ALL THAT JAZZ
Long Island Fall Festival puts on a show in Huntington

Members of Laura’s Dance & Fitness Studio perform at the Long Island Fall Festival, held Oct. 6 through 9 at Heckscher Park. Photo by Steven Zaitz

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Romaine vs. Calone
Clash of visions for Suffolk’s aging population

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Townline Rail: About C&D Debris

Townline Rail is a proposed alternative to trucking locally generated incinerator ash from the Huntington-Smithtown waste-to-energy facility as well as Construction & Demolition (C&D) debris off Long Island once the Brookhaven landfill is closed.

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- C&D debris in an enclosed facility or sitting short-term in covered rail cars does not present a threat to the aquifer
The 29th annual Long Island Fall Festival returned to Heckscher Park in Huntington for the Columbus Day weekend.

Held from Oct. 6 through 9 and hosted by the Huntington Township Chamber of Commerce and the Town of Huntington, hundreds flocked to enjoy fall-themed entertainment, vendors from local businesses, live music and an array of rides, food and wine and lively demonstrations for families.

Despite the inclement weather during most of Saturday, Long Islanders were treated to entertainment at the Harry Chapin Stage, a carnival, a variety of food vendors, including a craft beer and wine tent, as well as games and rides for young and old alike.

Performances by the Fat Nicky and the Snacks, Rusty Spur Band, Fleetwood Macked, The Electric Dudes and The Day Trippers — a Beatles tribute band — headlined the weekend. Many youth and high school-aged acts graced the stage, too, including from the Nassau BOCES Long Island High School for the Arts, Munro Music of East Northport and Laura’s Dance & Fitness Studio of Huntington.

As fall weather settles in, the celebration proves each year to be a highlight for Huntington and Long Island, ushering in the crisp weather and keeping spirits alive and well to kick off the 2023 holiday season.
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Candidates for Suffolk County executive went before the public Tuesday evening, Oct. 10, tackling various matters related to the county’s aging population and other topics.

Held at Stony Brook University’s Charles B. Wang Center and hosted by AARP-NY, Town of Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine (R) and businessman Dave Calone (D) fielded questions mainly on how they would assist seniors if elected next month to the county’s highest post.

Chanteé Lans, Long Island correspondent for WABC-TV, moderated the candidate forum, asking questions posed by AARP members.

Calone is a former federal prosecutor with private-sector experience assisting start-ups on Long Island and nationwide. “I believe that we need new ideas, new vision and, quite frankly, new leaders to bring us into the next decade,” he said.

Before assuming the role of town supervisor, Romaine served as Suffolk County clerk and county legislator. He staked his platform for county executive upon his experience in public life.

“I’m coming to change county government for the better,” he said. “I’m coming to build a budget that’s honest, transparent and that deals with situations.”

**Housing**

Suffolk County residents are increasingly being priced out, from young adults to seniors entering retirement, with many opting to leave the region in favor of a cheaper cost of living elsewhere.

Romaine emphasized the need to construct new housing units to ameliorate these challenges. He pledged to use the county executive’s office to encourage federal subsidization for senior housing.

“Long Island has been shortchanged in so many ways,” he said. “I intend to be a very strong voice to advocate for Section 202/8 housing so we can have senior housing for those who can least afford it.”

Calone described housing scarcity in Suffolk as the number one issue among many residents, exacerbated further by a lack of affordability. He noted that the problem has compound effects on the small business sector, which often needs more workers who cannot afford to live in the county.

“I would appoint a county chief housing officer to work with our towns and villages to identify where we already have the infrastructure we need to be able to build housing immediately,” Calone said.

**Cybersecurity**

Calone said the county government must ensure it has the proper cybersecurity protections, such as cyber insurance. He supported having a cybersecurity officer oversee the county’s information technology systems.

“When it comes to individuals, we need to make sure that we take those learnings and use them to help individuals understand when they’re at risk,” he said.

Romaine said introducing cybersecurity insurance, placing the county’s data center in the cloud and conducting periodic penetration tests would be necessary to enhance cybersecurity within the county government.

