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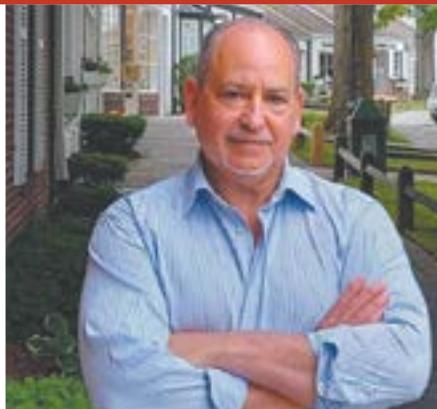
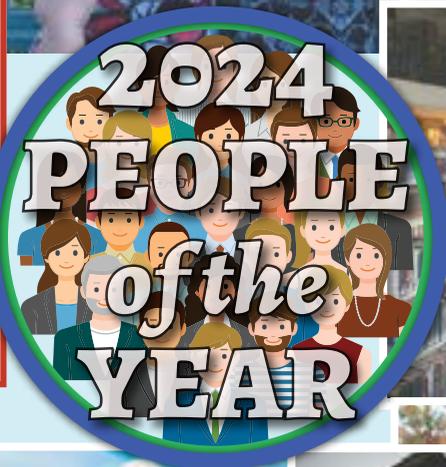
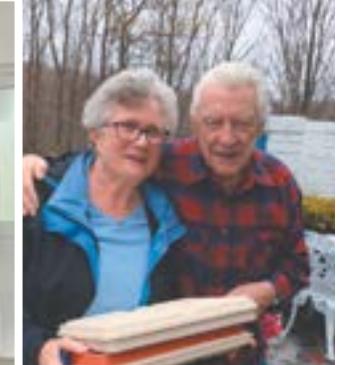
Vol. 21, No. 40

December 26, 2024

\$2.00

2024 People of the Year Winners

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Paul Braile | A4 |
| Jonathan Kornreich | A3 |
| Barbara Ransome | A5 |
| Robert Lusak | A7 |
| Ernie Canadeo | A8 |
| Gloria Rocchio | A10 |
| Ira Costell | A13 |
| Meals on Wheels | A14 |
| Dr. William Wertheim | A19 |
| Kristen Reynolds | A21 |
| Lenore Paprocky | A22 |
| Laura Ahearn | A24 |
| ECLI Vibes | A25 |
| Ann Pellegrino | A26 |



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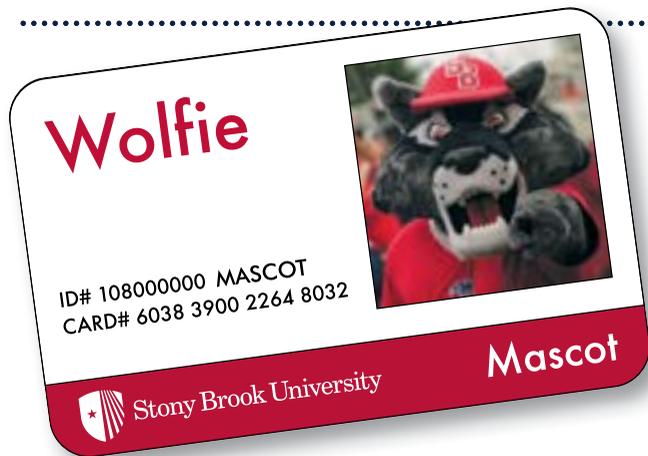


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Councilmember works toward a better Brookhaven

BY RITA J. EGAN
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Jonathan Kornreich (D, Stony Brook) may have grown up in Smithtown, but his heart is in the Town of Brookhaven.

The long-time Stony Brook resident and Town of Brookhaven councilmember is seen frequently at community events and civic meetings with his staff members Amani Khan and Abigail Choi,

interacting with constituents, listening to their concerns and aiming for what's best for all.

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

Before being elected to the TOB board during a special election in 2021, Kornreich, the only Democrat on the board, was known for his leadership skills and open-mindedness as a board member of the Three Village School District for 14 years. He was also president of the Three Village Civic Association for seven years and served on the executive boards of the Boys and Girls Club of Suffolk County and the North Shore Montessori School.

For his work, Kornreich has been named TBR News Media Person of the Year for 2024. This year's honor is the councilperson's second time receiving the recognition as he was named the news outlet's Man of the Year in Education in 2012.

Town of Brookhaven Supervisor Dan Panico (R) called the honor "well deserved."

"He is very caring, conscientious, and is frequently in my office as we discuss issues — and a myriad of issues — that affect the first town council district," Panico said. "He's proven himself to be a very diligent individual here at the town."

Herb Mones, Three Village Community Trust president and TVCA land use chair and former president, has known Kornreich roughly 20 years and said he admires Kornreich's willingness to help out with community matters and concerns. Mones added he also appreciates how Kornreich shows up for cleanups for the Setauket-Port Jefferson Station Greenway Trail and the Stony Brook train station and joins residents in tasks such as raking and picking up trash.

Joan Nickeson, Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Chamber of Commerce community liaison, said the chamber has had the same experience with the councilmember.

"Upon his election, Jonathan rolled up his sleeves, intent on maintaining open dialog and to improve community life in the Port Jefferson Station and Terryville hamlets," Nickeson said.

Nickeson said Kornreich has a "can-do attitude" and such assistance has produced tangible solutions for the chamber of commerce's



Brookhaven Councilmember Jonathan Kornreich (D-Stony Brook)
Photo by Herb Mones

Train Car office and park.

"We continue to depend upon his intuition, skill navigating Town Hall and support of small local businesses, and partners in Port Jefferson Station and Terryville," Nickeson said.

Tackling the district's issues

The myriad of issues facing Brookhaven's Council District 1, which includes Stony Brook, Old Field, Poquott, Setauket, East Setauket, Belle Terre, Port Jefferson, Port Jefferson Station and Terryville, recently has included a dam collapse that drained Stony Brook Mill Pond after a summer storm. In addition to the devastation the storm left behind, among local issues, Kornreich deals with constituents' concerns regarding land development in the area and, more recently, two proposed battery storage facilities for East Setauket. Kornreich is also working with the TOB on relocating the historic Roe Tavern to East Setauket Pond Park as part of the redesign and expansion of the open space. In his spare time, he has worked on raising funds to renovate the American Legion Irving Hart Post 1766 in Setauket.

Regarding tackling the more complex matters, Panico said Kornreich puts "public service ahead of politics."

"I think he's always a person who has a good compass when it comes to right and wrong," the town supervisor said. "I think he's a good listener and a person who does what's right, even though that decision may not appear to be popular at the time."

Mones described Kornreich as "sincere with a tremendous amount of integrity with communicating and dealing with complex issues."

"I feel that Jonathan has a certain unique capacity to communicate with people, understand their points of view and then express himself after being thoughtful and deliberate in his way,"

Mones added that Kornreich is unique in leadership because he's not showy or flashy.

"He is calm, thoughtful and able to bring about a certain amount of consensus by his speaking to

CONTINUED ON PG. 4

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Paul Braile brings light to his community

BY PETER SLOIEWSKY
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Paul Braile's volunteer commitments keep him constantly busy exemplifying his dedication to his community. Whether running Santa Claus Central at the First Methodist Church or managing

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

work for the Port Jefferson Dickens Festival, Braile's packed schedule reflects his extraordinary commitment to volunteerism and his gift for bringing people together.

Braile has worked in theatrical stage lighting since 1995 on projects for television, movies, theater and corporations including the Super Bowl, Glee and the CBS Thanksgiving Day Parade. In 2001, he moved from New York City to Port Jefferson Village and founded Paul Braile Creative, a company specializing in innovative lighting design.

His volunteer work began in 2005 with the Greater Port Jefferson/Northern Brookhaven

Arts Council where he provided lighting for the Charles Dickens Festival. Each year since (with the exception of 2020), Braile has illuminated 16 locations across the village creating magical displays for the community. Today, he serves as the vice-chair of the Arts Council.

Chair of the Council Allan Varela described Braile's "creative sense and tireless work ethic" as unparalleled, citing his reconstruction of the Roe House Santa's Workshop. Renamed ElfWorks, the project has become a beloved attraction delighting children and adults alike.

Beyond the Dickens Festival, Braile extends his talents to other community events. He creates lighting for the Port Jefferson High School prom where he also serves as president. Introduced to the prom in 2005, Braile continues to help transform parents' ideas into reality saying, "It's all about community and what one can do that can make a difference."

Braile's influence goes beyond his artistry. Jon Famularo, a lighting designer who credits Braile with inspiring his career, described him as a mentor

since middle school. Famularo praised Braile's high-quality work and dedication saying, "Regardless if you know him or not, most everyone who sees the product he delivers is blown away."

Port Jefferson Village Trustee Kyle Hill remarked that Braile's imagination and creativity "know no limit" while Renee Lemmerman, director of recreation in Port Jefferson, described him as "kind, generous, creative, funny" and a "problem solver." Co-worker Cindy Pipia added that Braile is a "visionary who strives to make all he brings to his volunteer activities better and better every year."

Braile's commitment to volunteerism stems from his love for his community. He describes Port Jefferson as "a community where strong friendships are born and continue to develop." As for the future, Braile plans to continue volunteering, mentoring and contributing to the village he loves.



Paul Braile competing on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire." Courtesy Paul Braile

Kornreich

Continued from page 3

people that way."

Mones said that when the two worked together on the civic association board, Kornreich's ability to talk to various people and develop relationships where he understood people's interests drew

newer members to the civic association.

Regarding the land use issues the council district faces, he said Kornreich goes out of his way to listen to everyone from residents to developers and get them to work together and see what needs to be done to move forward. He added that Kornreich will bring developers back

to reality when developers have proposals that may be "considered over the type in their asks for number of units or the type of build out of a store" and ask, "how could you expect that this would occur?"

