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SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

Volume 12, Issue 593

The Galleria at White Plains to Close After 43 Years

By Rick Pezzullo

One of the main landmarks in downtown White Plains will be shutting down in early 2023.

The Galleria at White Plains, which opened in 1980 and was a draw for local and distant shoppers for decades, is closing in March 2023 to make room for a mixed-use development that is currently in the planning stages.

The 870,000-square-foot mall, which sits on approximately 10 acres, has shown a steady decline in recent years with its two cornerstone stores, Macy's and Sears, both departing in 2021.

"This is one of the most exciting mixed-use development sites in the New York Metro area," said Steve Plenge, Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Retail Capital Partners (PRCP), which owns the Galleria with Aareal Bank. "We have worked over the past few years to acquire the Macy's fee interest at the site, along with the leasehold interest of the former Sears. Working with our new partners, we will reimagine the site as a vibrant mixed-use project that will be



The Galleria at White Plains

centered on residential development and amenity-based retail."

PRCP and Aareal Bank are teaming up with Cappelli Organization and SL Green Realty Corp. Cappelli recently held a groundbreaking a few blocks from the Galleria at the former Westchester Mall, which is being redeveloped as a \$600 million mixed-use complex with four residential towers.

continued on page 2

Greenburgh Receives Second Grant for Odell House Renovations

By Rick Pezzullo

The Town of Greenburgh has received a second six-figure state grant for renovations at the historic Odell House.

Supervisor Paul Feiner said the town was awarded \$500,000 in Environmental Protection funds for the Odell House Rochambeau Headquarters in Hartsdale, located at 425 Ridge Rd.

Odell House, which played a critical role in American history and is planned to be turned into a museum, is listed on the local, state and national registers of historic places. In 2020, Greenburgh took ownership

of the house and property.

In November, Greenburgh received a \$600,000 NY State grant for restoration purposes. To date and with the grant funding and local match, the building has been upgraded with temporary shoring under the design and supervision of Steven Tilly Architects, the project architect.

Additional restoration phases are planned for 2023. Work on the roof is planned to last for approximately four months.

"The house and site will ultimately be publicly accessible for residents and all interested in the rich history at 425 Ridge Road," Feiner stated.

New Year's Eve Spectacular to Light Up Skies in White Plains

By Rick Pezzullo

Thousands of spectators are expected to line the streets of White Plains New Year's Eve to usher in 2023.

The free party kicks off at 10:30 p.m. at Main St. and Court St. with live music from Just the Melody Band (JTM), an all-star cast featuring Grammy nominee Irene Blackman. There will also be a traditional ball drop at midnight and a fireworks display.

Due to the expected large crowd, city

officials have set up access to the festivities at four gated entries: Main St. at Church St.; Court St. at Martine Ave.; Renaissance Square at Williams St.; and Martine Ave. at Mamaroneck Ave.

The city will begin closing streets in the event area at noon on Saturday, Dec. 31. Streets will reopen to vehicular traffic at approximately 3 a.m. on Jan. 1.

The Platinum Sponsor of the event is the Westchester County IDA. Gold Sponsors are White Plains BID and Bay Crane.

Pajama Day Fun



Students and faculty at Post Road Elementary School and other schools in the White Plains School District enjoyed Pajama Day last week prior to leaving for vacation for the holidays.

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Sales Tax Suspended on Home Energy Costs in Westchester

Westchester County Executive George Latimer is reminding residents to check their heating bill almost a month into his initiative to suspend sales tax collection on home energy costs from Dec. 1 to Feb. 28.

The sales tax suspension covers home heating oil, propane, natural gas, electric, coal and wood for residential heating purposes and covers homeowners as well as rental units.

"Westchester County Government is constantly looking to find ways to make the lives of residents a little easier. This winter, heating your home will now cost you a little less. As we all face rising costs in our daily lives, this suspension of certain sales tax will add extra dollars to the wallets of those who call Westchester home," Latimer said.

The county portion is 4%; however, residents of Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, White Plains and Yonkers will see a reduction of 1.5% as these cities have their own sales tax.

Landlords and renters will be eligible

depending on the structure of the unit's heat and electric use. The initiative is administered by the NYS Department of Taxation and Finance; the vendors will not be assessing sales tax as directed by the State. The sales tax will automatically be taken off the bill.

"If you see you are being charged Westchester County sales tax for any home energy item starting December 1 please contact the County right away at (914) 995-2900," Latimer said.

This measure is in addition to the myriad of actions taken by the Latimer Administration and the Board of Legislators to combat rising inflationary costs nationwide. Those actions include the capping of sales tax on gasoline purchases, waiving of fees at certain parks and pools and – most notably – suspending fares on Bee-Line buses.

This is a press release provided by the organization. It has been lightly edited and is being published by Examiner Media as a public service.

Police Accompany Santa to Preschool



On Dec. 16, Santa Claus made an early visit to the students at Cerebral Palsy of Westchester's United Preschool Center. He was accompanied by officers from the Harrison Police Department, who have been visiting the preschool with Santa for more than 18 years and are happy to act as his helpers.

The Galleria at White Plains to Close After 43 Years

continued from page 1

"The reimagining of this property is integral to the dramatic transformation of downtown White Plains that is well underway," said Louis Cappelli, Chief Executive Officer of the Cappelli Organization. "We are fortunate to be able to play a role in recreating the property with mixed uses which will link the city's transit center with the Mamaroneck Avenue corridor."

During the ceremony for Hamilton Green, White Plains Mayor Thomas Roach made reference to the changing times at the Galleria, quipping that property was next in line in the Hamilton Avenue/Main Street corridor makeover.

In a statement, PRCP officials said tenants at the Galleria were receiving termination notices in accordance with their leases.

"We understand the difficulty posed by transitioning. Our goal is to provide an

opportunity for their businesses to continue," PRCP stated. "As we close the center, we are committed to working with the tenants to assist them in making a smooth transition. We are happy to connect them with our leasing team regarding the potential to open in one of our other properties in the region."

Based in Southern California, PRCP manages more than 20 million square feet of regional, open-air lifestyle and mixed-use centers nationwide.

"The Galleria at White Plains is an important property in Westchester County and the region," Plenge said. "The existing Galleria White Plains has been a community staple for many years. With our experienced real estate partners, the new masterplan and design will build upon the remarkable renaissance under way in downtown White Plains."

Correction

In last week's article on the "We Are White Plains" traveling museum exhibit, it was incorrectly reported that the photographs were part of artist Bayeté Ross Smith's "Our Kind of People" photo series. His photos for "We Are White Plains" are related but not part of his larger series. Also, the article omitted mention of Common Circles Creative Director Sue Spiegel, who runs the nonprofit organization with founder Marla Felton. The Examiner regrets the errors.

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Parking, Fourth Story Key Hurdles for Downtown Chappaqua Project

By Martin Wilbur

A request for relaxed parking requirements and a fourth story for a proposed mixed-use development at the former Rite Aid site in Chappaqua will be the major hurdles for the applicant to clear.

That was the sentiment from the New Castle Planning Board last week, which formally met with representatives for property owner Don Feinberg for a 45-apartment zero-carbon emissions project at 50. N. Greeley Ave.

Last Tuesday's discussion included the would-be applicant revealing that a special permit from the Town Board will be sought rather than asking for variances. The development team made its first presentation to the Planning Board after the Town Board referred the matter to them to collect feedback.

At issue is the plan calling for 53 on-site parking spaces, which would be significantly less than what the town's zoning code requires, and permission for a fourth story in the Business Retail-Parking (BR-P) zone. The developers are proposing about 4,200 square feet of retail space, a reduction of about 2,400 square feet from what was originally presented in June. Retail

space could include a restaurant and another establishment.

Philip Karmel, the attorney for the development team, said his client is proposing one parking space per residential unit plus an additional eight spaces for commercial purposes. Under the current zoning, 1.3 parking spaces per unit are required, in addition to the retail. Depending on the final square footage for the commercial uses and the breakdown of those uses, Karmel estimated that between 80 and 90 spaces would be required for the project.

Jeffrey Davis, a project partner, said a car sharing plan where residents could rent a vehicle for a couple of hours or for an afternoon should greatly reduce the number of multicar households. The structure, containing 21 one- and two-bedroom units each and three studio apartments, is also within walking distance of the train station and two bus lines, he said.

A parking study will be submitted to the town in the near future, Davis said.

"When you see it, you'll see parking requirements can be met for the town, and as you go out (from the site) there's a sea of parking," Davis said of the pending parking study.

However, while the board expressed hopefulness about the concept, it also conveyed skepticism about parking and whether the car sharing arrangement will be as effective as promised. Board member Tom Curley said that in the suburbs, as opposed to Manhattan, the lifestyle typically dictates that most residents have cars even if they live near mass transit.

He also said that parking needs should not only be considered for this project but other potential development as well.

"It's more than just existing parking demand, it's future demand," Curley said. "We as planners, the Planning Board, and I think the Town Board, really need to be concerned about, and so the parking studies are going to be really helpful."

Also concerned about parking, board Chair Robert Kirkwood said he might be more comfortable if there was no retail.

"It seems to me that this would be a whole lot more simple if this was completely residential," Kirkwood said.

Davis countered that downtown Chappaqua is in need of some evening activity.

"I think there needs to be some accessory retail," he said. "If you



An artist's rendition of the proposed mixed-use project at 50 S. Greeley Ave. in Chappaqua.

come down this side of town after dark, it's completely barren."

Board members also quizzed Karmel and Davis about their intention to seek a special permit rather than pursuing a variance for parking and the extra story through the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Karmel said it was his clients' belief that since fundamental changes were needed for parking and building height, it was more of a policy decision, which should be made by the elected body.

However, the board wasn't ready to accept that a fourth story is needed to make the project work financially. Building height would average 50 feet.

"I don't think it's a given that four stories is economically necessary here," Curley said. "There are three-story projects that are going up all around us."

Karmel said the development team is trying to find the right balance to make it worthwhile for them while helping the town.

"Hopefully, I think this would be a great project for the town," he said. "I think it's a dilapidated site right now, it's an eyesore and I think mixed use there with affordable (units), a green project, would be beneficial and it would really put New Castle on the forefront of putting something out there that's fantastic."

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Fundraiser Launched to Help Family of Young Boy Fighting Rare Disease

By Martin Wilbur

Two weekends before Christmas Michelle Leyva saw her son Jaycee thriving, a typically active two-year-old with an abundance of energy.

He played soccer on Saturday, took his tumbling class on Sunday and the family, like countless others, was looking forward to the holidays.

