Bulls swarm Patriots in nail-biting finish

Ward Melville edges Smithtown East, 33-32, in Town of Brookhaven summer league — A10

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SUNY names former Rutgers president Richard McCormick as interim SBU president

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
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The State University of New York Board of Trustees has named former Rutgers President Richard McCormick, 76, interim president of Stony Brook University as the school continues its search for a seventh president.

McCormick, who will take over the reins at the downstate flagship SUNY school on August 1st, replaces Maurie McInnis, who left Stony Brook after four years to become the president of Yale University on July 1.

Dr. Bill Wertheim, Executive Vice President for Stony Brook Medicine, has been serving as Officer-in-Charge and Stony Brook University Hospital’s Governing Body since July 1.

McCormick, who was president of Rutgers from 2002 to 2012 and has taught and studied United States political history in the 19th and 20th centuries, has over four decades of experience in higher education, including leading several highly ranked public universities.

McCormick will oversee Stony Brook University and Stony Brook Medicine and will serve as part of the management team of Brookhaven National Laboratory.

“Each step we take in this leadership transition is important, and we welcome Dr. McCormick,” John King, Jr, SUNY

Chancellor said in a statement. “His vast higher education experience will continue to move this esteemed university forward as the campus conducts a national search for its new president.”

McCormick welcomed the chance to lead Stony Brook during this transition period.

Stony Brook “has achieved national stature yet remains fully engaged with its Long Island community, for which it is an economic engine,” McCormick said in a statement. “My thanks to the SUNY Board of Trustees, Chancellor King and the Stony Brook Council for this opportunity.”

As an interim president, McCormick will not be a candidate to become the next permanent president.

In addition to his tenure at Rutgers, which started in 1976 when he joined the history department, McCormick also was vice chancellor and provost at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1992 to 1995 and was president of the University of Washington from 1995 to 2002.

The incoming interim Stony Brook president earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Amherst College in American Studies and his PhD in history from Yale in 1976, 20 years before McInnis also earned her PhD in the History of Art from the New Haven-based Ivy league school she now leads.

McCormick started his academic career at Rutgers, where he was a member of the history faculty from 1976 to 1992. He was also Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

McCormick is the son of Richard Patrick McCormick, a former Rutgers professor and Katheryne Levis, a former Rutgers administrator.

McCormick and his father co-taught an American history course.

An author of several books, McCormick is writing a book on the history of American political corruption from the 17th century to the present.

Rutgers achievements

McCormick, who earned his high school diploma from Piscataway Township High School in Piscataway, New Jersey, orchestrated constructive changes in his hometown university during his presidency.

McCormick helped raise $650 million while he was president.

Four years after becoming president, the university reorganized the undergraduate colleges on the New Brunswick campus into a School of Arts and Sciences and School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. The reorganization included a comprehensive new curriculum at the School of Arts and Sciences, first year

CONTINUED ON A11
Long Island school districts are suing social media giants over rising mental health concerns

BY TONI-ELENA GALLO
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According to News12 Long Island, thirteen Long Island school districts are suing social media companies Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook, citing increased mental health concerns among students.

South Huntington, Kings Park and Port Jefferson are just three of the school districts taking part in the class-action lawsuit.

South Huntington Union Free School District superintendent, Vito D’Elia, commented on his school district’s decision to join the lawsuit in a notice on the district’s website, saying, “We know the damage it’s doing to our students. We see it. We’re dealing with it. We see students that are more focused on their interactions on social media as opposed to their education. And, the ramifications are extremely dangerous.”

This stance was, recently, corroborated by U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, when he said that “it is time to require a surgeon general’s warning label on social media platforms,” citing found evidence that more than three hours per day on social media can double the risk of poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Social media use is a major component of the vast majority of adolescents’ lives. According to data obtained by Pew Research Center in 2022, up to 95% of youth, ages 13 to 17, use at least one social media platform, and more than a third use social media “almost constantly.”

A prime motive for joining the lawsuit is hiked mental health service costs, as students have been showing symptoms of internet overexposure.

South Huntington school district is seeking increased funding to employ more mental health professionals, as well as implement “social emotional learning lessons more,” including assemblies and workshops, on safe digital use.

Social media harm to students’ psyches has forced the school district to revamp their curriculum in recent years, with teachers having to focus on things “other than their actual lesson plans,” explained South Huntington Board of Education president, Nicholas Ciappetta, who added that the board’s decision to join the lawsuit was unanimous.

“There are costs associated with [our plans],” he said.

The lawsuit is also asking for the social media companies to implement appropriate and stricter safeguards including improved age verification, parental notification upon sign-up, improved management of age appropriate content and the design of their algorithms.

Ciappetta did add that the purpose of social media is not completely negative, or in vain.

“We’re not trashing social media,” he said. “[The school district] certainly uses it as a way of getting our message out. But if you look at any of the platforms, there’s a lot of negativity on there. And I think the negative always gets amplified. So you need a little more positivity and you need a little more kindness. And that’s something that the social media companies can invest in too. They can partner with us to promote that message.”