Recently, at the civic association's last meeting of the year, while there was no formal agenda,

attendees had questions regarding the proposed battery storage facilities. Mones said Kornreich was more than happy to field questions.

"He's not fazed by that idea of having people questioning, proposing ideas," Mones said. "He's willing to be that listener and try to help in whatever way he can with the community."

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Colleen has been a professional designer for over a decade. She is a member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). As a Senior Design Consultant, she has helped hundreds of families across Long Island with their home organizing needs. Colleen finds it most-rewarding to help her neighbors in the Three Village area where she and her family are residents.



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Barbara Ransome helps Port Jefferson thrive

BY MALLIE JANE KIM
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Port Jefferson Village is a North Shore gem for locals and visitors alike, with restaurants and shops a cornerstone of this historic district experience. For decades, Barbara Ransome, 16-year director of operations for the Greater Port Jefferson

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

Chamber of Commerce, has worked tirelessly and effectively to keep this charming corner of Long Island thriving.

“Barbara is a force of nature,” said Stuart Vincent, president of the

chamber and senior community relations program manager at Mather Hospital.

Vincent praised Ransome’s ability to organize complicated logistics of village events, and to make sure everything the chamber hosts — from the Health and Wellness festival to the Santa parade — is successful. She also keeps abreast of any new regulation or change that might impact local business, attending countless relevant meetings to keep chamber partners informed. She even dresses as the Easter Bunny for Port Jefferson’s Easter parade



Barbara Ransome. File photo

and egg hunt.

“Barbara’s all over,” Vincent said. “I wonder sometimes how she gets everything done in the day.”

Ransome, who also owns and operates The Ransome Inn on East Broadway, has brought to the village events like the Dragon

Boat Race Festival, the Chowder Crawl during Oktoberfest and the Mac & Cheese Crawl during the village Ice Festival — all features that add to the tangible sense of place in Port Jefferson while drawing more customers to local retail shops and restaurants.

Her presence has added to a sense of unity among village community leaders as well. According to Lobster House owner James Luciano, who is also president of the Port Jefferson Business Improvement District (BID), Ransome goes above and beyond to volunteer her time to help.

“If there’s a chamber partner out there who needs help, she’s there,” Luciano said. “Any time I need help with anything, she’s always the first one asking, ‘What do you need?’”

Ransome served six terms in local elected positions, including as village trustee and deputy mayor, so she has a deep understanding of how the system works, and she is adept at helping business owners navigate bureaucracy.

Luciano added that she has been an invaluable partner for other organizations looking to serve the village, including the Business Improvement District.

“The chamber and the BID used to be

very separate years ago, and now they’re very much one and the same,” Luciano said, describing the tight relationship his organization has formed with the Chamber of Commerce. “Having someone as committed as her is what really makes it happen.”

For Ransome herself, keeping the chamber running springs naturally from her personality and her long history in the village.

“I do like to work,” she said. “My motivation is to make sure that things are done correctly and the chamber as a whole benefits.”

Ransome also credits her success to having a board that trusts and supports her, due to her reputation for doing the right thing.

“There’s an expression in the horticultural community of a ‘proven winner,’” she said, referring to plants that have a track record of success. “I think that’s what I am for them — I’m a proven winner in doing the job here.”

For her unflinching commitment to the continued success of Port Jefferson Village, TBR News Media recognizes Barbara Ransome as a 2024 Person of the Year.

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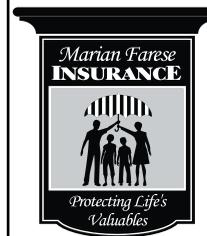
For over 30 years Marian Farese has been a trusted member of the insurance industry as well as her local community. Marian taught Insurance at Hofstra. She is a current Board Member of LIIC, Long Island Insurance Community, a charity which gives to local students, veterans & community members in need. I now serve as as Vice President of BIG I, Suffolk County, partnering with Stony Brook University to help students navigate business & insurance studies.

Marian grew up in St. James and currently has offices in St. James, (in the historic Old School House) and W. Sayville. She takes pride in her work and community, from serving on youth sports boards to coaching Little League. Marian and her staff take pride in forming lasting client relationships and offer their experience, knowledge, care to best serve clients and the community.

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Robert Lusak: Leading Smithtown Library's recovery with strength and dedication

BY SABRINA ARTUSA
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Smithtown Library Director Robert Lusak continues to work tirelessly to repair the immensely damaged library after the Aug. 19 storm. From arranging various reparations to meeting with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reimagining the damaged basement, Lusak's days are packed. His devotion exceeds simple career obligations and has made him a 2024 TBR News Media Person of the Year.

Talking to the director of almost 25 years, it is clear that the library is in capable hands.

About 17 years ago Lusak renovated and expanded all four library buildings under his jurisdiction. Back then he planned and replanned, sought approval, held meetings and consulted residents.

In August, when the basement of the Smithtown building was drowned in 8 feet of water, sludge and debris; when the windows were pushed inward and propelled almost 20 feet away; when the doors wouldn't open due to the water pressure; and when it would have been easy to give up, Lusak climbed to the roof with volunteer fire fighters and descended the ladder to determine what was next.

What followed were phone calls to cut the power, meetings with staff, the salvaging of archives, interviews, fundraising and a high level of coordination that wouldn't have been possible without Lusak.

"[Lusak's work] is all for the people and preservation of history and you need to have the discipline for that, and Rob possesses that quality," said Vinny Puleo, the vice president of the Rotary Club of Smithtown Sunrise, where Lusak sits as president.

"It was rapid-fire decisions," Lusak said. "We set up a team, almost. We had our local history librarian come over and she was so composed and professional when she saw what happened to her collection. She treats it like her child. We had janitors and custodians bringing it up here to rescue it, to protect it. Obviously, you don't learn this in library science school."

Lusak has sympathy for employees who lost their offices and personal belongings and for community members who lost their library.

"The first week was a blur almost," he said. "This is home to us, all of us."

As Lusak walks around the building, that fact couldn't be more apparent. The affection with which he indicates subtleties are proof of his care and attentiveness. Partial to



Smithtown Library Director Robert Lusak. Photo by Sabrina Artusa

Disney, Lusak points out that the artwork of the Smithtown library card contains a hidden Mickey Mouse. Evidence of Lusak's impact and passion for his job is inextricable from the library itself.

The basement is now gutted and cleaned. There is still over a year before the main floors can be opened — a permanent electric line will need to be established and a new HVAC system installed — but Lusak is optimistic and already thinking of ways he can improve the library's layout and services.

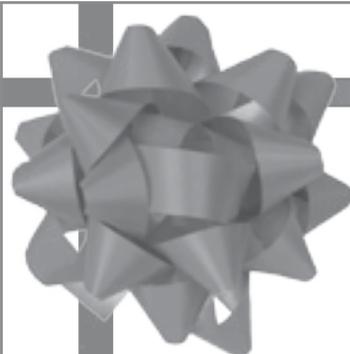
Smithtown Library Assistant Director Eileen Caulfield lauded Rob's "exceptional leadership, commitment to service and impactful contributions across different sectors."

In addition to his work as Smithtown Library director, Lusak is president of the Rotary Club of Smithtown Sunrise. Club members, who meet Thursday mornings, frequently organize donation events and partner with local charities. Recently, club members volunteered to purchase gifts for children whose families may not have the money for luxuries.

Lusak also makes time to fulfill his duties as a major with the 11th New York Infantry Regiment, a volunteer honor guard program that performs services to honor veterans and their families.

"When I heard it was honoring families and their loved ones who passed away, I was attracted to that. It is letting the families know that their loved one represented our country well. That's why when [the unit] was brought to my attention I said 'I'm in. I want to do this,'" Lusak said.

Lusak's consistent consideration for his fellow community members is inspiring. The strength, perseverance and grace he has shown make him a valuable leader.



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Lime light shines bright on Ernie Canadeo and the LIMEHOF

BY STEVEN ZAITZ
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

If you have not been to the Long Island Music and Entertainment Hall of Fame in Stony Brook Village, you might not know just how many musical giants are from around here.

Billy Joel, Mariah Carey, Eddie Money, Twisted Sister and the Stray Cats are just a few of the household names who grew up on Long Island, and made it big in the industry. They are now inductees in the hallowed halls of the LIMEHOF, which just this month celebrated its 20th anniversary.

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

Another musical giant, who is not on this list and will probably never sell out Madison Square Garden or make a platinum record, is Ernie Canadeo. Canadeo has been the Chairman of LIMEHOF for 10 years, and was the driving force behind transforming it from a rolling exhibit in a Winnebago, to the state-of-the-art 8,800-square-foot facility it is today.

Canadeo, who grew up in Westbury and now lives in Glen Cove, is the founder and Chairman of EGC Group, one of the largest advertising and digital marketing firms on Long Island. Last month, Canadeo was inducted into the Long Island Business Hall of Fame for not only his work at EGC, but also his membership on the board of directors for many Long Island non-profit organizations. Additionally, he is on the Executive Committee of the Long Island Association, which is the foremost business and commerce organization on the Island.

Canadeo has also spearheaded and supported many philanthropic endeavors, such as TeachRock, which promotes music in the classroom, and the National Stuttering Association.

Despite these achievements in the hyper-competitive digital marketing industry, Ernie is renowned for maintaining a sweet touch and sense of family with everyone in his orbit — business associates and loved ones alike.

“Ernie is huge on family,” said his wife Catherine Canadeo, who is the CEO of her own Corporate Wellness Advisory firm. “Everything he does focuses on that zest, that love of life, of food and friends and family, and of course, music.”

His experience in the music industry began in the 1970s when he worked as an advertising exec and promoter at RCA, A&M and Arista Records. Ernie promoted acts such as Hall & Oates, The Police, Diana Ross, The Kinks and R.E.M during the punk, glam and early disco eras of the ‘70s and ‘80s, until he founded the EGC Group in 1985. After landing some big

accounts like Blockbuster Video and Häagen-Dazs ice cream, EGC established itself as a major national player in the advertising world, despite not having an office overlooking Madison Avenue.