In a matter of two days, the lives of Leyva, her husband Oscar Aguilar and Jaycee were turned upside down. They spent Christmas in Maria Fareri Children's Hospital in Valhalla wondering how long Jaycee will be there and how well he might recover.

Jaycee was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre syndrome after a couple of harrowing days of being shuttled back and forth between home their White Plains home and the hospital emergency room. It wasn't until their pediatrician saw Jaycee nearly two days after their initial visit to the ER, that they must return.

"The doctor said you needed to go to the ER again – now," Leyva recalled. "We went to the ER and by the time he was being treated he couldn't sit or stand on his own. He couldn't hold himself up. He couldn't sit without holding onto something."

Leyva said late in the day on Tuesday, Dec. 13, she noticed Jaycee was walking around the house as though he had a diaper rash. Over the next couple of days, Jaycee wasn't eating, he didn't want to sit up or walk, and when he did try, his mom said he walked as

if he was drunk.

Medical staff performed a spinal tap and a three-hour MRI, which preceded a trip to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU).

"He couldn't breathe well on his own, so we had to go (to the PICU)," Leyva said.

When her longtime friend, Megan Caceres, learned of Jaycee's plight over social media, she reached out to Leyva to see what was going on. Soon after, Caceres set up a gofundme page to help the family. In the two weeks since Jaycee began showing symptoms, neither Leyva, a nanny, nor Aguilar, who's employed by a tree company, have been able to work, adding more stress to their situation. Neither have jobs that provide paid sick time.

Caceres said she also hoped to raise awareness for other parents to advocate for their children when they know something isn't right, even in situations where some medical professionals are telling them they can go home.

"The creation of the fundraiser was, yes, to help her support her family, but also to make people aware because now people are learning about it," Caceres said. "We've been lucky that a lot of people have been very kind, especially now during the holidays."

As of Monday, more than \$2,300 had been raised.

Dr. Celine Rahman, a director of neurosurgery for Northwell Health, described Guillain-Barre syndrome as a nerve disease caused by one's own immune system. Rahman said when it does occur,



Jaycee, 2, and his mother Michelle Leyva of White Plains, at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital. Jaycee is battling Guillain-Barre syndrome and has had to be placed on a breathing machine.

symptoms typically arrive two to four weeks after an infection.

Usually, when a person has an infection, their body creates antibodies to fight it off, she said. But if proteins in someone's body are too similar to those of the infectious agent, they attack parts of the body.

Jaycee had had a bad cold during the week of Thanksgiving before recovering, Leyva said.

Rahman said Guillain-Barre is rather uncommon with only about 3,000 to 6,000 reported cases a year in the U.S. It affects both children and adults. Only about 15 percent of cases require the patient to go on

a respirator.

Pain, including a pins and needles sensation, and an inability to walk are the most common symptoms.

"In almost all cases the paralysis is temporary," Rahman said. "Obviously, there are going to be some really severe cases where the child may have long-term disability, but the vast majority – 85-plus up to 95 percent – of patients recover completely, although it may take several months to get there."

In many cases, physical rehabilitation is needed.

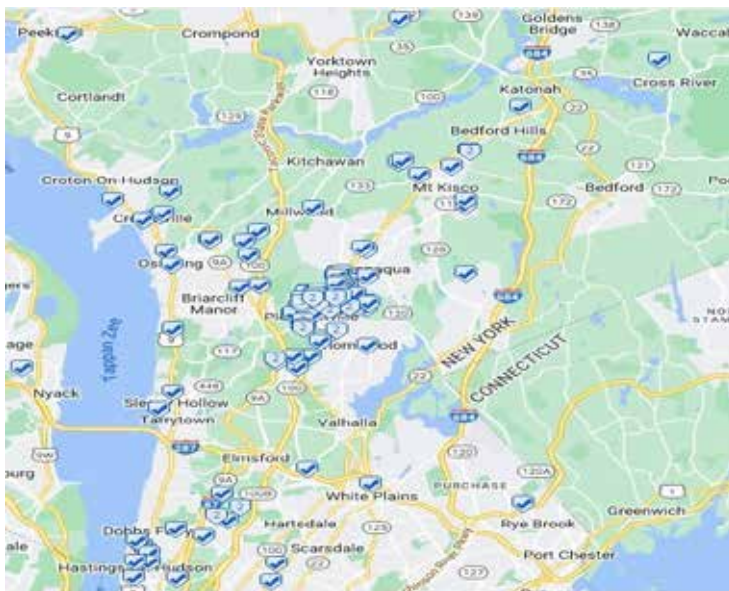
Leyva said it's still too early to determine what the outcome will be for Jaycee. She said the doctors are hopeful that since he's so young that could be in his favor. It's also been difficult to watch him in discomfort, which has been further heightened due to him contracting COVID-19, Leyva said.

However, the generosity of others and their support have been a source of strength, she said. Leyva and her husband have been staying at the Ronald McDonald House to be nearby.

"It's an amazing feeling to have the community helping and pitching in, especially since we're not working," Leyva said. "We're not even thinking about that now."

To help the family and to learn more about Jaycee's journey, visit <https://tinyurl.com/3zdmsz68>

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Feiner, Town Board Embroiled in Greenburgh Internship Controversy

By Martin Wilbur

A controversy pitting Greenburgh Supervisor Paul Feiner against his Town Board colleagues erupted over a sharp disagreement regarding spending on summer interns.

Feiner sought to increase the budget line for the town's high school and college interns from \$15,000 to \$25,000 for 2023 in the recently completed budget process. However, fellow Democratic board members pushed back, arguing that at a time when the supervisor asked for department heads to tighten their belts while dipping into fund balance to deliver a 6 percent tax rate reduction, spending more on interns was not

a priority.

Councilwoman Ellen Hendrickx, who is completing her first year on the board, was outspoken in her opposition to Feiner's attempts. Hendrickx said she and the council support the program but said the town pays its interns more than virtually every other government in Westchester, including the county.

Last year, 47 high school and college students participated in Greenburgh's internship program, which is overseen by Feiner and Town Clerk Judith Beville.

"If you're going to be so careful with the taxpayers' money, why are you spending taxpayers' money on these interns," Hendrickx said. "It's a nice, beneficial program but it's not really in the purview of the town to do that. So you're taking taxpayer funds to pay for these interns and the departments are asked to give up monies and we have potentially difficult times ahead of us and we went into the fund balance."

A stipend of \$400 for high school students and nearly \$600 to college students for the six-week internship.

Feiner countered that the popular program, which has been in place for about 12 years, has provided life-changing experiences for many of the participants. Last year, it ran into a shortfall because it has been his policy to accept every student who applies, and by June the town had a record 47 interns for last summer.

Feiner said he would not reconsider. The program accepts students from the town's wealthiest and high-achieving school

districts as well as those without stellar reputations, he argued, saying it allows youngsters from different walks of life to work alongside one another.

In one instance, a former student who had been mentored by Tony Award-winning playwright J.T. Rogers was able to get an interview with a casting director in Los Angeles, Feiner said. Hillary Clinton is among the other notable people who have participated.

"We have a budget of over \$100 million and we passed the budget unanimously," Feiner said. "We have a 6 percent tax rate decrease (in 2023), and the big controversy is over the \$10,000, which is stupid, really. This program can change somebody's life forever."

This year, Feiner said the extra \$10,000 was derived from the Zuckerberg Institute, run by Mark Zuckerberg's sister, Randi.

However, Hendrickx and Councilman Francis Sheehan said the projects, which the students select themselves, sometimes have no connection to the town. Sheehan said last summer some students worked on analyzing whether Westchester County can offer year-round free Bee-Line bus service.

To make matters worse, he said, when interns were taken to Regeneron for part of one day, the town rented a coach bus for the short trip to the corporation's headquarters for \$1,340 instead of using the Bee-Line buses. The county had suspended fares last summer.

"Their big project for the summer was lobbying Westchester County for the

free buses so more children and adults can take advantage of the free buses, and Councilwoman Hendrickx had the audacity to suggest at a work session that why not have the interns take the buses down to Regeneron," Sheehan said. "It's right down (Route) 9A. That was greeted by considerable disdain in public."

Sheehan suggested slightly reducing the stipend for each student if Feiner doesn't want to have a cut off to avoid a shortfall.

Hendrickx, who analyzed municipal internships from around the county, said the board later learned that Feiner had shifted the \$10,000 to pay for the extra interns without their knowledge.

"All five board members are the decisionmakers here, not just the supervisor alone," she said. "The voters expect us to use our independent judgment and act as good stewards of their tax money, and not merely to rubber stamp one person's desires and wishes."

Feiner said he will search for donations from local companies and corporations, like the town has done in the past, to ensure that any student who wants an internship won't be turned away.

He said many of the public service projects, such as lobbying the state Department of Transportation to fix local state roads, have paid off.

"We want to treat them not as clerical workers but more like legislators," Feiner said.



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Mt. Pleasant Planners Accept DEIS for Sensitive Pocantico Lake Plan

By Martin Wilbur

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for a 31-lot cluster subdivision on the shores of Pocantico Lake was accepted as complete last week by the Mount Pleasant Planning Board.

The document for Meadows at Briarcliff, located on about 36 environmentally sensitive acres, will now be placed in the public sphere and reviewed by the board, which is acting as lead agency, and the public, said Board Chairman James Collins. A public hearing will be scheduled, although no date was announced after the unanimous vote at the Dec. 19 meeting.

Board member Joan Lederman said the board's acceptance of the DEIS as complete does not equate to an approval.

"This is only to say they have addressed all the questions. Whether we think they're right or wrong is not what's at stake here," Lederman said. "It means that they just answered all the questions. I don't think you need to worry that your concerns will not be addressed."

The application was submitted to the town in spring 2021 by brothers Brandon and Brian Zappico of Zappico Development in Hawthorne and quickly gained the attention of concerned residents as well as environmental advocates. The 27-acre lake is a freshwater body, and Westchester County bought an adjacent 164 acres, now called Pocantico Lake Park in 1992 to preserve in perpetuity.

The Planning Board issued a positive declaration last year, which means there is the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts. Collins said that in the roughly 14 months since the scoping session was held, the DEIS went through four drafts before the board was prepared to vote on the document.

"The completeness review is simply the first step in getting the document into the hands of everyone concerned about the

project – the Planning Board, as lead agency, and the various other involved agencies and the public," Collins said.

There has been enough concern raised that last March the county Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board, an advisory body, passed a resolution recommending that county officials explore buying the land to preserve it from development.