Joining the lawsuit comes at no cost to the school districts. Lawyers taking on this case will get a percentage of a monetary recovery, if any, that comes out of this legal challenge.
DestinationKP is a relatively newly proposed development that is aiming to establish three things: a sports center for Long Island-based youth, an expansive medical center and commercial retail opportunities.

The two groups spearheading the project are Prospect Sports Partners of New York and Agape Community Sports Services of San Antonio, Texas.

According to a Suffolk County Industrial Development Agency press release dated July 8, the IDA has agreed to support the ongoing development and that DestinationKP will be the “largest privately-owned, mixed-use sports and medical complex in the tri-state region.”

Located at 350 Old Northport Road, Kings Park, approximately 44.5 acres of land will be transformed into a “state-of-the-art regional tourist destination for sporting events, camps and tournaments.”

In a general overview of the project, DestinationKP is expected to cost upward of $92 million, and create more than 100 full-time employment opportunities. As a hub for visitors and tourists alike, the project would create steady tax revenue, as well.

In specific terms, DestinationKP will consist of six, multipurpose outdoor playing fields, and one practice field. For indoor sports, a 63,900-square-foot facility will be built, with 10 regulation basketball courts, three indoor multipurpose fields and a concessions complex.

While Agape Community Sports Services will be handling the development of the sports-oriented facilities, Prospect Sports Partners is set to lead the commercial/medical center’s construction. This medical office building will stand on 50,000 square-feet.

According to the press release, the IDA plans on supporting the medical center’s construction: “The more-than $22.5 million investment will be leased to a tenant specializing in providing medical care, rehabilitation services and other sports-related uses to become a sports medical hub and regional tourism destination.”

The economics are sound and offer traveling families a “regional sports and tourism destination,” according to Kenny Henderson, a co-owner of Prospect Sports Partners.

DestinationKP has three objectives, the first of which is offering Long Island youth a place to safely gather and engage in organized recreational sports.

Kelly Murphy, executive director and CEO of Suffolk County IDA, said, “This groundbreaking project aims to provide our local youth, especially those encountering socio-economic obstacles, with access to organized sports opportunities that were once unavailable to them.”

The second objective is creating an economically stimulating project for local Long Island workers.

Murphy added, “The Suffolk IDA is proud to support this project that fulfills a significant need for our children and families, while providing high-quality job opportunities as well as substantial revenue generation for local businesses and taxing jurisdictions.”

The third goal of DestinationKP is the encouragement for tourism within Long Island broadly, and near the community itself.

“Any Long Island family who has children in competitive sports will tell you about the challenges and expenses associated with traveling to out-of-state tournaments,” Murphy said. “Having this asset in our region will be an enormous draw and become a sought-after destination that will keep the economic benefits of the complex’s numerous activities and offerings right here in Suffolk County.”

Highlighting Suffolk County IDA’s Long Island First policy,” which prioritizes in-community spending and supports local businesses, DestinationKP stands as an important supporter. The project itself does not have an expected completion date, but construction and funding are well underway. More information about DestinationKP and its developers can be found at the website: www.destinationkp.com.
Two men indicted for string of ATM burglaries in Suffolk County

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced on July 10 that Jamie Volini, 46, of East Patchogue, and John Mahoney, 41, of Mastic, were indicted for burglary, grand larceny, and other related charges, for allegedly breaking into commercial businesses, and stealing or attempting to steal ATMs from inside.

“To two individuals have been taken into custody in connection with yet another series of commercial burglaries in Suffolk County,” said District Attorney Tierney. “The arrests are the result of diligent investigative work by the Suffolk County Police Department, and I thank them for their work on this case. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to ensure that those that steal the property of others are held responsible for their actions.”

According to the investigation, throughout March 2024, Volini and Mahoney allegedly burglarized five commercial businesses and attempted to burglarize one commercial business throughout the Towns of Islip and Brookhaven. Once inside the businesses, Volini and Mahoney allegedly attempted to either break into or take ATMs. The defendants successfully removed two ATMs from two separate commercial establishments and stole money from a third ATM at another location.

On June 18, 2024, law enforcement placed Volini and Mahoney in custody. At the time of the arrest, Volini was allegedly in possession of over an eighth of an ounce of cocaine.

On July 3, 2024, Volini was arraigned on the indictment before Supreme Court Justice Richard Ambro. Justice Ambro ordered that Volini be held on $150,000 cash, $350,000 bond, or partially secured bond during the pendency of his case.

On July 10, 2024, Mahoney was arraigned on the indictment before Acting Supreme Court Justice Anthony S. Senft, Jr. Justice Senft ordered that Mahoney be placed on supervised released with GPS conditions.

Volini is due back in court on August 8. Mahoney was due back in court on July 16.  

— SUFFOLK COUNTY D.A.'S OFFICE

The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

Three people injured in head-on crash

Suffolk County Police Third Squad detectives are investigating a wrong-way, head-on, motor vehicle crash that injured three people in West Islip on July 14.

Jimmy Graham was driving a 2014 Audi A8 westbound on the eastbound side of the Sunrise Highway Service Road at Malts Avenue when his vehicle crashed head-on with a 2016 Jeep Grand Cherokee that was traveling eastbound at approximately 9:35 p.m.

