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December 21 - December 27, 2021

SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

Volume 13, Issue 665

Brewster Police Officer Charged in Sex Trafficking Scheme

By Rick Pezzullo

A Village of Brewster police officer was among six individuals indicted in federal court in Brooklyn last week in connection with a sex trafficking and bribery scheme.

Wayne Peiffer, 48, was arrested at his home in Highland and charged as part of a 14-count indictment that included conspiracy to transport minors and the transportation of minors, sex trafficking, conspiracy to commit Hobbs Act extortion, promotion of prostitution, and use of interstate facilities to commit bribery.

According to Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, for more than eight years Peiffer, a Brewster cop since 2006, allegedly directed members of the Cid-Hernandez Sex Trafficking Organization and the Godinez

Prostitution Business to deliver women to him, including at the Brewster police station, so that he could engage in sexual activity with the women at no cost.

In exchange, Peiffer provided the Cid-Hernandez Sex Trafficking Organization and the Godinez Prostitution Business protection from arrest, including by advanced warning of law enforcement operations and intervening to prevent arrest.

Since approximately May 2002, Peace stated members of the Queens-based Cid-Hernandez Sex Trafficking Organization allegedly engaged in the sex trafficking of young women and minor girls and the promotion of prostitution. The Godinez Prostitution Business also regularly caused women to be transported from a location in Queens to various locations, including Brewster, for the purpose of engaging in

prostitution.

"As alleged, the defendants conspired to lure young women and minor girls to travel to the United States based on false promises of a better life and forced them into prostitution once they arrived," Peace stated. "The defendants allegedly received assistance in carrying out this conspiracy from a corrupt police officer who traded the honor of his badge and sworn oath for free sexual services."

"Our arrest of a police officer isn't the most egregious facet of this investigation. We allege Mr. Peiffer had sex with the girls being trafficked as payment for his protection of the traffickers," stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Michael J. Driscoll. "The oath law enforcement officers take affirms they will serve and protect law abiding citizens and vulnerable members of the community, not aid and abet criminals

who are abusing young girls and forcing them to have sex against their will."

Peace said the Putnam County Sheriff's Department, Putnam County District Attorney's Office and Westchester Putnam County Real Time Crime Center provided invaluable assistance with the case.

"As alleged, the individuals named in the indictment were part of an elaborate network of conspirators that used deception and coercion to sell dreams of a better life in the United States to young and impressionable women, who arrived only to be forced into a miserable life of torment, sexual abuse and prostitution at the hands of their captors," stated Homeland Security Investigations Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Ricky Patel. "The criminal organization also allegedly retained the services of a corrupt cop, who betrayed the badge and the people that he

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New Citizens Take Oath in Putnam



Putnam County Clerk Michael C. Bartolotti hosted a Naturalization Ceremony on Dec. 8 at the Putnam County Historic Courthouse in Carmel where he administered the Oath of Allegiance to 29 new citizens from 17 countries. The Honorable Joseph Spofford served as the officiating Putnam County Judge.

Rise in COVID Cases Forces Carmel High to Go Remote

By Rick Pezzullo

A recent uptick in positive COVID-19 cases has forced Carmel High School to switch to remote learning for the rest of this year.

Remote learning began Friday and will continue through December 23. District officials are planning to bring high school students back into the classroom on Monday, Jan. 3 after the holiday break.

"Over the last week, Carmel High School has seen a sizeable increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in our local community and subsequently among students and staff at Carmel High School," Superintendent of Schools Mary-Margaret Zehr and Carmel High School Principal Lauren Santabarbara stated in a joint letter to parents and students.

"We have been working diligently with the Putnam County Department of Health to complete contact tracing and directly contact all individuals who may be impacted by these positive cases," they continued. "We have

worked hard to do all that we can to keep our schools open and safe for our students and staff. However, increases in positive cases among students and staff, close contact quarantines, and staffing shortages have become a challenge at Carmel High School this week."

Reportedly, between Dec. 2 and Dec. 15, 81 individuals in the district have tested positive for COVID-19---57 in the last week. Since September, there have been 167 positive cases. Of those, 54 were high school students, along with two teachers and two staff personnel.

"We recognize that time in the classroom is important for student learning, but the safety of our students, staff and community is also a top priority," Zehr and Santabarbara stated. "Our teachers and staff will continue to work hard to ensure that the remote learning environment will still provide our high school students with the quality education you expect from our district."

Zehr and Santabarbara stated no other

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Health Dept. to Hold Clinics for COVID-19 Vaccines for Adults, Kids

By Rick Pezzullo

The Putnam County Health Department will be offering Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for adults and children at two clinics scheduled on Tuesday, Dec. 28.

Children five to 11 years of age are eligible for either a first or second dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Adults are eligible to receive first doses, second doses and boosters of both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines.

One clinic will take place in Carmel Plaza at the former Dressbarn location, from 1 to 3:30 p.m. A second clinic will be at the Philipstown Recreation Center from 1 to 3:30 p.m., located on Route 9D in Garrison. R

Second doses and boosters will be given provided that the proper amount of time has passed for them. Second doses follow three to four weeks after the initial dose, depending which initial vaccine was received. Boosters for adults can be given if six months has passed since the second dose was received, or two months after a single-dose vaccine,



GETTY IMAGES

such as the Johnson & Johnson. Individuals who received the "J&J" shot initially, may receive either Moderna or Pfizer boosters, since the Johnson and Johnson vaccine will not be available at these clinics.

To be eligible for a Moderna booster, an individual must be 18 years and older. Pfizer boosters can be given to those 16 years of age and older. If an individual 16 or 17 years old received two doses of Pfizer more than six months ago, a Pfizer booster is the only option. Those 18 years of age and older can switch vaccines manufacturers if desired.

When registration opens, the online information and registration links will be posted at: www.putnamcountyny.com/health/covid19/#vaxinfo

COVID vaccines are also given at Health Department regularly scheduled immunization clinics. For further information or to schedule an appointment, call the Health Department at 845-808-1390. More COVID vaccine clinics are planned in January.

Rise in COVID Cases Forces Carmel High to Go Remote

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school building was experiencing the same level of COVID-19 cases as the high school. All athletics will continue in person, but spectators were urged to watch the games

by livestreams.

"We ask our entire district community to remain vigilant, self-quarantine if exposed, and consult a medical professional for advice when needed," the administrators stated.

Traffic Detour Reinstated at Sodom Road Bridge

The traffic detour at Sodom Road Bridge will be reinstituted for about three weeks as NYSEG reroutes the gas line that feeds the Village of Brewster.

In accordance with its NYC DEP permits, NYSEG must decommission the gas line that spans the East Branch of the Croton River and reattach the line to the bridge, where it had been before construction started.

"It's unfortunate that NYSEG couldn't get its portion of the work done on schedule and that drivers will be inconvenienced," said County Executive MaryEllen Odell. "NYSEG's gas line, however, is essential to residents and it's best that the work is done safely and completely now."

The gas line reattachment was originally

supposed to be accomplished in accordance with the county contractor's schedule and finished by mid-November. When NYSEG couldn't make the deadline, it delayed the project until January.

Rather than further inconvenience local drivers who were detoured onto I-684 and Route 22 while the bridge was closed, the county Highway Department reopened the bridge last month as soon as its work was complete. NYSEG notified the Highway Department that it had changed its schedule again and would begin work in the week of December 6. NYSEG now plans to have the permanent gas main relocated and the road reopened by December 23.

Brewster Police Officer Charged in Sex Trafficking Scheme

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swore to protect by being complicit in these deplorable acts and accepting payments in sexual favors. This case involved true collaboration between federal, state and local law enforcement partners to bring the

hierarchy of this trafficking organization to justice."

Peiffer and four of the other defendants, who all reside in Queens, were arraigned before United States Magistrate Judge James R. Cho. One defendant remains a fugitive.

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Dan's Wine of the Year

2014 Casa Santos Lima Reserva



The nose on this wine bursts through the seems with dark fruit notes earthy spice-tinged berries that remind you the wine is old school. The palate brings Very complex on the palate with coconut, blackberry, jam and dried fruit, prune and fig. The addition of the Syrah in this blend is what separates this wine from anything ordinary.

\$11⁹⁷

Jason's Wine of the Year

2019 Oak Farm Tievoli Cabernet Sauvignon



Deep garnet in color, this Cabernet Sauvignon is composed of complex aromas of black currant, blueberry, cedar, and floral characteristics. The wine is full bodied with echoing aromas on the palate. The finish is abundant in textured tannins, yet smooth and velvety.

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NV Isotta Manzoni Prosecco Rose



Subtle and fresh aromas with hints of small red berries, rose, and pomegranate. On the palate it is silky and full with elegant flavors of strawberry and crushed violets, finishing with well-balanced minerality. You will have no problem finishing the bottle once it's opened. This is crushable!

\$13⁹⁷

Tom's Wine of the Year

2018 Laurent Combier Crozes Hermitage



Mesmerizing deep dark ruby with dark pink shimmers along the rim of the wine. This Syrah emits a nose of black cherry jam, figs, black currants, and subtle notes of bacon fat, cured meat, and violets. The palate is rich with bright and juicy blackberries, blueberries, and cranberries. Black peppercorns, dried thyme, and subtle notes of river rocks breakthrough the berry medley. A lingering finish of dried blueberries and cacao finalize this wine.

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Jenkins, White Plains' Roach Test Positive as COVID Cases Skyrocket

By Martin Wilbur

Westchester's Deputy County Executive Ken Jenkins and White Plains Mayor Tom Roach tested positive for COVID-19 within three days of each other as the explosion of active cases likely fueled by the Omicron variant accelerates.

Jenkins, who said he was told of his positive last Thursday, and Roach, whose office issued a statement on Monday after the mayor received his test result Sunday night, are isolating at home with mild symptoms.

They join County Executive George Latimer, who learned of his positive case on Dec. 13, in isolation as the county and at least one local government are taking precautions to limit community spread.

Jenkins compared his symptoms to a cold with a bit of a cough, some body chills and aches but no fever. He said he was fully vaccinated and boosted in October. He is eligible to complete his isolation on Dec. 26.

"Vaccinations are the means to reduce the severe hospitalizations and fatalities, and going through this particular process right now, I feel fine," Jenkins said.

The statement from Roach's office offered a similar scenario.

"The Mayor's symptoms are mild, but he is taking every precaution, including isolating at home," the statement read. "Mayor Roach is thankful that he received 2 doses of vaccine plus a booster shot and

cites this as the reason he is not suffering more severely. He continues to carry out the work of the Government from his residence."

An alarming spike to a 7.2 percent positivity rate for Westchester on Saturday was coupled with a jump to 7,468 active cases, a more than 50 percent surge in under a week. Putnam County had a 10 percent positivity rate on Saturday.

Latimer, speaking virtually from his home in Rye on Monday as he continues to isolate, said that the rapid increase in cases is leading to long delays for people who want to get tested. As a result, Westchester has asked the state to temporarily re-establish testing sites at the County Center in White Plains and Glen Island Park in New Rochelle.

A positive development is that hospitalizations are under control. As of Saturday, there were 134 COVID-19 patients being treated in Westchester hospitals. Considering the rate of increase in cases, it is a relatively low number, Latimer said.

"Given the astoundingly high number of infections, we're hopeful that the number of hospitalizations are as low as 134," Latimer said. "We might have thought that they would be double that by now, so we're cautiously optimistic."

During last winter's peak, when cases peaked at more than 11,500 on Jan. 18, there were more than 500 hospitalizations.

Other steps the county is taking is

to distribute 500,000 masks from its stockpile to local businesses, nonprofit organizations and religious institutions, sending 35,000 tests kits to some of the public health facilities in economically stressed areas, including the Mount Vernon Health Center, the Greenburgh Health Center, Open Door Family Medical Centers and the Hudson River Health Care Center in Peekskill.