However, that doesn't mean the developer would be willing to sell the entire

parcel and relinquish development right even if the county pressed forward with an acquisition.

Last spring, Mount Pleasant Supervisor Carl Fulgenzi told a group of residents at a Town Hall forum that the Zappis, who have since formed the Meadows at Briarcliff, LLC, which is listed at the applicant, might be willing to preserve a significant piece of the property.

Winner, Winner Chicken Dinner

Standout Lakeland field hockey goalie Celeste Pagliaroli was picked by readers in a poll earlier this month as the Club Fit Jefferson Valley/Club Fit Briarcliff-sponsored female Examiner Athlete of the Season. She collected her prize last Wednesday. The male Athlete of the Season, Pleasantville football player Daniel Picart, was not available last week for the photo op.



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Obituary

Glenn Dubak

Glenn Lawrence Dubak, dedicated father, grandfather, cousin and friend, passed away unexpectedly on Dec. 18. He was 74.

Glenn was born to the late Lawrence E. Dubak and Regina F. Dubak (née Dahl) in the Bronx on Oct. 23, 1948. He spent much of his youth in Parkchester before moving to Briarcliff Manor where he graduated from Ossining High School in 1966. In his youth he enjoyed summer vacations with his family at Edwards-on-Wentworth Resort in Wolfeboro, N.H. and spending weekends with friends in the Hamptons. After graduating from Franklin Pierce College, he went on to start his 40-plus year career in insurance, primarily working as a land and marine underwriter.

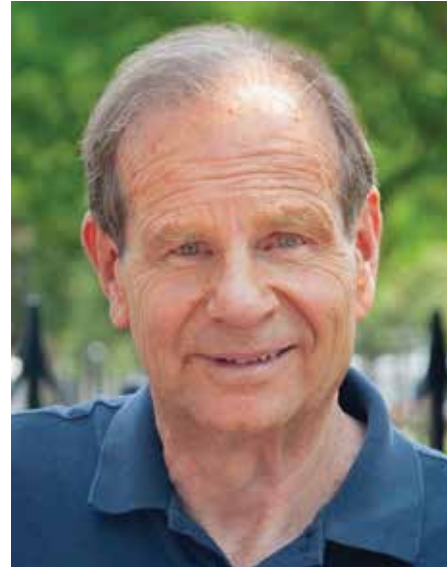
On Sept. 11, 2001, while working for Kemper in New York City, he arrived late to work to see his office, 1 World Trade Center, on fire. He stood and watched as a plane hit 2 World Trade Center. Fortunately, he and all of his co-workers survived the attack. Only recently did Glenn return to the site for the first time to visit the memorial and pay his respects.

He finished his career at Chubb, retiring in 2017, but continued to keep in touch with colleagues, most of whom had become friends.

A loyal son and nephew, he took exceptional care of his mother and great-aunt as they grew older. He was a devout Catholic and a parishioner at the White Church in South Salem and St. Mary's in Ridgefield, Conn.

Glenn spent the majority of his adult years residing in Lewisboro where he raised two daughters. In 2020, he moved to Pinehills in Plymouth, Mass. to be closer to family. He was an avid sportsman and a devoted fan of the New York Giants, New York Yankees and all of the teams his daughters played for. He loved reading, working on crossword puzzles, dining out and recounting stories from his youth, including the great American road trip he took with a friend after college.

Without a doubt, Glenn's greatest pride and joy was his two daughters and the six grandsons they gave him, aka "Poppy's Team." He cherished the opportunity to spend time with them, engaging them in conversations and inventing games to play together. He enjoyed taking them on vacations, ideally someplace warm with



Glenn Dubak

a beach or pool to enjoy. He constantly pored over pictures and videos of them, remarking on how much they had grown, the silly things they'd said and how excited he was to witness the talented people they

were becoming.

His daughters take with them the many lessons he instilled, in particular, to love openly and fiercely and to put family above all else. He never missed an opportunity to tell his girls how much he loved them and how proud he was to be their father.

Glenn will be remembered for his kindness, easygoing nature and love of his family. He is survived by his daughter, Blair Connolly, and her husband, Christopher, of South Hamilton, Mass.; daughter Farrell Hall and her husband, Christopher, of Mill Valley, Calif.; cherished grandsons Burke, Nolan, Chase, Graeme, Page and Calder; and his cousins, Dennis and Kenneth Dubak. Glenn was predeceased by his parents and his beloved great-aunt, Doris Dahl.

Friends and family are invited to a wake on Wednesday, Dec. 28 from 2 to 4 p.m. at Beecher Flocks Funeral Home in Pleasantville. On Dec. 29, a service will be held at 10 a.m. at Holy Innocents Church in Pleasantville, followed by interment at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Hawthorne. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

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Hearts & Homes Awarded \$45G Grant to Help Serve Refugees

Hearts & Homes for Refugees (HHR) is proud to announce it has received a \$45,000 grant from the Westchester Community Foundation (WCF). This grant will support Hearts & Homes in its two-part mission to resettle and support refugees and to work toward building a longer welcoming table in the Lower Hudson Valley.

This grant is a crucial part of WCF’s mission to connect generous people to the causes they care about, to invest in transformative ideas and for organizations to improve lives and strengthen our communities. WCF is a division of the New York Community Trust, one of the largest community foundations in the country with assets of about \$3 billion.

“The Westchester Community Foundation is pleased to support Hearts & Homes for Refugees,” said its Executive Director Laura Rossi. “The community sponsorship model eases refugee resettlement while strengthening existing community networks. Most important, it promotes the community foundation’s own values of a more welcoming, kind community for all.”

This grant will assist Hearts & Homes to build a more robust network of support for refugees. This coming year, Hearts & Homes will focus on the development of new community sponsors within their growing network of more than 50 faith and civic groups in Westchester, Rockland and Orange counties.

Sponsors are groups of passionate volunteers that work directly with refugees, providing up to one year of

holistic wraparound services. This includes assistance with housing, employment, personal finances, navigating schools and medical systems, community and cultural orientation and English language learning.

Utilizing their years of experience working with refugees and resettlement agencies, Hearts & Homes recruits, trains, mentors and provides financial assistance to volunteer groups that are interested in being a part of the local solution to the global refugee crisis. This includes volunteers interested in full community sponsorship or smaller commitments, such as community sponsorship “lite,” private resettlement support and welcome circles.

Part of this work involves orienting families in their communities to help them feel safe and confident in their new home. Hearts & Homes will use this grant to develop and share webinars for newly-arrived families on topics about life in their new community. The organization will also ensure that families have access to the necessary technology to view these webinars.

Throughout the coming year, Hearts & Homes will continue to host outings and networking events for resettled families. Gatherings and networking events allow refugees to connect with people of their culture and other families that have experienced similar hardships resettling in a foreign land, while also reinforcing bonds with volunteers.

Hearts & Homes will also use part of the funds to manage a mini-grant program to

help local groups meet refugee family needs not covered by other sources.

As a regional leader of refugee resettlement, Hearts & Homes is focused on expanding the network of refugee resettlement groups. Hearts & Homes was a founding member of the national Hello Neighbor Network (HNN), comprised of 25 sister organizations across the country. The HNN is an invaluable resource partner for sharing ideas and best practices in community-sponsored refugee resettlement.

In the coming year, Hearts & Homes will continue to grow its network and partnerships into a sustainable and robust grassroots community-support model that will improve long-term outcomes for aspiring new American neighbors.

Anyone interested in becoming a community sponsor for refugees in and around Westchester and the Lower Hudson Valley or to learn more, visit <https://www.heartsandhomesforrefugees.org/community-sponsorship>.



Notice the Sunflowers

The next time you see a sunflower lanyard at Westchester County Airport, take notice. In time for the busy holiday travel season, County Executive George Latimer announced last week the airport launched the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program to support passengers with hidden disabilities and accessibility needs. When travelers voluntarily choose to wear a sunflower lanyard, it is a way for them to discreetly inform others that they have a disability.

PUBLIC NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Notice is hereby given that the **Town of Cortlandt** will receive and publicly open and read sealed bids for:

CROTON PARK ROAD – WATER MAIN REPLACEMENT CONTRACT NO. CCWD 2023.01

at the Town Clerk’s Office (914-734-1020) located at Town Hall, 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567, at: **10:00 AM (prevailing time), Thursday, January 26, 2023**

The Contract Documents may be obtained at the Town Clerk’s Office noted above starting on **January 3, 2023** during regular business hours. A non-refundable Bid Deposit of fifty dollars (\$50.00) is required for each contract picked up at the Town Clerk’s office. Checks should be made payable to the “Town of Cortlandt”.

The Contract Documents may also be obtained electronically at <https://www.bidnetdirect.com/new-york> beginning on January 3, 2023. Registration is required to utilize this system.

Bids must be submitted in the form prescribed by the Contract Documents and received by the Town Clerk of the Town of Cortlandt no later than 10:00 am at the prevailing time standard on **January 26, 2023**. Bids must be sealed and addressed to the Town Clerk at the above address and shall be designated as:

CROTON PARK ROAD – WATER MAIN REPLACEMENT, CONTRACT NO. CCWD 2023.01

Each Bidder must furnish, with his Bid, Bid Security in the amount of not less than five percent (5%) of the amount of the Base Bid. This security may be in the form of a certified check payable to the “Town of Cortlandt”, a bid bond, or cash. In addition, each Bid must be accompanied by a properly executed non-collusion affidavit.

No Bidder may withdraw their Bid within forty-five (45) days of the bid opening.

This Contract is subject to the prevailing wage determination made by the New York State Department of Labor.

The Town of Cortlandt reserves the right to reject any and all bids, to waive any informality therein, or to award the Contract to any Bidder if deemed to be in the best interest of the Town to do so.

Attention Bidders: Due to the current Pandemic known as COVID-19, the bid opening procedure has been altered in the following manner.

- Sealed bids may be mailed to the Town of Cortlandt as prescribed in advance of the bid date and time... Thursday January 26, 2023 at 10:00 am. All bids will be date and time stamped when received.
- Sealed bids may be dropped off at Town Hall, 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor, within the 1-hour preceding the posted bid opening time. All bids will be date and time stamped when received.
- Sealed bids will be opened in the Nyberg Meeting Room located at Town Hall, 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567. All bidders are welcomed to join. The Town requests that only one employee of each firm register for the opening. Space is limited.

Laroue Shatzkin
Town Clerk
Town of Cortlandt

Editorial

Time to Polish Off the Crystal Ball and See What’s in Store for 2023

For many people, the dwindling number of days in the year once Christmas is over means it’s time for fresh resolutions, most of which are likely doomed to fail or be abandoned before January is through.

