's adoption.

"As COVID was a once-in-a-lifetime emergency, the WHO Pandemic Agreement offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build on lessons learned from that crisis and ensure people worldwide are better protected if a future pandemic emerges."

The issue of national sovereignty has been raised several times during the process of ne-

gotiating the accord, a reflection of false online claims that WHO is somehow attempting to wrest control away from individual countries.

The accord is at pains to point out that this is not the case, stating that nothing contained within it gives WHO any authority to change or interfere with national laws, or force nations to take measures such as banning travelers, impose vaccinations or implement lockdowns.

Eleven countries abstained, including Poland, Israel, Italy, Russia, Slovakia and Iran. Following the vote, the abstaining countries were given the opportunity to explain why they took this decision.

During the high-level segment which preceded the vote, a notable intervention came from the United States which has begun the year-long process of withdrawing from the WHO, and did not take part in the vote.

In a video addressed to the Assembly, US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy excoriated the WHO, accusing the UN agency of having "doubled down with the Pandemic Agreement which will lock in all of the dysfunction of the WHO pandemic response...we're not going to participate in that."

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from pg. 10)

ment building.

The Edwards, according to Habba and USDOJ Civil Rights Division Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon, used apartments in the southwest corner building of Main Street as a worship center and living quarters for their victims between 2011 and 2020.

As outlined in the indictment, the defendants would recruit people who are struggling and persuade them to worship and move in with them. The Edwards would use the victims to "provide manual labor in and around Orange" for their contracted clients. They "did not pay wages to the victims for their work and kept their money earned from their labor."

T. Edwards would tell the new recruits that he was a prophet who had direct communication with God and that disobeying him would bring about divine retribution as well as physical, emotional and financial harm. Both Edwards would regulate their prayer, work, eating and sleeping habits and whether to leave the building. Members/victims were told not to communicate with non-members because the latter were "evil" or "possessed by the Devil."

T. Edwards sex trafficking count was allegedly having "controlled and subjected one victim to repeated physical and sexual assaults, impregnated her and instructed her to get an abortion." Whether the defendants have an attorney is not known as of press time.

WEST ORANGE - Llewellyn Park resident Whoopi Gold-

berg's production company - including former township economic development chairman J. Wayman Henry - may be shifting their studio location attention from West Orange to Newark.

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and city Office of Film & TV Director Desiree Hadley said, on May 12, that they are talking with Whoopi, Inc. and the MBS Group about building a studio in New Jersey's largest city. MBS, of Manhattan Beach, Calif., owns and/or operates 48 studios around the world including Los Angeles' Television City, Queens, N.Y.'s Silvercup and Kaufman Astoria studios and two in Kearny, NJ.

The prospective studio, said Baraka, would generate affordable housing, local jobs and job training and economic development.

"MBS/Goldberg" would be Newark's second large scale studio over the South Ward's LionsGate. LionsGate - sited on the demolished Seth Boyden Homes public housing lot and to be partially served by a new PATH station - was scheduled to open in 2024 but is now set for a fall 2025 groundbreaking.

The Matrix Development Group is meanwhile redeveloping the 12.2 acre Barton Press/McGraw-Edison site at 55 Lakeside Ave. here into a "film ready community" studio.

The Township granted Matrix redevelopment rights and oversaw the Monroe-based company's purchase of the property from Prism Capital Partners. Prism, of Bloomfield and Nutley, had redeveloped the former Edison Battery factory into Edison Lofts - but had to buy back 55 Lakeside from Wells Fargo after a 2011 foreclosure auction.

Whoopi, Inc. was interested in 55 Lakeside in 2011 and 2017, when the property was returned to township ownership.

SOUTH ORANGE / MAPLEWOOD - Another permutation from Columbia High School Principal Frank Sanchez's 2024 arrest and reinstatement has been firmly settled in a Newark Superior Court room April 25.

Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Beacham dismissed Elissa Malespina v. Courtney Winkfield, Rachel Fisher and Stephanie Nasteff "with prejudice" - meaning that the suit can not go before that judge again. Malespina and Winkfield were South Orange-Maplewood School District Board of Education members 2023-24 Fisher and Nasteff were founders of "Friends of Frank" who supported the principal.