Latimer said he has sensed that in recent weeks residents are getting tired and upset with the latest surge and the precautions that are needed, thinking the worst of the pandemic had been in the past.

"I am concerned by the agitation I see out in the community, people who are now almost two full years off normalcy, they worry their kids won't go to school, they worry about not being with loved ones for the holidays, they're much more agitated, much more anxious, looking for somebody to blame, irritated," Latimer said.

All Board of Legislators meetings and those of their committees will return to virtual only at least through Jan. 31.

On Monday, the Town of Yorktown announced that its municipal office will be closed to visitors. Anyone doing business at Town Hall must call or e-mail staff in advance. The John C. Hart Memorial Library in Shrub Oak will return to porch pickup service only.

There will also be a resumption to online-only public meetings starting Tuesday evening. The situation will be re-



White Plains Mayor Tom Roach revealed Monday that he learned he tested positive for COVID-19 over the weekend.

evaluated during the first week in January.

"These actions are common-sense responses designed to protect the health and safety of the public and our employees," said Supervisor Matt Slater. "I ask everyone doing business with our Town to have patience and understanding. We are still open for business by phone and email."

The Town of Ossining has also returned to virtual board meetings in recent weeks.

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Gubernatorial Hopeful Slams Mask Mandate But Reaction is Varied

By Martin Wilbur

The presumed Republican frontrunner for the party's nomination in the 2022 gubernatorial race slammed Gov. Kathy Hochul's mask mandate last week, warning that it jeopardizes myriad business owners and infringes on personal freedom.

Long Island Congressman Lee Zeldin visited Jefferson Valley in Yorktown last Thursday with several local officials and merchants, charging that "the government is forcing you to turn (customers) away" even though many small businesses either failed or have barely survived the pandemic.

He chided Hochul for having run out of ideas, with her decision-making consisting of mandates, threats, fines and firings.

"We need people in government to be sensitive to what they need in order to survive because our small businesses are the engine, the backbone of the economy, the heart and soul of our community," Zeldin said while accompanied by Assemblyman Kevin Byrne (R-Mahopac) and Yorktown Supervisor Matt Slater on Hill Boulevard in front of Frankie & Augie's Z Ristorante and Pizzeria.

Hochul put the mandate into effect Dec. 13 for all indoor public spaces as a fall surge in COVID-19 has seen active caseloads skyrocket throughout New York and hospitals in some areas upstate fill up. On Saturday, New York State broke its record for the most new COVID-19 cases in one day since the start of the pandemic— 22,478, according to its daily online tracker.

Her directive allows businesses and

venues to opt for proof of vaccination to enter the premises rather than masks but not both. Violators could be fined up to \$1,000. The governor said she would reassess the matter on Jan. 15.

Zeldin said Yorktown is vulnerable because it is one of the communities that borders Putnam County, which is ignoring the governor. Last Monday, Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell said police and health officials will not be enforcing the mandate.

"In my conversations with some of the business owners who are here is that there are people who are going to be taking their business to Putnam; they're not going to be bringing their business here because of this mandate, which is causing even more pain and entirely unnecessary," Zeldin said. "What we need is leadership to be consistent, but not consistently inconsistent, which leaves a whole lot of people wondering what hammer is next."

Byrne said merchants don't want to be harassing customers to put on a mask or display their vaccine passport or other personal information. He said store owners in Yorktown and other communities are going to be at a competitive disadvantage as well as placing business owners and their employees in a difficult position.

"It is going to be even harder for them to do their job when customers are upset because they feel that they are forced to ask (customers) for a vaccine passport or force them to wear a mask," Byrne said. "It's unfair for counties to be competing on a different



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

Congressman Lee Zeldin, at lectern, a Republican frontrunner for next year's governor's race, criticized Gov. Kathy Hochul's mask mandate in a visit to Yorktown last Thursday.

playing field."

Slater said he supports what Massachusetts has done, which is to leave the decision to each municipality to determine what is best for their community.

A spokesperson for Hochul said that in remarks made by the governor last week, 73 percent of the state's population is governed by leaders who say they support the mandate. However, it's also meant to highlight for the public the urgency of the matter and that personal responsibility is crucial as well for there to be compliance.

"That is a pretty large number of individuals represented by people doing the right thing,"

Hochul said during a briefing last week. "I encouraged the counties to do this, but it's also, this is also up to individuals. Individuals are asked to follow regulations and in general follow laws, and that is what we're continuing to do here. There's nothing extraordinary about this."

State Sen. Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro) said he agrees that store owners are put in a difficult position, but for elected officials to publicly oppose the mandate fail is counterproductive.

"In times of crisis, leaders are supposed to be inspiring folks to do the right thing for each

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Gubernatorial Hopeful Slams Mask Mandate But Reaction is Varied

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other, and if we want to keep our businesses strong and if we want to keep our kids in school, wearing a piece of cloth on your face is what the medical experts say will help keep the population healthy," Harkham said. "For elected officials to be feeding into the anger and the negativity, I believe is the wrong approach."

A random sampling of business owners ran the gamut, from those who are opposed to the governor's measure to others who have imposed their own mask mandate since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Rich Donovan, president of All Seasons Wine & Spirits in Yorktown Heights, said last week that he lost customers. When told they need a mask, they walked out and said they would shop elsewhere. He said it is wrong to pit citizen versus citizen.

"Within one hour I had several customers turn around and walk away (and say) 'I'll take my business to Putnam seven minutes up the road,'" Donovan said.

Other business owners in areas farther away had less of an issue, but not completely without incidents. Mimi Wieland-Tesfaye, owner of Mimi's Café in Mount Kisco, said most customers have generally complied when asked to put on a mask.

However, different standards based on the type of business has been confusing for some patrons. Wieland-Tesfaye said that some people wonder that why if they're vaccinated and boosted must they still wear a mask when they enter or leave the premises or approach the counter. Then they see others who are sitting with a beverage who don't have masks on, even when talking to someone else.

"I just want to be serving coffee, not telling

people what to do," Wieland-Tesfaye said.

Kevin Kane, vice president of the Saw Mill Club in Mount Kisco, said fitness centers have other challenges. Strenuous exercise makes it unrealistic for many patrons to wear masks, unlike shopping in Target or Wal Mart, where it shouldn't be difficult for a shopper to wear one for a finite period of time.

With the recent mandate, Saw Mill requires members to be vaccinated, he said. Once proof of vaccination is presented, no mask is required and the member is logged into the system as vaccinated. Currently, unvaccinated members aren't allowed until the regulation is rescinded.

Kane, a strong vaccine proponent, said Saw Mill has willingly complied with every mandate during the pandemic, but sometimes leaders seem to forget the challenges.

"There's an unappreciated part of



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

The sign on the door of the Lil Chocolate Shop in Pleasantville requiring customers to wear a mask to enter the store.

STOP-DWI Engagement Campaign to Run Through New Year's

Putnam County Sheriff Robert L. Langley Jr., Carmel Police Chief Anthony Hoffmann and Kent Police Chief Kevin Owens announced last week that Putnam County police agencies and STOP-DWI coordinators are participating in special efforts to bring awareness to the dangers of impaired driving.

During this holiday season while celebrating with friends and family and looking forward to the blessings of a new year, a combined law enforcement effort to bring awareness to the dangers of impaired

driving prevent injuries and save lives across New York State, and STOP-DWI programs will be participating in special engagement efforts.

The statewide STOP-DWI High Visibility Engagement Campaign started last Friday and will end on Jan. 1.

The campaign is one of many statewide initiatives promoted by STOP-DWI NY and the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee. The campaign also targets Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day/End of Summer, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Super Bowl

weekend and St. Patrick's Day.

Highly visible, highly publicized efforts like the STOP-DWI High Visibility Engagement Campaign aim to reduce drunk and impaired driving incidents.

You can help to make a difference by having a Sober Plan. Download the mobile app Have a Plan and you will always be able to find a safe ride home at www.stopdwi.org/mobileapp.

Impaired driving is completely preventable. All it takes is a little planning.

business, which I don't think is recognized by the medical community or the political community," Kane said.

Annette Colasuonno, owner of Lil Chocolate Shop in Pleasantville, said she has had her own mask mandate for her store since the emergence of COVID-19. At 72 years old, she doesn't want to get sick, although the overwhelming portion of visitors have complied. However, there have been a few difficult people.

"If someone comes in with an attitude, they're always going to have an attitude," Colasuonno said. "It doesn't matter."

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Board of Legislators Chair Reflects on Four Years of Achievements

By Rick Pezzullo

Westchester County Board of Legislators Chairman Ben Boykin reflected last week on the achievements of the board over the last four years in an end-of-term report.

Boykin (D-White Plains), who was re-elected to a fifth two-year term representing District 5 last month running unopposed, has chaired the Democratic-dominated board since 2018.

"The last four years have been historic and consequential for this board," Boykin stated. "As Westchester County elected officials, our greatest responsibility is to work toward a county that is improved in every way from the one we inherit. When people look back on the last four years, they will see that we have done that, and more."

"I took office with great hopes for what we could achieve for the people of Westchester, despite the significant challenges we faced in terms of the county's precarious financial position at the time, and not knowing the unprecedented difficulties that would arise from the COVID-19 pandemic," he continued. "But the verdict is in – our revitalization of the county's finances over the past four years has been a remarkable success, and the myth that the only path to fiscal health is to deprive residents of necessary services has been debunked."

Working with County Executive George Latimer, Boykin said the budgets the board have passed since 2018 have eliminated one-shot revenues and borrowing to fund



Board of Legislators Chairman Ben Boykin

operations, cut the county's tax levy three years in a row and rebuilt the county's reserve funds to an expected \$300 million from \$65 million when Latimer took office.

"We have restored the county's financial health," Boykin stated. "Smart fiscal planning has made so much possible. With this transformative turnaround, the evidence is clear that with the right leadership and the right values we can strengthen the social safety net, invest in our infrastructure, and at the same time make extraordinary improvements in the

county's finances."

In addition, Boykin said the board passed historic legislation to support Westchester's working families; taken action to respond to the climate crisis; preserved and improved county parks and historic buildings; increased affordable housing access for thousands of seniors and working people; strengthened county government ethics and transparency; supported small businesses and consumers; and embraced and protected Westchester's diversity.

"While I am extremely proud to have led the board during these historic times, the board's achievements are not mine, they are the result of the committed, focused and collaborative work of all legislators during these last four

years, the outstanding work of the board's dedicated staff and the support and leadership of our partner in county government, County Executive George Latimer and his staff," Boykin stated.

"The opportunity to serve as board chair during these last four years, when we both celebrated the board's 50th anniversary and navigated the darkest days of the pandemic, has been one of the greatest privileges and the most formidable challenges of my career," he added. "It is a time and place I will never forget, as we look ahead with hope for a return to normalcy in our future."

It is unclear who will be the Board of Legislators' chair for the next two years.

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Brewster-Carmel Garden Club Seeks Gardens for Spring Garden Tour

Our club is seeking fine gardens for our showcase tour scheduled for May of 2022. Each garden will be open from 10am to 4pm. If you are willing to share your fine garden with the public for a worthy cause, please contact the Brewster/Carmel Garden Club Fine Garden Tour Chair at bcgardentour@gmail.com. Proceeds will benefit The Putnam County Children's Committee and the club's civic activities.

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Editorial

Opposing Mask Mandate Makes No Sense as COVID-19 Rages Again

Republican gubernatorial candidate Lee Zeldin, a congressman from the eastern end of Long Island, arrived in Yorktown last Thursday for the latest stop on his campaign tour around the state.

