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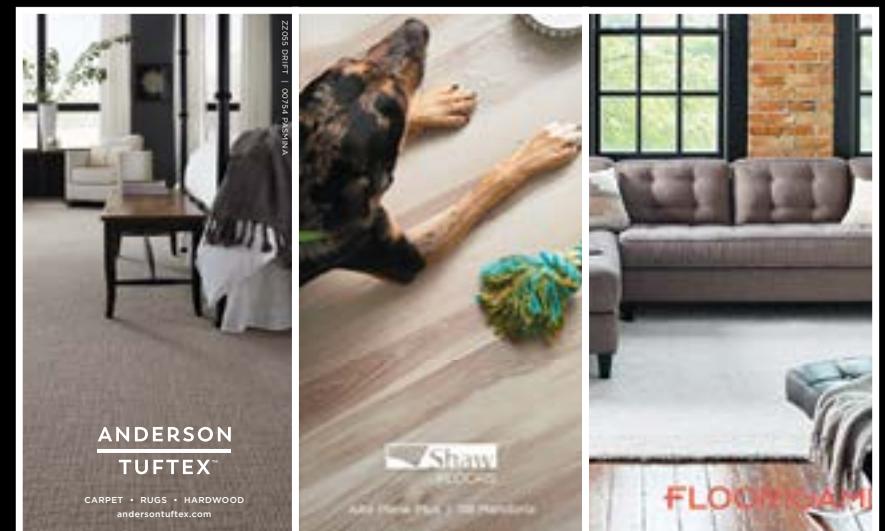
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File photo by Raymond Janis

Federal funding strives to keep Long Island's water safe

BY ARAMIS KHOSRONEJAD
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

In March, nearly 50 Long Island projects, totaling \$87 million, were approved in both the first and second tranche of appropriations bills that the U.S. Congress approved.

U.S. Rep. Nick LaLota (R-NY1) was able to secure monies to carry through these projects with other local congressmen,

FUNDING

Andrew Garbarino (R-NY2) and Anthony D'Esposito (R-NY4), and Sens. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

According to LaLota, after “months of relentless advocacy, including the crafting of detailed proposals and concerted efforts directed at members of the House Appropriations Committee,” they were finally able to integrate various initiatives and final appropriations bills.

For some time now, the water infrastructure on Long Island has been brought into question and, by extension, the quality of water available for citizens. Suffolk County has seen protests over the past year concerning the basic right each citizen has to clean water [See story, “Suffolk County Legislature recesses, blocks referendum on wastewater fund,” July 27, 2023, TBR News Media]. The conflict has evolved into a political issue.

The FY2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act passed with “overwhelming” bipartisan support in the House. LaLota described the local funding as “a significant milestone in our commitment to serving the people of Suffolk County.”

Included are the Town of Brookhaven's Port Jefferson Harbor dredging and wave

wall construction projects, for which \$1.5 million has been secured. “This funding will cover the costs of much-needed structural improvements to maintain the harbor,” LaLota said.

The town will benefit from another sum of \$1.5 million for sewer treatment facility expansion secured by Garbarino. The congressman also secured \$2 million for a Suffolk County sewer expansion project.

A further \$1.25 million has been secured by LaLota for the Suffolk County Water Authority's Westhampton Water Main Extension project. Old Country Road in Westhampton, which serves as an area housing 64 homes and families, has long been identified by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services for polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, contamination. An allocation of the federal monies will be used to ensure access to clean, regularly tested drinking water for affected households.

Charlie Lefkowitz, chairman of Suffolk County Water Authority, emphasized that “clean drinking water is the right of every New Yorker but making these projects affordable is critical to giving access to that resource.”

“Thanks to this funding we will soon be able to extend high-quality public water to these families, giving them peace of mind every time they turn on the tap,” he added.

LaLota and Lefkowitz, along with their teams, continue to “maintain our unwavering commitment to addressing water quality issues and prioritizing the well-being of every Long Island family,” LaLota explained in an email. With the passing of the Consolidated Appropriations Act and the considerable federal funding that comes with it, the future of the water infrastructure on Long Island looks brighter.