At The Examiner, we peer into our crystal ball as everyone gets ready to turn the page to 2023. It provides a little more fun, is marginally less frustrating and if only some of these come true, then it could be a satisfying year.

For everyone ravaged by the effects of inflation to experience a little bit of relief in the months ahead.

Anyone who saw their 401(k) balances take a frightful dip to have a better time when they open their statements in 2023.

For New York State and its communities to find a way to encourage the construction of more affordable housing as well as housing that’s more affordable (which are not the same things).

An increase in electric vehicle charging stations in communities everywhere in preparation for the sale of only non-gas cars, which is set to begin in 12 short years.

That drivers use greater caution on area roadways, particularly at night and in bad weather.

For the state Department of Transportation to move along with its study and eventual improvements of Route 9A between Ossining and Briarcliff Manor.

No more 100-year storms every other year.

No more cell towers in Mount Kisco.

Nothing but success to the recently reopened Mt. Kisco Movie Theatre for years to come.

That the White Plains Galleria is replaced with something that is acceptable and useful.

For the remaining malls operating in the area, once considered sort of de facto community meeting places, to find a way to survive and thrive.

For the state to have the courage to follow through and enforce the law requiring minimum staffing levels at nursing homes.

That fewer and fewer people contract COVID-19, RSV, the flu and whatever other virus of the day crops up.

For incidents of hate to be a thing of the past.

For school districts that have Native American mascots or nicknames considered offensive, to come up with a new name and mascot. If the baseball team in Cleveland and the football team in Washington can change after 120 and 85 years, respectively, without the world ending, so can they.

For the Chappaqua School District to let the public know what the status of the Buttonhook property is sooner rather than later.

When school districts face a controversy to have their personnel exercise some common sense and not only rely on policies to guide them.

That everyone stops using tobacco products, which offers no redeeming features and would make any future attempts at prohibition of flavored cigarettes moot.

A salute to the multiple organizations locally that are helping to ease the transition for refugees coming to their new home.

For Westchester County to find a way to ease the burden and improve the quality of life for those in the flight path of the county airport.

Wishing assemblymembers Sandy Galef and Tom Abinanti and Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell only the best in their years ahead after providing many years’ worth of incredibly valuable service in government.

Best of luck to their successors, Dana Levenberg, MaryJane Shimsky and Kevin Byrne, along with good wishes to Matt Slater and Mike Lawler on their new positions.

To everyone who puts themselves on the line to serve at any level of government, including school boards, library boards and fire commissioners. They have thankless tasks that are overwhelmingly underappreciated.

To the volunteers who help their communities by serving on planning boards, zoning boards, conservation boards, architectural review boards, historical societies and any organization that benefits others.

Only the best for all of our local high school athletes who take the field, track, court or rink representing their schools.

That all first-responders are told how much they are appreciated. Let them know whenever you get a chance.

A salute to all our readers and advertisers who have supported Examiner Media and our quest to continue delivering quality local journalism. Thank you, we can’t do what we do without you.

And a happy, healthy and prosperous 2023 for everyone.

Letter to the Editor

New York Needs Swift Action in Implementing Climate Plan

As we head into 2023, the Climate Action Council has approved the Final Scoping Plan, which establishes the roadmap for achieving the emissions-reductions targets mandated by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. It’s an important and exciting step in implementing New York’s nation-leading climate law, transforming New York away from a reliance on fossil fuels toward a renewable-powered, electrified system all while creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs. When it comes to meeting its climate targets, New York must be as ambitious and aggressive as possible.

As the bomb cyclone monster storm that recently ravaged both New York and the country illustrates, there’s no more time to waste and this Final Scoping Plan must be implemented swiftly and efficiently to keep us on target with reducing emissions as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately, not everyone feels the urgency, and the three members of the state Climate Action Council linked with the fossil fuel industry – Gavin Donohue, president and CEO of the Independent Power Producers of New York, Inc. (IPPNY), Donna DeCarolis of National Fuel Gas and energy consultant Dennis Elsenbeck – voted against the plan, proving their industries’ commitment to worsening the climate crisis. It’s time for New York to crack down on the oil and gas companies and reject their efforts to delay and distract from climate action.

Gov. Kathy Hochul must build on this important foundation that’s been put in motion to continue implementing bold and equitable climate policies that create a blueprint for replacing New York City’s dirty gas plants with clean energy.

Christine Arroyo
Carmel

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Guest Column

Looking Back at My Time in Albany While Pledging the Same Goals in Putnam

By Kevin M. Byrne

When I first ran for the state Assembly, I vowed to bring a new generation of leadership to Albany. I pledged that my team and I would work relentlessly to address the affordability crisis, protect our families and stand up for our active military, veterans and first responders.

As I look back on my time in Albany, I believe we met these goals and delivered results for the people of northern Westchester and Putnam counties. Of course, there were challenges. Our state legislature is dominated by a New York City majority that loves big government policies and even bigger taxes to fund them. However, despite this constant opposition, we were able to take a stand for our hardworking families and advocate for smart policies that valued our freedoms.

I co-sponsored over 70 bipartisan pieces of legislation that became law. That's in addition to more than 25 individual bills I personally introduced that passed the Assembly with 21 of them becoming law. I served on the Ways & Means Committee where I fought successfully to enact \$4 billion-plus in middle-class tax cuts and temporarily suspend the state gasoline and diesel tax.

In addition, my office successfully advocated for millions of dollars to invest in

infrastructure projects in our area, ensuring safe bridges and roads for people to travel on. We also successfully brought back over \$500,000 in grant funding to local governments and libraries providing vital needs while allowing municipalities to rely less on property taxes. We expanded cancer benefits for volunteer firefighters and strengthened the Clean Indoor Air Act. Through it all, I kept my commitment to advance a smaller and more limited government, voting "No" on every single proposed state tax increase.

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, my office rose to the challenge. As the ranking minority member of the Assembly Health Committee, I initiated the first hearings into the state's pandemic response in nursing homes, ultimately holding former governor Andrew Cuomo accountable for his disastrous mishandling of COVID-19 in elder care facilities. I supported a resolution to impeach him before watching him resign in disgrace. We worked to ensure the state handled its responsibilities during the emergency while also advocating for the rights of people to make a living, practice their faith and ensure their kids had access to in-person learning.

Our state continues to face many challenges and more work remains to be done, but I am proud of the work we accomplished and the

history we helped make. I wish our succeeding Assemblyman Matt Slater the very best as he represents us in Albany. I know he will give his all and I remain committed to helping him transition into this new role.

The challenges we face are serious and to defeat them, we must face them together. One of the reasons my office was able to accomplish as much as we did was because we prioritized working with people of all backgrounds and political affiliations. We focused on the work, not on petty partisan politics. That's the only way to get things done in Albany, and I encourage my colleagues in the state legislature to continue to find common ground.

Representing our community has been an immense privilege. Over the years, I've knocked on thousands of doors and met thousands of people. I've gained a tremendous amount of insight and knowledge from this experience, and for that you have my sincere thanks.

Of course, this is not goodbye. In January, I will begin my new role as Putnam County Executive. I'll be close to home, working in the building across from Lake Gleneida. As I prepare for this new role, my pledge to the people I represent remains the same. I promise to protect families, control the tax



Assemblyman and Putnam County Executive-elect Kevin Byrne with his wife Briana and son Braden.

burden and stand up for our military, veterans and first responders, as they have stood up for us. I look forward to working for you all in this new role.

With deepest gratitude for the opportunity you have given, I wish you all a safe and healthy holiday season.

Just one more thing as I close – now and always – it is the Tappan Zee Bridge!

Kevin M. Byrne has represented the 94th Assembly District since 2017 and will be sworn in on Sunday as Putnam County Executive.

Letters to the Editor

Setting the Record Straight on Politically Extremist Language

This is a response to a letter in last week's Examiner ("Democrats Have Done Plenty to Add to Our Nation's Incivility") about my column on politically extremist language.

To accord the writer the respect he is due, as a citizen exercising his First Amendment rights, I searched online to learn what he wrote about various Democratic politicians' awful statements in the past. I don't have the space to catalog all their comments, so I'll cite just a few examples.

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-California) said, during the trial of Derek Chauvin, the officer who put his knee on George Floyd's neck, that if Chauvin wasn't convicted of all charges, "We've got to get more confrontational." That could incite someone to violence.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) said in 2017 that migrant detention centers are concentration camps. I don't know a lot about migrant detention centers. I have read that they can be rough, but the migrants are fed and clothed. To compare them to concentration camps the Nazis ran in World

War II is offensive. The Nazi camps were set up to murder millions of people. The ones who survived the initial extermination were worked, starved and tortured to death.

Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota) has compared the U.S. and Israel to the terrorist organizations Hamas and the Taliban. I vehemently disagree.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Massachusetts) called President Trump an expletive that cannot be printed in this newspaper. She has accused a nameless "they" of exploiting minorities for profit, while "hiding behind a curtain."

For the record, I don't condone any of these or other incendiary statements. I was alarmed when AOC, Omar and Tlaib were elected, and I don't support them.

However, none of them have ever accused the other political party of murdering people in their party, as Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene (R-Georgia) has done.

Also, concerning President Trump, I have done some research and found no evidence of

any other former president ever degrading his office by calling another government official "an animal."

Other Republican representatives have posted violent images online. Paul Gosar, Republican congressman from Arizona, put up a video of Gosar killing Ocasio-Cortez. Republican Eric Greitens, in Missouri, posted a video of himself using an assault rifle. Donald Trump Jr. then said on Greitens' video, "Striking fear into the hearts of liberals everywhere." That's incitement to violence.

As far as President Biden, I believe he has tried to unify this fractious country, but that works both ways. I didn't see many Republicans raise their hands to help him out. I simply don't agree that Biden is the most divisive and polarizing President we've ever had. That honor rightly belongs to his predecessor, who called for crowds to lock up Hillary Clinton, his rival for the Presidency in 2016. I could write a book on President Trump's many incendiary statements, including spurring on a riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, but I don't need to.

Many others have.

Concerning the vote in Arizona, let's also mention Georgia. Brian Kemp was the secretary of state when he ran for governor in 2018. As secretary of state, Kemp purged more than 500,000 voters from the rolls (source: American Public Media).

In Arizona, the vote was certified by the state's election authorities. Republican Gov. Doug Ducey congratulated Ms. Hobbs on her victory. Wyoming Republican Rep. Liz Cheney campaigned against Republican candidate Kari Lake, specifically because she denied that Donald Trump lost the 2020 election.