Graham, 40, of Central Islip, was ejected from the Audi. He was transported to Good Samaritan University Hospital in West Islip in critical condition. A passenger in the Jeep, Chelsea Zamzam, 32, of East Northport, was transported to the same hospital for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries. Her husband, and the driver of the Jeep, Bryan Zamzam, 43, also of East Northport, was transported to South Shore University Hospital in Bay Shore for treatment of serious injuries.

Both vehicles were impounded for safety checks. Detectives are asking anyone with information on the crash to contact the Third Squad at 631-854-8352.

Ronkonkoma motorcyclist injured

Suffolk County Police Third Squad detectives are investigating a three-vehicle crash that seriously injured a motorcyclist in West Islip on July 12.

Dominic Dentici was operating his 2000 Yamaha eastbound on Sunrise Highway between Higbie Lane and Uddall Road when he lost control of the motorcycle and struck the rear of a 2023 Tesla, causing him to be ejected from the motorcycle, at 4:17 p.m. Keith Ward was operating his 1994 Harley-Davidson eastbound behind the Tesla. Ward lost control of the motorcycle in an effort to avoid the crash and struck the rear of the Tesla.

Dentici, 31, of Ronkonkoma, was transported to Good Samaritan University Hospital in West Islip for treatment of serious injuries. The driver of the Tesla, Ashish Kaushal, 37, of Lindenhurst, was also transported to Good Samaritan University Hospital in West Islip for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries. Ward, 48, of Island Park, was transported to South Shore University Hospital in Bay Shore for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries.

Anyone with information on this incident is asked to contact the Third Squad at 631-854-8352.

— COMPILLED BY HEIDI SUTTON

Fireworks damage Stony Brook home

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Sixth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate two men who allegedly used stolen credit cards at Commack stores in June.

A woman reported credit cards were stolen from a 2023 Hyundai parked in a parking lot on Landing Avenue in Smithtown on June 12 at 5:12 p.m. The credit cards were used by two men that same day at Target, located at 98 Veterans Memorial Highway in Commack, and Walmart, located at 85 Crooked Hill Road in Commack.

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.
As dengue fever soars, travel-related cases in Suffolk County rise

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Mosquitoes can be much more than a nuisance as they search for their next blood meal: they can also pass along potentially dangerous viruses.

Long considered a tropical and subtropical health threat, dengue fever has reached record levels in the Americas this year. The illness has been traveling with Aedes mosquitoes that have been moving further north amid global climate change.

As of early July, mosquitoes in Texas, Florida and California have had one of the four viruses associated with the disease. Through early July, Florida reported 10 cases from local spread, according to an American Medical Association update.

Suffolk County residents who have traveled into areas that have dengue have contracted the illness, which has symptoms that are similar to the flu, such as high fever, headaches, body aches, nausea, vomiting and a rash.

Suffolk County has reported 12 cases of travel-related dengue so far through early July, which is more than all of last year and is the highest level since 2013, when 13 cases were reported for the entire year.

“We do have a fair amount of concern with global warming,” said Dr. Sharon Nachman, Chief of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Stony Brook Children’s Hospital. “Even if people do not believe in it, mosquitoes have changed where they’re located. There is concern that the mosquitoes’ will continue their trek farther north.

Suffolk County is one of many places throughout the country and the Americas that have reported an increase in cases for a disease for which residents have generally had no exposure and, as a result, no natural immunity.

New York State Department of Health alerted medical professionals to consider dengue as a diagnosis if people who are sick have a travel history and related symptoms, Dr. Gregson Pigott, Suffolk County Health Commissioner, explained in an email.

Symptoms of dengue typically begin within two weeks of being bitten by an infected mosquito.

From January 1 through June 24, countries in the Americas reported more than 9.7 million dengue cases, twice as many as in all of 2023, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Indeed, in Puerto Rico, infection levels climbed so high in early April that the Puerto Rico Health Department declared a public health emergency.

While a majority of dengue infections are asymptomatic or produce mild illnesses, the virus can cause severe cases and can be fatal, according to the World Health Organization.

“Anyone who lives in or travels to an area with risk of dengue is at risk for infection,” Pigott explained. “Children and those who are elderly are at higher risk for serious illness.”

People with dengue typically receive supportive care, which includes rest, pain medications and fluids.

Protection

Health professionals urged people traveling to areas with dengue to take a number of steps to protect themselves.

EPA-registered insect repellents, coupled with loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and pants can keep mosquitoes away.

Additionally, people can treat their clothing and gear, including hats, shoes and socks, with permethrin.

“Don’t be around standing water, which is a wonderful place for mosquitoes to breed,” advised Nachman.

In Suffolk County, the arthropod-borne disease lab collects mosquitoes and sends them to the New York State Department of Health lab in Wadsworth, New York. Asian tiger mosquitoes, which have carried dengue, zika and chikungunya viruses, have been found in Suffolk County, Pigott added.

“No samples of Aedes albopictus mosquitoes that have been sent to the lab have tested positive for those viruses,” Pigott wrote.

While health professionals are on the lookout for potential cases of dengue among residents who have traveled, they are more concerned currently with West Nile virus, which people can contract locally.

Other local illnesses

As for illnesses in the county, Nachman has seen patients who have been battling a collection of viruses, including enteroviruses and Covid.

