The Stony Brook School begins construction

Phase one of two is underway as a new dormitory building is set for completion by the 2025-26 school year — A3

Photo courtesy The Stony Brook School

SBU interim president announced
Richard McCormick to step in as SBU continues its search for a seventh president — A3

Inside

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http://www.tbrnewsmedia.com
BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

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 reigns 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 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

CONTINUED ON A7

The Stony Brook School undergoes construction project

Dormitory building to be completed by fall 2025

BY SAMANTHA RUTT
EDITOR@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The first major construction in over a decade is in the works at The Stony Brook School. The private Christian college-preparatory school, located just off Route 25A in Stony Brook, will soon be the home of Daley Hall — a dormitory building set to house 52 boys and four faculty families.

The new building will replace a 100-year-old dormitory on campus and will be named on behalf of Clayt Daley, an alumni of the boarding and day school — Class of 1969 — who is also the former CFO of Procter & Gamble.

“We expect construction to be completed in time for the 2025-26 school year,” said Dan Hickey, the school’s director of advancement.

Led by J. Petrocelli Contracting, a family-owned construction company based in Ronkonkoma, the soon-to-be dormitory building is set to be constructed in line with the campus’ existing land.

The construction will utilize the elevation drop, on the Quaker Path border of the campus, to their advantage as they are in the process of “moving earth.” As explained by Hickey, “We are using the land drop to our advantage, maintaining the proposed three-story structure but building into the hill to adhere to the existing tree line.”

Obtaining approval and initial concerns

Just over a year ago, in July of 2023, the school applied to the Town of Brookhaven Board of Zoning Appeals, for a proposed expansion to add three new buildings to the 55-acre campus.

The initial proposal included the construction of an indoor practice facility, a three-story dormitory building and a three-story STEM building.

The school’s original application proposed installing a parking lot from campus, near the sports facility, with exit points onto Chub Hill Road, Stony Road and Woodbine Avenue, potentially resulting in an uptick in traffic in the neighborhood.

Since then, The Stony Brook School has hosted several well-attended meetings with members of the surrounding neighborhood where representatives of the school entertained input, ideas and concerns.

“The new athletic facility was a point of contention with our neighbors who bordered our campus. We had several in-person meetings with our neighbors on campus last year,” Hickey said. “The result of those

CONTINUED ON A7
Long Island school districts are suing social media giants over rising mental health concerns

BY TONI-ELENA GALLO
EDITOR@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

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.
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.
Medford man indicted for fleeing scene of fatal crash

On July 16 Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced the indictment of Dolores Mancialandaverde, 28, of Medford for leaving the scene of an incident without reporting, and other related charges for allegedly operating a motor vehicle while his privilege to drive in New York State was suspended, and then leaving the scene of a crash that resulted in the death of his passenger, Hedilberto Nava-Perez, 44, of Medford, and serious physical injuries to another passenger.

According to the investigation, on June 8, 2024, at approximately 1:52 a.m., Mancialandaverde was allegedly driving his 2008 BMW 328i southbound on Horseblock Road in Medford, with two passengers inside.

As a tractor trailer was making a left-hand turn from Horseblock Road onto Express Drive North, Mancialandaverde allegedly drove through the intersection and crashed into the tractor trailer. Mancialandaverde allegedly exited his vehicle and fled on foot as a bystander attempted to render aid to the victims.

Nava-Perez, Mancialandaverde’s back-seat passenger, was pronounced dead at the scene. Mancialandaverde’s front-seat passenger suffered femur, spinal, and facial fractures, and was airlifted to Stony Brook University Hospital. The driver of the tractor trailer was uninjured.

At the time of the crash, Mancialandaverde’s privilege to drive in New York was suspended.

“My office will seek justice for the victims in this case, including Mr. Nava-Perez who tragically lost his life,” added Tierney.

Supreme Court Justice Timothy P. Mazzei ordered Mancialandaverde held on $50,000 cash, $100,000 bond, or partially secured bond during the pendency of the case. Mancialandaverde is due back in court on August 18.

— SUFOLK COUNTY DA’S OFFICE

The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

Scooter operator injured in Medford crash

Suffolk County Police Fifth Squad detectives are investigating a motor vehicle crash that seriously injured a man in Medford on July 10.