But what had to have been one of the most ill-timed and tone-deaf press conferences in recent memory, Zeldin and local supporters essentially tried to make the argument that mandating masks to enter a store is bad for business. That decision, he said, should be left up to each individual.

This was in response to Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul's mask mandate that went into effect Dec. 13 in hopes of protecting society as the Omicron variant, which three-and-a-half weeks ago was first detected in southern Africa, has raced around the globe with breathtaking speed. On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 73 percent of all new cases in the U.S. are

now Omicron.

If Zeldin is successful in his drive to become New York State's next chief executive, don't expect him to do much to protect you. And on Monday he doubled down on his foolishness in Albany preaching to the same anti-mask choir.

Here's what's bad for business: COVID-19. What's worse for business? COVID-19 in overdrive, infecting more than 900 residents in Westchester on Sunday for the fourth consecutive day, filling up hospitals in less vaccinated portions of the state and burning out health care workers.

There's no one, Republican, Democrat, some other affiliation or no affiliation, who wants to wear a mask. They're annoying, especially if you have to work an eight-hour shift with one over your face or have it on for an extended period of time.

However, mature adults, and adults who aren't pandering for votes, realize

that if it can help themselves and others from getting infected, that's a good thing. Since most people other than health care workers don't have the N-95 masks to wear, the way that face coverings can be most effective is if everybody in an indoor space wears one.

If you're inclined to go to a restaurant, nothing has changed from before Dec. 13. You walk in with a mask on, and once you're seated you can take it off. When it's time to leave, you put it back on for a minute.

For those who won't shop at a business simply because they can't be bothered to put on mask while they run in for a gallon of milk and a dozen eggs, it's not about the mask. They're making a political statement to demonstrate which political team they support.

For those merchants in the northern Westchester towns that border Putnam County worried about losing business

to their northern neighbor, don't blame Hochul. You can point your finger squarely at County Executive MaryEllen Odell, who in a cynical move sent out a press release shortly after 9 a.m. on Dec. 13 announcing that Putnam would reject enforcing the regulation.

In a week that saw the Westchester County executive, his deputy, the mayor of White Plains and thousands more get infected, and faced with the worst public health crisis in our lifetime, you don't turn up your hands, shrug your shoulders and do nothing. You try the least intrusive option first, which is wearing masks.

We may have to live with COVID-19 in some shape or form for years, perhaps decades, even with vaccines. For some, that will be the remainder of their lives. It's time as a society we stop playing politics and gird ourselves for a lengthy fight, and to be successful, it can't be with one another.

Letters to the Editor

Odell's Refusal to Comply With State Mask Mandate is a Political Ploy

No shirt, no shoes, no service, no problem. No shirt, no shoes, no mask, no service... Oh my God the sky is falling!

This is the logic of Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell.

Store management and employees routinely refuse to serve those not wearing a shirt or shoes – and post signs saying so. We've all seen the signs. Nobody gets bent out of shape.

In the face of the most highly contagious variant of the COVID-10 virus (Omicron) and with infections on a fast rise, Gov. Hochul has wisely called for a statewide mask-wearing mandate in all indoor public places. Obviously, this is aspirational. Obviously, there will be no "enforcers" in each and

every indoor public space. The governor is sending the responsible message that this is what we must do to stay safe.

With well over 800,000 dead, over 1,100 a day dying and with more than 100,000 new infections per day nationwide it is incumbent upon government to do the responsible thing and call for greater safety. This is what the governor has done. If everyone were vaccinated the virus would be rendered of little consequence and we could be rid of this and get back to building our economy. Since we have vaccine "refuseniks" we have no choice but to all wear masks to protect our society and economy. This is the wise course.

Unfortunately, we have some "chicken

littles" like County Executive Odell who – for political reasons – assumes a posture that appeals to the fuzzy thought of ill-informed people. It appears she feels she must pander to this base.

In dealing with the pandemic, President Trump exploited a certain infantilism residing in the American psyche for his own political ends – much to the detriment of the nation. This "Trumpism" has trickled down to the local level in the behavior of the county executive. A cynical ploy by an overpaid public servant. Starting Jan. 1, her salary will be \$170,070, a 2.4 percent pay raise. She'll give herself a raise but can't bring herself to call for greater public health safety.

Odell takes care of herself very nicely. I

can put on and take off a mask faster than my shoes or shirt. It's not difficult, it's not a big deal. Unless of course, County Executive Odell wants to make it big deal for her own political ends.

Nick Kuvach
Putnam Valley

Correction

In last week's article on the Spectrum Designs employee Lindsay Waxman, it incorrectly stated that she is on the autism spectrum. Waxman has ADHD and anxiety. The Examiner regrets the error.

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Guest Column

Unite New Castle Should Explain Developers' Campaign Contributions

By Cynthia Schames

Local government may be small, but it's still politics.

Local elected officials are subject to the same standards of ethics and the same scrutiny that we hold state and federal public servants to. Avoiding even the appearance of impropriety should be of key importance to any elected official, but maybe even more so for small towns.

To that end, it's important to take a look into what's actually happened so far, and what may be happening in the future, in the Town of New Castle.

In arguments against the now-tabled Form Based Code, a proposed zoning change that would have rezoned a few acres of Chappaqua's North Greeley Avenue, new Supervisor Lisa Katz, who ran on the Unite

New Castle (UNC) ticket, has repeatedly said that she intends to engage in one-to-one negotiations with each developer to get the best deal.

In light of the facts below, we must ask the question: "Get the best deal for whom?"

As of the date of this writing, almost 30 percent of the funds reported on UNC's financial disclosures have come from just two families – each involved in billion-dollar commercial construction and real estate development.

Former Town Board member Adam Brodsky gave either \$4,000 or \$8,000. Although he no longer resides in town, his family owns the biggest lot on North Greeley Avenue, the 1.2-acre former Maxime's location, vacant for almost 20 years.

We can't be sure of his exact donation amount because:

1. One \$4,000 line item is in his own name, while the other is under the name SC Management, his commercial real estate development company. SC Management is an LLC separate from his day job at The Hakim Group, the billion-dollar real estate company owned by his wife's family.

2. The second \$4,000 transaction had the unusual designation as a Schedule O transaction, used for "subcontractors/partners." It is unclear whether that \$4,000 was a donation, (usually designated as Schedule A, B or C) or some other transaction between the two parties.

The UNC slate has refused to clarify this "partner" relationship, despite several inquiries both public and private, by several individuals. In fact, the campaign's treasurer got so angry when asked about it on Election Day, that she cursed and stormed away from her position talking to voters outside of a polling place.

Now on to a larger set of family donations.

Various members of the Kemler family gave a total of \$16,000 to the UNC slate – by far the largest aggregate donations of any parties.

This includes a maximum donation from an Andrew Kemler of Colorado, who seems to have lived in Colorado for at least 20 years. He is an active apartment house developer. What's his interest in a local Town Board race in a small town halfway across the country?

Steven Kemler is a New Castle resident. He gave the maximum donation twice, once before the primary, and once after. He was seemingly very invested in the success of UNC, and by extension, their principal platform issue: the death of the Form Based Code.

Mr. Kemler's wife is the daughter of the former CEO of Turner Construction, a multibillion-dollar commercial construction company. Steven Kemler runs a "family office-backed" investment firm named Stone Arch Group, whose website states they are actively looking to invest in the new construction of 50-plus-unit apartment buildings in subprime locations. Could that include North Greeley?

Again, we ask, is it the residents and local small business owners of Chappaqua, or is it these billionaire developers, who will be getting the best deal from Lisa Katz?

After the past year of the UNC slate's surrogates improperly and publicly maligning current board members as being "in the pockets of developers," it is very unsettling to uncover the fact that the UNC campaign coffers were filled by real estate developers.

I believe the public deserves the incoming Town Board's assurances that this money flowing into the UNC campaign pockets from developers is NOT going to buy any favors, zoning variances or undue influence.

I believe that the public has a right to be assured that the divisive, unnecessary, year-long conflict over the Form Based Code was not simply a way for an incoming Town Board to provide backroom dealings to campaign contributors.

I believe that our elected officials owe us respect and transparency.

Surely all of this can be explained, so I am asking the incoming Town Board to do just that. Explain.

Chappaqua resident Cynthia Schames has supported several local Democratic campaigns and has volunteered on initiatives for other organizations.

Letters to the Editor

Yorktown Desperately Needs the Help Overlay District Can Provide

As the owner of The Pub, located on Commerce Street in Yorktown Heights, I can tell you that the Yorktown Heights Business District needs help. The kind of help that the Overlay District legislation can provide, and I am officially throwing my full support for this legislation.

COVID-19 has significantly hurt many of our businesses and has heavily impacted my business. I applaud the town's initiative to attempt to revitalize our main streets by thinking of creative and proven ways to achieve that goal.

The Overlay District legislation will help to revitalize many areas in this district, by providing well-needed attention to so many

run-down properties that are simply not appealing to a would-be businessperson looking to start a new business or even an existing business that is looking to relocate.

The Overlay District is also critical to introducing housing alternatives so young people who cannot afford or may not desire to purchase a home can rent here.

No one can deny that our hamlets need help. The Overlay District Legislation is a great step forward!

Corrin Southwick
Owner, The Pub
Yorktown Heights

Putnam County Ignoring Mask Mandate is Senseless

Let's see if I have this straight: COVID positivity in Putnam County is up 49 percent, Carmel schools moved to remote learning on Dec. 17, professional sports teams have postponed games and Radio City has canceled the Christmas show but our county executive wants citizens to ignore a mask mandate?

Our own health commissioner says "... Both vaccination and mask wearing are needed to slow this COVID-19 winter surge." The governor's action is designed to keep us safe and stop another business shutdown. Responsible leaders need to encourage people to follow rules and to

look out for each other's health and safety. Instead of complaining that the governor didn't consult with each county executive, the elected leaders should consult with the local hospitals and health departments and get an accurate view on what is really happening.

I think it's about time we faced the fact that the virus is real and that we have to take real actions to reduce the risks. Encouraging people to ignore rules that they don't like solves nothing.

Kevin Carroll
Carmel

Strip Counties That Oppose Mask Mandates of Medicaid, Medicare Funds

As I see it, you break it, you own it. Putnam County (and any other county that refuses to enforce a governor's order relating to infectious disease) should not be eligible for any additional taxpayer funded COVID-19 rescue funds that may be distributed to local governments.

Putnam County should not be eligible for

any taxpayer-funded Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements for hospitalized COVID patients.

No one is above the law. And that includes laws relating to control of infectious disease.

Judith Sage
Mount Kisco



Obituaries

James O'Connell

Dr. James J. O'Connell, a longtime Pleasantville resident, passed away peacefully surrounded by family at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx on Dec. 12. He was 91.

Jim was born in Yonkers on Oct. 25, 1930, to Rita Keehan and James O'Connell and spent his early years in the Sacred Heart parish, where he met the love of his life, Catherine T. Lynn, in first grade. Jim and Kate were married for nearly 60 years prior to her death in May 2014. Together they raised six daughters, Catherine Hopkins (John), Rosita McNamara (Thomas), Bernadette Chiarlitti (Anthony), Maureen Leak (Kevin), Patricia Hoxsie (Ronald) and Jamie O'Connell (Ronald Jendzejec), all of whom survive him. He is also survived by 21 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his parents, his brother Bill and sister Rosita.

A graduate of Cardinal Hayes High School, Iona College (BBA) and Fordham University (MS, PhD), Jim served in Intelligence for the U.S. Army before launching his professional career as a teacher and track and field coach at Bergen Catholic High School. He moved to a 21-year tenure at Iona College where he served as career counselor, placement director and director of counseling until 1978.