“I’d have a better system than we have in the county now,” he noted.

**Aging in place**

To assist seniors with difficulties aging in place, Romaine proposed sweeping repeals to “regressive taxes” on home necessities.

“We tax your LIPA bill, we tax your heating fuel, we tax your natural gas, we tax your propane,” he said. “We are one of the few counties in the state that does that. I am making a commitment to repeal those taxes.”

Calone said that roadway safety would be a critical matter to support seniors. To allow for aging in place, he advocated for incentives for developers to promote senior accessibility at homes. “There are simple things we can do at the outset — when things are being built — to make sure that we have aging in place,” he said.

County voters will decide on these two candidates in under a month. Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 7.

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**Staying on track: Port Jeff Branch electrification gains ground in MTA’s 20-Year plan**

BY RAYMOND JANIS
EDITOR@TBREDNEWSMEDIA.COM

The decades-old proposal to electrify the Port Jefferson Branch of the Long Island Rail Road passed a significant hurdle last week, though uncertainty remains long-term.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which owns and operates LIRR, included capacity improvements for the Port Jeff Branch within its 2025-2044 20-Year Needs Assessment blueprint published last week.

The document outlines MTA’s long-term vision for the region’s transit, describing some of the needed improvements for the local line, including electrification, double tracking, stations, a storage yard and associated infrastructure.

The report states some of the project’s objectives, such as increased travel speed and frequency while providing a one-seat ride to Penn Station and Grand Central Madison. It further acknowledges the need to reduce strain upon the Ronkonkoma Branch by North Shore riders driving inland.

In a Sept. 29 letter addressed to Gov. Kathy Hochul (D), over two dozen state, county and local public officials called for Port Jeff Branch modernization within the 20-year plan. Dave Steckel, an MTA media liaison, said the agency had compiled with the core request of the letter.

“Regarding the letter on Port Jefferson Branch electrification, the MTA has satisfied the request laid out in that letter by including Port Jefferson Branch electrification in the 20-year needs assessment,” Steckel said.

But, he added, “Inclusion in this analysis does not mean that the MTA will be pursuing a project. Decisions about which of these projects, if any, will be included in subsequent MTA capital programs, will be made in the context of those future programs, including the amount of funding available to rebuild and improve the existing MTA system, which will need to be prioritized before any expansion projects can be considered.”

The report finds potential operational constraints for the electrification project, highlighting the need for additional capital improvements, space for a new terminal rail yard and planning studies. The plan suggests the Lawrence Aviation Superfund site in Port Jefferson Station as a potential site for the rail yard.

The 20-year plan also added some possible drawbacks for prioritizing the Port Jeff Branch. Electrification of the line rated average in cost-effectiveness “mainly due to the high cost and relatively low ridership.”

**Continuing the fight**

In separate statements to TBR News Media, public officials representing North Shore communities continued to call for the MTA to prioritize the project.

New York State Sen. Anthony Palumbo (R-New Suffolk) emphasized the centrality of the Lawrence Aviation property in regional planning for the North Shore and beyond.

“Electrification of the Port Jefferson line and the establishment of the Lawrence Aviation site as a regional rail hub is a critically important component of our efforts to enhance mass transit service to North Shore residents,” he said.

“Improving access and reliability to our mass transit system will increase ridership, alleviate traffic congestion and be an economic boost to the local economy.”

Village of Port Jefferson Mayor Lauren Sheprow expanded on the existing pressures upon Port Jeff Branch commuters to Manhattan, particularly in the context of the burden of transit by rail.

“For years, residents of Port Jeff and the surrounding communities have demonstrated by their actions how they feel about the Port Jefferson Branch — we drive to Ronkonkoma when seeking direct travel, a shorter commute, more frequent service options and less transfers,” she said. “Electrification and modernization of the Port Jefferson Branch will increase connectivity between stations. It will reduce travel time and transfers, and provide more frequent scheduling options, including express options.”