“LIMEHOF was founded primarily by musicians and educators,” said Canadeo, who is a Stony Brook and Fordham University alum. “But in 2006, they asked me to be on the board because there wasn’t really a business person on it. I was happy to lend my expertise, and a few years later, I was named chairman.”

Fellow board member and LIMEHOF founding father Jim Faith recalled the early days of Ernie’s tenure. “Money was always a problem for us in the beginning, and with Ernie’s vision, we have been able to take a huge leap,” said Faith. “He’s a great businessman who also happens to be a great lover of music. Getting that deal for the Stony Brook building was so important to us and has enabled us to do so many other things.”

One of Canadeo’s first orders of business as chairman was to establish a permanent home for LIMEHOF. “We tried over the years to have a real hall of fame, and a great mobile museum, but what we really wanted was a home,” Canadeo said. “In 2022, I got a call from Gloria Rocchio, a real estate broker in Stony Brook, who asked me if we were still looking. So I went up there and fell in love with the place, but told her we could never afford this. She said, ‘Yes, you can,’” he continued.

“We signed a 25-year lease for a grand total of one dollar a year and moved in a few months later.”

— ERNIE CANADEO, CHAIRMAN OF LIMEHOF

For 85 years, the Ward Melville Heritage Organization has preserved historic properties donated by Ward Melville, to support non-profits that promote culture and education through history, art and music. And this just so happens to be LIMEHOF’s exact mission.

Canadeo ends the story with this wonderful fact: “We signed a 25-year lease for a grand total of one dollar a year and moved in a few months later.”

Since taking over the facility on the northeast corner of Stony Brook Village, LIMEHOF has showcased a fascinating collection of artifacts, from concert-used instruments and outfits to memorabilia spanning decades — from Broadway legend George M. Cohan to doo-wop icons like Little Anthony and the Imperials, and even rap megastars Run-D.M.C. The space was conceptualized by famed artist and designer Kevin O’Callaghan, and there

is a steady stream of homegrown music emanating from the concert area every weekend of the year. This past Thanksgiving weekend, the organization celebrated its anniversary with two days filled with live performances from over a dozen bands — all with Long Island ties.

Across the hall, an entire wing of the museum houses the “Billy Joel – My Life, A Piano Man’s Journey” exhibit, which is filled with over 50 years’ worth of memorabilia — much of which came from the Piano Man’s personal collection. The exhibit opened to the public in November of 2023 and has been seen by more than 10,000 people.

LIMEHOF founder and board member Norm Presslin, a Stony Brook University professor of media, who has also been in radio for close to half a century, first got to know Ernie decades ago when the ad man guest spoke in the professor’s classroom, discussing the topics of music marketing and business. Presslin was impressed with Ernie’s ability to communicate, with warmth, the vagaries of challenging industries.

“I’ve observed many people in the advertising and marketing world, and many of them never adjusted to the rapid changes,” said Presslin. “Ernie’s ability to adapt has served him well and has served LIMEHOF well. Essentially, what he has done is create a home for Long Island musicians and people who love music that they never had before.”

While Ernie holds the title of chairman at his namesake EGC agency, his current CEO, Nicole Penn, handles much of the day-to-day operations. She has worked with Ernie for 20 years and has ridden shotgun with him as the industry transformed from traditional newspaper and television ad campaigns to the current digital-heavy, social media-driven model it is today.

“In the 21st century, no other industry has changed as much as ours,” Penn said. “Ernie has always been a great sounding board and mentor. He’s caring, but also astute and has a great lens at looking at a problem from different angles. If it’s a client challenge we are trying to solve, he always seems to have relevant experience and the right instincts. What he has done at LIMEHOF is a by-product of this and it is so great because music has always been his passion,” she added.

Music and passion. For someone who loves to cook Italian food as much as Ernie does, these two ingredients are like the white wine and garlic in his famous Chicken Scarpariello.



From left to right: Musician Richie Cannata, his wife, Shirlene Cannata, Catherine Canadeo and Ernie Canadeo. Photo courtesy of Ernie Canadeo

So much so that when it came to professing his love for Catherine on their wedding day five years ago, Ernie sang an original composition called ‘10,000 Kisses,’ just for the occasion. He performed it in front of 100 guests at their home. On keyboards was pianist Christopher Clark of the band Brand X, and on sax was Lords of 52nd Street saxophonist Richie Cannata, who played with Billy Joel for decades.

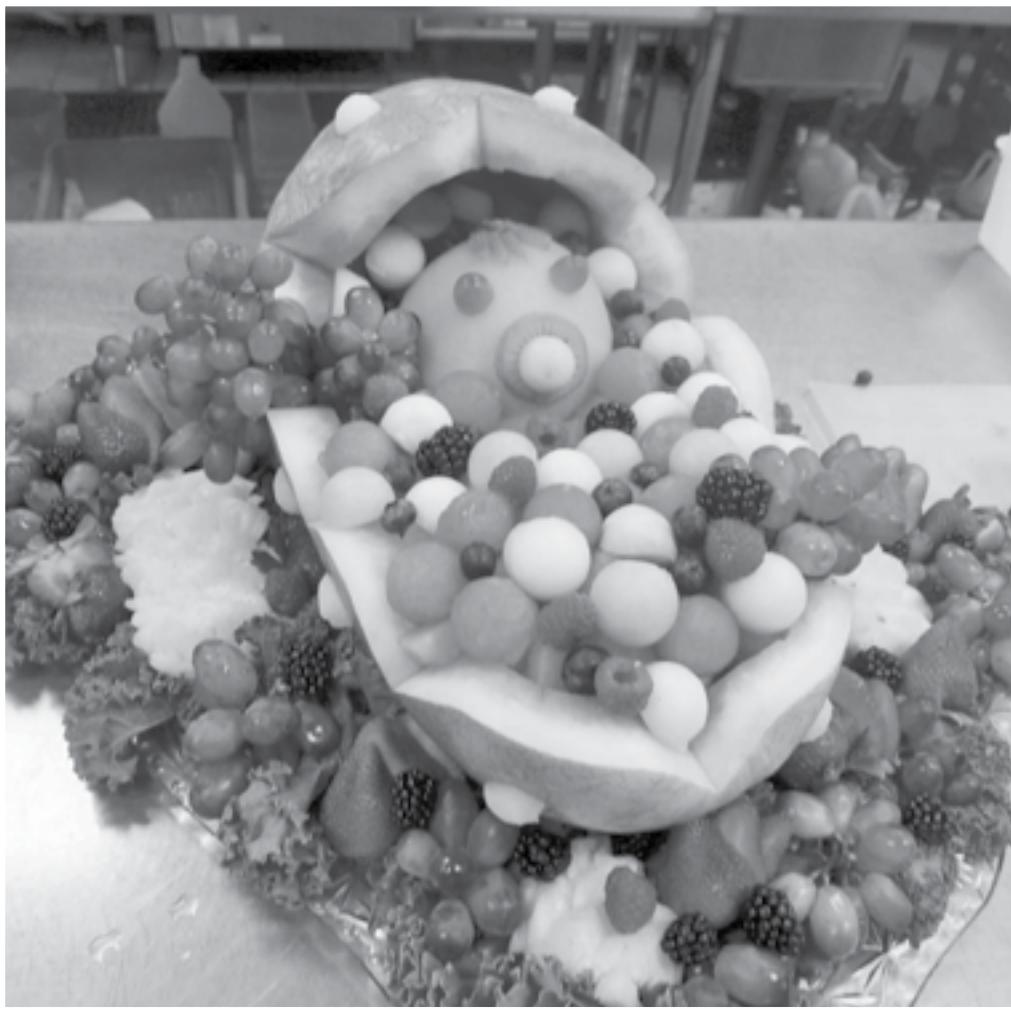
“To see him with that microphone, I was completely blown away,” Catherine said. “We have parties here at our house, and sometimes we have musicians come over, but I had no idea that Ernie was actually going to sing. When he did that, my heart was so full, so overwhelmed with admiration and fondness for his sweetness.”

“To do that in front of all of our friends, singing just to me — he was singing to my heart, and that showed his love on so many different levels,” she continued.

Ernie and Richie have been friends for many years, and it was Cannata’s then-girlfriend who introduced them. “Ernie and Cathy are a match made in music heaven, and I couldn’t be happier for both of them,” said Cannata, who was inducted into the LIMEHOF in 2014. “I’ve known Cathy for a long time, and it’s a beautiful thing for all of us — way bigger than words.”

That night, as a party favor, Ernie handed out a CD of ‘10,000 Kisses’ to all of his guests — a fitting metaphor for all Ernie has given to Long Island, the local music community and everyone who has had the pleasure of meeting him.

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Rocchio keeps Stony Brook Village Center running smoothly despite storm's aftermath

BY RITA J. EGAN
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Ward Melville Heritage Organization's 45th Annual Holiday Festival on Dec. 8 filled the Stony Brook Village Center with holiday spirit as entertainers played music, a short parade featuring large puppets weaved through the center and Santa visited with children.

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

It was hard to believe that diagonally across the street from the Village Center laid the remnants of a summer storm that brought down several inches of rain during a short time in the late evening hours and early morning hours of Aug. 18 and 19, altering a landmark in its wake. The deluge of rain left the historic Stony Brook Grist Mill's dam breached and the Stony Brook Mill Pond drained. Harbor Road running along the pond and Mill Creek Road were destroyed, and part of a home and its backyard fell into the Mill Pond.

Heading up the charge to keep the Stony Brook Village Center, which WMHO owns, running smoothly despite the devastation and working to restore the Stony Brook Mill Pond to its former glory has been Gloria Rocchio, WMHO's president.