A dedicated psychologist and career development specialist, Jim also served as the director of counseling at Pace University, senior vice president for Drake Beam Morin, Inc. and senior consultant for Spherion. He taught graduate courses at colleges and universities across the country, and was a frequent contributor to various publications and radio and television shows throughout his career.

Donald Ahrenberg

Donald Randall Ahrenberg was born on Feb. 25, 1956, in White Plains to Catherine Joan and Arnold B. Ahrenberg.

Don had his own food truck business known as DCL Foods and bartended locally for many years. He also had a long career at Blind Brook Middle School/High School from where he just recently retired.

Don passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by his family, on Dec. 15 at the

He also served as president for four major organizations and as a board member of three national professional organizations, including the Board of Governors of the College Placement Council.

Central to Jim's life was his Catholic faith, love of family and friends and service to others, particularly within the Holy Innocents community in Pleasantville. A licensed pilot, Jim also loved soaring through the sky, flying airplanes as a hobby and traveling the world with Kate. He was even fortunate enough to fly one last time in 2019 as a guest of the Hudson Valley Honor Flight's Mission #23.

If you couldn't spot Jim in the stadiums of the Summer Olympic Games he attended all over the globe, it was a guarantee you'd find him cheering on the Iona Gaels in cross country, track and basketball all around the U.S. He was also an avid gardener and spent many hours planting on the hilly terrain around his home, when not roaming the fairways of Pleasantville Country Club.

There wasn't a stranger Jim would meet with whom he wouldn't strike up a conversation, nor a holiday gathering or annual beach vacation he would pass up to let his sense of humor shine among the presence of his large family and friends.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held on Dec. 16 at Holy Innocents R.C. Church in Pleasantville, followed by interment at All Souls Cemetery in Pleasantville.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly requests donations be made to Calvary Hospital at 1740 Eastchester Rd., Bronx, N.Y. 10461 (www.calvaryhospital.org) or the Hudson Valley Honor Flight (<https://hvhonorflight.com/donate/>).

age of 65 after a four-month battle with a rare illness.

He is survived by his loving wife of 37 years, Jennifer; his three children, Donald (Jillian), Christopher (Michelle) and Laura; his four grandchildren; his parents; brother Doug (Sharon); sister Dawn (Seth); and many other nieces, nephews, family members and friends.

There was nothing more that he loved than being a grandfather ("Poppie") to his grandchildren, Hailey, Logan, Ryan and Peyton, who lit up his entire world.

Don was a lifelong fan of the Yankees and Jets and loved watching and playing golf. He loved music (especially Billy Joel) as well as sports and entertainment trivia. Don had a unique sense of style and was convinced duct tape could fix anything.

He will be forever in our hearts and deeply missed.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to be made to Maria Fareri Children's Hospital or the Kensico Little League.

John Valentine

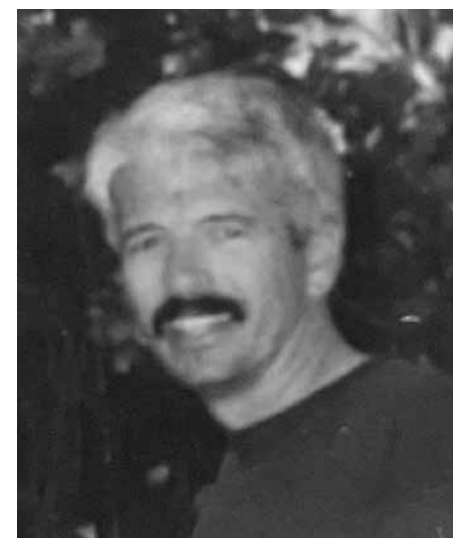
John J. Valentine, 67, of Lake Wylie, S.C. and formally of Pleasantville, passed away on Dec. 7 after a courageous battle with multiple sclerosis.

John was born May 3, 1954, in New York, N.Y. to Joan (Rice) Valentine and the late Joseph A. Valentine.

He was a graduate of Pleasantville High School, Class of 1972. John was proud to be a volunteer fireman at Daniel P. Hayes Hose and eventually became captain. He worked at Pleasantville Ford as parts manager for many years before moving to Connecticut.

John enjoyed family vacations in Lake George and Ocean City, N.J. Later, he and Annette spent winters in Venice, Fla. and enjoyed the warm weather.

Survivors include the love of his life, Annette Valentine; daughter Nicole Lowden (Keith) of Danbury, Conn.; son Ian Miles (Allison) of Lake Wylie, S.C.; mother Joan R. Valentine of Connecticut; sister Nora Donovan of Massachusetts; sister Nancy Sullivan (John) of New Jersey; sister Kathy Corcoran (Robert) of Connecticut; grandchildren Shane Miles, Vanessa Baran (Carter), Joshua Miles, Sophia Miles and Brianna Miles; great-



John Valentine

grandson Beckett Baran; five nieces, four great-nephews and many loving cousins whom he shared many family memories with growing up. He was also preceded in death by a brother-in-law, Michael Donovan.

Memorials may be made to a local National Multiple Sclerosis Society chapter or at www.nationalmssociety.org.

Anthony SanFilippo

Dr. J. Anthony ("Tony") SanFilippo of Chappaqua died peacefully on Dec. 15 at the age of 81.

He is survived by his sweetheart and loving wife of 56 years, Catherine (nee Cusimano); their two sons, Joseph (Mary Kate) and John (Maryann), both of Stamford, Conn.; and their five adored grandchildren, Anthony, Emma Rose, MaryGrace, Julia and Elizabeth.

Tony embraced life to the fullest each day, cherishing his family and friends. As a physician for over 55 years, his passion and lifelong devotion was always to his patients and their care.

Dr. SanFilippo was a graduate of Iona Prep, College of the Holy Cross ('61) and Georgetown University School of Medicine ('65). He did his pediatric surgical fellowship at Buffalo Children's Hospital and then served as a surgeon in the United States Navy where he reached the rank of commander.

Afterwards, Tony became one of the pioneer physicians recruited to develop the former Grasslands Hospital in Valhalla into a world class health care facility, which now includes Westchester Medical Center and Maria Fareri Children's Hospital.

During his career as a pediatric surgeon, Tony had particular expertise in surgeries of newborns, children and the adolescent, particularly with newborn anomalies, tumors and trauma. He was a professor of surgery at New York Medical College

and lectured at hospitals throughout the country and internationally including at the Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital in Rome and the Hospital Infantil Dr. Robert Reid Cabral Children's Hospital in Santa Domingo.

Dr. SanFilippo published numerous academic papers and served on several boards of trustees committed to long-term health care and pregnant women. Among the many organizations, Tony was a former Knight of Malta, past president of the Catholic Medical Association (<https://www.cathmed.org>), honored by the Children's Dream Foundation (<https://thecdf.org>) and was a member of the boards of Iona Prep and Malta House (<https://www.maltahouse.org>).

The family received family and friends on Dec. 20 at Beecher Flocks Funeral Home in Pleasantville. A Mass of Christian Burial was scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 21 at 11 a.m. at The Church of Saint John and Saint Mary, 30 Poillon Drive in Chappaqua. Entombment was to follow at Gate of Heaven Cemetery, 10 W. Stevens Ave. in Valhalla.

In remembrance of his life and commitment for the best health care for children, the family asks that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in memory of Tony to the Maria Fareri Children's Hospital, 100 Woods Rd., Valhalla, N.Y. 10595 (<https://cloud.wmhealthcommunity.com/support-mfch>).



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Annual Polar Plunge Returns on New Year's Day in Peekskill

By Rick Pezzullo

The annual Polar Plunge benefitting the This is Me Foundation is slated to return New Year's Day at the Peekskill Riverfront Green after a one-year absence.

The This Is Me Foundation, founded by Peekskill residents and sisters Caitlin and Lauren Brady in 2011, raises awareness about alopecia areata, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss, while giving hope to any individual who faces adversity.

After watching Miss Delaware 2010, Kayla Martell, take her wig off and explain that she would compete in the 2011 Miss America pageant wearing a wig, as she too had alopecia, the Brady sisters decided they needed to do something to inspire others just as Martell had done for them.

Three weeks later, on Feb. 12, 2011, This Is Me was born as a two-and-a-half-minute YouTube PSA. The video was created to not only raise awareness about alopecia, but to try and inspire others who are facing challenges.

All proceeds go directly to the This Is Me Scholarship Fund, Inspired by Ryan Risco and Cait Chivonne Polhill. The fund has awarded 89 \$500 scholarships since 2012 to local students who have faced adversity or helped a friend overcome hardship, as well

as national scholarships to students who have alopecia.

This year's event kicks off at noon on Jan. 1 and is open to the public to watch and cheer on the brave plungers. Anyone interested in plunging or donating can visit <http://www.newyearspolarplunge.com>.

Plungers are required to register in advance by Dec. 30 to participate.

The first Polar Plunge, where participants strip down to their bathing suits and run into the frigid waters of the Hudson River, on Jan. 1, 2013, attracted 11 brave souls and raised \$2,400. In 2018, a record-setting 80 participants raised more than \$13,500.

For more information, or to learn more about the This Is Me Foundation and the This is Me Scholarship Fund, visit the foundation's website at <http://www.thisismefoundation.com> or Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/ThisIsMeFoundation>.

Polar Plunge in Yorktown

On Saturday, Jan. 8, the Friends of Yorktown Parks & Recreation will be holding its first Polar Bear Plunge and Silent Auction at Sparkle Lake. The event will benefit the Friends' general fund and enable the establishment of various subcommittees to target parks and recreation activities that have a high impact



Dozens of brave souls will head to the Hudson River shoreline in Peekskill on New Year's Day to take part in the Polar Plunge. The event raises money for the This is Me Foundation, which awards scholarships to local students and raises awareness about alopecia areata.

on the health and wellness of residents.

Festivities will begin at 9 a.m. with a continental breakfast, with the Polar Bear

Plunge at 10 a.m. Following the Plunge, winners of the silent auction, 50/50 raffle and door prizes will be announced.

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Police Blotter

County Police/Mount Kisco

Dec. 12: A resident arrived at the Green Street precinct to report that he had been a victim of fraud after someone withdrew \$5,300 from his checking account using an altered check. The man said his bank advised him to file a police report while it investigates the matter.

Dec. 13: Report of a man in need of assistance at a North Bedford Road medical office at 11:21 a.m. The subject reported feeling depressed and hearing voices. He agreed to go to Northern Westchester Hospital for care and was transported there by the Mount Kisco Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

Dec. 13: Store security at Target on North Bedford Road reported a shoplifting incident at 1:05 p.m. Responding officers detained a woman as she attempted to leave the parking lot in a mini bus and arrested her after additional investigation. Sheyenne Dixon, 21, of Highland Avenue in Yonkers, was charged with petty larceny and fourth-degree criminal possession of a weapon, both misdemeanors. She is accused of leaving the store without paying for \$308 in merchandise and having a pair of

metal knuckles in her possession. She was booked at the Green Street precinct and released pending a Jan. 20 appearance in Mount Kisco Justice Court.

Dec. 14: Police responded to the 400 block of Lexington Avenue at 2:15 a.m. when a taxi driver reported that an intoxicated man had gotten sick in his cab and was refusing to get out at his destination. After officers arrived, the man complied without incident, paid the fare plus a cleanup fee, and was escorted home by a friend.

Dec. 17: An officer responded to North Bedford Road near Boston Market after a caller reported that a woman carrying a large stuffed animal appeared unsteady on her feet and almost walked into traffic. The officer canvassed the area but found no one fitting that description.

Croton-on-Hudson Police Department

Dec. 10: Units responded to the area of Harrison and Grand streets at 11 p.m. on a report of shots fired. There were no injuries reported. The incident remains under investigation. Anyone with information regarding the incident is asked to contact the Croton

Police Department Detective Division at 914-271-5177.