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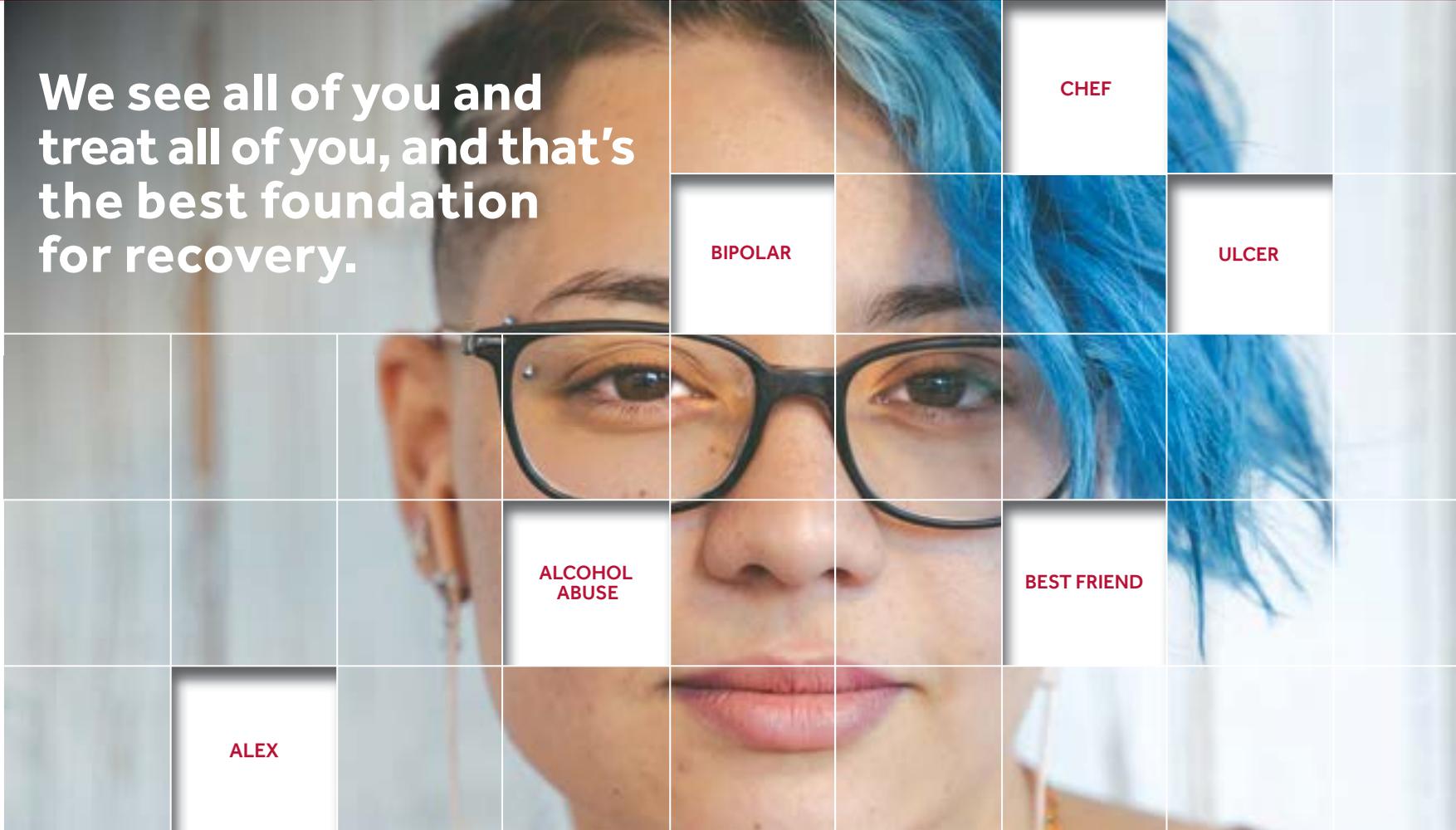
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Rabbi shares her journey to Judaism and becoming a rabbi

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.

