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Rethinking recycling

Smithtown company turns plastic waste into functional assets

A3

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Inside

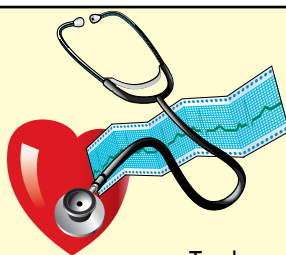
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Bull's eye

DiMaria and James chip away, but Northport maintains control — **A7**

Photo by Steven Zaitz



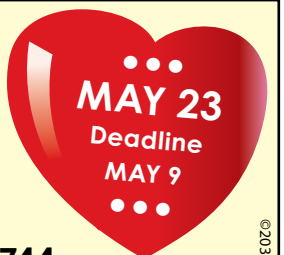
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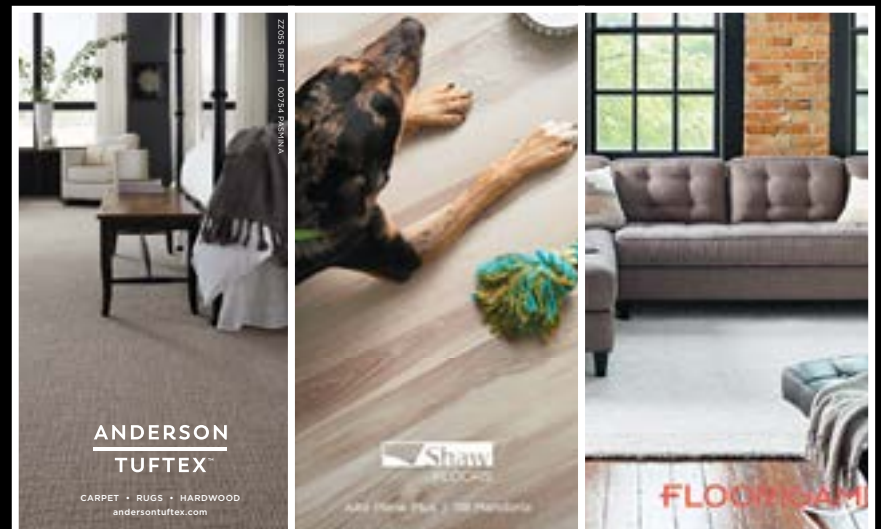
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Town of Smithtown partners in program to redefine sustainability

BY SABRINA ARTUSA
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Earth Day, April 22, is a great day to renew an appreciation for the environment, from the waterfronts of Northport and Port Jefferson to lush parks like Avalon Nature Preserve and Blydenburgh. Let us all reexamine obligations to the natural world.

Taking advantage of the eco-friendly practices and resources offered by our towns is an important way to get involved in sustainability.

Recycling is a well-known strategy to reduce our environmental impact. However, due to lack of resources, inconvenience or distrust in programs, many people pass up the opportunity to decrease the

5 pounds of waste, on average, each of us produces every day.

According to 2019 statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, only 4% of plastics are recycled in the United States while 73% are sent to landfills.

Mistrust in recycling systems is not wholly unfounded, as plastics are difficult to recycle given the many different types. However, the Town of Smithtown's recent partnership with Trex Company, a manufacturing corporation that upcycles household plastics for railings and deck construction, offers an outlet for our



NexTrex project flyer. Photo courtesy Town of Smithtown

unwanted plastics.

Trex accepts polyethylene plastic film, such as bubble wrap, produce bags, bread bags, Ziplocs, newspaper sleeves and any other stretchable plastics. The plastic will be classified as either low- or high-density polyethylene, distinctions indicated by the recycling symbols 2 and 4. A 4 indicates low-density PE and a 2 indicates high-density PE.

Trex also accepts plastic bags and shipping wrap — plastics that aren't accepted in curbside recycling.

Residents can recycle their plastic films at a drop-off container at the Municipal Services Facility in Kings Park.

“With the NexTrex program, you know exactly where your recycled plastics are going and how they will be used,” said Mike Engelmann, Smithtown solid waste coordinator.

Paying more attention to our consumption habits can also help decrease the amount of waste we produce. For instance, avoiding single-use plastics, paying attention to your municipalities recycling protocol, signing



Through the NexTrex program, the Trex Company accepts bubble wrap, produce bags, bread bags, Ziplocs and any other stretchable plastics. Pixaby photo

up for a beach cleanup and carpooling.

There are several local organizations that support sustainability. For example, Coastal Steward Long Island, located in Port Jefferson Station, holds programs to educate the community on how to preserve our shoreline and the organisms that live on our coasts. This environmental organization is hosting a beach cleanup April 26 at Smith Point Beach.

In addition, Avalon Nature Preserve offers a plethora of programs aimed at increasing youth involvement in nature.

Earth Day reminds us of what actions we can take to preserve the beautiful landscape around us. Smithtown's NexTrex program can only help the cause.