Regarding the aftermath, Rocchio said it was the worst weather-related damage she knows of since she became WMHO president more than 40 years ago. Despite the tragedy, Stony Brook Village Center businesses remained open, and events such as the holiday and Halloween festivals have continued. For her leadership and stewardship skills in keeping continuity and order, TBR News Media has named Rocchio one of its People of the Year for 2024.

Rocchio said when the news of the dam breaching awakened her, she didn't sleep for the rest of the day. The WMHO president has had to balance environmental, historical preservation, commerce and tourism concerns in the following months.

Regarding juggling all the responsibilities, she said, "I have a very good staff but inevitably I have to be involved."

She also has been grateful for volunteers (see sidebar) who have offered assistance. Among them, joining WMHO employees, were more than 70 nearby residents who cleaned debris and dead fish in Stony Brook Mill Creek on Aug. 22. Some debris came from the home that partially fell into the pond. Among the items found were suitcases, furniture and apparel. Some larger items, such as a lawn mower, couldn't be removed immediately.



Gloria Rocchio standing in front of the Stony Brook Village post office. Courtesy of the Ward Melville Heritage Organization

Rocchio said WMHO was grateful for the help they have received. Reflecting on the last few months, she was reminded that Stony Brook's hamlet gets its name from the stony mill creek. "This is the heart of Stony Brook."

Richard Rugen, WMHO chairman, said Rocchio has been working 24/7.

"It is a job for three people, and the reason she's able to handle it is that she not only has been doing it for a very long time, but she has worn so many hats on Long Island relative to civic things, that she's got an inventory, a mental inventory, that is like none other."

Rugen added that Rocchio began her journey with WMHO during a time when she was able to get to know philanthropist and developer of Stony Brook Village Center Ward Melville, as well as his wife, Dorothy, and other notable WMHO board members. To this day, Rugen said, Rocchio respects their vision of the Stony Brook Village Center and WMHO's other properties.

"I don't think a board meeting goes by — and if it does, it's a short one — where the Melville mantra is not brought up: What would Dorothy and Ward think of this idea?" Rugen said. "So, they are still there in that respect."

Since the storm, Rocchio has been in constant contact with elected officials, including Suffolk County Legislator Steve

Englebright (D-Setauket). The legislator has worked on various projects with WMHO and secured grants for the nonprofit during his former role as a New York State assemblyman.

Englebright said Rocchio tremendously respects the architectural and overall vision of Ward Melville and Richard Haviland Smythe, the Village Center's architect. The legislator has seen Rocchio at work, most recently restoring the historic eagle on the center's post office.

"It's a fragile entity that needs constant attention and care, and in this case, repair, and she's,

the right person," Englebright said. "She's doing almost curatorial-quality care for that architectural treasure that is the village, but it's not a static exhibit. It's a community. It's where people live and shop."

Englebright said that during the last few months after the storm, Rocchio has continued making the Village Center a welcoming place and kept it "vibrant and economically viable," adding that such a task is important but not easy.

"She's not just passively overseeing the Ward Melville Heritage Organization," the legislator said. "She's making sure that it remains a part of our living experience and our consciousness."

WMHO board grateful for community's help

Ward Melville Heritage Organization President Gloria Rocchio and Chairman Richard Rugen said they appreciated the assistance Long Island residents offered after the August storm that left Stony Brook Mill Pond drained.

Rae Marie Renna, general manager of the Three Village Inn, drove from the South Shore immediately after hearing about the dam breach and offered rooms to occupants of five homes that were evacuated near the dam.

Rocchio said Avalon Nature Preserve offered to patrol by the Stony Brook Grist Mill after people were walking into the drained pond, which is dangerous as the mud acts like quicksand. Residents have also called animal rescuers such as Sweetbriar Nature Center and Frankie Florida, of Strong Island Animal Rescue League, when they have spotted fish and wildlife in distress. Both Rocchio and Rugen said the animal rescuers who have saved fish, turtles and more were risking their own safety when walking in the drained pond.

Rocchio added that some of the animals were confused after the storm. Canada Geese have been sitting on a sandbar when the tide goes up and then swim with whatever water is there. One goose adopted TEB North Country Car Care service station after the pond drained and was named Scooter. Owner Brian Barton and his staff gave the goose cracked corn and water. When it was too hot, they bought the goose a kiddie pool to swim in.

Olivia Ross, of Port Jefferson, has been selling bracelets inscribed with Stony Brook Strong and Save the Mill Pond for \$2 each where all proceeds are going to WMHO. Rocchio said, "She has worked tirelessly with us."

The WMHO president and chairman said among the volunteers, especially during the Aug. 22 cleanup, were Town of Brookhaven Councilmember Jonathan Korreich (D-Stony Brook), New York State Assemblyman Ed Flood (R-Port Jefferson) and Lois Reboli of the Reboli Center for Art and History. Local businesses such as Crazy Beans Restaurant, Sweet Mama's Restaurant and Premiere Pastry Shop contributed food and beverages, while Stony Brook Kayak & Paddleboard Rentals, along with Lessing's Hospitality Group and the Three Village Dads, also took part in the cleanup. Stony Brook Fire Department was on standby to assist in an emergency, and the Town of Brookhaven Highway Department delivered dumpsters.

Rugen said they were grateful for everyone who had volunteerism "in their hearts."

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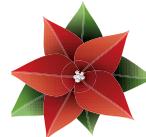
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The man behind the scenes of Port Jefferson Station/Terryville

BY DYLAN FRIEDMAN
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

When two years ago, a significant development threatened to reshape the character of his tight-knit community dramatically, Ira Costell knew he had to act.

As the recently elected president of the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association, Costell became more determined than ever to ensure his neighbors' voices were heard.

"I figured, this was an opportunity for me to pitch in and try to do my best to give voice to those issues that I felt some of my neighbors and myself were concerned about," Costell said.

Over the past two years, Costell has done just that, reinvigorating the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association and transforming it into a powerful platform for community advocacy.

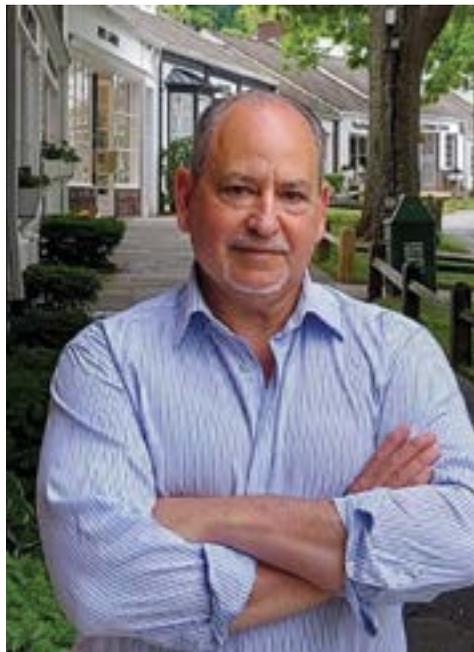
"I try to do it to the best of my ability. It's a learning experience, but I think I've grown into the position, and [I] do my best to be an honest broker so that it's not just about my opinion. I really try to facilitate what I think the group is trying to say," Costell said.

Through Costells' leadership, the organization has seen a surge in engagement. It has over 200 people on its mailing list, over 50 voting members and countless other community members who show up at meetings to voice their concerns.

This grassroots mobilization has allowed the civic group to have a tangible impact on key issues facing the area, from influencing the outcome of a contentious rezoning proposal to securing a commitment for a comprehensive traffic study, all completed under Costell's leadership.

While the association has accomplished many things under Costell's leadership, his decades-long commitment to community service extends far beyond the organization.

"I have a background of giving service to protecting the environment. I was the former chair of an environmental commission in the county of Suffolk," Costell said. "I [also] continuously give service as a family advocate for people struggling with problems with drugs and alcohol, connect people to treatment and give them help, and I try to educate and assist families that



Ira Costell, president of the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association. File photo

are struggling with loved ones who are challenged with the disease of addiction," Costell continued.

Costell's dedication to his community has not gone unnoticed. His tireless efforts and passionate advocacy have earned him the respect and admiration of his peers and neighbors.

"Ira Costell goes about his business in a quiet way. His planning background and decades-long residency in Port Jefferson Station and Terryville are priceless. He uses both to assist in his decision-making as it pertains to our community," Lou Antoniello, treasurer of the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association, said.

Costell's ability to galvanize community support and his commitment to addressing local concerns have significantly impacted the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville community. His leadership has not only revitalized the civic association but also empowered residents to actively participate in shaping the future of their neighborhood.

As Costell continues to serve his community, he inspires others to get involved and make a difference. His story is a testament to the power of individual action and the importance of community engagement at every level.

For his work with the Port Jefferson Station/Terryville Civic Association, TBR News Media is pleased to name Ira Costell as a 2024 Person of the Year.



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Meals on Wheels brings healthy meals to those in need

BY JULIANNE MOSHER
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

While helping to feed Long Islanders, two local Meals on Wheels groups are also the eyes, ears and friends of those in need of assistance.

Comprised of 5,000 community-based programs, Meals on Wheels is a national network that is dedicated to addressing senior hunger and isolation.

Smithtown

The Smithtown Meals on Wheels program, located within the Senior Center in the Smithtown township, provides a daily hot meal delivered directly to the homes of residents age 60 and over.

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

According to Tina Pfennig, supervising community service aide with the Senior Center's Meal on Wheels program, more than 40 volunteers help deliver hot meals to 90 clients weekly. Every day, volunteers will pick up the food, donated by a local Lake Grove deli, and deliver to the client's home. Each entrée comes with milk, juice, fruit, bread and sometimes dessert.

"We have some people who have been with the program long-term and some occasionally

come on for a short period," she added.

This year, the group celebrated its 45th anniversary.

But Pfennig said that the program would not run if it weren't for the people who help out every morning and afternoon.