Leonel Ventura Jr. was operating a motorized Varla scooter northbound on the sidewalk of Route 112 when he collided with the passenger side of an idling 2021 Dodge Durango that was attempting to make a right turn out of Speedway Gas, located at 2012 Route 112, at 5:29 p.m.

Ventura, 19, of Brentwood, was airlifted to Stony Brook University Hospital for treatment of serious physical injuries. The driver of the Dodge Durango, Keron Simmons, 37, of Coram, was not injured.

Anyone with information on this incident is asked to contact the Fifth Squad at 631-854-8552.

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 the person who allegedly set off fireworks causing damage to a Stony Brook home this month.

A person allegedly set off fireworks in the direction of a Manchester Lane home that caused damage on July 2 at 10:25 p.m. The suspect fled in a white vehicle.

Mt. Sinai smoke shop employee arrested

Suffolk County Police arrested a Mt. Sinai smoke shop employee on July 14 for allegedly selling nicotine to an underage person.

Alexzia Díaz Garcia allegedly sold an underage person Zyn nicotine pouches at MT Smoke and Vape, located at 5507-3 Nesconset Highway, at approximately 12:15 p.m.

Garcia, 18, of Coram was issued a Field Appearance Ticket for Unlawfully Dealing with a Child 2nd Degree and will be arraigned at a later date.

Police seek hit-and-run driver

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Seventh Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public’s help to identify and locate the driver of a vehicle that fled the scene in Shirley in June.

A white box truck was traveling southbound on William Floyd Parkway, near Flower Hill Drive, when the vehicle struck a 2015 Kia Optima on June 26 at 11:15 p.m. The driver of the box truck fled the scene. The driver of the Kia sustained a minor injury.

— COMPILED BY HEIDI SUTTON

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.
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 definitely 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.

SBU President
Continued from A3

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 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 campus, producing over eight megawatts of power, which, at the time, was the largest renewable energy system built on a college campus in the country. Rutgers has continued to add solar panels.

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-NY).
Setauket embraces its Native American history in a big way

BY SERENA CARPINO
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The Setalcott Nation held its annual Powwow and Corn Festival outside of Setauket Elementary School July 13-14.

After a rainy start Saturday morning, the two-day event included storytelling as well as performances from indigenous dancers and drummers. In addition, eventgoers heard speeches from Setalcott Nation chairman Helen Sells and tribal members Chitra Wells and Monique Fitzgerald.

According to Sells, a graduate of Setauket Elementary School, the powwow is a celebration of Setalcott history.

“We started this 18 years ago and decided that we would try to keep this going because of the history,” she said. “Because history, if you don’t keep it going, gets lost.”

The tribe has successfully kept the tradition alive, with most of the vendors at the event having participated for the last 18 years.

This celebration has brought some Setalcott members back to their roots, while it has allowed others to connect to their roots in a way they have never done before.

Robin Murdock, a retired Army veteran of 22 years, came back to his former community for the first time in 30 years to attend the event. Although this was his first time present, Murdock explained that the tradition “signifies how we come back together and show community. It’s important for how we pass on the culture, and let people know that we are still here. It’s a time for the kids to see what their ancestors have done and hopefully carry that on.”

Sells explained that the original deed to transfer ownership by the Setalcott tribe of their land — that became the future Town of Brookhaven — to the British was signed on April 14, 1655.

The land on which American Legion Irving Hart Post 1766 stands, located on Christian Avenue in Setauket, was given to the American Legion by Sells’ grandmother, who wanted to honor her brother, a veteran of both world wars.

“That’s why it’s called Irving Hart American Legion,” Sells, whose full name is Helen “Hart of the Morning Star” Sells, explained.

Setalcott Nation’s close community and familial ties also reflect the tribe’s core beliefs.

“We value life and family,” Murdock said. “We cherish our history. We are people of courage, and we try to stand for the right things. Those are our [peoples’] values.”