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Village of Head of the Harbor board meets under new mayor



Lisa Davidson, Head of the Harbor deputy mayor alongside historic village of Head of the Harbor sign. File photo

BY SABRINA ARTUSA
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Michael Utevsy, a real estate attorney, held his first board meeting since being elected as Head of the Harbor mayor in March.

VILLAGE

His first course of action was to appoint new counsel, Perillo Hill, a Sayville firm that also represents two other municipalities and describes themselves as “seeing both sides of the aisle” when it comes to common township cases. While Lisa Davidson, the newly-elected deputy mayor, couldn’t attend due to sickness, the other recent electee and long-time member, trustee Judy Ogden was present.

Drainage issues

Ogden spoke in detail of the drainage issues that have been wracking the town, especially amid the recent storms across Long Island.

The drainage “handles the lighter storms with smaller volumes,” she said. “When it gets to 1 or 2 inches ... we run into issues.”

Utevsy and Ogden spoke of eventually getting all of the drains checked and cleaned — a process that would take at least two years.

“People are trapped and can’t get out,” Ogden said, referring to areas like Harbor Road and Saneck Road, where drainage is

labeled as “priority” areas.

“There is never enough funding to take care of it at once,” she said. However, the board members suggested alternative options to afford drain maintenance — applying for grants, setting up a transaction balance account to organize a fund or reallocating money from unused funds as possible solutions.

One resident noted where Hitherbrook Road meets Route 25A as a dangerous area prone to flooding that causes traffic problems.

Another resident spoke up about the deteriorating buffer zones and reallocating money. The leaves, he said, provide natural structure to the buffers. Indeed, the buffers also slow down runoff, thus abating flooding from defective drains.

Lack of awareness about the purpose of the buffers is causing residents to think the leaves are residue. “If they leave some of the natural covering, it may be able to regenerate,” he said.

“It will take time to get these things done,” Utevsy said. “But they are all good and important.”

Additionally, the meeting made note of recent efforts from the Head of the Harbor Tree Board with contributions from Avalon Nature Preserve to organize an event in celebration of native plants this Arbor Day, April 26.

Rabbi shares her journey to Judaism and becoming a rabbi

BY RITA J. EGAN

DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

For Rabbi Margie Cella, the path to serve her congregation differed slightly from other rabbis.

At the annual Jewish University for a Day held at Stony Brook University on Sunday, April 7, Cella shared with attendees her experiences when converting from Lutheranism to Judaism and ultimately becoming a rabbi. The Port Jefferson Station resident, who taught math for 30 years, became a part-time rabbi with The Jewish Center of the Moriches in Center Moriches and an educator with the Women's League for Conservative Judaism in the last few years. Her new career blossomed after she wrote the book "Hindsight Is 2020: Torah Lessons from a Turbulent Time."

FEATURE

In a recent phone interview with TBR News Media, she discussed her decision to convert to Judaism and how she became a rabbi after working as a math teacher for 30 years.

The journey from the Lutheran Church to Judaism

Growing up in Massapequa, Cella attended St. John's Lutheran Church with her family. Her father was raised a Lutheran, and her mother converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism after she married Cella's father. The rabbi said her mother devoted herself to the Lutheran Church, which became part of the family's social life in many ways.

"It was a big part of our life growing up," she said. "We went every Sunday, and I went to Sunday school."

Her husband, Raymond, who was raised Roman Catholic, joined the Lutheran Church after it began morphing into a mixture of Christianity and Judaism. In 1982, the Cellas along with their children, Jessica and Benjamin, converted to Judaism after realizing St. John's church was becoming more like a cult, according to Cella.

At its peak, the rabbi said the congregation included approximately 2,000 members from every denomination. People came from all over Long Island, the five boroughs, Westchester as well as out of state to attend services. She added while it was the way she was introduced to Jewish practices, due to the mixture of Judaism and Christianity, she felt "it was inauthentic to both religions."

"I don't think that it is actually possible to practice both religions, because they diverged so much," Cella said.

However, as the church changed, Cella said she did a "total 180" initially and became involved, at times she felt due to peer pressure. After being part of the mixture of religions for 11 years, she said the church "gradually



Rabbi Margie Cella. Photo courtesy Margie Cella

morphed [as] more and more Jewish practice was introduced."

She added, "Christianity was emphasized and spoken about less and less, so when we left there ... we were faced with a decision, where do we go and what do we do?"

After realizing they were traumatized by the experience, Cella said she and her husband knew "the one thing that made sense to us out of everything that we were doing were the Jewish practices we were observing."

Once they decided to convert, the couple talked to Rabbi Moshe Edelman, who led the congregation of North Shore Jewish Center at the time, to ask what they needed to do. The conversion included a course of study and practice for at least a year, such as studying the basics of the Jewish religion and observing the practices.