Residents who are staying around Long Island should continue to be careful about ticks that can carry Lyme disease. Anyone who is going hiking should consider long pants and long sleeves, as well as dirt on their clothing.

“If you take your kids out to hike, check them and you for ticks,” said Nachman.
Diving into ‘Shark Week’ on Long Island

Sharks on Long Island
Sharks are often on the minds of beach-loving Long Islanders due to a wide variety of visiting sharks, such as the dusky shark, the sand tiger shark, the white shark and the sandbar shark. The New York Police Department captured the first shark sighting of this summer season using drone footage. The sharks were seen off the coast of Rockaway Beach.

Sharks have been known to appear in beaches like Robert Moses State Park, Long Beach and Kismet beach on Fire Island. In the last two years, 13 people were involved in shark-related incidents. However, this isn’t cause for fear. Since the surge in shark sightings on Long Island, the NYPD and New York State Parks have implemented more thorough measures to track sharks, such as drone tracking.

A ‘hot spot’ for wildlife
Long Island, an under-researched area in regards to sharks, has optimal conditions for sharks. Their visits to our island are certainly not new, according to Oliver Shipley, Stony Brook University School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences research assistant professor.

“In the summer the South Shore of Long Island is a hotspot of wildlife,” he said. “There is so much going on there. And it is a very productive system for all different animals, not just sharks.”

Shark research in New York began seriously 10 years ago. Stony Brook started tagging sharks for tracking purposes in 2017. In order to make scientifically sound conclusions, Shipley said SoMAS would need 10-15 years of data.

Is there an increase?
Researchers do not view the increase in sightings and incidents these past two years as an increase in the number of sharks. In truth, the numbers of sharks that exist along our coast presently are only a fraction of the numbers pre-1950s.

Shipley said that this “increase” of sharks is only an increase of people noticing them. There are more drones on the water and more people patrolling, which will result in more sightings. Indeed, five shark attacks were recorded during Independence Day weekend in 2023 — a stretch of days when there would have been more people than usual at the beach.

Some species of sharks, such as the sandbar sharks, have had dangerously low populations, leading to the species being listed as “vulnerable” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s list of threatened species. The population’s return to a stable number could also contribute to increased sightings.

Warming temperatures could be bringing sharks up north. Shipley has noticed different animals associated with warmer habitats moving closer to Long Island — water temperatures are important for these cold-blooded creatures to regulate their body temperature — but the research assistant professor is hesitant to definitively blame climate change due to lack of data.

“It’s important to understand that this is a really complex thing that we are studying and there is not a single cause or effect scenario,” he said. “We have really poor historical data to compare to.”

“We are doing everything we can to plug the gap and find out as much as we can about this animal,” Shipley said.

Stony Brook University introduces AI summer program

With the rise of artificial intelligence and the seemingly ever-changing technological world, the main question coming from educators and parents is how the new generation is going to adapt and thrive in the dawn of this new era. Stony Brook University’s new summer camp aims to prepare them.

Located in the university’s Center of Excellence in Wireless and Information Technology, the program is a collaboration between Stony Brook and Sunrise Technology. The program has yielded extremely impressive results and received international attention, attracting students from as far as Hong Kong. This largely has to do with the outreach program managed by Rong Zhao, the director of Stony Brook’s CEWIT, which strives to engage students from local high schools on Long Island.

Zhao said that the “demonstration” of the self-driving car models “is the biggest attraction.”

The camp is important, according to Zhao, because it shows students that such advanced technology such as self-driving cars and AI isn’t something to fear. “[It isn’t] this mystical, futuristic thing … it’s tangible … [the students] think, ‘Wow, I can code this.’ It is, in the end, the future generation that we’re helping.”

By teaching students to understand that advanced technologies such as AI aren’t something far off into the future but is our current reality, the camp aims to prepare the new generations to adapt to this inevitable future.

According to a report in Forbes by MIT and Boston University, AI will replace as many as 2 million manufacturing workers by 2025. With such rapidly approaching change, preparing the new generation to adapt to this future is paramount. This kind of preparation is exactly what this interactive AI summer camp aims to do, according to Zhao.

Yu Sun, founder and CEO of Sunrise Technology, explained in an interview with TBR News Media how the camp works. It consists of three main activities for students: Lectures where students will listen to a professor speak on the coding process; computer labs where students will be able to apply what they learned from the lectures; and lastly, a project where students will develop and deploy their own self-driving car models.

The program will “give the students an idea of how these self-driving programs work using their own unique design, which also keeps them engaged,” Sun said. She believes that, regardless of whether parents or students are interested in STEM, “AI is such an up-and-coming buzz and parents want students to be exposed to this field.”

“How can we turn this into an educational opportunity which will have a real impact?” Zhao asked. The future is here already, and teaching students how to thrive and adapt to it is essential.

The program spans over two sessions: The first consisted of two weeks from July 8 to 19, and the second session will consist of another two weeks from Aug. 5 to 16. Students from 9th to 12th grade are eligible for the summer camp.

There are very few prerequisites for this program. The second session of the program is still available for any interested high school students.
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Ward Ward Melville broke out to an early lead in Town of Brookhaven summer league action Monday, July 15, against Smithtown East and safely led until midway through the second half.