"Annually, we have a volunteer appreciation luncheon to show how much we appreciate them," Pfennig said.

She said that out of the roughly 40 volunteers, a few have been with the group for more than 20 years. Some have been volunteering for 10 years and others 15. They're still receiving applications for new drivers to come on board.

"Thankfully people are always applying and we're very grateful," she said. "Without them, we wouldn't have a program."

Kim Cunningham, senior neighborhood aide, said that while the main role of the Meals on Wheels volunteers is to drive the food to each client's house, they're also looking out for them.

"If a client isn't feeling well or there are other concerns, we make sure we follow through with their emergency contact," Cunningham said. "They'll have conversations with them and often become their friends."

Along with the drivers, Cunningham and Pfennig noted that other volunteers who make this program possible are the kitchen staff who help package the food to give to the drivers.

Like an assembly line, the tasks are "done efficiently, organized and in a timely fashion."

Pfennig added that some former volunteers have now become clients, themselves.

"We're returning the favor and making sure they get healthy food, too," she said.

Three Village

While not directly affiliated with the national brand of Meals on Wheels, the Three Village organization is similar in that it provides healthy food to people of any age as long as they're homebound due to medical concerns.

According to their website, clients are the elderly or disabled who, due to immobility and isolation, are unable to prepare their own meals and referrals are made by doctors, social service agencies, hospitals, neighbors, family members or the clients themselves.

Ruth Spear, office manager of the Three Village Meals on Wheels, said that they charge \$7.50 a day for two meals, one hot and one cold. If a client has concerns about payment, they can apply for a subsidy and that's funded by a big fundraiser and donations throughout the year.

Similar to other Meals on Wheels programs, food is prepared at Mather Hospital and St. Charles in Port Jefferson. Then, 130 volunteers pick up the meals and deliver to clients all over Northern Brookhaven — Stony Brook, Setauket, Port Jefferson, Port Jefferson Station,

Miller Place, Mount Sinai, northern parts of Coram and Selden. In 2023, 28,000 meals were delivered.

"We are so appreciative of the staff at St. Charles and Mather because if it weren't for them, we'd have to figure something else out," Spear said.

Each driver also creates that friendship with the client and acts as the eyes and ears of family who can't be there to check in on their loved ones.

"If the driver gets to the door and a client doesn't pick up the phone or answer, we're going to call the emergency contact," she said. "There are so many people who don't see one human being all day or all week, so our drivers are the only people they're seeing and being lonely is a terrible thing."

Spear said that the beauty of the organization is that friendships are formed and people often become attached to one another.

"That's what I'm most proud of ... The drivers really care about the clients," she said. "If everyone can just help people in the community just a little bit, it can go a long way. It's so gratifying and it's a great feeling."

For their volunteerism and dedication, all the volunteers of the local Meals on Wheels groups have been named TBR News Media 2024 People of the Year.

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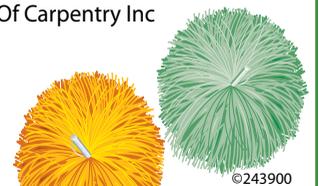
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Eye on the Street: People of the Year 2024



BY JENNIFER DONATELLI
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

As the year comes to a close, it's a time to reflect on the individuals who have had a profound impact on our lives. Whether through their kindness, wisdom or unwavering support, people leave an indelible mark, shaping us in ways both big and small.

To round out 2024, TBR took to the streets, asking locals to nominate their Person of the Year. Here are their responses.



Dorinda Haberfield, Smithtown

Haberfield nominated her mother, 97-year-old Genevieve Antonucci, as her Person of the Year, because of "everything she has been through in her life." "She lived through the Great Depression, the loss of her father at a young age, homelessness and having to work to help support the family," said Haberfield.

"Her perseverance and resilience has been a true inspiration and example of integrity and strong character," she added.



Margaret Munsch, Huntington

Munsch nominated her son "because he is my heart, and gives me a purpose for living."



Lisa Goldfeder, Babylon

When asked to nominate someone as Person of the Year, Goldfeder immediately said Kaitlyn Clark, the WNBA basketball athlete.

"She single-handedly changed the landscape of women's basketball, with TV viewership rising over 300%," Goldfeder said.



Gladys Brandow, Oceanside

Brandow's nomination for Person of the Year is her son Steven, "for being brave, accomplishing his goals and pursuing his dreams," despite the death of his father as a teenager.



Michael Joseph, Halesite

Joseph nominated Boris Johnson, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, for his dedication to his country and for "having the courage to put it all in a public memoir."



Michelle Mulderrig, Syracuse and Huntington

Mulderrig said she would nominate "anyone who has faced the diagnosis of cancer."

"These people have had to navigate waters they might find themselves drowning in. So for anyone battling cancer and the people it affects around them, you are all heroes to me," said Mulderrig.

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“A leader among leaders,” SBM’s Wertheim excels as officer in charge, doctor, baker

DANIEL DUNAIEF
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When Dr. William Wertheim visited Mozambique, where Stony Brook University has created the Global Health Institute, he was on a boat that got stranded in low tide.

The convivial and supportive Wertheim, who is Executive Vice President for Stony Brook Medicine, immediately climbed out of the boat and helped push it closer to shore, waiting for the tide to come in.

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“When he was out on the Indian Ocean with some fisherman, myself and my eight-year-old son, he was very quick to roll up his sleeves and start pushing the boat ashore,” said Dr. Sierra Washington, the director of the Stony Brook Center for Global Health Equity.

Indeed, Washington suggested that pushing the boat forward became a theme for Wertheim’s visit.

TBR News Media is pleased to recognize Wertheim as a person of the year for his leadership, his deep listening skills and his ongoing commitment to the university and the surrounding communities.

For a few weeks in the spring, Wertheim’s roles and titles changed, even if the manner and his focus did not.

In June, former SBU President Maurie McInnis named Wertheim executive vice president for Stony Brook Medicine, as he shed the interim label he had taken on starting the previous October.

A few weeks later, Wertheim effectively took over for McInnis, who resigned after four years to become president of her alma mater, Yale University, when he became officer-in-charge at Stony Brook University.

“Having Wertheim named as officer-in-charge gave everybody a sigh of relief,” said Dr. Todd Griffin, vice dean for clinical affairs and vice president for clinical services.

Justin Fincher, interim chief deputy to the president and senior vice president of government and community relations, said that Wertheim, who has been at Stony Brook for 28 years, “is the epitome of the university citizen. He’s the person we all think about as a leader among leaders.”

While Wertheim was in charge of the university for about six weeks until current Interim President Richard McCormick arrived in August, he supported leadership across the campus, offering to listen or provide advice.

“He was trusting the team in place to lead,” said Fincher. “He takes his ethic of care from his training as a medical doctor and applies that in every setting and in every decision.”

Indeed, first and foremost among Wertheim’s many responsibilities and roles, he continues to serve as a practicing physician with several hundred patients.

Finding the time to see patients requires taking some extra hours. He also relies on support from other physicians and nurse practitioners who work as a team whenever he is unavailable to see his patients.

“Seeing patients is at the core of what I do,” said Wertheim. “I did go to medical school for a reason.”

A graduate of Harvard University, Wertheim earned his medical degree from New York University School of Medicine.

Through his medical practice, Wertheim not only helps the patients who come see him, but also recognizes and can offer solutions to challenges patients or doctors face.

“It’s one thing to hear about a problem, but another thing to have that sense that this really does affect what happens, when you’re going through the care of patients,” Wertheim said.

This year, doctors had trouble setting up appointments in one particular department, and Wertheim struggled to schedule appointments for his patients. Griffin, one of the senior leaders on Wertheim’s team, was able to assess the challenges for doctors in seeing new and follow-up patients. Under the guidance, nurse practitioners now see follow-up patients. This change cut the delay time in half in under a year.

Pulling in the same direction

Griffin has known Wertheim for 25 years and appreciates the way Wertheim has brought various efforts and initiatives together.

“We are a number of different entities: the hospital, the school, physician practices,” said Griffin, suggesting that Wertheim helps all those people “pull the oars in the same direction.”

One of Wertheim’s directives that has been particularly effective involved developing a new governance structure for Stony Brook Medicine. Whereas groups had been creating strategic plans for one year, Wertheim asked them to develop a three- and five-year plan.

Wertheim also unified service lines, combining such areas as ambulatory care and hospital expertise.

By understanding how patients transition from ambulatory to hospital care, Stony Brook Medicine can ensure a smoother and more patient-centric experience.

As a leader, Wertheim makes a concerted and ongoing effort to interact with staff throughout the system, including medical assistants, front-desk representatives and janitors, to name a few.

“All those people in those services get to see him and know him,” said Griffin. “He’s not some leader in an ivory tower.”

Role reversal

Wertheim was a vice dean of the medical school a few years ago when Dr. Peter Igarashi, dean of the Renaissance School of Medicine, first arrived.

“He worked for me,” Igarashi said. “I now work for him. There’s a lesson there about be careful how you treat people who work for you.”

Igarashi is delighted that Wertheim supports the work he and others do throughout Stony Brook Medicine.

After Wertheim became interim executive vice president, he visited several clinical sites and met personally with providers.

Through these interactions, Wertheim has built “authentic personal relationships,” Igarashi said.

As a primary-care physician, Wertheim has also communicated effectively to residents and students about the importance of having a fundamental foundation of excellence.

Igarashi, who is a physician researcher, values the complementary nature of Wertheim’s strength as a clinician and educator.

Wertheim “makes it easier for us to bring the benefits from a research discovery or research program to the clinical setting so patients have access to the latest expertise,” Igarashi added.

Carol Gomes, chief executive officer/chief operating officer of Stony Brook University Hospital, has worked with Wertheim for over 20 years. She never feels like “I’m reporting to him. He always says I’m his partner.”

Dr. Bill

In addition to connecting with medical professionals, Wertheim has an ability to connect with people of different ages and in different stages of life.