I don't live in Arizona, but what I have read about the machine breakdowns is that these occurred due to technical problems that were fixed. No one has produced any credible evidence that the vote was fraudulent.

Michael Gold
Pleasantville

Yorktown Synagogue Eternally Grateful for 'Miracle' From Neighboring Church

Hanukkah is the time when Jews around the world celebrate a miracle – the miracle that one day's supply of oil lit the menorah of the Temple in Jerusalem for eight days, in celebration of the rededication of the Temple after it was reclaimed by the Maccabees from the Greeks.

On Friday, Dec. 16, Temple Beth Am of Yorktown celebrated the miracle of Hanukkah with more than 50 people in attendance.

Another miracle took place that night, one especially meaningful during this broader holiday season. We unfortunately live in times

of rampant anti-Semitism, forcing synagogues to be ever-conscious of safety and security, especially for Beth Am's well-attended Hanukkah service.

Among those at our service were a group of perhaps eight to 10 people gathered outside of the temple, who remained there during the service. As a show of solidarity and support, Rev. Chip Low, pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown, organized a group of his congregants to stand guard outside our temple, their presence acting as a visible deterrent to any potential wrongdoers, affording us an

additional measure of security.

Their act of kindness and generosity was a complete surprise to us; we only learned of their plans to come to the temple that afternoon. It represents the very best that our community has to offer, showing that the common values of our unique faiths far outweigh the differences. In this day and age, that itself is a miracle.

On behalf of the entire congregation of Temple Beth Am, I want to thank Rev. Low and the First Presbyterian Church for their caring and support. I fervently hope that we can make

such acts everyday occurrences, rather than a one-day miracle.

Best wishes to all for the holidays and upcoming new year.

Aaron Bock
President, Temple Beth Am
Yorktown Heights

P.S. There's still time to contribute this year's Yom Kippur Appeal. See the website for

Fair Street USA: Wishing Everyone A Holiday

As 2022 wraps up, the City of White Plains looks forward to keeping the spirit of Fair Street USA alive. Fair Street USA is a 3D, immersive, interactive arts exhibit focused on exploring fair housing challenges. Housing discrimination derails dreams. Fair Street USA aimed to change that course. Ten community organizations joined forces with artists to envision a community where fair housing reigns. Visitors to Fair Street USA learned about fair housing choice, impact of housing discrimination on communities, and how to recognize and report fair housing concerns. The exhibit premiered on the White Plains library plaza and later remained on display in the library gallery.

In October, the exhibit inhabited Court Street at the Serious Fun Arts Festival. White Plains Mayor Tom Roach stated, “Fair housing education is essential to eliminating housing discrimination in communities. Each community must do their part to educate stakeholders about how to identify and combat these deleterious practices so that every person has equitable access to housing.” Mayor Roach continued, “Thank you to the city staff, community organizations and artists that collaborated to bring Fair Street USA to the City of White Plains. “Every person should be treated with dignity and respect and should be able to live where they choose.”

History of Fair Housing

Community Group: Westchester Residential Opportunities.

Artist: Moira Trachtenberg



The history of fair housing is paved with problematic practices. Redlining: the discriminatory practice of denying services to residents of certain areas based on their race or ethnicity. Restrictive Covenants: covenants that prohibit racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups from buying, leasing, or occupying homes; these became common after 1926 after the U.S. Supreme Court validated their use. Blockbusting: manipulating homeowners to sell or rent their homes at a lower price by falsely convincing them that the neighborhood's socioeconomic demographic is changing because of new groups of people moving in and that this shift will affect the value of their home. Steering: influencing a buyer's choice of communities based upon one of the protected classes.

Promoting Fair Housing

Community Group: Hudson Gateway Association of Realtors.

Artist: Taesha Muhammad

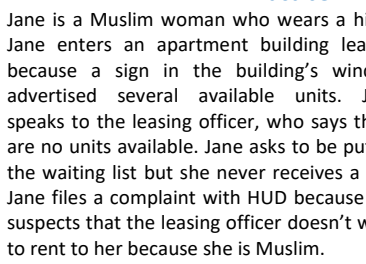


We all have a role to play in promoting fair housing and realtors have a special opportunity. “Hudson Gateway Association of REALTORS® believes in Equal Opportunity for all. Fair housing laws are a cornerstone of community. As REALTOR® members, we have both the opportunity and responsibility to increase efforts to support diversity and inclusivity in the real estate market. It is our commitment to uphold fair housing laws and offer equal professional service to all in their search of real property.”

Protected Class

Community Group: White Plains Muslim Community.

Artist: Jennifer




Jane is a Muslim woman who wears a hijab. Jane enters an apartment building leasing office because a sign in the building's window advertised several available units. Jane speaks to the leasing officer, who says there are no units available. Jane asks to be put on the waiting list but she never receives a call. Jane files a complaint with HUD because she suspects that the leasing officer doesn't want to rent to her because she is Muslim.

Reporting Discrimination

Community Group: Westchester County Human Rights Commission.

Artist: Taesha Muhammad



The Westchester County Human Rights Commission combats discrimination by implementing and enforcing the County's Human Rights Law and Fair Housing Law and by empowering the community through its education and outreach efforts regarding discrimination and hate-related issues.

If you have experienced or witnessed discrimination or a hate-related incident in Westchester County call the Human Rights Commission at (914) 995-7710 or email the Commission at humanrights@westchestergov.com

Future of Fair Housing

Community Group: WP Mayor's Youth Council.

Artist: Moira Trachtenberg



Our youth are our future, and the young people who envisioned the future of fair housing envision housing in its broadest sense with access to healthy food, green space, recreational activities, Wi-Fi, mental health services and supports and so much more.

Protected Class

Community Group: The Muslim Community.

Artist: Taesha Muhammad



John, who is a Black man, speaks to a landlord leasing an apartment. The landlord sends him to a real estate agent. John is contacted for a reference. John files a complaint with HUD because he suspects the real reason he was denied was because of his race. Joe, who is an Asian man, meets with a real estate agent to purchase a house for his family. When Joe is interested in the house, the broker steers him to a different neighborhood where there are more "desirable" residents of the neighborhood appear to be. Joe files a complaint with HUD because he suspects the real reason he was denied was because of his race.

This project is funded under a grant with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the project are dedicated to the public. The City of White Plains is not responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in the project. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Government.

Day Season Free of Fair Housing Challenges

As part of the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, and familial status, and protects residents who feel they have experienced discrimination in housing,” said Alicka Ampry-Samuel, HUD Regional Administrator for New York and New Jersey. “HUD provides funding for fair housing education and enforcement to local governments and organizations that assist residents. I am pleased that the City of White Plains, stakeholders, and artists came together to create this innovative exhibit.”



White Plains Mayor Thomas Roach, HUD Regional Administrator Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Westchester County Human Rights Commission Executive Director, Tejash Sanchala, and Artist Rebecca Mills in front of the house representing discrimination on the basis of sex and gender.

Protected Class: Religion
Community Group: Interfaith Committee.
Artist: Rebecca Mills



Protected Class: Sex/Gender
Community Group: The LOFT LGBTQ+ Community Center.
Artist: Rebecca Mills



When Jane falls behind on her rent she asks her landlord if he will give her more time. He says yes but only if she will go out with him. Feeling she has no choice, Jane agrees. Jane's landlord tells her that if she does not go out with him again he is going to evict her. Jane files a complaint with HUD because sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. A realtor refuses to show houses listed for sale to a potential buyer because the buyer is transgender. A housing provider refuses to rent a house to a same sex couple because of their "family composition". A maintenance worker employed by a housing provider subjects a female tenant to pervasive harassment because she is a lesbian. A tenant is evicted after the housing provider discovers the tenant has dated persons of the same sex and identifies as bisexual. A same-sex couple asks a realtor to see rental units throughout the city but is only shown rental units in a part of the city known for having many LGBTQ residents. All these examples constitute a form of sex discrimination.

Protected Class: Familial Status
Community Group: Lifting Up Westchester.
Artist: Rebecca Mills



John has three teenage children. John's building has a patio with picnic tables, and John's children decide to have lunch there. John receives a notice from the homeowners association informing him that the building rules say that the patio is for adult use only. Building rules that discriminate against children are a form of familial status discrimination. Jane & John are filling out an application for a mortgage at their local bank. Their loan officer notices that Jane is visibly pregnant and asks whether she will be taking maternity leave. When Jane says yes, the loan officer informs the couple that they either have to apply without Jane's income or wait until she returns from leave. They file a complaint with HUD because the bank's policy discriminates based on sex and familial status.

Protected Class: Race/Color
Community Group: Thomas H. Slater Center.
Artist: Jennifer Levine

John recently moved to the United States from Mexico. One day, John sees that there is a new tenant in the apartment next to his, so he welcomes her to the building. John's neighbor comments on how nice everyone in the building seems, especially the building manager who offered to waive her security deposit. John is surprised because the building manager was short-tempered with him and said that John's accent made him hard to understand. John later finds out that the building manager has waived fees and deposits for other tenants he likes, but not for John or other persons from Mexico. Providing different terms and conditions to tenants because of national origin is illegal discrimination.

Protected Class: National Origin
Community Group: El Centro Hispano.
Artist: Jennifer Levine



Protected Class: Disability
Community Groups: WP Mayors Advisory Council for People with Disabilities and MHA Westchester.
Artist: Moira Trachtenberg

Jane has a developmental disability and needs assistance managing her finances. Jane tells her building manager that her mother will be paying her rent and asks if all notices relating to her rent can be sent to her mother. The building manager says that the management company will only send notices to residents, no exceptions. Jane gets an eviction notice because her mother did not know that Jane's rent increased. Denying a reasonable accommodation is disability discrimination. John, a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair, views a condominium he is hoping to purchase in a new building. When John arrives, he finds there are no accessible parking spaces in the building's parking lot. Inside the unit, the thermostat and light switches are all too high for him to reach. The building has a fitness room, but the only way to get to it is to go up steps. Failing to comply with accessibility requirements is a form of disability discrimination.



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Suggested New Year's Resolutions to Enhance Your Home

You never know where you're going to find useful information to help with that glorious (and sometimes challenging) job of being a homeowner.

As I coast the internet, sometimes I find the most useful information, mostly from those professionals who are on the front line of home improvement: those who actually do the jobs required.

In this case, my source for ideas to utilize as New Year's resolutions for the home is a blogger/contractor family with the name Lombardo from the Midwest. Here is a brief outline of their suggested resolutions for the home in the new year.



By Bill Primavera

prepare emergency exits. Create easy-access emergency packs should anything happen.