Ahead in removing forever chemicals, NYS preps for higher drinking water standards

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Forever is wonderful when it comes to love, but not so much when it comes to chemicals that don't break down and stay in the human body, accumulating over time and threatening people's health.

In a move applauded by environmental advocates and health officials, the Environmental Protection Agency last week set a limit on the amount of so-called forever chemicals, such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, called PFAS, of four parts per trillion in drinking water.

HEALTH

Water companies have until 2027 to complete initial monitoring to reduce chemicals that have been linked to damage to the kidney, testes, liver, thyroid, reproductive and immune system, according to the new regulations. Found in a host of products including fireman's foam, carpets, clothing, food packaging and nonstick cookware, PFAS are resistant to oil and water.

New York State already had one of the toughest regulations in the country, as the Empire State set maximum contaminant levels of 10 parts per trillion for these chemicals in 2020.

Charles Lefkowitz, chairman of the Suffolk County Water Authority applauded the EPA for this new national standard.

The SCWA has been "preparing for this and we are well on our way to meeting all regulatory requirements within the time frame laid out by EPA," Lefkowitz said in a statement. "Since 2020, when New York enacted its own PFAS rules, SCWA has been meeting or surpassing all standards. It has given us a great head start on the new rules, but there is still work to be done."

Suffolk County Health Commissioner Dr. Gregson Pigott noted that the state's water standards for emerging contaminants are among the most protective in the country.

"The new federal measures will have the greatest impact nationwide and will also further protect our drinking water on Long Island," Dr. Pigott explained in an email.

Environmental groups recognized the ongoing work at the SCWA to meet these standards and appreciated the authority's public disclosure of its testing results.

Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, described the SCWA as "ready" for this rule change and "poised for action."

Since 2016, the SCWA installed 27 new Granular Activated Carbon treatment systems that remove PFAS from drinking water. The authority expects to install as many as 80 new GAC systems to meet the new regulations.

"We are well within our way to achieving that



Left, firefighting foam erupts from fire hose. Right, nonstick pan atop stove. Both products are regular hosts of PFAS chemicals, resistant to oil and water.

Pixabay photos

within the timeframe set by the EPA," Jeff Szabo, Chief Executive Officer of SCWA, explained in an email.

Each new system costs about \$1.5 million to install. SCWA had already instituted a \$20 per quarter water quality treatment charge to customers in 2020, when New York State established its PFAS limits.

SCWA has also secured \$9 million from New York State for GAC treatment, which, Szabo explained, would help reduce the cost to customers.

Rates won't be increasing in the next fiscal year. The rates, which are based on the budget, may change in future years, depending on the operating budget, a spokesman said.

SCWA tests all of its wells at least semi-annually for PFAS. If the authority finds a well with these chemicals, it retests the well at least quarterly and, in some cases will test it every month or every two weeks.

Private wells

Esposito urged people with private wells to test their water regularly.

"People think when they have a private well, it comes from a mysteriously clean spring,"

said Esposito. "They must get their wells tested. Ignorance is not bliss. If there are PFAS, they must call and report it and see if they're eligible to get federal funds for filtration."

Esposito estimates the cost of testing for private well water could be \$200 to \$250.

Carbon filtration, using a process called reverse osmosis, can remove PFAS.

The cost of installing filters depends on the home and the type of filter. Several online providers estimate a cost between \$800 and \$3,000, although specific costs from different providers may vary.

Residents can call the Department of Health Services Office of Water Resources at (631) 852-5810 for information on testing by either the health department or a local contract laboratory. Health department staff are also available to provide treatment recommendations.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has provided alternate water supplies to a limited number of private well owners on a case-by-case basis over the last several years.

The New York State legislature is considering

proposed legislation to provide grant funding to private well owners with impacted wells to connect to public water or install treatment.

The county health department coordinates with the DEC and the state Department of Health when they receive information regarding water that exceeds PFAS containment levels.

People interested in further information about the health effects of the PFAS are urged to reach out to the New York State Department of Health.

Jaymie Meliker, Professor in the Department of Family, Population and Preventive Medicine in the Program in Public Health at Stony Brook University, added that private wells have numerous potential contaminants in part because Long Island has so many septic systems.