When he was in Mozambique, Wertheim lived with Washington and her son Malachi, who called him “Dr. Bill.”

Wertheim was “like one of the family,” said Washington. “He’s very down to Earth and was just as easily able to have a stimulating conversation with my son as with hospital directors.”

During his visit, Wertheim and Malachi both shared their passion for the Mets.

Wertheim has been a “great ally” to the Center for Global Health Equity, Washington said, and is always available to discuss core strategic planning.

Wertheim recognized that the limitations on health care workers in Mozambique had less to do with their knowledge and skills than with supplies.

“What they lack are resources,” said Wertheim.

A talented baker

At Harvard, where he was a history and literature major, Wertheim wrote his thesis



Stony Brook University’s William Wertheim with Malakhi Washington. Photo by Dr. Sierra Washington

on the influence of the philosophy of William James on the literature of Robert Penn Warren, author of “All the King’s Men.”

The first time Wertheim read the book, he was on a plane flying to St. Louis. He recalls reading the first chapter, which described the governor’s driver maneuvering down a highway. “The description is so brilliant, I paused and looked out the window and realized that I was flying over the country that was not dissimilar from what he was describing. It was an incredibly powerful moment,” he said.

As if all of his skills weren’t enough, Wertheim, who is the fifth of five brothers, is also a passionate baker.

“I’m of an age where the kitchen might have been thought of as a place for girls or women,” Wertheim said. “That wasn’t the case in my house.”

He made several mistakes, particularly with his sourdough bread, but has learned from those earlier experiences.

“It’s fun and relaxing,” Wertheim said. “When you spend a lot of time thinking about very serious things, it can be gratifying to focus in on a small task” such as kneading dough.

Gomes recalled recently receiving a croissant. She loved the “very buttery” taste.

Griffin sees overlaps between Wertheim’s medical duties and his baking abilities.

“The precision needed, following recipes being detail oriented, having the patience to bake and make it come out the way you want” is also evidence in how “careful and precise [Wertheim] is in how he engages with others. Big complicated things don’t happen overnight. He’s methodically and carefully putting down the ingredients.

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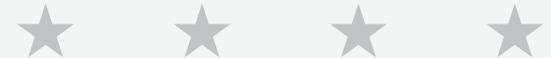
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Kristen Reynolds: A leader shaping Long Island's future

BY JENNIFER DONATELLI
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Long Islanders know they're lucky to live in one of the most beautiful places in New York state and across the globe. Whether you're a lifelong resident or a new or recurring visitor, there's always something to discover on Long Island.

Kristen Reynolds, CEO and president of Discover Long Island, is at the helm of this nonprofit organization that markets the region as a world-class tourist destination.

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

Reynolds has been named a TBR News Media Person of the Year for her transformative leadership, exceptional community involvement and unwavering commitment to advancing tourism and economic development on Long Island.

Reynolds and her team at Discover Long Island work to promote a positive perception of Long Island across the globe, which draws lucrative visitors, stirs business attraction — and drives economic development throughout the region — all for the purpose of improving the quality of life for Long Island residents.

Her appointment as CEO in 2018 marked the beginning of a new era for Discover Long Island, the region's premier destination marketing organization. Under her stewardship, the organization has seen unprecedented growth in tourism, regional partnerships and community engagements, elevating Long Island's profile as a world-class destination, attracting 41.8 million visitors each year and significantly boosting the local economy by generating over \$5.8 billion in revenue for the Island in 2021.

Gloria Rocchio, president of the Ward Melville Heritage Organization, witnessed this firsthand, having been on the board that hired Reynolds. Describing her as “a creative person who thinks out of the box,” Rocchio says Reynolds is a visionary who inspires and empowers those around her and says hiring her was “the best decision we ever made.”

Under Reynolds' helm, the nonprofit has undergone a complete overhaul and refocused its internal strategy, including rebranding and social media. “When I first got here,” Reynolds explains, “we had one Facebook page and no social media.” She continues, “We focused on communications, content creation and rebranding.” Currently, the organization employs 25 full-time employees, including an entire in-house social media and video production team that maintains and grows



Kristen Reynolds, CEO of Discover Long Island (third from left,) with colleagues, promoting tourism on Long Island. Photo courtesy Discover Long Island

the company's 11 social media accounts, YouTube channels, a weekly podcast called Long Island Tea and most recently an AI chatbot on their website named LILI. Reynolds describes her team as “eating, sleeping and breathing our brand,” and they wouldn't have it any other way.

“Kristen has completely transformed the way Long Island is perceived, both in the U.S. and internationally,” says Rocchio. “Her ability to connect with people, build partnerships and elevate Long Island's offerings has been nothing short of remarkable.”

Originally from Midland, Texas, Reynolds graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in public relations and began her career as a coordinator for the Arizona Tourism Bureau. She spent six years there, eventually becoming the youngest tourism director in the state of Arizona.

Claiming she's “always up for a challenge,” Reynolds has rebranded and marketed countless organizations, resorts and tourism bureaus, including turning the Sheridan Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa in Chandler, Arizona, into the only five-star, five-diamond resort on Native American land in the entire state.

As a single mom of two young girls at the time, Reynolds admits it was a tough decision to uproot them and move across the country to “the middle of nowhere” as her friends say, but she did it and has never looked back. “I love Long Island, the beaches, the close proximity to New York City and the four seasons,” she says with a smile.

Championing a blend of marketing

innovation, strategic partnerships and sustainable tourism development to ensure Long Island remains a top-tier destination, Discover Long Island has expanded its reach with digital marketing campaigns that spotlight the Island's diverse attractions — from its world-renowned wineries and beaches to its rich cultural heritage and vibrant culinary scene.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Reynolds is a staunch advocate for Long Island's community. She believes that true progress can only be achieved when communities work together, and her tenure has been defined by a focus on collaboration.

Dede Gotthelf, experienced this firsthand. Owner of the Southampton Inn, Gotthelf said the need to attract visitors in the fall and winter months has always been a must for the local business communities “With Kristen's innovative marketing ideas, she has transformed the East End into a year-long destination vacation spot.”

In addition to her work with the community, Reynolds works closely with local governments, civic organizations and nonprofit groups to ensure that Long Island's tourism growth is sustainable and beneficial to all. Her efforts have fostered a spirit of inclusivity, ensuring that Long Island's future remains bright for everyone, from residents to tourists.

Crediting much of her success to a philosophy rooted in empathy, transparency and empowerment, Reynolds believes in leading by example, working closely with her team to ensure that everyone's voice is heard

and that all ideas are considered. This approach has earned her the respect and admiration of her colleagues and fellow Long Islanders.

Reynolds says she is fortunate to have the support and hard work of her driven team who understand the mission and purpose of Discover Long Island. “They're passionate about what they do. We make it look fun and glamorous, but the expectations are high and I run a tight ship.”

Sharon Wyman, chief operating officer at Discover Long Island, and a native of Bay Shore, has been with the company for 23 years and has seen firsthand the changes that Reynolds has made. “Before she came there, we needed a major overhaul and to rebuild relationships within the Long Island community,” Wyman credits Reynolds with the success of Discover Long Island and says, “She is always the first to know what we need and makes things happen.”

Wyman says Reynolds takes the team under her wing and is a great mentor to the staff.

“Her best quality as a leader,” explains Wyman, “is that she is an innovator who likes to take risks, and bring new ideas to life.” Reynolds' co-workers describe her as a “fun, humble and warm hearted” leader who is a great mentor and is not afraid to take risks.

Ed Carr, director of sales and advocacy and stewardship for Discover Long Island, has worked with Reynolds for three years and describes his boss as being “exceedingly competent and an iconoclast.” He explained that her legislative knowledge, marketing and tourism experience and the fact that she's not from Long Island, allows her to be able to bring an outside perspective on what needs to be done.

Carr says, “Kristen is very cutting edge. She's always looking to do something that hasn't been done. She has a desire to try new things. As a result, we are trendsetters in the tourism industry.” Carr explains that it is refreshing to have someone who understands the big picture of politics, cause and effect, and who is always looking for new ways to fund or streamline the processes.

“I'm proud of what we've accomplished, and I'm excited for what's next as we continue to shape the future of this amazing destination,” Reynolds says with a smile.

As Discover Long Island continues to innovate and shape the future of tourism on the Island, Reynolds remains focused on ensuring that the region's growth benefits everyone. Her leadership style, her unwavering commitment to the community and her vision for the future have solidified her place as a true leader, not just in tourism, but in Long Island's overall development.

Lenore Paprocky, a champion for Long Island's business community

BY JENNIFER DONATELLI
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Lenore Paprocky, president of the Greater Middle Country Chamber of Commerce has been named Person of the Year for 2024 by TBR News Media for her exceptional leadership, advocacy, and commitment to strengthening the local business landscape.

Since taking the helm of GMCCC in 2020, Paprocky has been a driving force behind the chamber's initiatives. Her leadership has not only

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

propelled the chamber to new heights, but has also made it a vital resource for local businesses.

The GMCCC, which serves the Middle Country area, including the towns of Centereach, Selden, Lake Grove and surrounding communities, represents a broad spectrum of industries. Under Paprocky's stewardship, the chamber has expanded its services, increased its outreach and has become a central figure in the area's economic development.

By championing initiatives that support workforce development, business growth and entrepreneurship, Paprocky has helped create a

more robust and resilient ecosystem in the local community. She has also worked closely with local municipalities and organizations to ensure the Middle Country businesses have access to resources and opportunities that can help them expand and thrive.

Karen Roth, REMAX agent and chamber board member, first met Paprocky when she started attending the board meetings, and felt an immediate connection. "I love her," says Roth, "because she listens to the board members' ideas and makes things happen."