State Sen. Mario Mattera (R-St. James) emphasized the vast support for this effort among officials and community stakeholders, noting “everybody involved wants this.” He said generating the necessary public awareness and appealing to Hochul remain critical.

Town of Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine (R) suggested electrification would help counteract some of the downward trends throughout the region, namely the loss of youth.

“Thousands of Brookhaven residents use the LIRR to commute to work every day, and thousands more ride the train for other reasons,” the town supervisor said. “Electrification would provide faster, more efficient service and attract people to live in the communities with close access to the railroad.”

To read an expanded report of this event, please visit tbrnewsmedia.com.
The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

**Hauppauge woman arrested for stealing check images from bank**
A Jericho bank lost around $108K after a woman it employed accessed images of checks, Nassau police said. The images were eventually sold on an app, police said. Cricel A. Santamaria, 24, of Hauppauge, was arrested Oct. 3 and charged with second-degree grand larceny, police said. Santamaria, while employed at Webster Bank, at 1 Jericho Plaza, allegedly fraudulently accessed check images without any legitimate business purpose around 8:10 p.m. Feb. 4, 2022, police said. The images were posted for sale on Telegram, a social media messaging app, police said. The bank lost $108K, police said.

**Wallet stolen from restaurant patron**
Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Second Squad detectives are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the man who allegedly stole a wallet containing credit cards from another patron at The Bryant, located at 100 Walt Whitman Road in Huntington Station, on August 23 at approximately 8:05 p.m. The theft was captured on video. To view the video, go to YouTube.com/scpdtv and click on Wanted for Huntington Station Grand Larceny 23C0557133.

**Huntington Station serial thief arrested**
A man who allegedly stole landscaping equipment and tools across several places in Huntington Station over the course of the year was arrested on Oct. 7. Juan Fransico, 40, of Huntington Station, allegedly stole landscaping equipment and tools from homes and businesses in his hometown on Feb. 11, March 13, April 5, Aug. 24, and Oct. 5. On Oct. 7, Fransico destroyed the padlocks of a trailer in a yard on Broadway in Huntington Station and stole two leaf blowers and a yellow wheelbarrow.

Fransico was charged with four counts of fourth-degree grand larceny, one count of third-degree criminal mischief, one count of fourth-degree criminal mischief, two counts of third-degree criminal mischief, one count of petty larceny, and one count of criminal mischief.

**FOR MORE PRESS RELEASES FROM THE SUFFOLK COUNTY POLICE, VISIT WWW.TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM/POlice**

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**CATUGHT ON CAMERA**

Do you recognize these three? Photo from SCPD

**Wanted for grand larceny**
Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Second Squad detectives are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the three people above plus a fourth accomplice who allegedly stole merchandise from a Commack store.

Two men and two women allegedly stole approximately $3,600 worth of sunglasses from a locked case at TJ Maxx, located at 5020 Jericho Turnpike, on September 27 at approximately 7 p.m.

**Merchandise stolen from Kohl’s**
Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Fourth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the woman who allegedly stole clothing from Kohl’s, located at 45 Crooked Hill Road in Commack, on September 16 at approximately 8:15 p.m.

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**COMPILLED BY HEIDI SUTTON"**

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**SUFFOLK COUNTY CRIME STOPPERS OFFERS A CASH REWARD FOR INFORMATION THAT LEADS TO AN ARREST. ANYONE WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THESE INCIDENTS CAN CONTACT SUFFOLK COUNTY CRIME STOPPERS TO SUBMIT AN ANONOMOUS TIP BY CALLING 1-800-220-TIPS.**
Notice of formation of Law Office of Vaughn Krmoyan, PLLC LLC. Articles of Organization filed with the Secretary of State of New York SSNY on August 22, 2023. Office located in Suffolk County. SSNY has been designated for service of process. SSNY shall mail copy of any process served against the LLC to 1330 Ave of Americas, 23FI, NY, 11001. Purpose: Any lawful purpose.