Malespina had filed a defamation suit against Winkfield, Fisher and Nasteff Jan. 23, claiming that the trio were falsely asserting that she had conducted wrongdoing by leaking an internal Sanchez report draft to the Maplewood Police Department Dec. 12, 2023. That draft over internal findings about Sanchez's altercation with a 16-year-old student in a CHS hallway March 9, 2023, led to the principal's Jan. 2 arrest on second-degree assault and being placed on administrative leave by the school board.

Sanchez's charge was downgraded to simple assault and was dismissed in Maplewood Municipal Court. The school board reinstated him June 23, 2024 - in time for that year's CHS graduation ceremony.

Malespina, Winkfield and

their BOE colleagues had received a draft investigation report from a district-hired outside attorney on the March 9, 2023 incident Dec. 12, 2023. They were told by the BOE attorney and a representative of the investigator that it was for internal use only, due to the need to have the report formally processed. Malespina said she, as a "mandatory reporter," had to present the report to MPD due to the assault of a child allegation.

James Davis III, attorney for Malespina, said on dismissal that his client had been investigated by SOMSD administrators but no ethics violation charges were filed against her. Malespina and Davis said that she had been "intentionally, maliciously and recklessly defamed" by the three respondents. Beacham, in his written ruling, said that the "plaintiff had failed to establish a prima facie case as to each essential element of any cause of action in the complaint. and that the defendants are entitled to judgement as a matter of law."

Winkfield told a reporter on May 10 that she had signed a settlement and release document but, according to a "Friends of Frank" statement, chose not to pursue lawyers fees out of consideration of the client."

BLOOMFIELD - The remains of George A. Dittrich, who was born and raised here, will be buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery, after a Funeral Mass at St. Valentine Church, May 23. Dittrich, 27, died in the company of family at University Hospital May 16 from injuries he had suffered in the southbound Watsessing section of the Garden State Parkway 3:31 p.m.

(Continued on page 14)

NJ TRANSIT

(Cont. from page 5)

It is not clear whether Haas or his predecessor had consented, but enough engineers did not report to work on the 2023 federal Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday observance to suspend NJTransit's commuter rail system that Monday.

Both NJTransit CEO and President Kris Kolluri and BLET General Chairman Tom Haas said that the negotiations, impasse and agreement came down to wages.

Haas and BLET said that NJTransit's engineers are the lowest paid in the New York City Metropolitan area. Haas has said that some of his members left for higher paying jobs at MTA LIRR-Metro North, Amtrak and freight railroads.

Kolluri, who succeeded Kevin Corbett Jan. 15, said that he wanted to balance the engineers' needs with riders and taxpayers. He once said that the carrier could not accept a "17 percent wage increase" without "fare hikes, more taxes and reduced service."

Gov. Phil Murphy's point man did say on Saturday afternoon that both sides had the

contract "95 percent" settled. Both he and Haas said that their compatriots were cordial and not rude to each other.

What details of the new contract include 2.75 percent annual raises over the next five years. BLET discarded the "Me Too" clause in the contract for NJTransit. Transit would otherwise be obligated to make the same wage increases with its other unions.

The strike could have been a whole lot worse. NJTransit came to a contract agreement with its bus drivers union May 13.

The Observation Booth



OP-ED By Andrea Dialect

JERSEY VS. NEWYORKERS

STEEL SHARPEN STEEL

REPIN" HOOD - Picture That!

When asked where I'm from, Jersey spills off my lips faster than those swagga-dripped comebacks from all those folks proud to be callin' Brick City home. Can't nobody voicefully rep their home like my Newark Mocha kin. It's all about the way they say it. "I'm from Newark!" is usually embellished with that handwave—as if in praise to testify—or a tight grip when those arms expand to enhance that response, along with the one-step, two-step toward ya.

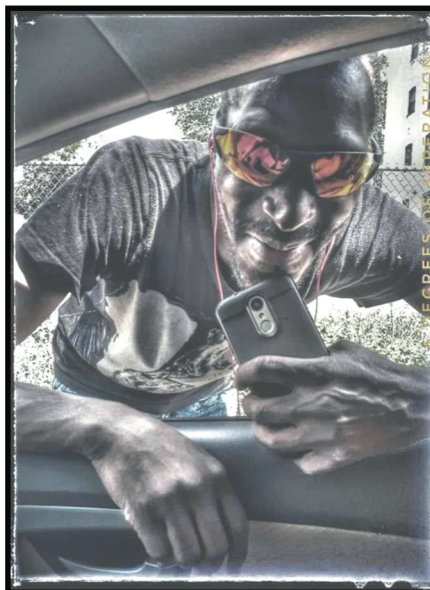
Ask them about their hood? Forget about it. To date, in my opinion, can't nobody rep where they're from or where they at like NNNNEWARK do. Hands down!