The Setalcott Nation’s annual Powwow and Corn Festival on July 13-14. Photos by Serena Carpino

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Notice of formation of 2079 River Road LLC. Articles of Organization filed with the Secretary of State of New York SSNY on 5/22/2024. Office located in Suffolk. SSNY has been designated for service of process. SSNY shall mail copy of any process served against the LLC to 20 Woods Corner Rd., Setauket, NY 11733. Purpose: any lawful purpose.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
TOWN OF BROOKHAVEN


VILLAGE TIMES HERALD
THE FOLLOWING CASES WILL COMMENCE AT 4 P.M.
29. Bin & Ying Zhang, 14 Stony Rd, Stony Brook, NY. Location: North side Stony Rd., 270’ West of Houghton Blvd., Stony Brook. Applicant requests rear yard variance for existing residence addition (0200 15300 0600 050000)
30. Denise & Paul Mallia, c/o Andrew Malguanera, 713 Main St, Port Jefferson, NY. Location: North side Fox Rd., 534.57’ East of Donna Court, East Setauket. Applicant requests minimum side yard variance for existing church. (0200 36100 0100 013000)
31. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, c/o Andrew Malguanera, 713 Main St, Port Jefferson, NY. Location: South side John St., 170’ East of Memory Way, (East side Manchester Ln.), Stony Brook. Applicant requests minimum side yard variance for existing church. (0200 36100 0100 013000)
32. Temple Isaiah, Howard Kandwitz, President, 1404 Stony Brook Rd., Stony Brook, NY. Location: West side Stony Brook Rd., 225’ North of Memory Way, (East side Manchester Ln.), Stony Brook. Applicant requests minimum side yard variance for existing church. (0200 36100 0100 013000)

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the date for the following Board of Fire Commissioners meeting has changed as follows:
The August 1st, 2024 meeting has been rescheduled for August 8th, 2024 at 6:00 pm.
The meeting will take place at 26 Hulse Road, East Setauket, NY.
Dated: July 12, 2024
David Sterne
District Manager/Secretary

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Not Responsible for Typographical Errors
SBU Provost Lejuez discusses McInnis departure, tenure track reviews, Regents exams

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Like colleges around the state and country, Stony Brook University is preparing for the possibility that New York State students will no longer be required to pass Regents exams to graduate from high school.

During Covid-19, when many schools including SBU made reporting Scholastic Aptitude Tests, or SATs, or American College Testing, or ACTs, optional, the university continued to take a broader view of college applicants.

“The idea of holistic admissions has been something that has been gaining steam for a while,” said Provost Carl Lejuez in a wide ranging interview. Such an approach brings numerous potential student strengths into the admissions decision process.

“Judging by the success we’ve been having, we feel good about our ability to bring in the best students and help them succeed,” Lejuez added.

The admissions process at SBU has been considering additional factors, such as students’ educational experiences and opportunities, the adversity they experienced, and their trajectory and improvement.

A flagship public university, Stony Brook has become an important higher education entry point for students who are first-generation college applicants.

The university does not “want to make the process so onerous that it becomes less successful when you think of low income, first generation students who may not have a lot of the same opportunities” as students in wealthier, more established school districts, Lejuez said. The university wants to be “rigorous and equitable” in the strategy for bringing in the best students.

In the meantime, Stony Brook University recently completed its first full week after the departure of President Maurie McInnis, who had led the school for four years and is now the president of Yale University.

“The mark of a good leader is an organization that continues to thrive while they’ve gone and that is something, because they’ve created the right infrastructure and hired the right people and developed the right culture” that McInnis did, Lejuez said. “While folks are eager to have our permanent leadership in place, things are exactly how they should be.”

Indeed, Stony Brook in the coming days is expected to announce an interim president, who will take the reins for the university while the school conducts a national search, chaired by Stony Brook Council Chairman Kevin Law, for the seventh president.

Since McInnis’s departure, Stony Brook Medicine Executive Vice President Dr. William Wertheim has overseen operations as Officer-in-Charge.

Professor grades

In evaluating professors, Stony Brook uses student-driven evaluations. The university also has peer faculty observe classes and provide feedback.

“We are revising a lot of our promotion and tenure guidelines,” said Lejuez. “We’ve been very, very clear that you have to be an excellent teacher as well as an excellent researcher here at Stony Brook.”