One of those ideas was to have the chamber host an annual music festival. Working closely with elected officials, Paprocky managed to get a grant that covered the expenses of putting the festival together. Last year, the music festival was host to over 1,000 attendees, making it the largest turnout for events the chamber has ever had. This year's festival was held in April.

Since 2008, she has been on the Smithtown Industry Advisory Board and works with Smithtown High School students in a mentoring program she started that gets students ready for college and the working world. She says, "I love to mentor and help people succeed."

Seeing a need to continue mentoring the youth in her community, Paprocky formed a

partnership with the Holiday Inn and initiated a hospitality-driven internship program for college students, showing them how each department in an organization needs to work together in order for the company to grow, thrive and run effectively and efficiently.

This commitment to community engagement and mentoring has helped raise the profile of the GMCCC as not just a business entity, but also a pillar of the greater Middle Country area.

Paprocky's leadership has not only benefitted the Middle Country Chamber of Commerce, but has also inspired others to take an active role in supporting their local

communities. Under Paprocky's leadership, there is no doubt that the work she has done to date will continue to shape the regions' economic future.

In addition to her job at the chamber, Paprocky is also the director of business development at Synergy Wealth Strategies in Smithtown, and recently co-founded Spheres of Influence, a nonprofit organization that helps business professionals grow their business, while supporting local nonprofits at the same time. Through this initiative, she helps grassroots organizations raise their visibility and secure the funds needed to continue making a positive impact in the community.

Doreen Newman, a co-worker at GMCCC says, "Lenore brings a wealth of knowledge and energy to every endeavor. Her unstoppable spirit and ever-present smile are a testament to her commitment. She gives 110% to every project she

undertakes, and she does it all with warmth and resilience."

Seeing a need in the community for women business owners, Paprocky created a Women's Power Hour series where once a month, women meet local professionals in the area to make new connections and discuss important topics affecting them.

Roth says Paprocky is known for her relentless dedication. "Lenore seeks out new prospects, elevates brand awareness and manages all events with her signature enthusiasm and professionalism. Her passion for fostering meaningful connections is evident in everything she does."

Paprocky was recognized for her efforts by being awarded Employee of the Year from Suffolk County Community College Education Advancement Center, as well as Volunteer of the Year and Member of the Year, consecutively. As an influential business leader, she was named one of the Top 50 Most Influential Women in Business on Long Island, as well as being awarded Long Island Business News Corporate Citizen of the Year.

In naming Lenore Paprocky as Person of the Year, the recognition not only celebrates her past accomplishments, but also her vision for the future. Her tireless advocacy, leadership and dedication to the community, make her a true champion for local businesses and residents. She is a role model for others in the community, inspiring growth, innovation and unity for years to come.

When asked what her biggest accomplishment is to date, Paprocky smiles and proudly says, "raising my daughter."



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Crime Victims Center's Ahearn, a tireless advocate and supporter for the abused

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF

DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

An advocate, defender, educator, legislative partner, social worker and attorney, Laura Ahearn is prepared to help during periods of extreme duress whenever needed.

Executive Director of the Crime Victims Center, Ahearn has secured orders of protection for abused women, accompanied victims to court, counseled high school students about inappropriate relationships and helped victims receive funds for survival.

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

For her work this year and every year for nearly three decades, Ahearn is a Times Beacon Record Newspaper Person of the Year for 2024.

"I love Laura Ahearn," said Kara Hahn, a former legislator who met Ahearn in 1999, and crafted legislation in 2015 requiring domestic violence agencies in the county to use the Jacquelyn Campbell risk assessment, to help victims understand the level of danger from abuse.

Hahn, who is currently the Deputy Regional Director for the Long Island region of New York State Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, added that Ahearn is "one of the fiercest and most dedicated champions for the protection of children [among others] in this advocacy space and any advocacy space."

Indeed, recently, Ahearn and the Crime Victims Center have been working with a particularly troubling case with children in a family that have endured trauma in their former home.

"When you're dealing with child victims who are directly or physically impacted, or have witnessed it, a lot of planning goes into counseling and advocacy," said Ahearn. "This case has impacted me more than any other case in my entire career, which is pushing 30 years."

Most of the 40 people involved in the Crime Victims Center, which originally started out in a room in Ahearn's home and was called Parents of Megan's Law, have been affected by the case.

The team is working on behalf of these children, helping them with educational and counseling programs, as well as working with law enforcement.

Ahearn has brought her advocacy, messaging and support to people in numerous contexts.

"The thing you might say about [Ahearn] is that [her help] is not just from a social work position," said Kathleen Monahan, Associate Professor in the School of Social Welfare at Stony Brook University. "She's attacking this from all different levels, from the



Laura Ahearn petting sled dogs on a trip to Alaska. Photo courtesy of Laura Ahearn

health care perspective, from law and policy issues, treatment and from the mental health perspective."

Ahearn not only received a Master's in Social Work from SUNY Stony Brook, but she also earned a Juris Doctor from Touro Law, where she graduated at the top of her class.

Educational messaging

After discussing relationship violence with students, the Crime Victims Center has fielded phone calls from attendees.

"We had a call from a teenager in high school, who was unhappy with a forced kiss. She saw our program and wanted to know if that's okay," said Ahearn.

The CVC has also worked with students and school administrators to help recognize efforts to lure girls into prostitution.

These children "were being groomed by a person running a human trafficking ring," said Ahearn. They came to school with expensive purses and shoes they couldn't otherwise afford.

"If we have our eyes wide open, educating kids as young as middle schoolers, administrators and parents can protect these potential victims," she continued.

Financial help

The Crime Victims Center has helped victims of sexual assault and domestic violence recover funds from the Office of Victim Services, which is the payer of last resort.

Victims who are cooperating with law enforcement and who have eligible expenses, which can include out of pocket medical and counseling costs or even funerals, can receive funds to pay for some of those expenses.

In an assault, if someone has their clothing damaged or their clothing is taken into evidence, the survivor provides the center with receipts for a replacement for the damaged

property.

The Crime Victims Center has helped facilitate the return of nearly \$8 million since it first started working on behalf of victims from the Crime Victim's Fund, in the Office of Victim Services.

The center has helped families recover thousands of dollars in lost wages after the primary breadwinner in a household was hit in a driving while intoxicated incident.

Leading

In addition to helping victims, Ahearn leads virtual meetings during sexual assault awareness month and domestic violence awareness month.

This past October, Ahearn had just introduced Dr. Hirsch Handmaker, CEO of The CACTIS Foundation in Scottsdale, Arizona during the third-annual, virtual domestic violence awareness month conference.

Handmaker was in a hospital where a fire alarm blared so loudly that he couldn't hear the other attendees, much less focus on his discussion about traumatic brain injuries.

"She was so fabulous," recalled Monahan about Ahearn's response. "She handled that like water rolling off a duck's back," as Ahearn suggested an unscheduled break to allow Handmaker to clear the area.

Ahearn is a "beacon of light throughout the U.S. in highlighting the issue of sexual assault and domestic violence, and is one of the few individuals leading entities in collaborating and engaging law enforcement, social workers and healthcare providers," Handmaker explained.

As an example of the awareness advocacy groups brought to law enforcement, Handmaker highlighted a change in the way police officers think about women who are wearing sunglasses.

Previously, officers might have suspected

women were hiding their eyes because of drugs or other issues.

Instead, women with concussions often wear sunglasses to protect their eyes to avoid headaches caused by bright sunlight.

Handmaker started working with Ahearn this year. Ahearn has been coordinating with Monahan and Handmaker to create a concussion program with law enforcement. Ahearn is a "real champion in making that happen," Handmaker said.

SAFE support

In addition to advocating for victims, supporting various legislation and running virtual conferences, Ahearn remains primarily focused on one task.

Ahearn "cares deeply about the outcomes for survivors," said Wendy Linsalata, Executive Director of LI Against Domestic Violence, and a frequent collaborator with Ahearn.

Starting in Nov. of 2023, CVC partnered with Stony Brook University Hospital to have Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners ready to respond to any reports of a sexual assault.

Called SAFEs, these professionals are New York certified nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants or resident nurses.

Ahearn hopes that effort expands to ensure that these trained staff are available at every emergency department throughout Long Island.

From protecting Maggie to protecting herself

Ahearn's reflex to protect others may have started when she was as young as 10 years old.

The owner of a dog named Maggie, Ahearn and her friend brought their two dogs near one another. When her friend's territorial dog snapped at Maggie, Ahearn intervened and, to this day, has a scar on her arm.

Ahearn, whose current dog Jack comes to work as a companion and instant pet therapist, suggested that the advocacy field is rewarding, demanding and exhausting.

"Sometimes, there are cases that take a little part of you, and a piece of your soul withers," said Ahearn, such as the recent case with the abused children. "You must take action to replenish that area."

To do her best for the staff and those she supports, Ahearn relies on the encouragement of her family, the love of her dog, and the opportunity to travel.

Ahearn loves animals, including birds, and enjoys fishing. This year, she took a trip to Alaska, where she had a chance to pet sled dogs.

Ahearn, Linsalata and others in the victim advocacy world urge people to reach out to any of their organizations, or to authority figures, if they are abused.

"If in your gut, you have that feeling that something is wrong, don't underestimate what you're feeling or thinking," said Linsalata.

ECLI-VIBES brings services and hope to survivors

BY JULIANNE MOSHER
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There is hope for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence thanks to the founders of Islandia-based nonprofit ECLI-VIBES.

Co-founded by Feride Castillo and Jennifer Hernandez, ECLI-VIBES is dedicated to creating a safe and supportive community for individuals

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and abuse. Through their trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approach, they work to break the cycle of violence,

one life at a time, by empowering individuals to achieve safety, independence and healing through their services.

ECLI-VIBES not only serves survivors but also helps their families by providing essential resources and support to help them rebuild their lives. On average, they serve more than 2,500 people every month.

“ECLI-VIBES began with a small spark nearly 10 years ago,” Hernandez said. “We founded ECLI with the idea that we create something extraordinary when we pour love and care into others.”