So... I'm from Jersey. My hands are waving. These arms are extended toward you, as in sync with the two-step. We from Jersey, for real. (Use the embellishments.)

For a deeper dive, I did a Google search to see if there were other interesting ways to rep the Garden State. Google dropped the ball, I tell you—for sure. Officially, we are New Jerseyans, but are commonly nicknamed Jerseyites. I abandoned seeking and finding immediately. Jersey it was and so Jersey it is.

But what is official today is the kickoff of the Steel Sharpens Steel concept and projects. Even though, for me personally, I'm always on the hunt and in hopes of finding reps that rep whatever or those who can do it better. In today's comparison, will it be us—us as in Jersey—or will those New Yorkers put us to shame in our own sections of town or in this Local Talk news section? Don't get it twisted, I love New York. Love the vibe. Let's just say there are a whole lot of kin from the Big Apple consuming space in my archives. IJS!

Photos Courtesy Andrea Dialect



This is a PBA—it's all about the pics. STEEL SHARPENING STILL is all about repin us. So, for future reference, you'll wanna check out the features or muses that are state repin' when they're state repin' or simply repin us when repin. I won't be telling you who is who or what just yet. Pay attention to the Gallery Crawl people. And perhaps I need not—because you have the ability to peep out all those identifying markers, and there are identifying markers or scribble in those identifying markers when need be. But only if you can see what you see.

So who you rollin' with or repin'? Jersey or New York during my coming out project? Picture that.

Visit Localtalkweekly.com and read this short in its entirety as getting even more up close

and personal with the Entertainment section. While you're at it, check out the archives in support of my subjects that, while Lending Their Image To Change, become my muse and clay as supporting my experimental projects as I mold them into Fine Artistry. Also join me and the collective for my Facebook live as I develop daily "PORTAL" sessions. I'll see you between 5:30-6:45. 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 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)

March 28.

Dittrich, who was born into a family of four June 19, 1997, was a Bloomfield High School Class of 2015 graduate. He wore No. 15 as a pitcher and first baseman for the BHS Bengals 2014 and 15. He was Petco's dog day care manager in Totowa.

Dittrich was likely named after two namesakes - his uncle and great uncles. Uncle George P. (1938-2015), BHS Class of 1957, was a naval veteran and a 30-year Bloomfield Police Officer before retiring to Toms River. Great Uncle George ran an upholstery shop at 483 Broad St. 1930s-60s.

George A. is related to

George P. and the earliest George by cousins/daughters Alicia Foulke and Carrie Bieksha.

Younger brother Craig, BHS Class of 2018, was a Bengals catcher. Other brother Anthony, parents John and Lisa and grandparents Joseph Mahoney and Genevieve Herrmann are also among his survivors.

The Levandoski-Grillo Funeral Home here arranged May 22's visitation and its live streaming. Memorial donations may go to the Mayor John Bukowski Bloomfield Animal Shelter, PO Box 241, 07003.

MONTCLAIR - Students and staff of Montclair State University's College of Humanities and Social Sciences are waiting

to see if their specialized library in Dickson Hall will be staying, moved to another part of the campus - or be leaving with the just-graduated Class of 2025.

English junior Jazmine Perez has been keeping watch on David Dickson Hall Room 155 since May 5, the last day of scheduled classes and three days before the Class of 2025 held their graduation ceremony. Perez was informed by CHSS Department Chair Mary English on Jan. 24 that she was told by CHSS Dean Peter Kingstone that movers were to take out the library, busts and maps May 2-3. That move-out, however, said MSU spokesman Andrew Mees May 8, has been postponed to June.

English said that the "Classics Library" is being va-

cated so that the Student Success Center, at Room 153, will have needed room, going back to a 2018 capital plan. Where the room's contents will go or be absorbed into the Harry Sprague Library to its southeast or be dissolved remains in question.

The CHSS mini library had practically grown along with Dickson Hall, named after MSU's first African American president, since its 1995 opening. Donated books of the classics in literature and archeology and related objects lined the walls over the last three decades. The library room became a seminar space, mini group study hall has works and hours outside of the Sprague Library.