Smithtown East inched closer in the final minute of play when the Bulls drained a 3-pointer to trail by one promptly calling time-out. Both teams traded baskets and with 1.7 seconds on the clock, the Bulls inbounded the ball and threw the Hail Mary shot downcourt without success, falling to the Patriots 33-32.

The win lifts the Patriots to 3-2 in the large school varsity division and Smithtown East drops to 3-2 with four games remaining.

— Photos by Bill Landon

Patriots survive last second scare in Brookhaven summer league

BY BILL LANDON
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Ward Ward Melville broke out to an early lead in Town of Brookhaven summer league action Monday, July 15, against Smithtown East and safely led until midway through the second half.

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— Photos by Bill Landon

Go to tbrnewsmedia.com for more sports photos
SBU President
Continued from A3

seminars, signature courses, expansion opportunities for undergraduate research and honors programs and support for top undergraduates competing for highly competitive scholarships and awards.

In the final years of his tenure, he merged Rutgers with the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and divisions of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. The New Jersey Legislature passed a bill to integrate almost all units of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey into Rutgers.

“Dr. McCormick’s notable accomplishments as president of Rutgers from 2002 until 2012 included reinvigorating undergraduate education, elevating its standing in the top tier of public research universities, realizing a longstanding goal of returning medical education to the university’s portfolio, and improving and strengthening connections with important partners, including alumni and local communities,” Wertheim said in a statement. “He is the ideal leader to help Stony Brook sustain its momentum as New York’s flagship university.”

The former Rutgers president led the school when it installed 40,000 high-efficiency solar panels over two large surface parking lots on the Livingston

One of Three Village’s own featured in Forbes magazine

BY KATHERINE KELTON
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Three Village resident Matthew Niegocki has been ranked No. 91 Top Best-in-State Financial Security Professionals on the 2024 Forbes list.

TBR News Media sat down with Niegocki to learn about his work and how he earned the coveted Forbes title.

Niegocki, who grew up in Ridge, had to make a difficult decision upon graduating college: Did he want to become a police officer or pursue an insurance career?

He admits to not knowing much about financial security as it was more of an area of intrigue for him.

Though his proficiency in the job is undeniable: “Right out of college, after interviewing at different financial advising positions, I chose Prudential. Graduated in May and started in June, 18 years later here I am."

Niegocki’s dedication to his profession is unparalleled.

He shared a recent story that underscores his clientele relationships.

“I have a client out in Glendale, Queens — a senior woman,” he said. “She called me up asking for funds out of one of her accounts to make home improvements. So, I sent her some of the money. Then, she calls up again asking for more money — and this is someone who doesn’t spend extensively, and lives below her means. Her taking out large deposits, to me, raised a red flag.”

He continued by saying he had a conversation with her about exactly what home improvements she was having done that cost such a deep investment: a 7-foot flat roof for which she was going to be charged $136,000.

Niegocki immediately called the Queens district attorney’s office and a contractor friend of his, who traveled out to the woman’s home.

It was clear to Niegocki that his client was being scammed.

“The guy that was scaming her got two guys from Home Depot, and they weren’t even using the correct tools,” he said. His contractor was able to complete the job, charging only a fraction of the original at $11,000.

“My philosophy is to have a conversation,” he added. Taking time to build relationships with clients is key. With new prospects, he asks many questions, ensuring he is properly understanding them and their concerns, on a personal level.

Prudential Financial, the financial security company for which Niegocki has worked his entire career, has been designated one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies — an award given by the Ethisphere Institute, for the last 10 years.

Niegocki does admit that most firms in the financial security industry are “good companies.” He says that there is not a lot of competition within the industry, “believe it or not.”

He usually advises people not to switch their financial advisers, so long as they are happy.

Prudential does have a unique outlook on insurance, Niegocki shared.

“It’s more of a needs-based approach. So, we sit down with families, individuals and business owners and have a conversation to see what their concerns are and what they’re looking to accomplish. Based on that, we tailor retirement planning and life insurance around that,” he said.

The Forbes distinction gives Niegocki extra credibility, as it will distinguish him from other advisers in the state.

Outside of work, Niegocki’s life does not revolve around phone calls, computer screens or emails. He enjoys a very active lifestyle, biking around the shores of the Three Village community, gardening and spending time with his family.

As a part of his community appreciation, he joined the Three Village Dads Foundation. This group has raised over $100,000 for the Stony Brook Children’s Hospital. The nonprofit, additionally, fundraises for local businesses and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3054, which serves the Three Village area.

“I love the Three Village community,” he said. “I feel like it’s a community like no other. There’s so much history. It’s great to raise a family and own a business — it is beautiful here.”

William Wertheim, Executive Vice President, Stony Brook Medicine.

William Wertheim, Executive Vice President, Stony Brook Medicine. Photo courtesy Stony Brook University

Stony Brook momentum

McCormick’s experience with solar energy dovetails with some of Stony Brook’s recent environmental initiatives and successes.