"Now, in our case, we were already observing a lot," she said. "It was just we had a lot of misconceptions."

At the end of their studies, the couple was interviewed by a rabbi and two congregants. Soon after, a ceremony marked their conversion by immersing them in water using a mikvah.

From teaching math to leading congregants

Cella and her husband moved to Maryland soon after they were married. They were both

certified teachers. However, according to the rabbi, there were no available teaching positions on Long Island at the time. After living in Maryland for approximately a year, the couple moved back to Long Island, living in Coram and then Miller Place until they moved to Port Jefferson Station in 1985.

When the couple first returned, there were still few teaching jobs, so Cella worked in retail until she had her first child. She stopped working for a few years and returned to teaching after her second child was 3.

The rabbi said while it may have taken nine years after graduating from college in 1975 to begin her

teaching career in New York, in total she spent 30 years as a math teacher. The rabbi taught at William Paca Middle School in Mastic Beach, North Babylon High School, Bridgehampton High School and for the last 25 years at Southampton High School.

It was after she retired from teaching, that Cella began her studies to become a rabbi. She said for 25 years she thought about going to rabbinical school, but it wasn't practical with raising a family and the necessity of being a two-income family.

She attended the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, describing the five-year program at a school in Manhattan as "intensive." For the first four of the five years she studied, she traveled into the city and attended every weekday except Friday. She also lived and studied in Jerusalem for one semester. She now holds master's degrees in Bible and rabbinic ordination and was ordained in May 2019.

Cella said her 30 years of teaching comes in handy. One example is instead of a sermon for Shabbat, she said hers is more like a study of a week's Torah portion, which is interactive, involving the congregants in the discussion.

Reflecting on the Torah leads to publication

Before leading The Jewish Center of the

Moriches, during the COVID-19 mandatory shutdowns, Cella said North Shore Jewish Center's Rabbi Aaron Benson reached out and asked if she could help him sustain the congregation while they could not attend in-person services.

"I had this idea, because I have always been a lover of text and a lover of teaching, I decided to do a daily study of part of that week's Torah portion," she said.

The rabbi added that each Torah portion is divided into seven parts, making studying a portion each day ideal.

"I would write about it, and I would relate it not only to what it said in the Torah portion, but where possible, I would relate it to what was going on in the world at that time, because that was a unique year," Cella said.

Her writings were emailed to the congregation every day. When members were able to return to the synagogue to worship, Cella said she decided she wanted to finish what she started.

"It takes a full year to go through the whole cycle of the Torah, and that's what I did," she said. "I wrote basically every day for a year. I wrote on every piece of every Torah portion, the entire Torah, over the course of a year, and it wasn't until I got to the end that I said to myself, 'I think I have the makings of a book here.'"

Cella said she learned a good deal from her book-writing experience.

"I think now that we've returned to what we call normal — or the new normal — I think that a lot of times we tend to forget the lessons that we learned from that year," she said. "There were a lot of really profound things that we could take away from that year because nobody ever anticipated we would have something like that in our lifetimes. It wasn't just COVID, there was so much else going on that year. There was political unrest in the country. There was social unrest in the country. There was so much going on. That all shows up in my book."

The rabbi said she also feels it's important to talk about her life as she did on April 7, as she believes it's a cautionary tale regarding following religious leaders blindly, especially those who may prey on younger people. She hopes to share her experiences in another book one day.

As she reflected on her life and all the changes that had occurred over the past few years, Cella believes that if a person has something they want to do, they can make it happen regardless of age.

"One thing I like to tell people is you're never too old to pursue whatever your dream is," the rabbi said.

For more information on "Hindsight Is 2020: Torah Lessons from a Turbulent Time," visit www.rabbi cella.com.

Man found guilty of possessing loaded gun and drugs at Mt. Sinai gas station

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced on April 18 that Clyves Laurent, 30, of Elmont, was found guilty after a jury trial of weapons and drug charges, for possessing a defaced loaded handgun and methamphetamine outside of a Mount Sinai gas station convenience store.

The evidence at trial established that on Feb. 11, 2023, at approximately 1:20

a.m., an off-duty Suffolk County Police Department detective observed a male matching the description of a person wanted for a robbery of a Smoke Shop that occurred a week earlier at a Sunoco gas station in Mount Sinai. The detective observed that Laurent entered the gas station's convenience store wearing a ski mask, did not purchase anything, and then quickly exited.

When the detective approached Laurent, he observed a bulge in the defendant's pants which appeared to be a firearm. Laurent became combative and refused to keep his hands away from his waistband. The detective



Clyves Laurent

called for assistance, and when officers arrived, they attempted to conduct a frisk of Laurent for weapons, at which point he unsuccessfully attempted to flee.

After Laurent was placed in custody, the detective removed a defaced Glock handgun from the defendant's groin area. Laurent was transported to the Suffolk County Police Department's Sixth Precinct, where upon being processed for the arrest, was found to be in possession of methamphetamine.