These wastewater systems are a source of nitrogen for waterways, leading to fish kills and can also add contaminants to drinking water.

Wastewater treatment is "vastly under resourced," said Meliker. The county and the state need infrastructure investments.

As for PFAS, they can vary from one neighborhood to the next.

On the manufacturing side, companies are working to lower the toxins of PFAS, creating shorter chains that provide the same benefits without the negative effect on health.

Meliker was pleased that the EPA had established low level limits for these chemicals that accumulate in the human body.

The studies and concerns have been "going on for a couple of decades," he said. "There's enough evidence to suggest it's prudent to do something."



Suffolk County Water Authority Chairman Charles Lefkowitz and Suffolk County Health Commissioner Dr. Gregson Pigott. File photos



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Heritage Center hosts Fling Into Spring Carnival

Chaos erupts on day one, day two goes on without a hitch

BY AIDAN JOHNSON
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The 9th annual Fling Into Spring Carnival at Heritage Park in Mount Sinai saw its share of disorder Saturday night, April 20, after a fight broke out within the packed crowd.

“There were just a bunch of young kids acting out, acting crazy,” police officers said, expressing worry that little kids could get hurt in the chaos.

“Groups of unaccompanied teens acting out caused us to close early tonight,” the North Shore Youth Council, which partnered with Newton

Shows to put on the carnival, said in a statement on Facebook.

“We had a wonderful day with many families and are extremely disheartened that the actions of these few individuals spoiled the rest of the evening,” the statement added.

The carnival continued on Sunday with packed crowds, despite the raucousness of the previous night. There was an announcement on the Heritage Center’s Facebook page that anyone under 17 years old would have to be accompanied by an adult or guardian. Police officers, along with the carnival’s own security staff, were present throughout the entirety of the second day.

-Photos by Aidan Johnson



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Remembering Matt LoNigro with honorary Selden street name

BY RICH ACRITELLI
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

“Matt would give you the shirt off his back and you always had his support.”

These were the words of Paul LoNigro on the positive qualities of his older brother Matt, who passed away May 10, 2023, at 51 years old. Paul and Matt LoNigro, only two years apart, were inseparable.

Through the support of former neighbor Jeanine Ross and the Daleo, Peck, McFarland, Bach and Kortbus families, the neighbors asked the Town of Brookhaven to add Matt’s name to Biscayne Drive and Comet Road in Selden to honor Matt and the legacy of the neighborhood kids.

Paul recalled his father Richie bringing home from their family business, Port Jefferson Sporting Goods, a priceless gift for the LoNigro kids and the local children — they were given defective sports jerseys with “Bombers” imprinted on them.

From that moment, these active kids were known as the Biscayne Bombers as they played numerous hours of kickball and football on this street. This community represented the simpler times of small-town America through the constant activity of these kids on the street.

Decades ago, Richie LoNigro often drove to work from Boyle Road in Selden, over Old Town

Road, and onto Terryville Road, when these areas still had farm fields and woods. As Long Island’s housing population grew, Port Jefferson Sporting Goods increased in size to meet the sporting needs of children from Montauk to Manhattan.

Matt spent 22 years working at this store and in the sporting industry along with many of the 11 children of the LoNigro family. He was proud of his Selden roots, was loyal to his friends and at Newfield High School he played soccer, basketball, lacrosse and was the class president. Matt later attended college and played lacrosse at Salisbury University in Maryland, where he met his wife, Julie.

For years, Matt presented unyielding support toward the needs of Hope House Ministries in Port Jefferson and was a president for the Miller Place lacrosse and booster clubs. At his family’s sporting goods business and later at BSN Sports, Matt thoroughly loved all aspects of lacrosse. He handled the retail and sales of lacrosse items for local, travel, high school and college teams.

Retired St. Anthony’s High School athletic director, Donal F. Buckley, recalled “Matt was an incredibly warm person, who created smiles when working with the staff of this school. He was a master salesman who fully understood all sporting equipment and was an approachable figure who loved talking about all aspects of sports with our staff.”