North Castle Police Department

Dec. 10: A woman arrived at headquarters at 8:14 a.m. to report that her vehicle was stolen out of her driveway on Miller Circle.

Dec. 12: A caller reported at 3:40 a.m. that two unknown persons are attempting to enter his residence on North Broadway. The responding officers reported that the involved subject is intoxicated and unsure of where he resides, and the second subject is a second-floor tenant at location who was attempting to assist the intoxicated subject. An ambulance was requested for the intoxicated subject. A mutual aid ambulance from Hawthorne Fire Department responded and transported the intoxicated subject to Westchester Medical Center.

Pleasantville Police Department

Dec. 16: An officer pulled over a vehicle at 8:16 a.m. whose driver, a 28-year-old man, was operating the car without a license and had it suspended previously.

He also has ignored numerous tickets in the past and the vehicle was unregistered. The man was arrested and released without bail.

State Police/Cortlandt



State police released this image of the person suspected of stealing the identity of a Cortlandt resident and \$800 from the victim through an ATM withdrawal. Anyone who recognizes this individual can call 845-769-2600.

Dec. 15: Police are seeking the public's assistance identifying a man suspected of stealing the identity of and approximately \$800 from a victim in Cortlandt.

On Nov. 27, a subject utilized stolen financial information from the victim and stole about \$800 at a Walgreens Pharmacy ATM on Sunrise Highway in the Town of Islip, Suffolk County. Anyone with information regarding the identity or location of this individual, contact the state police at 845-769-2600 and refer to case #10571377.

Yorktown Police Department

Dec. 16: Harold Montas, 33, of the Bronx, was charged at 2:01 a.m. with driving while intoxicated following an accident in the area of Old Yorktown Road and Union Road.

Dec. 16: Arber Gashi, 24, of Yorktown, surrendered to police and was charged at 5:37 p.m. with reckless driving, criminal mischief and assault in connection with a two-car crash on June 18 on Crompond Road, just west of the Bear Mountain Parkway. Following an investigation, it is alleged Gashi operated his vehicle in a reckless manner and caused serious injury to the operator of the other vehicle. He also was speeding and driving without wearing a seatbelt.

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High-Flying High School Senior Earns Top Civil Air Patrol Award

By Abby Luby

When Grant Becker was 13, he sat in the co-pilot's seat of a small Cessna 172 plane that was taking off at Westchester County Airport.

At an altitude of 1,000 feet, he was allowed to take control and do basic maneuvers.

"I loved it," he said, recalling the flight that marked the first leg of his pilot training.

A member of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) since 2016, Becker, a Pleasantville High School senior, just earned his private pilot's certificate through the Civil Air Patrol's Cadet Wings program, which provides cadet scholarships funded by the United States Air Force to cover the cost of flight training.

When Becker initially received his private pilot's license, he said he took his mother for a ride in one of the flight school planes.

"She really liked it a lot," he said.

Becker was recently awarded CAP's highest cadet achievement, the Carl A. Spaatz Award, a prestigious honor for cadets who have worked for five years to complete 16 required achievements in the Cadet Program. He has served as his squadron's cadet commander and graduated from Region Cadet Leadership School, a school that specializes not only in leadership training but offers officer training courses as well.

Becker's list of accolades also includes graduating from the Hawk Mountain Ranger School, a search-and-rescue training facility operated by Pennsylvania's Civil Air Patrol, and completing the field medic course, a one-week program for future combat medics.

The local CAP is based at Westchester County Airport, and there is occasional squadron training at Camp Smith.

During the summer Becker said he had basic training at Stratton, the National Guard based near Scotia, N.Y. and has trained privately at a local flight school at the airport.

Becker is currently an emergency medical technician and volunteers with the Pleasantville Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

Innovation and construction played a big part in Becker's childhood. At 10 years old, Becker was one of 13 finalists, out of thousands of applicants, in the 2014 Grow Your Own Business challenge, flying out to Omaha, where he met Warren Buffett.

"My grandpa and I fabricated the wheelchair bike together," Becker recalled. "One of my classmates was in a wheelchair and since I enjoy riding a mountain bike, I thought why shouldn't my classmate with a disability be able to do that? I showed the bike to Warren Buffett."

For 80 years, the Civil Air Patrol has been the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force. Becker said he always wanted to pursue service and hasn't ruled out entering the military. Since he was 12, Becker said he



Pleasantville High School senior Grant Becker, a Civil Air Patrol cadet, was recently awarded the highest cadet achievement, the Carl A. Spaatz Award. The award is a prestigious honor for cadets who have worked for five years to complete 16 required achievements in the CAP Cadet Program.

has dreamed of going to the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

To be accepted to the academy, Becker needed to be nominated by his congressional representative. Just a few weeks ago, Becker was notified that Rep. Mondaire Jones had officially nominated him.

"That means there is a slot at the academy for me," said Becker. "It's like a conditional acceptance."

As a future enrollee at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Becker said he will probably take undergraduate courses towards a Bachelor's Degree in science and then apply to medical school.

"My hope is to pursue a medical degree as a flight surgeon with a flying squadron," he said. "They have a few different paths to go down in terms of medical school that leads to the air force or the military in general."

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Carmel Students Give the Gift of Healthy Holidays

In the spirit of giving this year, Kent Elementary School fourth-grade students used Giving Tuesday as a day to give back and support those in need in the local community with an in-class volunteer opportunity.

Through a project idea from Volunteer New York, the students in the classes of Cathleen Rossetti, Carrie Cioffi, Kristin Mordecki and Chris Livulpi assembled individual hygiene kits that included a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner and body wash, along with a hand-drawn card from a student.

Putnam Community Action Partnership

(CAP), an anti-poverty group dedicated to helping those who are struggling in the community, will distribute the kits this year.

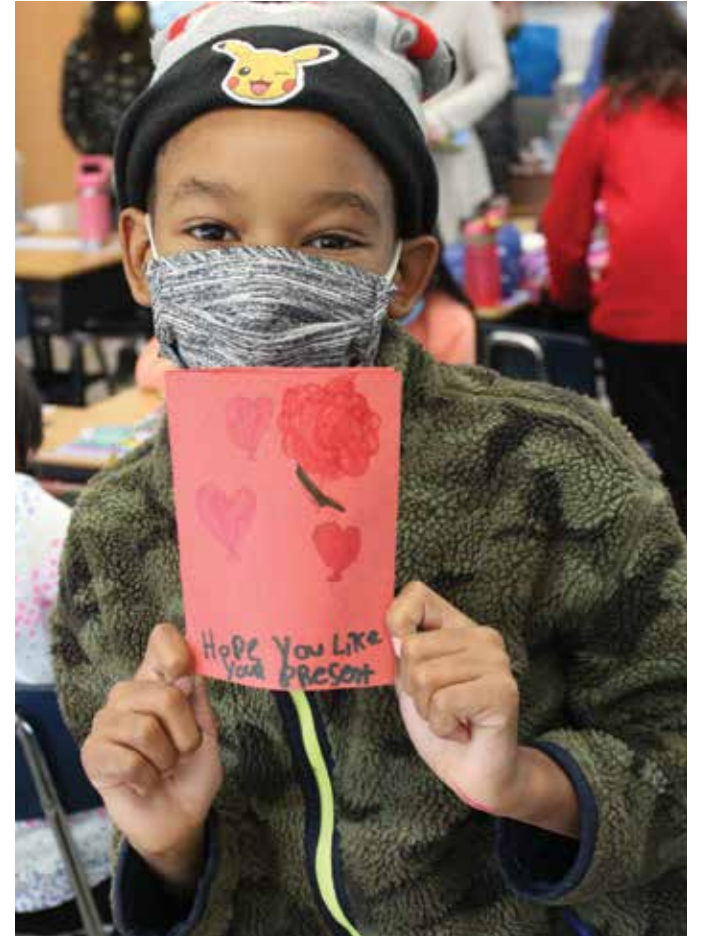
"We are working on cards to put in bags to send shampoo and conditioner to a shelter so whenever someone needs something the shelter can give it to them," said student Natasha Portillo, who drew a smiley face, balloons and a flower on her card. "It's important to give back because if some people need these things, they can get it for free."

Cards from the students included a variety of positive sentiments, such as

"keep going, you are awesome," "you are special in a perfect way," and even "soar like an eagle and stay strong."

The purpose of the cards: "To make them feel good and maybe if they are having a bad day, it might cheer them up," said student Tyrieke Hall.

The students created 65 total hygiene kits for the Putnam CAP and showed a great deal of compassion for others this holiday season.



One of the 65 fourth-graders at Kent Elementary School who assembled individual hygiene kits that will be distributed to people in the community who are struggling to make ends meet.

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Taking Steps to Avoid – or Embrace – Steps

I can't remember the last time I climbed a flight of stairs.

For the past five years, I've been happily ensconced in a one-level home at Trump Park and, yes, I probably haven't climbed a flight of stairs during all that time. My generous waistline would attest to that.

Prior to that I was climbing and descending stairs all the time, living in an 18th century home where every day I would climb two flights from my home office to the attic for supplies or down to the basement to attend to a temperamental boiler and water heater.

Some people seek to avoid stairs in their housing choices, especially older citizens, preferring one-level living, while others insist on having sleeping quarters on a second level. The reasons for either preference can be quite different.

When I was very young, maybe five or six years old, I had a recurring dream of tumbling down an endless flight of steps, but they were of a rubbery consistency and I just bounced like a ball the entire way. Maybe my subconscious had absorbed the story my mother had told me about how as a toddler I miraculously survived a fall down the steps to a concrete basement floor.

The experience never dampened my enthusiasm for a beautiful staircase from the time I discovered that I could enjoy a bumpy ride down the bare wooden steps from our

second floor.

When we moved from a two-story row home in Philadelphia to a ranch-style home in the South, I remember, even as an eight-year-old, that it seemed strange that when it came time to climb to my weary trundle bed, there were no steps to climb. It just didn't feel right that I was sleeping on the same floor where I ate and played. From my experience in real estate, I've found that many people feel the same way.

Let's face it, steps are a necessity in most housing situations. While it may be easier to build a one-story house, it makes more sense economically to have two stories

rise above one foundation and tucked in under one roof. Then, there is the argument for the raised ranch, which is basically two stories using a split staircase. The split-level also involves steps, but not in one long run.

While early in my real estate career, I thought that only senior homebuyers would have a preference for avoiding steps, I found many young buyers with the same avoidance issue because they had young children and were afraid either of children falling or being too far removed if the master bedroom was on the first floor.

For older buyers who prefer homes without steps, many have mobility issues. The need for level floors is inarguable. But assuming one must live with stairs, is there any benefit to



having them?

A set of stairs in the middle of the home might be an annoyance for people who aren't used to them, but I have lived with them for most of my life. There were times in New York City when I have lived in four- and five-floor walk-ups. In the country, I've lived in a two-story home with laundry and storage in the basement. I've looked at the stairs as part of my exercise routine. In fact, the workout that comes from regular stair climbing may help to keep us young.

As a case in point, I think of my mother-in-law. My wife was initially relieved when her parents, upon retiring to Hyannis, Mass., selected a single-story bungalow to live in. Her relief turned to irritation, however, on the first visit. The house was indeed a single story

– with a basement. This dim lower level was deeper than the first story of the house was high, with a steep set of rough-sawn wooden steps leading straight down into it. My petite mother-in-law flew up and down those stairs several times a day.

With every visit my wife would try to firmly make some suggestion to her mother that she not use the basement so often. But then she would run off again, carrying down laundry, bringing up line-dried linens, putting food into storage or bringing up the good dishes for the many parties she hosted. It drove my wife crazy, but her mother lived to be nearly 92, and she was able to keep using the stairs until her last few years.