Laurent was convicted of Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Second Degree, a Class C felony, Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Third Degree, a Class D felony, and Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the Seventh Degree, a Class A misdemeanor. Additionally, in 2010, Laurent was previously convicted of Attempted Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Second Degree, a Class D felony. He is due back in court for sentencing on May 21 and faces up to 15 years in prison.

—SUFFOLK COUNTY D.A.'S OFFICE

POLICE BLOTTER

The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

Bullet strikes man in wallet in Coram

Suffolk County Police Sixth Squad detectives are investigating an incident in which a man was shot in his wallet at an apartment complex in Coram on April 17.

An unknown person fired multiple shots into a vehicle located at the intersection of Homestead Drive and Grant Court inside the Homestead Village Apartment Complex at approximately 10:50 a.m. A bullet became lodged in the wallet of a man who was inside the vehicle. The man was not injured.

Anyone with information on the incident is asked to contact the Sixth Squad at 631-854-8652 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-220-TIPS.

Two Shirley women charged in odometer rollback scheme

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced on April 23 that Ashley Duff, 27, and Ginger Sipes, 58, both of Shirley, were charged with allegedly selling motor vehicles that had their odometer's mileage turned back, falsely increasing the vehicles' value so that customers paid higher prices than what the vehicles were actually worth.

According to the investigation, between July 27, 2020, to May 6, 2022, more than a dozen victims of the alleged odometer rollback scheme filed complaints with the Suffolk County Police Department, prompting them to contact the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office and the District Attorney Squad, who initiated this investigation with the specialized assistance from the NICB.

An extensive investigation revealed that ABB Auto World Inc., which was located on Montauk Highway in Brookhaven, allegedly purchased high mileage vehicles from car auctions, some with over 200,000 miles documented on their odometers, and then had the odometers rolled back to show lower mileages. The vehicles would then allegedly be advertised for sale by the defendants on Facebook Marketplace. Sales paperwork was allegedly fraudulently created with false mileage and presented to the victims as authentic. This resulted in ABB Auto World Inc. charging thousands of dollars more for each vehicle than what the vehicles were worth.

Duff, president of ABB Auto World, Inc. and Sipes, a saleswoman at ABB Auto World, Inc. were indicted for Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, a Class E felony, and Conspiracy

CAUGHT ON CAMERA



Do you recognize this man? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for grand larceny

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Fourth Squad detectives are seeking the public's help to identify and locate the man who allegedly stole sunglasses, valued at \$3,115, from Sunglass Hut, located in the Smith Haven Mall in Lake Grove, on April 11 at approximately 8 p.m.

in the Fifth Degree, a Class A misdemeanor and are due back in court on May 30. Both charges are considered non-bail eligible under current New York State law, meaning prosecutors cannot ask for, and judges cannot set bail.

Visit www.tbrnewsmedia.com/police for more press releases from the Suffolk County Police.

— COMPILED 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 anonymous tip by calling 1-800-220-TIPS.

Northport controls ball in 10-3 win over Smithtown East



BY STEVEN ZAITZ
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The Northport boys lacrosse team powered past the Bulls of Smithtown East on April 18 by a score of 10-3.

They are now a sparkling 8-1 on the season with their victory over Bay Shore on April 20 and have won five straight games. Smithtown East drops to 3-6.

SPORTS

Attacker Jack Deliberti and midfielder Luca Elmaleh had three goals apiece and midfielder Quinn Reynolds had a goal and two assists for the first-place and defending Suffolk County champion Tigers. Cameron James had a pair of goals for the Bulls.

Deliberti got the party started two minutes into the game with his sixteenth goal of the year, firing a sharp-angle rip from the left wing. It stayed that way until Deliberti bounced another one past All-Suffolk

Bull goalkeeper Brendan Carroll from 10 yards away with 1:30 to go in the first period. Elmaleh finished a nearly-flawless quarter for Northport, scoring with 47 seconds left.

The second quarter started just like the first when a Smithtown turnover turned into a goal for long pole middle Giancarlo Valenti. Faceoff artist Dylan Baumgarth won 75% of his draws in the first half and one of his wins led to Reynolds' goal and Northport built a 5-0 lead. Luke DiMaria and James Scored for East to slice it 5-2 at half, but they would never get any closer.

Northport traveled to Bay Shore on April 20 capturing a 9-3 win. The Tigers next game will take place on April 26 when they will travel to Patchogue-Medford.

Smithtown East won 10-9 against South Fork High School on April 20 and played Huntington yesterday, but results were not available at press time.



1 Smithtown East goalkeeper Brendan Carroll makes a save against Grayson Cabrera. 2 Tim McLam does everything he can to battle past Brendan Carroll. 3 Campbell Cracchiola and Derek Vassallo chase the loose ball. Photos by Steven Zaitz

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Northport 10 • Smithtown East 3

East Setauket pitcher comes on strong with the Chicago Cubs

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

JoAnne Wilson-Brown was driving on Belle Mead Road, returning to her house in East Setauket with Easter Dinner and candy when Christmas came early.