Stony Brook emphasizes the importance of teaching at faculty orientation, where administrators urge new professors to visit and get to know the options available at the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

Through various assessments, SBU is working to ensure students are learning the lessons and ideas they should in classes.

The university made its first set of revisions this year by providing a midpoint feedback at the three-year mark for professors on a six-year tenure track throughout the university. Such feedback had been available for faculty in the College of Arts of Sciences previously.

“When you see professors who are struggling with their research or teaching, they should be getting feedback,” said Lejuez. “Sometimes they don’t get it until they’re going up for tenure. That’s not fair to the students or the faculty for that matter.”

To help students throughout their educational journey, Stony Brook invested several million dollars in increasing the number of advisors, while also increasing the support within the tutoring center.

These efforts have paid dividends, as the retention rate from first year to second year for students, which had been in the mid 80 percent range, is moving higher. Within two or three years, SBU would like to see that number reach 92 percent or more.

As for international efforts, the university plans to connect resources in places like the Turkana Basin Institute in Kenya, Centre ValBio in Madagascar and SUNY Korea, which is a partnership between SBU, SUNY and the South Korean government.

“I, as well as several deans and faculty, have made trips to all three in the past year and we are increasing our support,” said Lejuez. “We have also been ramping up fundraising efforts.”
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 scamming 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.”

The Stony Brook School
Continued from A3

meetings was a desire on our part to change our plans for a large stand-alone athletic facility to an expansion of an existing facility — an idea that actually came from one of our neighbors.”

On Sept. 20, 2023, after several ZBA meetings and opposition from nearby residents, the proposal was finally approved, but not without modifications.

The new construction “will have less impact on sight lines and traffic/parking, and we are very excited to move forward together as a community,” Hickey added.

Additional construction

The Stony Brook School is now in phase one of two phases, which will complete the updates approved by the town.

Phase two is set to include two additional structures — an academic building that will focus on math-and-science-related studies and an athletic building. Both structures are still in the planning phase, as the school continues to work with architects.

“We are currently working on those plans and they are not yet before the Town of Brookhaven,” Hickey said.

Going forward, The Stony Brook School looks to continue to enhance student experience, campus facilities and being good neighbors.

“We wanted to be good neighbors,” Hickey explained in an interview. “The level of concern from our neighbors was real, we want to be good neighbors. Though the upgrades would benefit our school, it was not worth fragmenting our community.”
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
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Editorial

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.

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 our 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 NYS 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 shoved 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.

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

My wife and I locked 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. Somehow, one of them asked if we had seen the series “Black Mirror,” suggesting it was a modern version of “The Twilight Zone.”

The first episode, with Salma Hayek, was clever and amusing at the same time. Playing herself, Hayek was particularly funny. Psychologically, it was what we thought and expected.

Then, we watched a few more episodes that became darker and more unnerving. Both of us lost some sleep after watching scenes that exceeded our gore threshold.

We started a text chain with our children, letting them know that we liked the first one and then felt as if the program did a bait-and-switch on us, taking us in a different direction from the psychological into the painful and gory.

They instantly offered their thoughts on different episodes and what they advised was appropriate for mom and dad to watch.

Our kids sent messages like “this one is not scary” and “I think it’s safe to watch.” At least as far as some TV programs, we’ve come full circle. We are no longer trying to offer them parental guidance, at least where movies are concerned. Maybe they can help establish a new film rating system for sensitive parents.

Compare 1920s vs. 2020s: There are remarkable parallels

In some ways, the 2020s appear to be similar to the 1920s. We humans like to look for historical parallels, I think, in hopes of using the past to predict the future, futile as that might be. Call them coincidences between the two centuries, if you will, but let’s look at them and judge if history is repeating itself.

The most obvious is the raging coronavirus pandemic of this century and its resemblance to the Spanish Flu that began in 1918 and lasted into the early 1920s. The flu killed some 50 million people worldwide, with 675,000 being Americans. Covid killed 6.5 million, including 1.1 million in the United States.

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 backlashes to these ideas, setting us up for views toward equality of women and minorities, drug use and sexuality blossomed then, as well as backlashes to these ideas, setting us up for
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 boom, 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 crucible 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?
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