Over the years, Matt continually learned about

lacrosse equipment, uniforms, coaching and the promotion of this sport that he truly loved. Matt advocated for lacrosse through the Police Athletic League and coached numerous Miller Place teams over the last several years to help further this sport.

Town of Brookhaven honor

On April 4, Town of Brookhaven Councilman Neil Manzella (R-Selden) sponsored the request with the support of Councilwoman Jane Bonner (R-Rocky Point) for the authorization for the addition of “Matthew G. LoNigro” as an honorary street name between Biscayne Drive and Comet Road in Selden. Bonner believed that “Matt’s impact transcended the playing field, as he instilled invaluable life lessons through sports, cheered on every child with boundless enthusiasm and exemplified the epitome of goodness for our children to emulate. His legacy is etched in the hearts of those he inspired.” The resolution was unanimously adopted.

Matt learned two important lessons from his father: hard work and supporting his community. As a driving force at Hope House, this local organization helped troubled children and it recently named one of its buildings Matt’s House. This special person quietly supported others through the vital programs of Christmas Magic, that provided gifts for underprivileged children during the holidays in different areas of Long Island. In the near future, Matt

would eventually take over this large Christmas initiative. When students returned to school, the Backpack Pirates initiative provided supplies to children to donate much-needed items toward their education.

The LoNigro family has a long and proud history of giving back to the community. While Matt passed away far too early, he cemented his legacy of giving back through a myriad of humanitarian efforts to make Long Island a better place.

The Biscayne Bombers will always remember their youthful moments decades ago. As a former member, Matt’s older brother Craig marveled at “all the street sports, break dancing and shoveling driveways of older neighbors.” He added, “Matt brought out the best in all of us in making this into a special place to grow up. Matt was the heartbeat of Biscayne Drive and now his name will forever be linked to a place where so much love and happiness cultivated a unique generation of kids.”



Matt LoNigro.
— Photo courtesy Rich Acritelli

MEMORIAL

Town of Brookhaven to add Matt’s name to Biscayne

Drive and Comet Road in Selden to honor Matt and the legacy of the neighborhood kids.

Paul recalled his father Richie bringing home from their family business, Port Jefferson Sporting Goods, a priceless gift for the LoNigro kids and the local children — they were given defective sports jerseys with “Bombers” imprinted on them.

From that moment, these active kids were known as the Biscayne Bombers as they played numerous hours of kickball and football on this street. This community represented the simpler times of small-town America through the constant activity of these kids on the street.

Decades ago, Richie LoNigro often drove to work from Boyle Road in Selden, over Old Town

NAR settlement impacts real estate market

BY SAMANTHA RUTT
EDITOR1@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

A significant shift is coming to Long Island’s real estate market, with the National Association of Realtors agreeing to a settlement that could alter how buyers and sellers pay their agents.

In mid-March, the NAR reached a settlement agreement with home sellers who argued that NAR policies unfairly inflated commission rates. While the details are still being finalized, the agreement is set to impact the real estate market, both for buyers and sellers.

For years, the NAR faced lawsuits alleging their rules for Multiple Listing Services — the system where homes are advertised — restricted competition and kept commission rates artificially high, allegedly violating U.S. antitrust laws and regulations.

The settlement, valued at \$418 million over four years pending court approval, doesn’t admit wrongdoing by the NAR but allows sellers more freedom in how they offer compensation to buyers agents. Previously, commissions were often set through a system of predetermined splits between listing and buyers agents.



Pixabay photo.

“There’s been a lot of misinformation about the settlement with the National Association of Realtors,” Darryl Davis, a real-estate coach based in Rocky Point said. “There has been no removal of any percent of a commission. To summarize, real estate companies have not been impacted at all because commission amounts, or the percentage, was not part of the lawsuit or the settlement.”

Local realtors are still analyzing the full scope of the settlement. However, early indications suggest a shift toward a more

negotiable commission structure.

“Part of the settlement was that there would no longer be an offer of compensation on the multiple listing agreement for the agent that brings the buyer to the property,” John Fitzgerald of Realty Connect USA said. “So now for that agent to get paid, they’re going to have to have a contract with the buyer for compensation and that is changing our industry.”