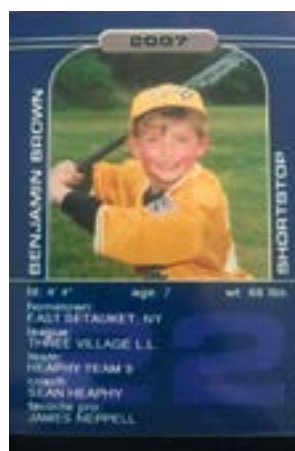
Her 24-year old Ben, who tracks his parents on their cell phones and regularly checks up on them, was calling.

“Mom,” Ben said, “you need to be in Texas tomorrow.”

Ben, who left home seven years ago after graduating from Ward Melville High School when the Philadelphia Phillies chose him in the 33rd round of the major league baseball draft, was going to pitch for the Chicago Cubs in his first major league game against the defending World Series Champion Texas Rangers.

Ben also called his father Jody Brown, who had been working in the backyard on windows that he immediately put back in place so they could travel to The Ballpark in Arlington.

In his debut, Ben entered in the seventh inning. Perhaps fittingly, David Robertson, the pitcher the Cubs traded to the Phillies to acquire the hard throwing rookie Brown, pitched the top half of that same inning for the Rangers, allowing a hit without giving up a run.



Ben played short stop for the Three Village Little League at age 7. Photo courtesy the Brown family

Ben matched Robertson that first inning, giving up a lead off walk before inducing a groundout, strike out and line out to left field.

In his second inning of work, however, after getting three hours of sleep the night before, Brown allowed

six runs on six hits in two third of an inning, leaving him with a tough introduction to “The Show” and an unsightly 32.40 earned run average.

Ben’s debut is a microcosm of the journey he took to the pinnacle of baseball. An impressive and imposing high school player, the now six-foot, six-inch pitcher had such a stellar sophomore season that he attracted considerable attention from college scouts, receiving five offers.

In his junior year, however, Ben developed appendicitis, which forced him to spend time in the hospital.

After an appendectomy, Ben, who wanted to be a baseball player from the time he was two, had to return to the hospital.

“When they took him away in the gurney, he looked up at me and said, ‘Mom, is this going to



Left, Ben with his mother, JoAnne, wife Maggie and father Jody in Arlington, Texas. Photo courtesy the Brown family

be it [for his baseball career]? Do you think it’s all over?” Wilson-Brown recalled.

Recognizing her son’s fierce determination, she instantly told him “absolutely not!”

Brown rebuilt his body and boosted his fastball sufficiently that the Phillies chose him at the age of 17 at the tail end of the draft.

In the seven years that followed, Brown endured Tommy John surgery, an oblique injury that robbed him of time on the field, and Covid, which shut down the minor league system.

Undeterred and with considerable support from his family including his mother, father Jody, brother James and sister Abbey, Ben remained focused amid those interruptions and put hours into himself and his craft, cutting out sugar from his diet, listening to anyone who could offer advice and dedicating himself to improving.

Brown also found love, marrying Maggie Seibert, a woman he met in church in Florida.

Ben “has put in so much work and made so many sacrifices,” said Ward Melville High School baseball coach Lou Petrucci, who speaks to his former student and pitcher at least once a week and whom Ben refers to as “another parent.”

After Ben was drafted, he arrived at the training camp in Clearwater, Florida, and talked to anyone and everyone about ways to improve.

Petrucci believes that Ben’s unquenchable thirst for baseball knowledge reflects an extension of the dedicated teachers in the Three Village school district who encouraged learning.

When graduates like Brown, former Met and current St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Steve Matz and current Yokohoma BayStars pitcher Anthony Kay advance in life, “it’s because of the K through 12 education” they received at the schools.

When Brown called Petrucci, whom he has known since he was a sixth grader in his class at Minnesauke Elementary School, to share the news about his promotion to the majors, Petrucci said, “Congratulations!

And, now, your next step is to make sure you stay there.”

Bouncing back

After that rough inning in his first game, Ben received considerable public and private support from his teammates and from baseball people he

admires and respects.

Fellow Cub players publicly supported him, telling him that they couldn’t throw strikes in their first outing.

“It’s so encouraging when you’re a young guy,” said Ben. “You feel like you’re not alone when you get all this love from your teammates. It makes such a difference.”

Matz, who predicted Ben would be in the major leagues within five years of being drafted after he saw Ben as a late teenager, also offered him immediate support and encouragement. Matz “let me know I’m going to be okay,” said Brown. Matz told him he has “good stuff and I’m in a good spot.”

A soccer player at Clemson years ago, Ben’s father Jody Brown suggested that circumstances in baseball change quickly and “you have to have a very short memory.”