164240 9/7 6x tn

Notice of formation of STILL SHORE STUDIO LLC. Arts of Org filed with Secretary of State of New York SSNY on 06/20/23. Office located in Suffolk County. SSNY has been designated as agent of the LLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail a copy of any process to 1299 Oak St, Northport, NY 11768. Purpose: Any lawful purpose.

166530 9/14 6x tn
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Email: legals@tbrnewsmedia.com

Notice of formation of Long Island Inspections LLC. Articles of Organization filed with the Secretary of State of New York (SSNY) on 6/30/2023. Office located in Suffolk County. SSNY has been designated as service of process. SSNY shall mail all copies of process served against the LLC, 26 Echo Lane Melville NY 11747. Purpose: any lawful purpose.

169070 10/5 6x thn

Notice of formation of MDM Licensed Clinical Social Work, PLLC. Arts of Org. filed with Secretary of State of New York (SSNY) on 09/07/2023. Office location: Suffolk County. SSNY has been designated as agent of the PLLC upon whom process against it may be served. SSNY shall mail a copy of the process to the PLLC: 140 East Main Street, Suite 3, Huntington, NY, 11743. Purpose: Any lawful purpose.

170470 10/12 6x thn
It is difficult to determine which was more a bummer for Huntington High School and its football team this past Saturday — the unrelenting rain that drenched players, fans and guests of its Homecoming festivities, or the beatdown the Blue Devils suffered at the hands of the Northport Tigers.

Tiger running back Michael Campoli rushed for 180 yards and two touchdowns as Northport defeated Huntington 30-13, Oct. 7. The Tigers improve to a record of 2-3 as the Blue Devils are still looking for their first win of the season as they drop to 0-5.

Northport’s game plan from the very beginning of the game was obvious — run the ball down the Blue Devils’ throats. The Tigers ran 11 straight plays after receiving the opening kickoff and all of them were on the ground. Campoli ran six times for 76 yards, and he finished the drive with a 9-yard score.

Northport would score again in the second quarter but this time it was the defense that registered the points. Linebacker Ben Pipolo would stop Blue Devil halfback David Djebi in the Huntington end zone for a safety and give the Tigers a 9-0 lead with just over nine minutes remaining in the half.

As the rain became more ferocious, Northport got sloppier with the handling of the ball. The Tigers fumbled twice on their next two possessions and the Devils took advantage of the second turnover. Djebi slipped a tackle and sloshed 38 yards down to the Tiger 1-yard line and quarterback Joey Zink snuck it in to make the score 9-6.

But another 11-play drive by Northport to close the half put them up 16-6. Quarterback Simon Blissett completed his only pass of the afternoon on the march, and it was a big one. He threw a rainbow down the right sideline to his brother Calvin for 28 yards to the 4. Campoli slid into the end zone on the next play.

Two explosive plays, one by each side, highlighted the second half. On the first play of the 4th quarter, Djebi broke four tackles on his way to a 91-yard touchdown run that made the score 23-13 but this was quickly negated by kick returner Luke Loiacono who broke a few tackles of his own while bringing back the ensuing kickoff 89 yards to the house. It was the final scoring of the afternoon.

Northport will attempt to win two games in a row for the first time this year when the team travels to Bellport this weekend. Huntington tries again to get into the win column when it hits the road to Deer Park.

Northport football gets win over Huntington in drenching rain

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In a battle of two powerhouse teams, the Commack girls volleyball team beat crosstown rival Northport last Friday night.

The Lady Cougars dropped the first game 24-26 but came storming back to take the match in four games, winning the final three by scores of 25-8, 26-24, 25-16, at home Oct. 6.

Commack’s Kaitlin Curran had a monster day with 15 kills, 20 digs and four service aces. Both teams entered the match at the top of the standings in League II, but Commack now takes control of the conference, opening up a two-game lead over Northport with a 9-1 record. The Lady Tigers drop to 7-3.

“We knew Northport was going to be a tough team going into this match,” said Curran, who is tied for fourth in Suffolk County with Sarah Idler of Eastport-South Manor in kills with 147. “We never lost faith after losing that first set, and we knew if we kept a positive attitude and minimized our errors, we would come out on top.”