5. Create a home cleaning routine. Devise daily, weekly and monthly maintenance routines for yourself and your household to keep your home clean, creating less work in the future.

6. Make a note of how to clean your things. It's a good idea to learn the ins and outs of how different things in your home should be properly cleaned. Sometimes things are complex, or just don't need to be cleaned very often and can be forgotten. Walk through your house and make a list of anything you don't know

how to clean, then look everything up. After reading up on how to clean those things, put the notes with your cleaning supplies so they're always close for reference.

7. Clean out your cupboards. Even though a lot of canned foods are nonperishable, check your cupboards for anything that might have expired or you don't plan to use.

8. Empty out your products before replacing or repurchasing. Before filling cabinets and covering counters with brand new things you already have, finish out the products you already have in your home. This reduces clutter and the chance of things expiring on your watch. If you



find something you're not interested in finishing, you know to dispose of it.

9. Give your new things a proper home. When you do stock up or get new things, be sure to put them in a place they belong, rather than letting them stack up and create clutter. If you're very busy, you can always have a space designated for these things to be until there's time for them to be sorted.

10. Get rid of things you don't need or want. Whether you have a garage sale or donate, get rid of the things in your home that lack purpose for the future.

11. Keep a donation box handy. Along with getting rid of things that you don't have use for anymore, have a designated box for things you'd like to donate or sell so that whenever you

come across them, you can put them away for later. They'll be handy for delivery or pickup, or organizing in your garage later on.

12. Rearrange furniture for efficiency and comfort. To optimize heating and cooling, be aware of how your furniture is arranged and move it accordingly. In summer months, shift the focus of your great room away from the fireplace.

13. During winter, shift everything back to face the warmth.

14. Prepare your home for guests. If you plan to do any entertaining, you can prepare your home for guests by giving key areas of your home an update. Add new or repurposed décor in an accent color to the living room. If you have guest bedrooms, make them more welcoming by adding warmer furniture that will make them feel more comfortable. Streamline connective areas like hallways to create a feeling of closeness and continuity.

These suggestions should be useful in planning an organized and satisfying way to welcome in the new year as a homeowner.

Bill Primavera is a residential and commercial realtor associated with William Raveis Realty, as well as a publicist and journalist writing regularly as The Home Guru. For questions about home maintenance or to buy or sell a home, he can be e-mailed at williamjprimavera@gmail.com or called directly at 914-522-2076.

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Queen of Kettle Bells Helps Clients Round Into Shape

By Brian Kluepfel

Although former Manhattanite Connie Cramer had been an exercise enthusiast most of her life, things shifted when she moved to Mahopac and became interested in more outdoor activities like kayaking, hiking and biking. She had to up her game.

Studying up on nutrition and physiology, Cramer has spent the past 15 years helping combat the suburban spread. She works with a variety of clients – more women than men – in confronting their fear and hesitation about exercise programs and reshaping them into the bodies they long to possess.

In a spartan, efficient space near the Olympic Diner on Miller Road, which is also home to a spa, a yoga studio and a chiropractor, Cramer takes her clients through the paces, one hour at a time, twice a week, providing a guiding hand in weight loss, strengthening and injury recovery, all with a bit of yes-you-can mantra.

“Connie keeps me motivated,” said Gail Ahearn of Somers, a four-year devotee.

Ahearn changed her eating habits significantly through Cramer’s planning, no longer skipping meals or overeating, and says that “Connie has actually become a good friend” over the course of their sessions. The duo even continued during the worst of COVID, holding Zoom workouts with the minimal equipment required by Cramer’s routines.

“Connie has not only transformed my body, but my mindset,” Ahearn said.

You see, says the instructor, it’s all about forming good habits. In fact, 30 minutes into

our interview, the tables were turned and Cramer is quizzing me: What do you eat for breakfast? How often do you go to the gym? How much do you eat at night?

By the time our conversation is over, I’ve promised to keep a log of my diet for the next three days. As one client told me, “Accountability is definitely a part of this.”

“Instead of making resolutions each January, some people let their fears stand in the way instead of going to a professional and letting them guide,” Cramer said. “I’m interested in the person who wants to start but is afraid to.”

She communicates about her clients’ lifestyles, motivations, knowledge of exercise and history of ailments and injuries.

Christine Adler of Somers was one who had to overcome some trepidation and did – in just one year.

“For me, the mental battle was half the battle,” Adler said. “Connie’s personality was very welcoming. Some personal trainers are very intense. Connie was very easy to talk to and be open with about how unhappy I was, feeling stuck.”

“I’m 55, and I thought that would make it harder to reach any fitness goals,” added Adler. “But Connie works with many women my age, and that gave me the confidence that she was the right trainer for me.”

Clients’ needs change over the years. One woman who began with the desire to improve her yoga classwork by strengthening her shoulders and back, now must deal with other injuries and improve her core.

At the core of Cramer’s programs are sensible meal plans which draw on more



Mahopac fitness enthusiast Connie Cramer guides clients through an exercise program and nutrition regimen to help them be the best version of themselves.

conventional foods, rather than trends like keto or paleo diets. (She’s recently completed two nutritional certifications with the American Council on Exercise.) An overview of one client’s weekly program showed a structured regimen of regular meals and snacks adding up to 1,200 calories a day. The petite trainer emphasized that starvation is definitely not a healthy way to lose weight.

“You have to keep the engine burning,” she said.

Cramer’s low-key inspiration is crucial to her one-on-one sessions.

“Physically and mentally, I was in a dark

place last year,” Adler said. “I really needed a cheerleader to tell me ‘You can do this; you can reach your goals.’ Just getting out to talk to Connie was tough.”

For Adler, the results speak for themselves.

“As I was getting dressed this morning in my mirror, I noticed how well everything fits me, and how easy it is to get up in the morning,” she said. “I am stronger, and I love my toned and slimmed-down body. I’m in the opposite place of where I was a year ago.”

Cramer’s studio is at 54 Miller Rd. in Mahopac. Find her at <https://www.conniecramer.com>.

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Police Blotter

County Police/Mount Kisco

Dec. 22: An officer responded to Gatto Drive at 11:52 a.m. on a complaint that taxi cabs are speeding on the street. The officer remained at the location to observe traffic conditions.

Dec. 23: A 54-year-old Bedford

Hills man was charged with DWI, a misdemeanor, following a traffic stop on North Bedford Road at 12:10 a.m. He was booked at the Green Street precinct and released pending a Jan. 5 appearance in Mount Kisco Justice Court.

Dec 23: A Manchester Drive resident reported at 11:09 a.m. that someone

entered his vehicle overnight and rummaged through it looking for items of value. Nothing was taken from the car. The incident was captured on a security camera but the would-be thief was wearing a hooded sweatshirt and could not be identified.

Dec. 23: An officer responded to Barker Street at 4:32 p.m. on a report of damage to a car from a hit-and-run driver. Upon arrival, the officer observed a fallen tree branch along with tree debris and informed the owner that his vehicle was damaged by a branch that came down in the storm, not by another motorist.

sign deployed while students were boarding.

Dec. 17: A Cedar Hill Road resident reported at 11 a.m. that a group of three women walk their dogs and routinely allow the dogs onto residents' properties and do not clean up after them. The complainant stated that she and her husband have tried to nicely ask them to clean up after the dogs but the women ignore their requests. An officer responded and made contact with those parties. They were advised of town ordinances.

Dec. 17: Police received an E-911 call from the owner of a North Broadway business who reported at 3:17 p.m. that he had recently filled the oil tank for his business for about \$1,500. However, the complainant asserted that when he recently checked, the tank was completely empty and he believes it may have been intentionally pumped out. The responding officer secured depositions; a report will follow.

Dec. 21: Report of a deceased owl off the side of the roadway on Whippoorwill Road East at 8:51 a.m. The animal control officer responded and confirmed the report. The town's highway department was notified.

Volunteer's Corner: News From the Pleasantville Volunteer Fire Department

By John R. Thys

October and November were relatively quiet in terms of the number of alarms for the Pleasantville Volunteer Fire Department. Aside from a few accidents on the now fully reopened Saw Mill River Parkway, there were no major incidents to report.

However, the department was busy decorating the firehouse for the holiday season. Windows were painted, trees decorated and lights were put up. Santa also paid a visit to the Bedford Road School in early December.

The department hosted its annual children's holiday party on Dec. 9. It was well-attended with Santa arriving on Engine 90 to hear the children's Christmas wishes. More than 150 gift bags were given and refreshments were served on the apparatus floor with a band playing holiday music. The department also provided pictures with Santa to all.

Previously, we have profiled a member of the department to recognize that member for his or her contribution to the community and to demonstrate that the department's volunteers are regular residents of the village, except from time to time, they ride the big red trucks to come to the aid of their neighbors.

We also profile parent-and-child teams, of which there have been many. This month we are profiling a father-and-son team, one with a twist. In the past it has always been a parent joining first and a son or daughter following. This month we feature Ryan Onuma and his father Chester Onuma. Ryan preceded his dad in joining the department.

Ryan, now a lieutenant in the Pleasantville Fire Company, joined the department's Junior Corps in early 2016 after spending the preceding months hanging around the firehouse. He took courses at the Fire Training Center and quickly became proficient in both leadership and firefighting skills.

After graduating from the Wentworth Institute of Technology, he returned home and joined the department. Since then, he has become a go-to guy for training others and taking on responsibilities such as running fire safety seminars for schoolchildren, scout troops and other groups and running the department's open house. His commitment to the department and to the village is an outstanding example of community service.

Chester worked for New York City for 37 years supervising landscape architects and later managing the design and construction of the city's fire and EMS facilities. He moved from Queens to Pleasantville almost 30 years ago.



The father-and-son team of Chester and Ryan Onuma, both of whom are members of the Pleasantville Volunteer Fire Department. Chester Onuma followed his son, Ryan, into the department after the son joined first.

Chester managed his son Ryan's sports teams, but when Ryan graduated from high school, he realized that he had some spare time. He then followed in his son's footsteps and joined the department, taking direction from his son at fire emergencies. This past year he was elected to the Board of Fire Commissioners and is in charge of the facilities. When asked why he joined he responded that he "always felt that giving back to the community can be an extremely rewarding and satisfying experience."

Both the department and the village are grateful that the Onumas moved to Pleasantville. They have made a big difference.

New Members Sought
The Pleasantville Volunteer Fire Department is always looking for new members. The fire service has proven to be a rewarding and meaningful experience for many volunteers. Just ask our long-term members, some of whom have been with the department more than 50 years, and many others 25 years or more.