With the support of the Simons Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies, Stony Brook University won the competitive process as the lead institution to create a climate solutions center on Governors Island. The New York Climate Exchange will develop and deploy dynamic solutions to the global climate crisis, will provide educational and research opportunities and will serve as a place for New Yorkers to benefit from the green economy.

The Climate Solutions Center will include 400,000 square feet of green-designed building space, including research labs, classroom space, exhibits, greenhouses, mitigation technologies and housing facilities.

McCormick takes over as interim president at a time when Stony Brook has achieved some important financial and academic victories.

A year ago, the Simons Foundation made a $500 million endowment gift to Stony Brook. The gift, which will be spread out over seven years, was the largest unrestricted donation to an institution of higher education in United States history.

The Foundation gift, which the state will match on a 1:2 program, and other philanthropic contributions are expected to increase the endowment by as much as $1 billion.

Stony Brook recently climbed 19 spots in the rankings of colleges from US News and World Report, ranking 58th in the rankings. That’s the highest ever rank for a State University of New York institution.

The school also placed 12th among national universities for social mobility rank.

“Stony Brook is a world-class institution, moving on an upward trajectory, educating the next generation of leaders and thinkers and bettering our society through research and economic development,” Stony Brook Council Kevin Law said in a statement. “I am pleased to welcome Dr. McCormick, whose accomplishments and vision in higher-education leadership are nothing short of extraordinary, as our interim president, and to begin the search for our next permanent president.”

Challenges ahead

McCormick will likely face the same some of the same challenges other university presidents, interim or not, have dealt with as protestors have expressed their frustrations over the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

At numerous universities, protests disrupted exams, classes and graduation ceremonies.

College presidents have tried to balance between the rights of students to assemble and express themselves and the university’s need to protect various groups of students from intimidation, bullying, or threats.

Local politicians welcomed McCormick. “I look forward to getting to know Dr. McCormick and collaborating with him to ensure that Stony Brook remains a premier institution of higher learning, providing a safe environment for students of all religions,” said Rep. Nick LaLota (R-NY1).
Rocky Point High School track and field standout flies at U.S. Olympic Trials

“"The goal is always to work the hardest.""
Track and field standout - Jasmine Moore

Rocky Point resident Alexandra “Alex” Kelly, a gifted, 20-year-old athlete, had the opportunity to compete in the 2024 Olympic Trials June 21. There, she was placed 21st in the Women’s Long Jump Qualification – Group 1. She has gained valuable knowledge watching the preparation of other top athletes on the national stage.

Reuben Jones, assistant women’s track and field coach at Princeton University, said, “Alex is one of the all-time most physically-gifted athletes I have ever coached in my 14 years in the Ivy League and the last eight with Princeton. Alex can raise her game to meet the level of any competition. Before she graduates, she can surpass the 22-foot mark in the long jump and the 45-foot mark for the triple jump.”

In 2022, Kelly graduated from Rocky Point High School as an honor student, with a 101 GPA, who enjoyed singing in the chorus and working as lifeguard at her local beach.

As an eighth grader, she was still somewhat new to athletics but still broke the long and triple jump records at the high school.

During COVID-19, every athlete was stopped in their tracks. But, being the positive individual she is, Kelly took this period in stride, and realized that it could be an opportunity for growth. She prioritized her leg health, and never stopped training.

For a time, Kelly ran the 4x100 meter relay, and while she liked this event with her teammates, she stopped running this discipline to devote more time to jumping. To stay in shape, she ran sprints and had a strenuous lifting regimen. All of this training paid dividends as Kelly kept establishing new jumping records, and finished first in New York State championships in the triple jump during the 2021-22 winter and spring track seasons.

Right before high school graduation, Kelly was New Balance Nationals champion in the triple jump, held at the University of Pennsylvania.

As this remarkable athlete successfully competed at the highest levels of track and field in high school, Kelly was aggressively recruited by Columbia, Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford and both the Air Force and Naval academies.

For Kelly, Princeton University was the perfect distance away from home. She is majoring in ecology and evolutionary biology, and minoring in the history of science technology and medicine. Kelly is equally as dedicated to her academics.

During her freshman season, Kelly quickly cemented her presence on the Princeton team, as she helped the school earn three Ivy League titles.

This special athlete has some current time to see her family and friends, but she looks forward to her junior season when she will return to Princeton as a captain.

A goal-oriented student-athlete who has her eyes set on attaining her education and the pursuit of athletics brilliance, she will keep being a role model to other younger women and will surely continue to make the North Shore proud of her accomplishments.
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Be mindful of shark safety

One of the many attractions of Long Island is access to our beautiful beaches. As we take full advantage of our island’s coasts in this hot weather, it is important to stay informed on the risks of the ocean.

While deaths from shark attacks are uncommon — there were only two recorded fatalities nationally caused by a shark in 2023 — Long Island has seen an uptick in shark bites in recent years. Here, at least five people were bitten by sharks in 2023 and eight bites were recorded in 2022.

Robert Moses State Park was a popular spot for sharks last summer with several bites and multiple sightings. Several of the bites occurred during the Fourth of July weekend, so while it’s possible more sharks may be visiting our coast, there was likely an uncommonly large number of people at the beach for the holiday, and therefore more people who were ignorant of shark safety.

This summer, it is important to prepare for what the increased number of bites in the last two years have shown us: that we share the water with sharks.