Ben made his debut at Wrigley Field, the Cubs historic home park, on April 3rd against the Colorado Rockies.

His parents trekked to Chicago for that outing as well.

“When we got to Chicago that first night, it was just after midnight,” Wilson-Brown said. “We turned that corner and saw Wrigley Field and it just took my breath away.”

She felt the same way her son did when they traveled to Cooperstown for the 12U tournament when he saw the immaculate fields.

At Wrigley, Ben came on in relief and pitched well, using the combination of his fastball and curveball to pitch four innings, allowing three hits and one run.

Ben’s first start came in San Diego, where he threw 4 2/3 innings without allowing the Padres to score.

A Red Sox fan growing up who had an enormous blanket of David Ortiz that filled most of one wall, Ben spoke after the game with Red Sox star-turned-analyst Pedro Martinez, who said on the show that Brown looked “sharp” and “clean.”

In his second start, Ben continued to impress, as he allowed one run on one hit in six innings against the Arizona Diamondbacks, the team that made it to last year’s World Series and that scored a record 14 runs in one inning in its home opener this year.

“It’s been a little bit of a roller coaster,” said Ben. He was pleased that he “threw the ball well” and left a “solid impression.”

With an earned run average down to 4.41 after his fourth game, Ben made a case for staying in the majors.

Getting there

The journey from East Setauket to the major league ballparks not only involved considerable work from Ben, but support from family, friends and coaches.

Indeed, Ben’s older brother James was instrumental in sharing his love for the game.

James “showed me how to be a ballplayer, how

to wear my jersey right,” said Ben. “He toughened me up on the baseball field.”

Ben believes he “wouldn’t be in the big leagues” if his brother and father didn’t work with him every day, from hitting grounders and fly balls to him so he could practice his fielding to throwing a ball.

The Brown family appreciates the tireless support of numerous coaches, friends and family, who sometimes helped drive Ben to baseball events and encouraged him throughout his baseball growth.

Petrucci has watched many of Ben’s games over the years, reveling in the progress he’s made and wishing him well with each new opportunity.

When Ben was on the Phillies, he gave Petrucci a tee shirt with the words “Train to Reign.” Every time Ben pitched, Petrucci wore the shirt.

Playing for the Cubs has particular meaning for Maggie’s family, who, thanks to her stepfather Matt Pippin, are lifelong Cub fans.

Indeed, one of Ben and Maggie’s dog’s names is Wrigley.

When they were dating and Ben was still on the Phillies, Maggie gave him a Cubs shirt.

“I thought it was such a weird thing,” Ben recalls. “She gave me a shirt for a team I’m not playing for.”

When he was traded, it came “full circle. It’s all too good to be true,” Ben said.

Pippin learned that Ben was joining the Mets and recalled almost running off the road with excitement.

So, if a local restaurant decided to make a meal they named after him, the way the Se-Port Deli did for Matz, what should it be?

A large steak that comes from grass-fed beef with butter works for Ben, he said.

As for advice, Ben urged people who enter a field like baseball, with numerous competitors and obstacles, to work “harder than everybody else in the world,” especially when such a small percentage of people realize their baseball dreams. “When you want to do something that’s really difficult, lock in on the best path.”

Early on, Ben saw that path and pictured the future he is now living.

When he was 12, Ben joined one of his teams for a field trip to Shea Stadium. His mother asked him to pose for one more picture on the field before they left.

“Don’t worry” about the photo, Ben reassured her. “I’m going to be back here.”



Ben with his niece Emma at Wrigley Field, Chicago. Photo courtesy the Brown family

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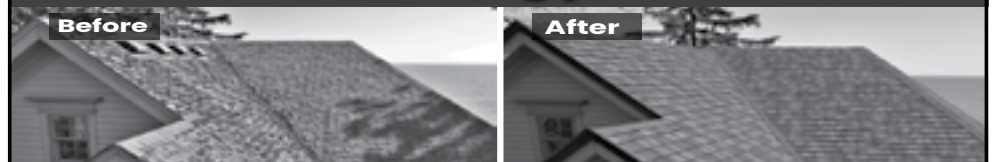
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Editorial

Participate in community cleanups



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April 22, 1970, marked the first Earth Day celebration. A day dedicated to Mother Earth, to appreciate, recognize and demonstrate support for the planet we inhabit. A time to reflect on the impact our actions have on the environment but, more importantly, it's a springboard for action.

Here in our own communities, the need for environmental stewardship is particularly relevant. From keeping our streets and parks clean to embracing sustainable practices, we can all play a vital role. The good news is there's a wave of positive momentum building.

Numerous opportunities exist for us to roll up our sleeves and make a real difference.

Friends of the Greenway is hosting a cleanup day, on Saturday, April 27. Beginning at 9 a.m. at the Port Jefferson Station trailhead, meet with members of the community to aid in the cleanup efforts along the beloved Greenway Trail.