Even without the involuntary exercise stairs give us, they also benefit homeowners in other ways, whether by helping shape the design of a home or a patio into a hilly property, offering a means to build on a smaller parcel of land or helping keep the bedrooms away from the sounds – and kitchen smells – of the first floor.

There is a George Gershwin song called "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise." Notice that he didn't say he'd get there by just strolling across to it on the same level or taking an elevator.

Bill Primavera is a realtor associated with William Raveis Real Estate and founder of Primavera Public Relations, Inc., the longest running public relations agency in Westchester (www.PrimaveraPR.com). To engage the services of The Home Guru to market your home for sale, call 914-522-2076.



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Harckham Announces State Grant for New Castle Park Renovation

State Sen. Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro) announced this week that he was able to secure \$100,000 in state grant funding for renovations and improvements to the popular soccer fields at Amsterdam Park, located on Hoags Cross Road in the Town of New Castle.

"Parks and recreation areas are so important for residents' well-being, especially as people look to be outdoors more, and that means maintaining the infrastructure is a must for these well-used grounds and facilities," Harckham said. "The upgrades coming to the soccer fields at Amsterdam Park will benefit community members in so many ways, and I'm pleased to have been able to partner with town officials in getting improvements at the park underway."

Harckham made his surprise holiday announcement during the Town Board's Dec. 14 meeting.

Amsterdam Park is home to two of the Town of New Castle's three soccer fields. The fields serve as practice and home fields for the youth soccer program, which serves over 400 children between the ages of 8 and 14, and also for a smaller lacrosse program of about 40 10- and 11-year-old players.

Because of heavy regular use of the fields throughout the year, the turf has suffered to the extent that one of the fields at Amsterdam Park was deemed unusable and needed to be closed off for athletic use after a child tripped on an exposed sprinkler head during a soccer match and was injured.

The town plans to use the state grant funding to completely renovate the damaged playing field at Amsterdam Park. The field will be skinned and graded and fresh topsoil will be installed to completely conceal the recessed sprinkler heads and allow proper drainage. Sod will then be installed and allowed to set, so that the field will be playable by late spring.

The awarded grant funding was secured within the State and Municipal Facilities Program (SAM), which is among the grant programs administered by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) to support community and economic development.

"New Castle's soccer fields at Amsterdam Park are in desperate need of repair," said Supervisor Lisa Katz. "Thanks to Sen. Harckham and this generous SAM grant, the town will be able to repair and renovate these heavily utilized fields so that our

youth soccer players and summer camp participants will have safe fields on which to play. It is always wonderful to see the state enabling important infrastructure improvements in our community."

"Sen. Harckham has always gone to bat for New Castle, both for our parks system and for the greater good," said Councilman Jeremy Saland. "The facilities at Amsterdam Park are a big asset to our town, and maintaining the fields in their best condition benefits all of our residents."

State Sen. Peter Harckham, center, with New Castle Town Board members, left to right, Lori Morton, Supervisor Lisa Katz, Lauren Levin and Jeremy Saland.



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Families Should Be Mindful of Alzheimer's Warning Signs

Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic caused many families to celebrate the holidays remotely because of public health concerns.

As we return to more in-person celebrations this year, cognitive or memory changes in an elderly loved one may be alarming and concerning.

Visiting aging loved ones after being apart for so long might lead to the realization of changes in behavior, physical health and new expressions of memory loss or cognitive decline. When starting to notice these changes, there can be a variety of responses and moments of uncertainty. Denial that anything unusual is happening can be tempting, and families often don't know where to turn.

As our loved ones age, we often attribute memory loss to a normal part of aging, although some behaviors or signs of cognitive decline may result from something more severe.

"Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. It is a progressive disease, in which the symptoms gradually worsen over time," said Meg Boyce, vice president for programs and services at the Alzheimer's Association Hudson Valley Chapter. "Ignoring signs of cognitive impairment out of fear or denial can lead to greater heartache and the possible worsening of the situation."

The Alzheimer's Association Hudson Valley Chapter encourages families to keep the 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's in mind:

- Memory changes that disrupt daily life, such as forgetting important events.

- Challenges in planning or solving problems, such as keeping track of monthly bills.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks, such as driving to routine places.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing.
- Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps, such as putting keys in the freezer.
- Decreased or poor judgment, such as giving large sums of money to telemarketers.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities and forgetting how to work on a favorite hobby.
- Changes in mood and personality, such as becoming angry or fearful for seemingly no reason.

"The holidays revolve around traditions, so if you are seeing someone struggling with a familiar task, it's important to reach out to their health care providers," Boyce said. "Early diagnosis is crucial, as it gives the person living with the disease and their family more time to plan for the future, as well as the opportunity to take advantage of some drugs that can help manage symptoms in the early stage."

The Alzheimer's Association typically sees the number of calls to its 24-hour Helpline (800-272-3900) increase during and after the holidays when people visiting with friends

and family whom they haven't seen in a while become aware that something is different. The helpline is an ideal place to find answers and resources for additional assistance.

"Helpline calls often lead to local referrals to our chapter for additional resources, such as free education programs and personalized family care consultations," Boyce said.

The Alzheimer's Association Hudson Valley Chapter serves families living with dementia in seven counties in New York, including Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester. To learn more about the programs and services offered locally, visit alz.org/hudsonvalley.

What a Victory!



Team Walk to Victory raised \$76,345 for the 2021 Westchester Walk to End Alzheimer's in October, the most its members have ever raised for the organization and a record-breaking amount for a family team. A majority of the money was raised at the team's sixth annual Alzheimer's Luncheon and Card Party: "Take Me to Provence!" that was held at Brae Burn County Club on Oct. 14. This year's event featured a theme of cards and luncheon tables outside, as well as raffles and 14 vendors.

THERE'S A WORD FOR IT

A vocabulary-building quiz By Edward Goralski

Dickens of a Time. Charles Dickens is best known at this time of year as the author of "A Christmas Carol." But, "the man who invented Christmas" also penned other pieces that capture the holiday spirit. "Christmas with Charles Dickens," a new collection of seasonal stories, is the source for the quiz words this week. And to all, happy holidays!

1. **impudent (adj.)**

A) not showing respect

B) improvised

C) acting momentarily
2. **privation (n.)**

A) a place of seclusion

B) hardship

C) private knowledge
3. **wend (v)**

A) to diminish by use

B) escape an obligation

C) meander
4. **impalpable (adj.)**

A) not easily appeased

B) not believable

C) not easily comprehended
5. **consequent (adj.)**

A) ensuing

B) of the same nature

C) careful
6. **ennoble (v.)**

A) to participate heartily

B) make something better

C) set forth
7. **cross-grained (adj.)**

A) not glorious

B) unsatisfactory

C) stubbornly contrary
8. **wormwood (n.)**

A) an object of pity

B) a source of bitterness

C) a cause of worry

- ANSWERS:
1. A. Not showing due respect for another person; impudent
2. B. A lack of the basic things that are necessary for an acceptable standard of living; poverty; hardship
3. C. To move slowly and not directly; meander; wander
4. C. Not easily comprehended
5. A. Following as a result or effect; resulting; ensuing
6. B. To make something or someone better so that people admire it, him, or her more
7. C. Stubbornly contrary or bad tempered
8. B. A state or source of bitterness or grief.

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Westchester County, WCC Partner on Manufacturing Training Effort

As part of the county's commitment to growing the local advanced manufacturing industry and ensuring companies have access to qualified local talent, the Westchester County Office of Economic Development and Westchester Community College (WCC) are pleased to announce a career training program for advanced manufacturing.

The program assists individuals with little or no prior manufacturing experience on the path to a highly skilled, well-paying and in-demand career.

"Westchester County is home to a diverse advanced manufacturing industry which makes a tremendous impact on our local economy," said County Executive George Latimer. "This program will help to equip the next generation of employees with valuable skills and ensure our businesses have access to the talent they need locally."

Beginning a career in advanced manufacturing does not require a college degree. WCC's program lets participants earn a certification at their own pace and provides education and mentorship. Participants will learn skills to create products using computers, robotics, 3D printing and more, as well as master the basics of safety, quality, manufacturing processes and green production.

The program will also offer opportunities to see first-hand how things work inside some of Westchester's advanced manufacturing firms. Upon completion, participants will hold a Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) CPT 4.0 Certification.

"WCC has been experiencing a surge in enrollment by those who have chosen to upskill and pursue job training in fields that are, and will be, drivers of our economic re-

emergence," said its President Dr. Belinda Miles. "A WCC education serves as a catalyst, preparing our students with the skills and certifications they require to move up the socioeconomic ladder and provide for themselves and their families. This program illustrates how WCC partners with local industries to identify future workforce needs and then prepare workers to fill those critical roles."

Of note, the National Association of Manufacturers' nonprofit and workforce development partner, The Manufacturing Institute, projects there will be 2.4 million unfilled jobs across the manufacturing industry by 2028. And the Office of Advanced Manufacturing with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, an agency reporting to the U.S. Department of Commerce, recently noted that roughly 75

percent of manufacturing jobs don't require a four-year college degree.

"The demand for qualified employees in advanced manufacturing is growing," said Bridget Gibbons, the county's director of economic development. "This program is a great way for people to learn about the opportunities that exist in the industry and become the candidate that many companies are looking for. I encourage anyone who likes technology, is curious about the way products are manufactured and is looking to start their next chapter of work to apply for this program."

Those who are interested can visit WestchesterCatalyst.com/SignMeUp to be notified when the enrollment period opens. The Westchester County Office of Economic Development will loan laptops to participants who need them at no cost.

PNW BOCES Official Named Communicator of the Year

Ellen Lane, the communications director at Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES, has been named the 2021 Communicator of the Year by the New York School Public Relations Association.

The award recognizes a school communications professional who has been a leader in strengthening relationships between public schools and the students, families and communities they serve. A panel of out-of-state communications experts chooses the honoree.

Since her arrival at BOCES in 2010, Lane, who oversees a team of 18, has embraced and pioneered 21st century communications tools, bringing mobile apps, digital communications, live-stream captioning and live production video to BOCES and the districts it serves. She has also broadened the scope of the service turning it into a one-stop shop for all of a school district's communications needs.

"Ellen is like the 'MacGyver' of communications. Whatever is needed, Ellen will make it happen," said former superintendent Valerie Henning-Piedmonte, who worked with Lane in the Brewster Central School District and Hastings-on-Hudson Union Free School District. "As a bonus, my own knowledge and understanding about communications was enriched by working with Ellen."

Lane arrived at a time when school districts were feeling the effects of the 2008 recession and money was tight. She began by offering free workshops for school leaders with titles such as "How to Communicate on a Shoestring." Lane met school districts at their level, built relationships and then respectfully led the way to improved communications.

She found economical and effective ways to raise a district's profile and community engagement, but also demonstrated best practices that gave district leaders something to which they could aspire.

"It's important to be confident in your expertise and the importance of your role," Lane said of what it takes to be a successful communications director. "School communications professionals should not write curriculum and educators



Ellen Lane, the communications director at Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES, was recently recognized as the state's top school communications professional.

should not write press releases. Be respectful but firm when giving public relations advice."

Lane has worked diligently over the

years to assemble a strong team with deep, broad expertise.

"She has been an inspiration and a mentor," said Laura Belfiore,

communications director in the Peekskill City School District, in her letter of support of the nomination.

In addition to her colleagues, several area school district superintendents and public relations professionals submitted letters on Lane's behalf. Hendrick Hudson Central School District Superintendent Joseph Hochreiter commended Lane for her ability to lead the communications function.