Experts trace the increase to the stabilization of endangered shark species, such as the sandbar shark, as well as warming water temperatures that are attracting prey closer to the shores.

Luckily, there are many ways to prepare ourselves before plunging into potentially dangerous environments.

An attack can be prevented by staying up to date on sightings and checking the state of the water. Last year, Robert Moses State Park prohibited swimming after a shark sighting. However, you don’t always have to wait for officials to take action in order to stay safe.

Before swimming, it is helpful to observe the water yourself, making note of any schools of fish, dolphins and seabirds — signs that a shark could be nearby. Often, being alert to your surroundings is the primary way you can protect yourself.

If the coast is clear and you choose to swim, stay with other swimmers and in the line of sight of a lifeguard. Avoid swimming when sharks are most active, at dawn or after dusk. To further protect yourself, don’t wear shiny jewelry — the sheen resembles the shimmer of fish scales — or bright colors.

Lifeguards and other officials have taken steps to diminish the danger, such as monitoring beaches with drones, patrolling the area and carrying bite-specific first-aid materials.

The sharks visiting Long Island are primarily nonaggressive and on the smaller side. If you are in the water and see a shark, try to maintain eye contact.

Remember, attacks occur when sharks mistake a person or surfboard for prey. They aren’t vengeful, malicious creatures as movies like “Jaws” might suggest, but an essential part of the ecosystem of the ocean. In fact, biologists and experts see an increase in sharks as a good sign that the ecosystem is stabilizing after years of overfishing.

Swim safely this summer, keeping in mind that sharks, too, love our Long Island beaches.

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Letters to the Editor

America’s ‘war on opioids’

Fifteen years ago, a local 13-year-old boy died on his couch after overdosing from opioids. It was a shock to our community, and it set the ominous precedent for the opioid epidemic that has ravaged our country. As I often ask, why is it taking so long to stop the ever-increasing overdose deaths? Americans are dying inside our borders thanks to adversaries who are funneling deadly drugs that have killed more Americans than multiple U.S. wars. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention more than 1 million Americans have died from opioid overdoses. In 2023, over 100,000 Americans died of overdoses, including an estimated 366 from the powerful opioid fentanyl in Suffolk County.

As the former Suffolk County Addiction Prevention and Support Advisory Panel chair, I can tell you firsthand that the “war on opioids” is not even close to being over, even as we see a slight decline in death rates. We need to see this epidemic as a real war that our adversaries are waging against us and use military force to stop the needless deaths of so many of our fellow Americans. Those actions include sanctions on China, a hard crackdown on drug cartels and the border, and a united front throughout this country to address the carnage of the drug epidemic. That means putting some of the proposed $850 billion in military spending toward our own internal “war on opioids.” The Supreme Court recently ruled that the Sackler family, the owners of Purdue Pharma that produces OxyContin, cannot be shielded from liability. This decision holds the Sacklers accountable, however it also puts $6 billion in settlement funding, targeted to address the opioid epidemic, in jeopardy.

Let’s stop wasting time over political bashing and focus on what we need to do to make our country stronger and safer. We can end this war by uniting and finding effective strategies to identify drug dealers through law enforcement, providing services for those who need addiction and mental health support, and educating our kids on the dangers of opioids.

So much money has been made in legal and illegal opioid drug sales, yet no money can replace the loved ones we’ve lost who battled addiction and did not know they were casualties of America’s “war on opioids.” It’s time to end this war!

Sarah Anker
Former Suffolk County legislator and chair of Suffolk County’s Addiction Prevention and Support Advisory Panel. Current NY Senate District 1 Democratic candidate.

A statement by Presiding Officer Kevin McCaffrey

Violence has no place in our political process, whether in our capitols or on the campaign trail. We are thankful that former President Trump was not seriously harmed and we send our prayers to the loved ones of the rally spectators who were apparent victims of this callous assassination attempt. Kudos for the bravery and quick response of the Secret Service and members of law enforcement.

Kevin McCaffrey
Suffolk County Executive

A statement from Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine

Hatred and acts of violence toward an elected official or candidate for office regardless of political affiliation have no place in this country. As Americans, we stand united on the principles that make our country strong. While there are no reported threats in Suffolk County at this time, my office will continue to monitor the situation.

Ed Romaine
Suffolk County Executive

WRITE TO US ... AND KEEP IT LOCAL

We welcome your letters, especially those responding to our local coverage, replying to other letter writers’ comments and speaking mainly to local themes. Letters should be no longer than 400 words and may be edited for length, libel, style, good taste and uncivil language. They will also be published on our website. We do not publish anonymous letters. Please include an address and phone number for confirmation. Email letters to: editor1@tbrnewsmedia.com or mail them to TBR News Media, P.O. Box 707, Setauket, NY 11733
In a role reversal, we ask our kids for the kind of help we used to give them

When our children were young, our first, primary and most important mission was to make sure they were safe and healthy.

We didn’t sit down at the beach because each of them had a tendency, like me I suppose, to head directly into the water. Sometimes, they weren’t on board with our efforts to protect them.

We would put them in a car seat and, almost instantly, they would arch their backs so far that it was impossible to strap them in.