If your artistic side thrives outdoors, join the Gallery North Cleanup on April 27 and 28. Day 1 will be held at Flax Pond Tidal Wetland Area on Saturday and day 2 at Smith Pond Beach on Sunday. Each cleanup will be conducted in two shifts starting at 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. each day. The event is free and open to the public, and will be held rain or shine. All ages are welcome.

On Saturday, May 18, the Great Brookhaven Cleanup will offer a chance to tackle litter in our neighborhoods. Part of a national effort, the event draws over 5 million volunteers in more than 20,000 communities across America who come together to pick up litter and clean miles of roadway, rivers, lakes and more. Last year, the Great Brookhaven Cleanup drew more than 2,600 volunteers.

Stony Brook University also stepped up with Earth Day events — several student clubs joined together to organize a beach cleanup last Saturday, April 20, at West Meadow Beach.

But Earth Day isn't just about one-time cleanups. Sustainability is the key to long-term environmental health. The Town of Smithtown's recent upcycling program, NexTrex with the Trex Company, serves as a shining example. This initiative allows residents to transform used plastic into eco-friendly composite materials.

Let's take inspiration from these efforts. Consider reducing your single-use plastics, opting for reusable alternatives. Support local farmers markets and businesses committed to sustainable practices. Every little bit counts.

Earth Day is more than just a day on the calendar. It's a call to action, a reminder that the well-being of our environment is intrinsically linked to our own. Let's celebrate this Earth Day not just with words, but with dedicated action. Together, we can build a cleaner, more sustainable future for generations to come.

Letter to the Editor



Top left, MTA call center. Photo by Nasrin Zahed. Bottom left, LIRR train arrives at the station. File photo by Joseph Cali. Right, a Long Island Rail Road train arrives at Stony Brook train station during rush hour. Photo by ComplexRational from Wikimedia Commons

Happy 190th anniversary to Long Island Rail Road

Let us all wish a happy 190th anniversary to the Long Island Rail Road. On April 24, 1834, the Long Island Rail Road was officially chartered by the State of New York to run from the Brooklyn waterfront 95 miles east to Greenport. In 1900, the Pennsylvania Railroad bought a controlling interest as part of its plan for direct access to Manhattan which began on September 8, 1910. The Pennsylvania Railroad subsidized the LIRR into the late 1940s. This provided the financial basis for support of expansion and upgrades to service and infrastructure.

At the end of World War II, there began a decline of our LIRR with a corresponding loss of farebox revenues. The Pennsylvania Railroad began to reduce financial support as well. This played a part in the LIRR going into receivership in 1949. In recognition of the role the LIRR played in the economy of both Long Island and NYC, New York State began providing financial assistance to the LIRR in the 1950s and 1960s.

The "Line of the Dashing Dan" was officially chartered on April 24, 1965, by the State of New York. In 1966, NYS bought the railroad's controlling stock from the Pennsylvania Railroad and put it under the newly-formed Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority. The MCTA changed its name

to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in 1968 when it took over operations of the NYC Transit Authority.

With MTA subsidies, the LIRR modernized further and grew into the busiest commuter railroad in the United States. Over the past 50 years, several billion dollars in combined county, city, state and federal taxpayer-generated dollars have subsidized both the capital and operating costs for the LIRR.

Riders must remember that fare hikes are periodically required if the MTA is to provide the services millions of New Yorkers use daily.

*Larry Penner
Great Neck*

The opinions of columnists and letter writers are their own. They do not speak for the newspaper.

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Opinion

Finding peace and connection in a house of worship

Everywhere we go, we are surrounded by sights, sounds, and smells. More often than not, other people need something from us, want to talk with or at us, and expect us to provide feedback, learn from them, acknowledge them or validate their existence.



**D. None
of the above**

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF

At the same time, our texts, emails, social media apps, and others require checking, replying, reacting and thought.

Throughout the day, we aren't just draining our cell phone's battery, we are also draining our own battery. We need time for our nervous system to catch up, to take a break and to experience the world around us in a calmer way.

For me, that happened recently when I went to a religious service. I don't go all that often even though I often walk away feeling refreshed.

These services offer an opportunity not only to disconnect from my phone for several hours, but also a chance to be present, centered, and focused.

The words and the songs are familiar, which other members of the congregation say or sing, helping me feel like I'm a part of a connected group.

During the service, I am focused on where I am, reading the same text as everyone else and reacting, as if by reflex, to some of the interactive speaking parts.

This occurs even when I travel, as I did recently to attend a service. I didn't know most of the people in the room and yet we reacted and interacted for several hours as if we had grown up next to each other, played on the street with our neighbors, attended the same schools and shared the same hopes for ourselves and our children.

Some of the songs had slightly different melodies, but they were more of a variation on a theme than a journey into another religious, spiritual or musical genre.