According to their website, a major cornerstone of the group’s mission is to foster a warm, welcoming and supportive environment where individuals facing trauma feel safe, respected and understood. At ECLI-VIBES, they believe that trauma is the catalyst for complex issues rooted in violence and abuse. They aim to uncover and address the underlying causes of trauma, enabling genuine healing and lasting transformation.

“That tiny spark has grown into a flame, one that burns brighter than ever as we work tirelessly to empower survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking and abuse,” Hernandez added.

Castillo said that the duo wanted to build a space that supports individuals, heals generations and breaks cycles.

“True transformation happens in spaces where people feel connected, loved, validated and seen,” she said. “My goal is for everyone to know what it’s like not to feel alone and empowered by the support of a team that believes in them every day.”

Some services that ECLI-VIBES boasts is a 24-hour “hopeline” that is available to all members of the community who are seeking crisis intervention, emotional support, information on victim rights and other resources.

They also host a youth program that provides support and mentorship to children and teens, a community food pantry, counseling, an advocacy program, housing program and legal programs, among others.

“This work is not just about providing services

— it’s about creating a community where love and resilience lead the way,” said Hernandez. “People are inherently resilient, and love is what brings that strength to the surface. My passion comes from knowing that we all rise when we share our light with others. My job is to keep my cup overflowing so I can pour into my team and help them pour into our community. Together, we create the kind of impact that changes lives and builds brighter futures.”

“At its core, ECLI-VIBES was designed to put the ‘human’ back into human services — to be a place where people can rediscover hope, tap into their inner strength and heal,” Castillo added. “Every day, I am inspired by the power of human resilience as individuals take the courageous step to reach out, no matter how impossible their circumstances may seem.”

ECLI-VIBES also has created an Anti-Human Trafficking Program that supports individuals who have experienced human trafficking, helping them through complex issues they might have faced by utilizing a holistic approach with cost-free services.

“Human trafficking has been an ongoing issue in our county, and I am proud to work with ECLI-VIBES to support the victims and combat the traffickers,” said Suffolk County Legislator Chad Lennon [R-Rocky Point]. “In addition, ECLI-VIBES has been providing help to so many other people throughout our county.”

Hernandez said that ECLI-VIBES’ mission is to ensure that survivors have access to everything they need to “survive and thrive.”

“We have the privilege to stand in solidarity with them, offering not just services but an open heart, a shoulder to cry on and someone who listens to guide them toward long-term healing,” she said. “We are dedicated to supporting the mindset that empowers individuals to reclaim their power and self-sufficiency.”

For their passionate education and advocacy, TBR News Media is pleased to name Feride Castillo and Jennifer Hernandez 2024 Persons of the Year.

“As I reflect on this journey, I’m reminded of the incredible power of community and the importance of leading with love. ECLI-VIBES was built on this foundation, and it’s what continues to guide us as we create lasting change for the individuals and families we serve,” Hernandez said. “This honor is not mine alone — it belongs to every survivor who’s trusted us, every team member who’s shown up, and every person who’s believed in our mission. Love is what our community needs and will always lead us forward.”

Castillo said that the co-founders have always believed they are “the extended family member, cousin or friend who will pick up your call when you’re in need and figure out a way to help you.”

“No one should have to face the hardest moments of their life alone,” she added. “That’s why we’re committed to breaking down barriers and removing gatekeeping to provide tangible, life-saving information and resources. It’s about creating spaces where people feel supported, validated and empowered to reclaim their power and take back their lives.”

If you need help or know someone who does, visit www.eclivibes.org or call 631-360-3606.

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Ann Pellegrino: Cultivating hope, feeding souls

BY SABRINA ARTUSA
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Ann Pellegrino is a busy woman. Between the Bethel Hobbs Community Farm, a nonprofit farm she built herself and describes as “more than a full-time job,” and her appointments speaking at local hospitals about the life-changing effects of organ donation, it was difficult to schedule a time to talk. However, she made sure to make time to talk to me about what she describes as her calling.

In 2007, Pellegrino was in her car and noticed people in the woods hungry and homeless. The unfortunate sight ignited a passion she didn't know she had — a passion that would be tested by the skepticism of others and the practical challenges of developing a farm without experience.

She became certain what she was meant to be doing, that the vacant lot of loose, barren dirt — a collection ground for the unwanted and disposed — could become something nourishing and productive with the proper care.

It started with a fence

After first ripping up her own lawn, intending to farm fresh vegetables to use in her own home (much to her husband's dismay), Pellegrino had the idea to renovate the Bethel Hobbs land. For decades the land was farmed by the Hobbs family before ultimately falling into unuse after the death of Alfred Hobbs.

Pellegrino received permission from the Bethel African American Episcopal Church to work on 50 x 50 acres, which then became 50 x 100. Her unwavering confidence in the project was intriguing, and as she began the work, increasing numbers of community members began offering support.

“There was something inside of me that was giving me the drive to do it. If you didn't do it you couldn't sleep. They still think I'm crazy but they come and help now,” Pellegrino said.

Once a single mother herself, Pellegrino knew that food pantries have a hard time finding good produce. Most of the produce that was donated was damaged, over-ripe or rotten. The plot of neglected land was the perfect opportunity to change that.

Her father offered fencing, which piqued the interest of nearby residents who then asked Pellegrino about her plan. One neighbor offered his hose, another offered sprinklers. Previously, Pellegrino had been transporting water in her car. “This little vacant land with a fence going around it and a hose leading from across the street” was becoming something real.

Pellegrino's contagious enthusiasm for helping others inspired their own generosity, just as their generosity inspired Pellegrino. “I feel blessed to be even a small part of our community,” she said.

And the community has shown that they feel the same way about the farm. Bethel Hobbs Community Farm hosts a plethora of events such as the annual “Run the Farm,” dances and breakfasts, not to mention,



Ann Pellegrino (left) posing with a tractor. Courtesy Ann Pellegrino

volunteers enjoy serving others as well as gardening on a beautiful day.

“It is a great area for people to get together as far as a community hub is concerned,” said Lenore Paprocky, president of the Greater Middle Country Chamber of Commerce.

“Her nature is such that she is a servant to her community and that comes naturally to her. For all these reasons you can't help but become endeared to her,” said Paprocky, who has collaborated with Pellegrino in the past. “She is kind, giving, sincere, and genuine. We need more people like her.”

The late Peter Castorano, was invaluable in the development of the farm. Pellegrino describes him as her best friend. “My granddaughter was his granddaughter,” she said, emphasizing his importance to her and her family.

Castorano died last year and always described himself as “Ann's right hand man.”

Organ donation

In addition to the farm, Pellegrino speaks regularly at hospitals, offering encouragement to exhausted nurses and speaking on the life-changing effects of organ donation. She starts speaking during winter months while the farm is closed.

At 19, Pellegrino's son Christopher was paralyzed in a car accident. For seven years afterward, Christopher would speak at schools about the importance of wearing seatbelts; he would pursue his college degree in the hopes of getting involved with alcohol and drug rehabilitation; and he would try to change lives, like his mother.

“His attitude was that if he could help save one life it is worth it,” Pellegrino said of her son, who passed on Christmas Eve in 2018.

Pellegrino decided to honor his memory by pursuing his goal of helping save lives. She goes to hospitals and shares her son's statement, something that she enjoys. “I get to celebrate him,” she said. Three men live on because of the gifts Pellegrino's son made through organ donations.

Moreover, she extends support to the staff. “This time of year I don't want them to feel like they were forgotten and it's not a thankless job. Letting them know what they do matters and it really counts,” she said.

Paprocky describes Ann as quiet, thoughtful and eager to befriend anyone who shows an interest in service; a woman who exemplifies what it means to be a community leader; a true person of the year. It is for all of these accomplishments that Ann Pellegrino is a 2024 TBR New Media Person of the Year.

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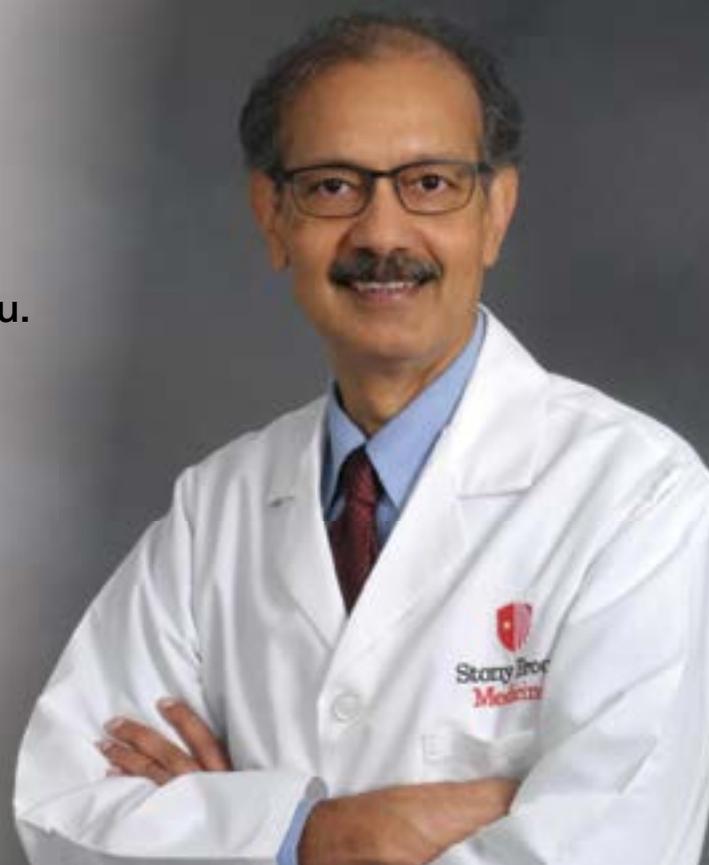
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