Lady Tiger outside hitter Emma Watts, who has 170 kills this season, felt her team committed too many errors to win against such a quality opponent.

“We just had too many mistakes, and Commack did a great job in finding the weak parts in our defense,” Watts said. “It was definitely a tough loss, and we are focusing on these last few games and hopefully we will come out on top in all of them.”

Lady Cougar Maya Khan had 10 kills and 19 digs, and Molly Singer had 21 assists and four service aces. Curran’s sister Rylee had 35 digs.

For Northport, who wore all-pink uniforms to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Chloe Mayer had 30 assists and 15 digs, and eighth grader Riley Zdrojeski had four service aces and five kills.

“We have such a talented team with some of the best hitters in Suffolk County,” Mayer said. “But we just couldn’t get the job done after winning that first game. We will regroup and be ready for our next match.”

Northport played Sachem North at home on Tuesday, Oct. 10, and Commack, who lost at Connetquot in their very first game and haven’t lost since, played at Lindenhurst on Wednesday, Oct. 11. Both results occurred too late for press time.
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Editorial

Introducing News Flash

Responsible AI integration for local journalism

This week, TBR News Media has embarked upon a pilot project we’re calling News Flash.

It’s a first-of-its-kind journalistic endeavor to integrate artificial intelligence technologies into our newsroom operation. Using ChatGPT, a popular chatbot developed by OpenAI that launched in November 2022, we believe News Flash can aid us in our mission to inform our North Shore readership.

The concept here is simple. We are feeding some of our original content into ChatGPT, directing the chatbot to extract the most interesting or insightful news nuggets within a given article.

While AI generates the bullet points, we assure our readers that our staff retains complete editorial control over the end product. We are committed to subjecting AI-produced content to the same rigorous standards we use for content by human writers.

There are several motivations behind this effort. We are acutely aware and deeply concerned our digital technologies have diminished our attention spans and impaired our faculties for processing large chunks of information. Reading proficiency scores in the U.S. are declining, and in an electoral system demanding a well-informed citizenry, this rings of deep trouble for our republic.

Presenting noteworthy or insightful points up front may make one more inclined to read the entire article. But even if a reader opts not to read the article, News Flash will have delivered some of the necessary material, informing even the nonreader.

There is also a broader philosophical objective behind this project. Artificial intelligence may be the defining technological innovation of our lifetimes. Our staff is in uncharted waters, with no precedents to guide us on properly synchronizing AI and local journalism.

With the awesome power of AI comes an equally awesome responsibility to harness its power appropriately. We believe trained journalists must guide AI, using this tool to enhance and augment the reader experience. Without strict human oversight, we risk irreversible disruption to a vital American institution, with the potential ramifications still unknown.

Scanning the local media landscape, we see alarming trends all around us. Each year, more local news outlets shutter. Others consolidate under large conglomerates. And most disturbingly, more and more Americans live in news deserts, or places without a local newspaper. These are trying times that should trouble journalists and citizens alike.

Without the local press, we naturally gravitate to larger, national media outlets whose contents are increasingly polarized and politically charged. Reading only about higher levels of government, whose centers of power are far away from Long Island and interests often unaligned with our own, we become disillusioned and disconnected from the democratic process.

For the first time ever, local journalists have a powerful tool to help advance their mission to inform democracy. If used properly, AI can help counteract these downward trajectories in our industry, restoring local journalism to its central place in American life.

At TBR News Media, we pledge to use AI technology responsibly. Like generations of pioneers before us, let us plunge forth into the Great Unknown. May this adventure prove fulfilling for both local journalism and democracy — and our readers.

Letters to the Editor

Jen Hebert's vision for Huntington

Jen Hebert is running for the Huntington Town Board in the upcoming November election.

I strongly believe she’s the best possible candidate for the job. She brings vast experience from her nine years serving on the Huntington Board of Education. She also ran a local nursery school for many years, so she understands the challenges of being a small business in our town.