The Pleasantville Volunteer Fire Department does a lot more than fight fires. There is a great deal of community involvement in becoming a member. Anyone interested in joining the department can stop by headquarters at 75 Washington Ave. almost any Monday evening when there are meetings and drills and the equipment is maintained. If you see us, come in and we'll make time to talk to you. Or you can call us at 914-769-2336. (There will be a recording, but your call will be returned.) We always need a few good neighbors in our department.

Croton-on-Hudson Police Department

Dec. 17: Patrol conducted a traffic stop in the area of Benedict Boulevard at 1:18 a.m. The operator of the vehicle, a 22-year-old Cortlandt man, was arrested for aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle. The subject was released on his own recognizance.

North Castle Police Department

Dec. 16: The Byram Hills transportation supervisor forwarded information alleging that an erratic driver had passed a school bus on Round Hill Road at 9:32 a.m. The complainant stated that the bus had its stop

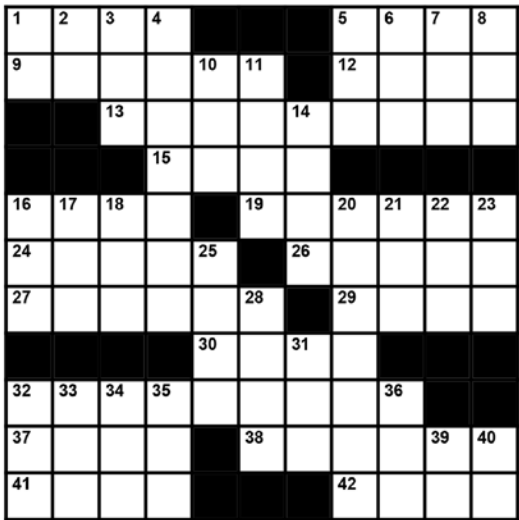
Crossword

Across

1. Residence hall
5. Blues on second, "___ on Main" in Mt. Kisco
9. Occurring every year
12. Courtroom bargain
13. Relieve
15. Surfaces, as a road
16. ___ Minor
19. Judaic philosophy
24. Mortgages, for example
26. Take game without permission
27. Enthusiastic
29. Nothing
30. Served the unanswerable
32. This Yorktown dental office will "light" your path to a whiter smile
37. "Tombstone" name
38. Smooth musical transitions
41. Looks at
42. Give off

Down

1. Anita Van Buren, in Law & Order, abbr.
2. ___ location
3. Molecular biology topic
4. Feral horse or Ford muscle car
5. File format for some pics
6. The greatest boxer
7. School of Buddhism
8. Make a sharp turn
10. Solid ___ rock
11. Linger in the shadows
14. Do it now



16. H.S. math requirement, usually
17. Small French coin
18. Actor McKellen
20. State of being under the control of another
21. Auto insurer with roadside service
22. Screen type
23. Eureka!
25. Deposed Iranian leader
28. Fall times, abbr.
31. Mrs. sheep
32. Swarmer
33. Bit of sunshine
34. Infuriate
35. Family M.D.'s
36. "Dee-licious!"
39. Emotional intelligence (abbr.)
40. Ave. intersector, abbr.

Answers on page 21

Santa's Wish List Brings Gifts to Healthcare Workers' Children

By Abby Luby

The holiday season can be stressful for nearly anyone. For healthcare workers caring for ailing patients in a nursing home, gift shopping for their families can take the cheer out of a joyous holiday.

At North Westchester Restorative Therapy & Nursing Center in Mohegan Lake, a program to help staffers and their families has given back to these valuable workers, by lessening their burden and purchasing gifts for their children.

"The program honors our hardworking staff who have children," said Megan Elba, the facility's administrator. "Some of our staff have been in their shoes as working parents raising their own kids."

Staff members volunteered to become sponsors who purchased gifts for their co-workers' children. Elba said the number of sponsors this year was the most since the program began five years ago. This year 30 children received gifts.

The sponsors were anonymous. Each parent wanting gifts for their children was assigned a number and they detailed what their children wanted as part of a wish list to Santa. Sponsors chose a number and were given the corresponding family's list.

On Wednesday, in the center's large main room, several brightly wrapped gifts were piled in front of a Christmas tree waiting to be opened. Admiring the gifts



ABBY LUBY PHOTO

Megan Elba, left, administrator at North Westchester Restorative Therapy & Nursing Center in Mohegan Lake, with Tiffany Thames, a certified nursing assistant and a single mother of three. Thames was part of a program where the center's staffers helped working parents by purchasing holiday gifts for their children.

was Tiffany Thames, a certified nursing assistant and a single mother of three. Thames, a Peekskill resident, was one of a group of parents whose children received gifts.

Thames filled out a wish list for the first time in the five years she has worked at the center. Her children are 16, 14 and six years old.

"Things have been a bit tight this year

and I haven't had that much time to shop," Thames said. "My teens asked for sheet sets and comforters and gift cards for games. My six-year-old wants LEGOs."

Thames said the Santa's Wish List program and other holiday activities at North Westchester Restorative have always made her feel special.

"I do appreciate that it can be a fun place to work, where workers come together," she said. "I feel like part of a family."

As a certified nursing assistant, she does everything from feeding, grooming and helping patients be more mobile.

"It's total care and some patients need more help than others," Thames said. "Nursing assistants are the engines to nursing homes."

Thames has been working on her bachelor's degree in criminal justice and expects to graduate next year. She is considering taking an accelerated program in nursing to keep her future job options open.

Children receiving gifts are asked to write general thank you notes to their sponsors. Thames said she hopes to learn who her sponsor was so her children could write thank you notes directly to that person.

"Without a doubt, my kids are absolutely writing thank you notes," said Thames. "Gratitude comes from your heart."

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The Changing Demographics and Preferences of Wine Consumers



By Nick Antonaccio

What are you drinking these days?

I've written about numerous wines, from innumerable regions, crafted from multitudinous grape varieties. I've focused on tried-and-true wines and fringe wines hoping to attain a mainstream

recognition.

My mantra has always been to experiment. A regular practice of sampling new wines will invariably lead to consumers finding their "new favorite wine," a phrase I frequently employ.

Of course, most of us have our go-to wines, the ones we consider our comfort wines, those wines that are consistently reliable palate-pleasers. But there are so many wines in the marketplace today that have the potential of replacing, or at least supplementing, your core cache of favorite wines.

For many of us, finding our current favorite wines was accidental, a result of experimenting with a wine recommended by our local wine merchant or a sommelier at a forward-thinking restaurant. Many of our current favorites replaced longstanding previous favorites.

I am intrigued by the divergent demographics of today's wine consumer. In my travels, I've classified them into three very broad categories. With due credit to

'As millennials become dominant in the marketplace, their preferences are differing sharply from their predecessors.'

(two-time) former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, they are:

I-know-what-I-know consumers, with blinders full-on, who have been drinking the same wines since their first adult sip.

I-know-what-I-don't-know tipplers, who are aware of the vast choices currently in the marketplace but feel no compulsion to venture outside their self-created boundaries.

And my favorite: the I-don't-know-what-I-don't-know adventurers. Rather than intentionally shunning the vast, unknown universe of wine choices, they approach each purchase decision-point with a clean slate (and clean palate).

Into which category do you fall?

The reality of the wine consumption landscape in the United States in 2022 is clear. There is a wide swath of the wine consuming public that views wine as a pleasurable companion to a meal, but not necessarily a vital component of it. A significant percentage of consumers (still) purchase Pinot Grigio without giving a second thought to the endless alternatives of light, aromatic and structured white wines. Anonymous red blends command a growing market share as a middle-of-the-road, middle-of-the-palate wine of choice.

The Nielsen group of statistical and demographic patterns and trends reports

on the top-selling grape varieties by volume (not sales value). A recent survey identified the following rankings:

1. Cabernet Sauvignon
2. Chardonnay
3. Red Blends (my note: a blend by definition is not a single varietal)
4. Pinot Grigio
5. Sauvignon Blanc

Rounding out the top 10 were Moscato, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Rose (my note: rose is a style, not a varietal) and Malbec.

Other statistics reported: 46 percent of all sales were for red wine while 44 percent were for white and 10 percent for rose.

Where do your preferences fall in this plethora of varieties? Are you a steadfast consumer of one of the top varieties? Did you identify one with which you've been thinking of experimenting?

When I read these rankings, I was reminded of a similar survey several years ago. At the time the rankings were quite different. The top-ranking varietal was Chardonnay, followed by Merlot, Pinot Grigio, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. My how the public's preferences have changed over the years.

What has caused this significant change? In part it's due to the changing demographics of wine drinkers. Aging baby boomers are drinking less of their favorites. As millennials become dominant in the marketplace, their preferences are differing sharply from their predecessors.

The rise of the internet, and its outreach of peer-shared opinions of wine, has exposed consumers to a broader spectrum of available wines that suit their palate. Consumers increasingly approach wine from a knowledge base, supplanting a subjective, instinctive approach. More espouse the I-don't-know-what-I-don't-know approach to their purchasing decisions.

Whether the subject is wine varieties or more esoteric topics such as your favorite cut of steak, music genre or political ideology, we can all find surveys that support our preferences. I

know that I know that.

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.

You Heard It Through the Grapevine

The Skies Will Provide a Magical Night of Star Gazing on New Year's Eve

With all the celebrations and merriment as we wind down these last few days of the year, I thought it'd be fun to take a break from all the rushing around. Instead, let's see what magic is in the night sky as we celebrate on New Year's Eve.

We're past the solstice now, which means it's officially winter. It might be difficult to recognize, but the days are getting longer. It'll be a few weeks before we really start to notice that extra daylight sneaking in, but it won't be long.

Clear Skies

As the late afternoon darkness falls, the first couple of things we'll see poking into the fading glow are our solar system's planets. Reddish Mars, toward the east, and yellowish Jupiter toward the south.

The pair have been unmistakably bright for the last few months and are still quite a sight. If you need help, the first-quarter

moon will be between them. Just jump to the moon's left for Mars and to the right for Jupiter.

Toward Jupiter's right is the subdued-yellow Saturn. It's fun to imagine where the three planets are and imagine our gaze going deeper and deeper into space. They're all along the same line, called the ecliptic. Let's follow the line into the west's glowing dusk. Maybe we can spot Mercury and Venus, too. They'll be challenging, low to the horizon and in the sun's glow, so be patient. That's all the bright planets in the sky at once.