Or we would try to apply sunscreen and they would wiggle away and giggle, as we dropped a glob of white cream on the floor or sprayed it into the air.

We made them hold our hands even when they didn’t want to touch us. Anyone who read last week’s column can understand why my children, in particular, might not want to hold my intolerably sweaty hand during the heat of the summer.

We also urged them to wear bike helmets, even though they weren’t cool, to wear mittens or gloves in the winter and to get enough sleep so they could function the next day at school or at their numerous basketball/baseball/softball/volleyball/music practices over the weekend or in the evening after a long day of listening to adults talk at them.

One day, after a particularly exciting and challenging basketball game for our son, one of his friends asked if he could bring him to a movie with his family.

“Uh, I guess so,” I shrugged, as I counted the basketballs I shoveled into a mesh bag to make sure I had exactly the number the league had given me.

“What movie?”

“Hunger Games,” my son’s friend said.

I looked at my wife. I’d heard that the movie was particularly violent and knew that our son, who was under nine, might struggle to make it through a PG-13 movie, particularly one that involved violence among children.

“Are you sure you want to go?” I whispered to our son, hoping that I could encourage him to do something else that evening that might not cost him and, perhaps, us some sleep.

“Daaaadd,” he said, giving me the can’t-you-be-a-fun-dad-just-this-once look.

My wife and I looked eyes, trying to figure out if either of us should step in and suggest that we’d rather he didn’t go.

We rolled the dice, holding our breath as he jogged away from us across the gym.

We considered taking a nap before he came home, just to prepare ourselves for a restless night.

When he finally returned, he had a broad grin on his face.

“You gotta see the movie, it’s amazing,” he said.

We weren’t sure whether he was just being tough in front of his friend or if he really liked it.

Each of the next eight times we asked, he never changed his answer or wavered.

That night, all of us slept well.

Fast forward to today. Our kids are watching and streaming whatever appeals to them.

Somewhere, one of them asked if we had seen the film rating system for sensitive parents.

Sometimes, they weren’t aware and instantly, they would arch their backs so far that it was impossible to strap them in.

And although no plans existed for coping with a pandemic in 1918, individual cities did implement school closings, banned public gatherings, issued quarantines and encouraged social isolation. Public health and medical advances have made huge strides, which account for the global change, although the world population has quadrupled in the last 100 years.

We can compare cultural shifts, too. Liberal views toward equality of women and minorities, drug use and sexuality blossomed then, as well as backlashes to these ideas, setting us up for issues that have followed. Marijuana became popular in what was termed “The Jazz Age,” especially among musicians and those in show business. These themes, along with their inherent tensions, are prominently with us today, even if we consider that we have made significant progress in some ways.

Geographically, more of the population began to live in cities than on farms then, and that holds true for our cities and suburbs now. But the divide today is not so much physical as generational. Social media and video games are the provenance of the young, while older Americans still read, watch TV and film.

The stock market and the financial world are strikingly similar while a century apart. Stocks are roaring today, much as they did in the Roaring Twenties. America’s wealth more than doubled in the decade of the 1920s. But it was a time of immense economic prosperity for upper-class white American men. Most Americans, with minimal wages, only experienced income inequality. It was also a time of the one percent owning a widely disproportionate share of that wealth, some 23.9 percent.

Sound familiar? And because the wages of the working class were not brought along with that of the wealthy, as consumers, they could not keep up their vital role. Consumers are responsible for as much as 70 percent of the economy. Depression followed. Again, today the top one percent own some 26 percent, and again income inequality is rampant.

Then there was Prohibition. In 1920, the 18th Amendment banned the making and selling of alcohol. But alcohol didn’t simply go away. It went underground, making petty gangs who transported and sold liquor into powerful forces in the country. Fast forward 100 years and we have drug lords with the same sort of influence over society as a result of similar incredible profits. The legalization of pot is clearly an attempt to learn from the century-old Temperance Movement. The turnaround in policy toward cannabis has provided a big economic boon, as the product has made its way into fiber, food and medicine.

Technology in the 1920s was dramatic and had a profound effect on people’s lives. Fridges, vacuums, telephones, radios, electricity and automobiles changed daily living. Again, major technological innovations, coming along at an exponentially faster pace, are transforming lives today. Consider internet expansion, 5G connectivity, 3D printing and artificial intelligence among most recent debuts. A few people are amassing unprecedented wealth with these marvels. Here we go again with an ever-increasing wealth gap. Plus, both centuries saw workers worried for their job, first with industrialization and now with knowledge. Advancing technology provides miracles and threats. It is also a crucial for social unrest in both centuries.

And then there is transportation. Lindbergh crossed the ocean in 1927. We are on course to fly to Mars in 10 years. Both centuries’ 20s hosted marvels. But the 1920s set the stage for WWII.

Are we learning from history?
Wonderful Tea Party Baby Shower

“Words cannot describe how perfect my daughter’s shower turned out in large part to your amazing food and even more so your amazing staff! Guests were wowed with the passed items and then the crepe station was just beyond! The staff were like old friends! So many guests remarked on how they just loved them! I’m attaching some photos but just want you to know I will never use another caterer!! ” –Kathy D, East Islip

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