Most importantly, Jen has experience representing her neighbors and being a voice for our community.

As a school board member, Jen fought tirelessly for Huntington students, staff and families. But she was also a careful and respectful steward of taxpayer money. Jen was completely dedicated to the job of school board trustee, almost never missing a meeting or event in the nine years she served.

During her time on the board, Jen worked to strengthen the curriculum, add extracurricular programs, improve and modernize district buildings, and build community trust in the board of education.

Jen was also an integral part of the team that found a path to reopening the Jack Abrams school as an innovative STEM magnet school.

Huntington needs a proven leader like Jen Hebert on the Town Board. She’s an independent thinker, and has the experience and integrity we need and deserve.

Cathy Ribando
Huntington

Green dreams, commuter realities

Greatly improved service along the Long Island Rail Road’s Port Jefferson Branch is possible and necessary.

The time is opportune. New York’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act requires state agencies to move toward zero-carbon emissions. Virtually all local leaders of both parties support green energy for the Port Jefferson Branch. It is among the highest priorities of the Long Island Sierra Club, and it would substantially improve our local economy and real estate values.

This issue needs the attention of Gov. Kathy Hochul [D] as it brings to light the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s lack of initiative regarding the CLCPA.

There is also the issue of MTA/LIRR accountability to local communities.

Relocation of the Port Jefferson train station to the Lawrence Aviation Superfund site in Port Jefferson Station would eliminate two grade-level crossing bottlenecks and two rickety, narrow bridges — one of which the state has agreed to repair at great expense.

The LIRR has spent hundreds of millions of dollars eliminating grade-level crossings in Nassau County. Moving the station to Lawrence Aviation would be vastly less expensive than any of the Nassau projects.

LIRR planners suggest they want to electrify and “double track” the Port Jefferson line — not in our lifetime. I believe this is a “deal killer” pitched to prevent anything from being done. The LIRR planners admit that more land must be acquired by eminent domain to double track.

This clearly gives the planners an excuse to spend money elsewhere.

The LIRR planners state it is not feasible to electrify the Port Jefferson Branch because there is insufficient ridership to sustain the investment. What was the population density along the Ronkonkoma line when they electrified the Ronkonkoma Branch? The LIRR planners strip ridership off the Port Jefferson Branch and then tell us the ridership will not sustain the investment.

To the MTA and LIRR, create a “one-seat ride” for the people of the North Shore. A ride that can go from Port Jefferson to Manhattan, “a better ride.” It is time to put our feet in the starting blocks. And remember: We pay taxes, too.

Bruce Miller
Port Jefferson

WRITE TO US …

AND KEEP IT LOCAL

We welcome your letters, especially those responding to our local coverage, replying to other letter writers’ comments and speaking mainly to local themes. Letters should be no longer than 400 words and may be edited for length, libel, style, good taste and uncivil language. They will also be published on our website. We do not publish anonymous letters. Please include an address and phone number for confirmation. Email letters to: editor1@tbrnewsmedia.com or mail them to:

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The messy world makes even less sense when we’re sleep deprived