During these times in a house of worship, I appreciate and enjoy the quieter voice of some

of the speakers, who encourage me to think of myself and my world in different ways and who share a wonderful combination of thought, insight, perspective, and spiritual ideas.

While I listen to them, some thoughts I have that might otherwise not bubble up to the turbulent surface of my life, where a combination of bright sun, wind, and cross currents of thoughts, ideas, actions and deadlines create a potentially exciting but murkier picture, can receive attention.

Through these thoughts, I can make connections to earlier versions of myself, track where I am and where I'm heading, and think about people who helped shape who I am but are no longer in my life.

I can also delve more deeply into the kinds of questions and thoughts that don't tend to help with an assignment or a deadline, pondering the nature of existence and the meaning of life.

I can reflect on the amazing and inspirational people I am fortunate to know, and the exhausting but miraculous gift of our children, who inherit the world we helped shape or alter during the course of our lives.

One image often appears in my mind as I breathe, think and listen during the service: that is of a tree with the words "I was here." When I was younger, I didn't understand why anyone would cut into a tree to let the world know they were here.

Over time, I've thought about the cave drawings primitive man made, the graffiti that adds color and chaos to our world and those words in a tree in the same way. In those moments, people are declaring, the way Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin did when they planted an American flag on the moon, that their journey through life brought them to this place and time. They are announcing and reaffirming themselves.

I'm not advocating for carving anything into a tree or for painting graffiti. Instead, by sitting, standing and singing together, we are announcing to the other people in the room and to ourselves not just that "I am here," but that "We are here." While we might take that for granted much of the time, a religious service gives us the chance to marvel at the wonder of the connections we've made and at our existence and all it does and could mean.

Are you stuck in your house? Here is a modest proposal

Elsewhere in this week's newspaper, there is a section on financial matters. Continuing that theme, let's look at the value of our homes and what that means for our lives. Taking out a mortgage and buying a house was always considered a popular path to security. A house was a piggy bank into which payments were deposited each month until the debt was repaid to the bank, or whomever the lender, and ultimately was totally owned by the buyer. A house, after all, is a home, a shelter and foundation for raising a family. One cannot live in one's stocks or CDs. Besides, as an asset, it might increase in value over the ensuing years.



**Between
you and me**

BY LEAH S. DUNAIEF

Best of all, the equity in a home guaranteed wealth for retirement.

While some owners might continue to live in their original houses rent free (but not property tax free), others intended to sell the home, buy a smaller, two bedroom house or condo at a cheaper price, and live off the surplus cash or the entire proceeds if they wanted a smaller mortgage.

Sounds like a fairly risk-free plan, right?

In fact, something strange has happened. For the last couple of decades, interest rates on mortgages have been unexpectedly low. I know when my husband and I bought our house 50 years ago, for example, the interest on the mortgage was seven and five-eighths percent. For those who bought in the 90s and sooner, the rates went down to two and three percent, which was even less with interest deductions.

What has happened?

Interest rates have zoomed in the last couple of years, as the Federal Reserve has tried to put the brakes on an overheated economy, the result in part of Covid. Many people rushed from the cities to what they hoped would be smaller, safer locations, creating a marketplace in which

there are now fewer homes for sale—and incidentally raising prices. And builders, who were busy building large homes, then switched to apartment buildings. The smaller, one-story homes, ideal for downsizing, are scarce and pricey as they have disappeared from the market or become unaffordable.

Further, longtime home owners with lower mortgages, though they may wish to follow the time-honored formula and downsize, are not about to give those up in order to buy overheated smaller houses at higher mortgage rates, if they choose to take a loan.

For the moment, retirees are stuck in their large, mortgage-free homes, with their faulty furnaces, unmowed lawns and unwelcome stairs. There might be buyers but where, then, to go?

For the moment, as The New York Times has observed in this past Tuesday's paper, they are stuck.

I have a modest proposal for those folks. There are many young people looking to move out of their parent's homes but can't yet afford

to buy a house with their partner or significant other. Some aren't so young but don't have the down payments or pay the high rents in new apartments. Older residents, who might be waiting for the real estate market to cool down, have empty bedrooms that could fill some of the gap. They could rent out those empty rooms.

Now I know that some people think they would never want to live with strangers and share their kitchens, washers and dryers, and so forth. Besides, how do they know how trustworthy these prospective tenants are?

Certainly any possible tenants would have to be checked out. There might be a business that does just that, even as they investigate caretakers, cleaning services and babysitters. After all, we welcome those people into our homes.

If we are thinking of renting, we could also envision a way to separate a section of the house, with its own entrance, for the tenants, and just share the common rooms.

The extra rent money is nice. The additional housing choices can be helpful. The situation can be a win-win.



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Serving Our Community for 48 Years

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Mother's Day **BRUNCH**

SUNDAY 05/12/24



Seatings every half hour 10:30AM - 2:30PM

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