"I can count on Ellen and the service to ensure that our district follows best practices for school public relations and uses the latest tools to reach our stakeholders," Hochreiter said. "Her demeanor, confidence and resilience has played a large role in my professional success and the increasingly positive reputation of our school district."

"I was touched and delighted to receive this award because I have so much respect for my peers and the great work they are doing all across New York," Lane said.

The New York School Public Relations Association is a nonprofit membership organization that serves school communications professionals and administrators in New York State. For more information, visit www.nyspra.org.

P'ville Farmers Market Closed Next Two Saturdays

The Pleasantville Farmers Market, which is held outside at Memorial Plaza year-round, will be closed the next two Saturdays, Dec. 25 and Jan. 1. The winter market will resume Jan. 8 and remain open on Saturdays through Mar. 26 from 9 to 11:30 a.m.

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My Favorite Culinary Encounters of 2021

As dining rooms across the region began to reopen earlier this year, I enjoyed many fine culinary experiences. Here is a short list of favorite dishes and dining venues you should not miss in 2022! Of course, take-out is a good option, too.

Fogo de Chao

After a major renovation to the landmark Bank of New York building on Main and Church streets in downtown White Plains, Fogo de Chao, a Brazilian steakhouse chain with 40 restaurants across the U.S., Middle East, Brazil and Mexico, premiered in this sprawling space with its churrascaria BBQ. It is a sparkling spot for drinks, giant market table salad bar and waves of fire-roasted meats served on skewers in the churrasco style. If you've never experienced this type of dining concept, make sure you bring a hearty appetite.

Additions to the traditional meat offerings include a fresh daily seafood selection, a variety of fresh-made salads and a dramatic bar and lounge where it's Happy Hour all day, every day. There is a bar menu and a butcher shop for take-home.

Fogo de Chao is located at 235 Main St. in White Plains. Info: www.fogodechao.com.

Maria

A two-time winner of Michelin's prestigious Bib Gourmet Award, brothers Peter and Giovanni Cucullo have been causing a stir in New Rochelle, drawing patronage from all over the county to their flavorful riff on Italian-global cooking.

Named after their mother, Maria has become almost a regular haunt for me. Love their Happy Hours from 3 to 7 p.m. when they offer some favorite beverages and small plates that are loaded with flavor. I am hooked on such eclectic dishes as glazed pork ribs, truffled green beans, grilled sausage with sweet and spicy Peruvian peppers, Mom's meatballs, cauliflower fritters and roasted shishito peppers. Special mention must go to their tender baby lamb chops.

The family also operates the bustling Fratelli's Pizza & Pasta and Pop's Espresso Bar on the same block.

Maria is located at 11 Huguenot St. in New Rochelle. Take-out and delivery. Closed Sundays. Info: 914-636-0006 or visit www.marianewrochelle.com.

Trattoria Vivolo

Seasonal baccala, also referred to as salt cod, is a traditional staple in many ethnic kitchens, especially during the holiday season. Chef and owner Dean Vivolo prepares several versions, and one of my favorites is baccala salad. Vivolo prepares it fried or in a stew with potatoes.

His Paglia e Fieno con Funghi, was also incredibly flavorful with its mix of mushroom ragu, scallions, crispy prosciutto and pecorino cheese. We enjoy it with a side of tender broccoli rabe.

Vivolo and his friendly staff are on top of their game. His robust regional Italian cuisine is served out of a restored diner just across from Harrison's Metro-North station. Sit at the counter, tuck into a booth or take a table in the rear greenhouse and enjoy the surprising contemporary and traditional



By Morris Gut

flavors: tasty thin-crust pizza; old-fashioned meatballs and sausage; rabbit cacciatore; crostino di polenta topped with wild mushrooms, gorgonzola and tomato sauce; lasagna Bolognese al forno; and osso buco (tender braised veal shank).

There's a good wine list and sparkling lights in the evening. Open seven days. Free parking.

Trattoria Vivolo is located at 301 Halstead Ave. in Harrison. Info: 914-835-6199 or visit www.trattoriavivolo.com.

Macelleria Italian Steakhouse

This high-end Italian steakhouse with locations in Pelham and Armonk just premiered a third location in Greenwich offering classic cuts of prime beef and chops along with a hearty helping of Italian-American specialties. Tony Lala and his crew will take good care of you.

Be seated in the handsome dining room with its warming stone hearth or bar and lounge and peruse the menu over a glass of wine. Enjoy diver scallops, steak tartare, slabs of Canadian bacon, spaghetti carbonara, pappardelle with short rib ragu, zuppa di pesce and even a classic burger. Carnivores should consider the lamb chops, veal chop, New York strip steak or porterhouse for two. Open seven days for lunch and dinner.

Macelleria is located at 111 Bedford Rd. in Armonk. Info: 914-219-5728.

Freebird Kitchen and Bar

During my visits we have devoured fried calamari, meaty racks of baby back ribs, Cobb salad, spicy chicken wings, crispy Brussels sprouts, shrimp and grits and braised short ribs, too. The cooking here is very satisfying and all done with a friendly Southern theme. Portions are ample and shareable.

The lighting and those artsy birds hanging from the ceiling in the dining room give it a magical atmosphere. There is a seasonal rooftop, Sunday night jam sessions and a sprawling bar. Craft beers. Happy hours are Tuesday to Thursday 4 to 6 p.m. and Friday 2 to 6 p.m.

Freebird is located at 161 Mamaroneck Ave. in White Plains. Open Tuesday through Sunday for lunch, dinner and weekend brunch. Info: 914-607-2476 or visit www.freebirdkitchenandbar.com.

Alex's Bar & Grille

Proprietor Alex Ahmetaj updated the menu at his restaurant offering big cuts of aged steaks and chops along with generously served Northern Italian/Continental fare. The handsome dining room is split into cozy sections with white tablecloths and colorful de Villeneuve impressionist paintings. Mediterranean clay-colored banquets and chairs complement wooden walls and plush beige curtains.

Out of Chef Nick Deimant's kitchen come the pan-fried calamari with hot cherry peppers; linguini alla vongole; classic veal parmigiana; grilled filet mignon; New York sirloin steak; a hefty rib-eye; or pork chops. The house-made smooth ricotta cheesecake is top notch, as are the cannoli.

Alex's Bar & Grille is located at 577 N. Broadway in North White Plains. Info: 914-



You can have delicious cannoli for dessert at Alex's Bar & Grille in North White Plains.

358-1444 or visit www.alexsbareandgrille.com.

MP Taverna

Celebrity chef Michael Psilakis brought his Mediterranean culinary magic to Westchester almost a decade ago. He is an award-winning innovator, having enhanced our knowledge of modern Greek-inspired cuisine through his restaurants, cookbooks and television appearances. Psilakis was there on our visits tending to tables and chatting with guests. We preferred the handsome main dining room.

Share a platter of his superb grilled octopus served with an herbal chickpea salad and Greek yogurt. For main courses, there's an eight-ounce lamb burger served with spicy whipped feta and a stuffed falafel souvlaki wrapped in fresh pita with tzatziki, onion, tomato, romaine and bell pepper. Both dishes come with sides of signature smashed potatoes. Portions are generous.

MP Taverna is located at 1 Bridge St. in Irvington next to the Metro-North station. Open daily. Free parking. Info: 914-231-7854 or visit www.mptaverna.com.

Gusto Pizza

David Masliah and chef Erwen Perez of Encore have opened an artisanal pizza shop next to their popular bistro in Larchmont. One taste of their pies and your palate will fly off to foodie heaven.

The imported wood-burning pizza oven is named Victor, after Masliah's father, who was a pizzaiolo in France for many years. Have wines by the glass, appetizers, salads and delicious individual pizzas such as the Margherita (tomato, fresh mozzarella, fresh basil) or the Pancetta (tomato, pancetta, crème fraiche, onion, and mozzarella).

Enjoy the cozy and colorful setting. Open seven days for lunch and dinner.

Gusto Pizza is located at 18 Chatsworth Ave. in Larchmont. Info: 914-881-3466 or visit www.gustopizzany.com.

Jack's Bar & Restaurant

Marking their first year, Jack's is the new kid on the block – and a darn good one. Owner Shane Clifford and his staff have been drawing a fine crowd. The space has been



The mouth-watering tender baby lamb chops at Maria in New Rochelle.



Gusto Pizza's counter and wood-burning oven where visitors can enjoy a wide variety of artisanal pizzas.

remodeled and offers an enhanced Irish-American tavern menu on steroids.

Generous specialties coming out of Chef Brendan Donohoe's kitchen include a refreshing harvest green salad; a double-stacked smash burger; decadent short rib mac 'n' cheese; Jack's meatballs; seared scallops; chicken curry; 'shroom pizza out of their wood-fired oven; the Berkshire pork chop; and grilled lamb sliders. The staff could not be more friendly.

Open daily. Indoor and outdoor seating. TVs. Municipal parking is free in the evenings.

Jack's Bar & Restaurant is located at 219 Main St. in Eastchester. Info: 914-652-7650 or visit www.jackseastchester.com.

Follow current COVID-19 protocols and stay safe!

Morris Gut is a restaurant marketing consultant and former restaurant trade magazine editor. He has been tracking and writing about the food and dining scene in greater Westchester for 30 years. He may be reached at 914-235-6591 or gutreaactions@optonline.net.



Putnam Chorale Performs Holiday Concerts Before Sold-Out Crowds

On Dec. 3 and Dec. 5, the Putnam Chorale, the sole community chorus in Putnam County performed the complete Messiah before sold-out audiences at St. Luke & St. Andrew Episcopal Church in Beacon and the First United Methodist Church in Brewster.

Under the artistic direction of composer and Conductor Dr. Douglas Anderson, a chorus of 46 singers and soloists Lianne Gennaco, Helen Fanelli, David Gordon and Fred Redd, accompanied by a 14-piece orchestra, joyfully sang the entire 54-section version of one of the best-known and most frequently performed choral works in the history of Western music.

The Messiah, composed by Handel in

1741, based on a text compiled by Charles Jenner from Old Testament Psalms and New Testament Gospel, spans the prophecy of Christmas, the Crucifixion and Resurrection and features the famous "Hallelujah" chorus.

Audiences at both concerts couldn't contain their enthusiasm, showering the performers with standing ovations and shouts of Bravo!

The Putnam Chorale has been entertaining and educating Putnam and Dutchess County audiences continuously since 1984. Two major concerts in December and April of each year, plus a rotating program of community events offering open summer sings, ensemble

performances at various local living centers and historic sites, a Christmas program at Boscobel and Walter Brewster House and the America Through Song Summer lawn concerts, offer local singers of all experience levels the opportunity to enrich their lives through music and provides the community with compelling, unrivaled performances not available outside major city venues. There is also the fascinating education about the music, which is provided by Anderson during each concert.

Videos of the chorale's performances

appear weekly on local public access channels

The Putnam Chorale always welcomes new singers. Auditions are not required. Rehearsals for next spring's performance of opera choruses begin Monday, Jan. 3 at 6:45 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church on Main Street in Brewster. All experienced singers at all levels are cordially invited to join.

For more information, visit www.putnamchorale.org.



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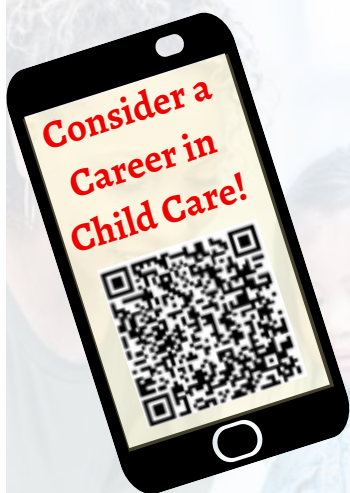
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Rising Star

Netra Easwaran, a Horace Greeley High School junior, joins some of the best young artists in the United States after being honored by YoungArts, an organization that identifies and nurtures visual, literary and performing artists 15 to 18 years old. Easwaran was recognized in dance for a 2022 award. A complete list of the winners is available at youngarts.org/winners.