T

he world is a mess.
For some, that world doesn’t even need to extend beyond the walls of their own home, as they deal with one personal or family crisis after another.
For others, that includes horrible headlines and the reality of a world in which people jump at the opportunity to attack them physically, verbally or both. The world is filled with so much dry kindling that any kind of spark seems sufficient to lead to a brush fire.
And, stupidly, many of us look at our phones or watch the news right before we go to bed, giving our unconscious minds the opportunity to marinate in the misery and to imagine ourselves caught in circumstances beyond our control that conjure our worst nightmares on steroids.
Once our minds start to ponder these horrific realities, some of which play out in the protests and counter-protests that characterize an American landscape filled with divisions and tectonic differences, we find ourselves staring, wide eyed, into a dark abyss.
Despite the need to give our minds and souls a rest to rebuild our resilience and prepare for the next day, we struggle to sleep for any length of time.
Like a bad habit we can’t kick, sleep deprivation defines our existence, making us more vulnerable, angrier, and reactive to the kinds of stimuli, conspiracy theories, and information that unnerves us.
Shutting that down and ignoring the reality of a world coming apart doesn’t seem like an option, even if we ourselves aren’t doing anything other than losing sleep, arguing with friends, family or coworkers, and promising to vote for the person whose anger, frustration, and alarm bells sound similar enough to our own.
These restless nights exacerbate our feelings of unease and anxiety. Even for people who didn’t have a hard day filled with deadlines, challenging assignments, impossible bosses, or frustrating losses, the end of the day can feel less like a chance to reflect on triumphs than a moment to surrender to a cruel circadian rhythm that leaves us with even less emotional and energy reserves each day.
We need the kind of sleep that doesn’t depend on over the counter remedies. We need to feel safe, secure, and relaxed enough to rest.
For many of us in the United States, that relaxation can arise out of a belief in a better tomorrow. We can control ourselves, the world we create for our children, and the way we interact with each other.
We might sleep better if we feel like we improved someone else’s day, if we volunteer to help others, or if we take a moment to appreciate what we can control.

Like our children, cars seem to need attention, support and, lately, more money

I

t’s difficult to live in the suburbs without a car. In fact, it’s almost impossible to raise a family here without four wheels. Many people own more than one to accommodate the various members of the household. And the costs of maintaining a car are escalating, threatening to take away from disposable income and the suburban quality of life.
Here are some statistics from a recent article in The New York Times that quotes the AAA.
The average annual cost in the first five years of ownership is now $12,182. Last year it was $10,728. This jump is a result of higher purchase prices, maintenance costs and greater finance charges. Just to put this in its proper perspective: “That’s 16 percent of the median household income before taxes.”
And about 92 percent of households own at least one; 22 percent have at least three.
Here are some more facts. All those personal cars number some 223 million and together add up to trillions of dollars a year in spending. (I can’t even check this because my calculator doesn’t go up that high.) How much, by comparison, was spent on public transportation in 2019 for capital and operating expenses? The answer, while still up in the mind-blowing category, is only 79 billion. Just drop the zeros and you get the point.
Car expense can be on a par with housing, child care and food for some families. The average payment for a used car is $533, according to TransUnion, while the average for a new one is $741 a month. Multiply that by the number of cars parked in one driveway for a household.
Some examples of car expenses: monthly payments, which have gone up in the last year, either to buy or lease, gas, registration, insurance, regular maintenance, perhaps tolls, parking, car washes and maybe even an un-budgeted accident. While insurance covers most of that, still there is deductible, perhaps loaner costs, not to mention the toll of stress and aggravation, which we are not even measuring with a price tag.
Now to the other side of the equation. Some people love their cars. They love driving them, washing them, caring for them, even naming them. They love shopping for them. They love proudly comparing theirs to other comparable vehicles in animated discussions with likeminded owners. Their car is a pleasure they don’t mind spending on because they get more from it than just passage from one point to another. For some, a car is like having another child.
Since I grew up in New York City, where public transportation is, for the most part, excellent, my parents never had a car. I remember when my dad made a careful list of the expenses connected with owning a car and decided we could take taxis all over town for much less. Of course, we never took taxis either. And neither of my parents had a driver’s license. My mother, who loved a bargain, was particularly delighted that one could take the subway for miles, from one borough to the next, even to Coney Island and Rockaway Beach from midtown Manhattan for only one 15-cent token. Having to travel in a car for her would have been a deprivation.
The other issue about cars, of course, is pollution. As we are thinking green, we are aware that automotive emissions are responsible for some 50 to 90 percent of air pollution in urban areas. Wherever they are, motor vehicles are a major contributor to air pollution. Those emissions affect global warming, smog and various health problems. They include particulate matter, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide. All of those are toxic to living organisms and can cause damage to the brain, lungs, heart, bloodstream and respiratory systems—among other body parts.
All of that notwithstanding, it is said we have a love affair with our cars.
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