What this means for buyers and sellers

“It really affects the seller,” said East Setauket-based Michael Ardolino, also of Realty Connect USA. The settlement “affects the sellers and the buyers more than anybody.”

For home buyers, this could translate to potential savings. Traditionally, buyers agents received a set commission, often around 3% of the sale price. Now, sellers may offer a lower commission to incentivize buyers agents to show the property.

However, some industry experts warn this might not be a guaranteed benefit for buyers, especially for those applying for loans from the Federal Housing Administration or Veteran Affairs.

“The problem is, if the buyer is going to pay the compensation to the agent, you’re not incorporating it into the property — as far as getting it from the proceeds of the sale — [and

that] then is going to have an effect on FHA buyers and VA buyers and that’s extreme,” Fitzgerald said.

“If it’s a first-time homebuyer and they have an FHA, you buy a house with 3.5% down and you can mortgage up to 6% of your closing costs. Now you have to add a brokerage fee on top of that — that might put that buyer out of the market. Same thing for the VA. That might be a little bit difficult for primarily first-time buyers,” Fitzgerald explained.

For sellers, the impact is a bit more complex. Increased negotiation over commissions could add time to the selling process. On the other hand, some sellers may be able to attract more interest by offering a lower commission to the buyer’s agent.

The road ahead

The Long Island real estate market is known for its competitiveness and this settlement is likely to add another layer to the negotiation process. Ultimately, how this settlement plays out for the Island’s buyers and sellers remains to be seen. However, one thing is certain: The way real estate commissions are negotiated on Long Island is about to change.

The NAR settlement is expected to take effect in mid-July.



High-flying Eagles eclipse the Wildcats

BY BILL LANDON
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Rocky Point Eagles, on a six-game winning streak, paid a visit to Thomas Cutinella Memorial Field to take on Shoreham-Wading River on a rainy Saturday morning in a Division II matchup, April 20.

The Eagles rattled off three unanswered goals in the opening minutes only to have the Wildcats peel off three of their own to make it a new game with five minutes left in the first quarter.

Rocky Point senior Anna Wood stretched the net in the final seconds to put her team ahead by two at 5-3. Teammate McKenzie Moeller split the pipes off a penalty shot and found the back of the net again to put her team out front 7-3.

Shoreham freshman Madison Herr scored an unlikely one-handed goal while sitting on the turf to

trim the Eagles' lead to three at 7-4 at halftime. Five minutes into the third quarter Reese Marcario scored back-to-back goals for the Wildcats and after teammate Grayce Kitchen netted, Shoreham trailed the Eagles 8-7 at the third quarter.

Rocky Point slowed the tempo of the game the rest of the way with Kylie Lamoureux and Moeller finding the back of the cage for the 10-7 victory.

Moeller finished with four goals and Lamoureux scored twice along with an assist. Brianna Henke had four stops in net for the Eagles.

Marcario had two goals with an assist and freshman goalie Sophia Giangreco had four saves for the Wildcats.

The Eagles (8-1) hosted Mount Sinai and the Wildcats (5-4) visited Comsewogue, Wednesday, April 24, but the results were not available by press time.



● Rocky Point midfielder Kylie Lamoureux pushes up-field in a road game against Shoreham-Wading River. ● SWR's Morgan Lesiewicz and Rocky Point's Kaleigh Moeller battle for possession. Inset: Freshman midfielder Madison Herr scores with one hand sitting down for the Wildcats in a home game against Rocky Point.

- Photos by Bill Landon

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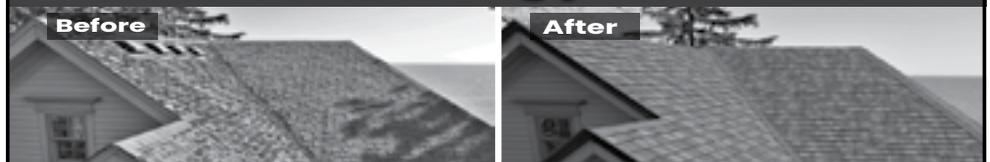
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Editorial

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 Point 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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