By around 8:30 p.m., the constellation Orion joins the night in the east. Let's look for the three stars that make up his famous belt. Once we have them in sight, we can widen our gaze and see the rest of the hunter's stars fill in around it. The well-known orange supergiant Betelgeuse is to the right of the belt as Orion rises. We can also see the ribbon of bright lights that surrounds Orion, called the Winter Hexagon.

Orion's belt happens to be a handy tool for finding our way around the night. If we follow the belt upward (toward the west), we'll come to the V-shaped Hyades, and then the tiny dipper-shaped Pleiades. These are two of the closest star clusters to us.

Downward toward the horizon, we'll come to Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky. Sirius is always one of my favorites to watch cross the sky. In Westchester, it's always fairly low to the horizon, so the light we see from it can get mixed up with some disturbances in our atmosphere. These disturbances make it twinkle more than some other stars, and sometimes it even appears to change color before our eyes.

Let's check in on Sirius and watch it move southward as the evening goes



By Scott Levine

by. Just as the clock strikes midnight and the confetti falls, check in again. Every new year starts with Sirius in that spot, due south, and at its highest point for the night, with Orion standing tall beside it.

It's always amazing what we can see if we take a few minutes to track them down, and New Year's Eve is no different. Thanks for reading this year and happy 2023, everyone!

Scott Levine (astroscott@yahoo.com) is an astronomy writer and speaker from Croton-on-Hudson. He is also a member of Westchester Amateur Astronomers, a group dedicated to astronomy outreach in our area. For information about the club including membership, newsletters, upcoming meetings and lectures at Pace University and star parties at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, visit www.westchesterastronomers.org.

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continued from page 20

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Optum Problems Contribute to Broader ER Surge at NWH

This column is the second installment of a multi-part series about concerns at Optum.

By Adam Stone

Since publishing an in-depth column earlier this month on the vexing issues at Optum Tri-State medical group – the former CareMount/former MKMG – I’ve been blown away by the volume and emotional intensity of reader feedback, mostly echoing concerns in the original coverage about severe scheduling issues and alleged profit-driven doctor shortages.

I’ve probably received more comments reacting to the column than any piece we’ve ever published, spanning the past 15-plus years.

In the couple weeks subsequent to publication, we’ve been chipping away at follow-up reporting, and that chipping continues.

But, given the massive local interest in the topic and the nature of Optum’s response (meaning the organization’s refusal to respond), it seemed worth updating our readership in the interim on where the issue stands, even as we work on a separate, thorough, eventual in-depth news report.

In fact, I was already debating between waiting versus publishing my next column on the topic when Examiner Editor-in-Chief Martin Wilbur directed me to another layer of the local healthcare saga.

The layer came in the way of a Village Board report update last Monday from Mount Kisco Deputy Mayor Lisa Abzun.

ER Traffic Jam

As it turns out, the Northern Westchester Hospital/Northwell emergency room, already dealing with a surge in use for other unrelated reasons, has become even more filled with non-emergency patients because people face soul-crushing delays and scheduling hiccups with Optum and then pivot with a visit to the ER instead.

While officials are publicly urging people to use urgent care facilities, and not the ER, for non-emergency health issues such as sprains, minor lacerations, infections such as pink eye, etc., not everyone has heard or is heeding the call.

“The recent acquisition of CareMount Medical by Optum has also left many patients seeking treatment at the (Northern Westchester Hospital) ER rather than waiting to see their primary care physicians, many times for non-emergent health issues,” Abzun said at the Dec. 19 Board of Trustees’ meeting. Her comments were part of a broader update on the emergency room issue following a Dec. 7 Zoom meeting she participated in between Northern Westchester Hospital/Northwell officials and an array of community leaders.

It’s infuriating to realize the fixable problems at Optum (chronicled in our prior coverage) now contribute to potentially clogging an already taxed local emergency room.

It was Northern Westchester Hospital/



By Adam Stone

Northwell reps, at the meeting with community leaders, who cited the emergency room concerns, Abzun explained.

She noted how the initiative to hold the wide-ranging meeting came from Northern Westchester Hospital/Northwell, and also said how no similar session has been suggested by Optum. Asked if a meeting with Optum might be in order, to review various community pain points, she said such a conversation with the company “would be lovely.”

In a phone interview last Friday afternoon, the deputy mayor also pointed to her connection to the larger issue as a patient herself. After CareMount became Optum, she received a letter from her two doctors explaining how they’d now only be available twice per week.

“Presumably it was five days before,” Abzun said. “I’ve seen the issue personally.”

(It’s also important to emphasize how various problems with scheduling and billing and other patient complaints significantly predate Optum; a chorus of especially embittered, widespread — justified — grumbling about Mount Kisco Medical Group, and then CareMount, had already been growing for well over a dozen years.)

Puzzle Piece

Meanwhile, Northern Westchester Hospital declined my request to comment on the Optum piece of the puzzle but did offer a substantive statement about the troubling local ER issue, citing factors also mentioned by Abzun when she described the problems at the Village Board meeting.

“The Northern Westchester Hospital emergency department has been experiencing a recent surge in patient volume primarily driven by viral respiratory illnesses such as influenza, COVID-19, and RSV,” stated Dr. Jim Dwyer, Northern Westchester Hospital’s chair of emergency medicine. “Outpatient care providers such as pediatricians, internal medicine physicians and Urgent Care Centers are also experiencing high patient volumes due to these viral illnesses. Although wait

times for non-critical patients seeking care in the emergency department have increased at certain high volume times of the afternoon and evening, we have the capacity to handle

this surge.”

And while no one is suggesting the Optum issues are a primary factor, or even secondary, the domino effect of how the scheduling issues would contribute to the wider ER surge are plainly obvious and simple to imagine.

- Patient develops non-emergency health issue.
- Patient contacts Optum.
- Patient can’t get appointment.
- Patient gets frustrated.
- Patient goes to emergency room.

While that patient “should” use urgent care instead, the bottom line is that not everyone does, and not everyone will.

And some worry urgent care facilities

could also become overrun. (Optum operates the urgent care in Mt. Kisco, at 360 North Bedford Rd., along the Mt. Kisco/Bedford Hills line.)

The deputy mayor asked Northwell officials at the Zoom meeting earlier this month if they might open their own additional urgent care in Mount Kisco to address the broader issues, with the nearest Northwell urgent care location in Yorktown Heights; Abzun said she was told by Northwell there are no current plans to do so.

This is purely anecdotal but an Examiner reporter went to the Mt. Kisco Optum urgent care late last Friday and it was absolutely packed. One woman said she arrived at 2 p.m. that afternoon and was told she’d receive a call as soon as there was an opening. That call didn’t come till about three hours later, at about 5 p.m.

(My own occasional experiences at the Mt. Kisco urgent care have always been exceptionally positive, and it’s been a terrific resource for my family when needed. But I do wonder if the convenience it delivers could be neutralized if more people are pushed to use it and providers decline to add staff and/or locations.)

Lawmakers Loom

There’s also momentum brewing for local legislators to weigh in.

I was in touch with Assemblyman Chris Burdick (D-Bedford), and he hopes to have more detailed information to share come January, and can go into depth in an interview. But he said he’s currently “digging into” the issue while also mentioning how he needs to determine “the action which under present law and regulation the state can take.”

“There is a barrage of complaints about Optum,” Burdick told me in an e-mail exchange last Friday. “Physicians leaving the practice. Incredible frustration and endless delays getting appointments. It’s as though they’ve fallen off the cliff. I am extremely concerned about it, am delving into it and will be taking the appropriate action.”

A local legislator directing serious attention on the issue is no small development.

Silent Treatment

Let’s also examine Optum’s refusal to grant an interview.

As noted in the original column, Optum would only provide a canned e-mail quote.

After the piece published, and Optum was flooded with new complaints, I remained hopeful company leaders would take the opportunity to communicate with patients through a follow-up article by one of our news reporters. But after reaching out yet again, multiple times in recent weeks, all we’ve heard back this time is the sound of crickets.

“Our goal is to deliver the right care, at the right time and in a way that results in the best outcome for our patients,” stated a portion of the non-sequitur corporate communications gobbledygook provided on Sept. 8 to Examiner freelance reporter Sherrie Dulworth, submitted by Julie Robinson-Tingue, a public relations senior director.

The quote was attributed to Optum Tri-State Region CEO Dr. Scott Hayworth –

the head of CareMount before CareMount joined Optum last year – and President Kevin Conroy.

Getting ghosted by irritated or disinterested sources is commonplace for local news outlets, and not typically worthy of prominent public airing. But a corporate decision to be essentially silent amidst a torrent of desperate patient complaints speaks to what seems to be the remarkable arrogance of a company flirting with a potential future monopoly, at least figuratively speaking.

Don’t forget, Optum is a subsidiary of the multinational behemoth UnitedHealth Group, which is one of the most revenue-rich corporations on the planet. The organization is both a healthcare provider and an insurance company.

I don’t pretend to be an expert on antitrust issues. But, speaking of a monopoly, it sure sounds to me like United almost owns the medical industry equivalent of Boardwalk and Park Place.

Speaking of which, the U.S. Justice Department seems to generally hold that same big picture assessment, as it’s appealing a judge’s decision to permit United, one of the country’s largest health insurers, to acquire Change Healthcare, a firm that connects payers, providers and patients. (A fascinating related ProPublica article describes Change as “the pipes that carry insurance claims between health care providers and insurers.”)

New York State of Mind

Pushback begins right here in New York, as state Attorney General Leticia James in February filed the aforementioned antitrust lawsuit with the Justice Department and the state of Minnesota to stop the proposed acquisition of Change Healthcare by United.

“We are suing United to stop its attempted acquisition of Change to ensure that New Yorkers benefit from competitive healthcare markets,” James stated in a Feb. 24 press release.

The lawsuit claims the acquisition would give United, as described in the press release, “an unparalleled competitive advantage – allowing it to use Change’s enormous repository of claims data to raise costs for its competitors, hobble their ability to compete with United, and deny them access to innovations.”

I called and e-mailed James’ office, asking what thoughts the attorney general might have on whether the problems described by patients could be seen as evidence of real-world fallout from broader antitrust issues. The office declined comment.

Patient Pushback

All the elected official reaction aside, the bottom line is how the issues impact everyday people. While most local patients feel powerless to Optum’s offenses, Stephanie Porteus, who just happens to also be an attorney, is taking action.

“When I say negligent, I truly believe that the delay in both care...

To read the rest of this column, visit us online. This is a partial excerpt of a column published in full at TheExaminerNews.com. As noted in a previous column, if you’re a current or former doctor/employee, concerned about these local healthcare issues, email astone@theexaminernews.com.

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