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Father (Thinks He) Knows Best

For this Westchester dad (and Examiner's Publisher), putting trust in his parental instincts proved to be music to his ears, in more ways than one.



By Adam Stone

You are reading this week's print edition excerpt of Examiner+, a digital newsmagazine serving Westchester, Putnam, and the surrounding Hudson Valley. Need to subscribe — or upgrade your Examiner+ subscription to enjoy full access to all of our premium digital content? Visit www.examiner-plus.com

The youth softball player cuts the shape of a young pro, strutting to the on-deck circle with quiet confidence, twirling her bat for fun with the ease and dexterity of a baton artist. She unleashes a series of fierce and fluid practice swings.

Sporting a muddied red and white jersey with black pants, glistening from a day of sweaty game action, she sprints around the sun-soaked bases with studied precision, skillfully

nicking the corner of each bag, hustling around the diamond with the intensity of an inmate running a jailbreak dash. Patrolling centerfield, knees bent in perfect ready position, she glides to flyballs in the gap, comfortably catching the yellow orb rocketed her way. All familiar sights.

What made this spring of 2021 softball afternoon different, however, was what I saw that day when studying the lithe, athletic beauty flashing her on-field skills at her final Fox Lane Middle school softball game. I saw a young adult who was done with life dominated and defined by softball. She just didn't know it yet.

Call it a father's intuition, call it a subtle look I saw in her eyes,

but I knew it was an issue that needed to be addressed, despite positive outward appearances. Sometimes you love someone so much that you know something about them that they don't yet consciously know about themselves.

Here in Westchester County, we're all too familiar with parents who lovingly but misguidedly apply all manner of unnecessary pressure on their kids, in the classroom and out on the ball field. Highly competitive youth sports deliver uniquely wonderful benefits to kids, especially team sports. Those benefits are sometimes counteracted by well-intentioned parents who lose sight of what matters and begin to rely on the athletic achievements of their kids to fulfill their egos and social lives. It is also true that feeling a sense of pride and generating a sense of community through youth sports can and usually is achieved in healthy doses, despite what naysayers



might insist. But, in my case, I started to wonder ...

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Homemade Holiday Delights That Are Guaranteed to Butter Anyone Up

As we find ourselves surrounded by an abundance of this year's must-have items, our shopping lists are often dictated by retail experts all claiming to offer the ultimate gift-giving guide.

But there's no need to spend a fortune or face the aggravation of competing with crowds for sold-out products. Sometimes, the most rich and memorable gifts can be created in the kitchen.

To put a touch of finesse on your sweet treats, take a cue from the experts and use

Plugrá butter, which professional pastry chefs prefer because of its slow-churn and extra creaminess. Unlike other butters, Plugrá uses the right balance of specially selected cream and butterfat, resulting in a texture that harmoniously bends and blends to help craft homemade, confectionary masterpieces.

Using the finest ingredients, Plugrá's executive chef, Linda Hall, developed a decadent brownie recipe that's certain to spice up gift-giving.

Mexican Hot Chocolate Brownies

Prep Time: 10 Minutes
Cook Time: 30 Minutes
Servings: 24

Ingredients

- 5 ounces unsweetened chocolate
- 10 tablespoons Plugrá European Style Butter, unsalted
- 4 large eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon ground Saigon cinnamon from the Spice House
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon chipotle powder or cayenne pepper
- 2 teaspoons Nielsen-Massey Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract
- 6 ounces Valrhona Manjari 64% Dark Chocolate, chopped

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line a 9-by-13-inch square pan with parchment paper or aluminum foil and spray with non-stick cooking spray.
2. Place the unsweetened chocolate and butter in a large, microwave safe bowl. Microwave on high for three minutes, stirring every 30 seconds or until melted.
3. Stir in the sugar until well blended.
4. Beat in the eggs.
5. Stir in the remaining ingredients until just blended.
6. Spread the batter on the prepared pan and bake for 25 to 30 minutes. Check for doneness by inserting a toothpick into the center of the pan to see if it comes out clean.



PREMYUDA YOSPIM/ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

"Nothing says indulgence like a gooey, chocolaty brownie; however, most people have been there, done that," Hall said. "This year, dial it up a notch by adding spices and flavors that evoke warmth and coziness. My recipe is reminiscent of a hot cup of Mexican hot chocolate that has cinnamon and vanilla notes."

To get you inspired this season, Plugrá partnered with other premium ingredients brands to create a brownie with better results. The Mexican Hot Chocolate Brownies recipe below embraces a savory note produced by Spice House's strongest

and sweetest Vietnamese "Saigon" cinnamon, along with a kick of chipotle pepper.

The decadent flavor is also emphasized by using fair and sustainable Manjari dark chocolate from leading chocolate brand, Valrhona, in addition to Nielsen-Massey Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract, which uses premium, hand-selected beans and a slow extraction process to produce the richest tasting vanilla. Additional holiday recipes can be found by visiting plugra.com/recipes.

Holiday Activities to Consider With the Children

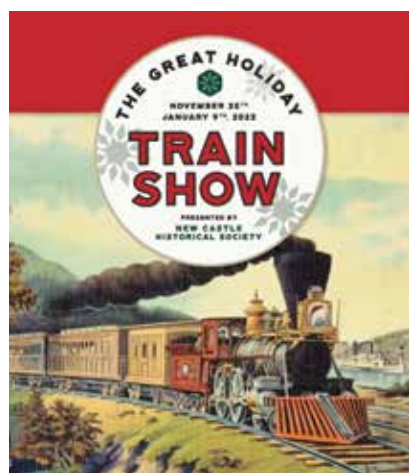
Local museums and arts groups will offer four in-person events during the holidays when children are not in school.

The events range from holiday favorites like "The Nutcracker" to story time in the Hudson River Museum's planetarium.

"The arts don't take a break during the holidays, which we can all enjoy activities safely and happily by observing proper face-mask protocols," said Janet Langsam, ArtsWestchester's CEO. "Our member organizations know that local families rely on them for entertainment and enrichment. Some of these holiday traditions, such as "The Nutcracker," help children form memories that last a lifetime."

Contact the presenting arts groups ahead of time in case changing health rules cause event postponement or cancellation. Scheduled activities during the last week of the year include:

Dec. 27: Mr. Dickens Tells a



Christmas Carol, Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, Pelham.

"Mr. Dickens Tells a Christmas Carol" re-creates the famous performance tour by Charles Dickens in 1867 with his classic tale bringing the travails of Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim alive. Taken

from the original script, actor Michael Muldoon plays Charles Dickens and tells the well-loved story in the beautifully decorated double parlors of the mansion meeting the different spirits and characters. Info: 718-885-1461

Dec. 28: "The Nutcracker: Drosselmeyer's Workshop," The Wainwright House, Rye.

The Carole Alexis Ballet Theatre/ Ballet des Amériques returns to the Wainwright House through Dec. 28. Info: 914-967-6080

Jan. 1: The Great Holiday Train Show, New Castle Historical Society, Chappaqua.

The display will feature numerous vintage train sets, one dating back 100 years, running throughout the festively decorated rooms of the Horace Greeley House for the holidays. Children and adults alike can experience the magic of these heirloom items as they watch trains travel through such backdrops as a Bavarian countryside scene, the

Rip Roaring 20's, or ride the rails with the rugged Jesse James Gang, and then take it East to the New York Central.... and more!

Admission to this special event is \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members. Children eight years old and under are \$8. Tickets can be purchased online at www.newcastlehs.org/events. Info: 914-238-4666.

Jan. 1: The Girl Who Walked Upside Down, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers.

A tale of a girl who arrived one spring day, after a storm, walking upside down upon the rainbow. She has a unique way of looking at things, in particular the sky, and an affection for the moon and stars.

Recommended for ages four to seven years old. It's a 33-minute show plus Q&A. Capacity is currently limited to 60 seats per show. Masks are required in the planetarium until further notice. Advance reservations are strongly encouraged. Info: 914-963-4550.

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A Look at Wine 'Truths' - Myths or Facts?



By Nick Antonaccio

In this age of media frenzy, our cravings for real-time news and our blind faith in the plethora of social media outlets has created a society of information-hungry individuals where "first to report" supersedes vetted information time and time again.

To make matters worse, misinformation, whether inadvertent or intentional, can grab a foothold and become de facto truth by the mere passage of time – or the number of likes.

The media world of wine falls into this category.

In past columns, I've addressed a number of wine-related "facts" to determine their veracity. My goal was to demystify subjects as diverse as whether screwcaps are good or bad (good), whether an open full bottle allows wine to breathe sufficiently (no), if sniffing a cork provides an indication of its quality (no) and if the word "Reserve" on a bottle label indicates a higher quality wine (maybe).

Herewith is another installment in my series on wine "truths" that have been questioned by readers. Myth or fact?

Whether one relies on word of mouth or the media, there are conflicting – mostly anecdotal – wine-related accounts that, in my opinion, warrant clarification.

This week's myth buster subject: Always use cheap wine when cooking.

Wrong.

A good cook knows that the best ingredients make for a superior dish. You don't use industrial grade olive oil for your favorite recipe, you use extra virgin olive oil. Similarly, you shouldn't cook with a mass-produced generic wine.

The reason for adding wine to a recipe is to enhance its aroma, to create a new flavor or to add a unique component to a sauce. Cheap wine is generally too light in aroma or flavor for these tasks. My rule of thumb: If the wine is nondescript in your glass, it won't be magically transformed in your cooking pan. Select a wine that has a distinct and noticeable aroma and/or flavor.

For your original or personalized recipes, the wine should fit the overall profile you are attempting to achieve for a particular dish. Alternatively, certain

third-party recipes (from books, television or the internet) call for a "dry wine." This is a carryover from a long-gone era when many wines were overly sweet or enhanced with salt or sugar – certainly not for cooking that \$35-per-pound wild Pacific King Salmon.

You Heard It Through the Grapevine

'...there are conflicting – mostly anecdotal – wine-related accounts that, in my opinion, warrant clarification.'



In today's sophisticated world of wine, a dry wine may be a French Chardonnay for a simple chicken dish or a citrusy Sauvignon Blanc for a basic seafood sauce. It may be a Syrah for a pot roast or a Cabernet Sauvignon for a robust sauce to accompany medallions of filet mignon.

Stay away from bottle labels that identify the contents as "cooking wine." These industrial wines bear only a minor resemblance to a wine you would pour for your personal consumption.

Another rule of thumb I follow: Pour the same wine into the sauté pan as you will pour at the dinner table with your completed dish.

Yet one more rule of thumb: Sipping a bit of that same wine while you are cooking helps you get through the stove-side rigor of attempting to be a gourmet chef.

And speaking of alcohol, the general assumption is that the alcohol in wine "cooks

off" in the pan. Not so. A typical sauté or baking recipe calls for five to 15 minutes of cooking time after wine has been added. Scientific testing has shown that up to 40 percent of a wine's alcohol is still present after 15 minutes of cooking. An additional 5 percent dissipates for each subsequent 15-minute period.

Whether for significant or trivial matters, my mantra has become to question everything I read or hear. I welcome the opportunity to vet your questions on wine-related "truths."

Nick Antonaccio is a 45-year Pleasantville resident. For over 25 years, he has conducted wine tastings and lectures. Nick is a member and program director of the Wine Media Guild of wine journalists. He also offers personalized wine tastings and wine travel services. Nick's credo: continuous experimenting results in instinctive behavior. You can reach him at nantonaccio@theexaminernews.com or on Twitter @sharingwine.

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