(Continued on page 15)

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 14)

Mees said that the "Classics Library," not part of the Sprague Library, will have its holdings in a secured space for the time being. A change.org "Save the MSU Classics Library" petition to University President Jonathan Koppel has, as of May 17, reached 1,226 signatures.

GLEN RIDGE - Some observers are looking at whether the Glen Ridge Public Schools' May 13 acceptance of an unnamed employee's resignation and Glen Ridge Public Schools' May 12 reception of a teacher-student grooming tort claim was coincidental or not.

Westfield attorney Justin L. Drazin, of Drazin and Warshaw P.C., said he had filed a \$10 million tort claim against the borough's school district and board in Superior Court-Newark Civil Part May 12 on behalf of client "MOC" and her family. The tort claim gives both sides 90 days from the district's receipt to respond and to reach a settlement before heading towards court.

MOC, said Drazin, was the manipulated victim of an inappropriate sexual relation with a public school teacher from September 2021 into March 2025. The relationship started when the client was 11 years old in the Ridgewood Avenue Upper Elementary School - which serves as GRPS' junior high school - and ended when she was 14 in Glen Ridge High School.

The plaintiffs' attorney said that the "non-consensual relationship" was discovered when the victim's diary was found by another teacher. The diary's contents - starting as handwritten notes of early morning meetings into later emails, texts, voice memos and "obsessive messages and photo requests" are the basis of the grooming and coercive behavior.

That journal was turned over to the school's main office, district administrators, borough police and ECPO.

Drazin, in his press release and in court documents, is accusing 23-year teacher Gerald White, 51, of Green Brook, of grooming. White was last listed as a Ridgewood Avenue language arts and homeroom teacher. The lawyer is asking for \$10 million for "emotional pain, distress and other psychological damages."

District Superintendent of Schools Kyle Arlington, at the May 13 meeting, said that state law limits his remarks on the "rumors circulating" that led to questions from the community on receiving "a notice of safety concern." Arlington said

that a GRPS internal investigation can not start until law enforcement completes theirs and the district will provide additional information when it is allowed to.

BELLEVILLE - State Monitor Thomas Egan's May 6 overriding veto of the Belleville Public Schools April 29 6-1 rejection of the proposed 2025-26 district budget is the latest cause for some Belvillites to regain financial autonomy.

Egan, who has been in Belleville since 2014, allowed the \$140,228,132 budget to go through with a \$5,930,475, or 4.429 percent, increase on the current and outgoing 2024-25 budget.

That increase is being paid with a \$1,415,612 school property tax levy. That 2.93 percent levy increase comes out to \$127, based on the average assess house's property value, on the coming school year.

The override is the latest incident for residents and public officials to cry out to the state to end Egan's tenure here. Mayor Michael Melham asked on his own Facebook page May 14: "If the State Monitor can override our elected Board, why have a Board? In my 2024 State of the Township Address, I clearly urged the Board to appeal to the State for his removal. It's time to return home rule to our district."

Board of Education Trustee Jean Gillis had also called for Egan's dismissal at their April 29 meeting. Both Melham and former BOE trustee Michael Sheldon - usually at odds on most issues - cite that the township had made its last \$4.2 million loan repayment to the N.J. Department of Education in March.

NJDOE stipulated Egan's monitorship as a condition of its giving the \$4.2 million loan to plug that size gap in the BPS 2012-13 budget. Sheldon has started a petition for community members to urge the Governor and State Education Commissioner that Egan's sun has set in Belleville.

NUTLEY - The Nutley FMBA Local No. 44 saluted one of the township's firefighters, Robert F. Shepard, Jr., by posting, "Rest in Peace, 'Shep' " on its Facebook page May 13. Shepard, 69, who was a career firefighter with Nutley Hose No. 2 at 200 High St, died at his home here May 10.

"Shep" was a volunteer firefighter before being hired by the township. Nutley is a municipality served by both paid and volunteer personnel. NFD hired its first paid fire chief in 2023.

Born Sept 8, 1955 in Passaic Shepherd was a lifelong Nutleyite. The NHS Class of 1973 graduate married his high school sweetheart, the former Terry Sierchio. They raised Jonathan and Katie at their

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Oak Crest Place house.

Before his NFD hire, Shepard worked with his late father Robert at Shepard and Shepard Land Surveyors. That family business continues.

Sisters Maryann Romas, Nancy Luxton and Elizabeth Stoffers are also among his survivors. A private cremation was arranged by S.W. Brown & Son Funeral Home here.



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