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Gabby Petito Foundation brings awareness to domestic abuse

The Petito family was present for the charity softball game played in her honor

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Smithtown Library reopens

After August's storm decimated the lower floor, the library reopens with limited services

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'Miss Austen' heads to PBS

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36th annual Roth Regatta

In hand-made boats, SBU students attempt to cross the pond without sinking — **A4**

Photo by Stanley Zheng



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Ward Melville softball raises money for Gabby Petito Foundation

BY STEVEN ZAITZ

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The familiar school colors of green and gold gave way to a sea of purple this past Saturday, May 3, on the campus of Ward Melville High School as the Lady Patriots softball team held their annual charity game against Bellport.

SPORTS For the past five seasons, the team has chosen a different charity to support and, for 2025, the team selected the Gabby Petito Foundation.

Petito, who attended Bayport-Blue Point High School, was 22 years old when she was murdered by her fiancé in 2021 during a cross-country road trip. The foundation's mission is to address the needs of organizations that support locating missing persons and to provide aid to organizations that assist victims of domestic violence situations through education, awareness and prevention strategies.

Purple balloons, bunting and petals of lilac and lavender festooned the grounds near the softball field and, although it was only 10



Sophie Reed, senior second baseman, hit a grand slam homer

o'clock in the morning, the strengthening whiff of fire-grilled hot dogs tantalized the taste buds.

Posters of Petito stood on easels near the backstop and an ice sculpture rested on a purple-and-pink draped table that was protected from the morning sun by a canvas tent. Two banners devoted to Petito and her namesake organization hung on the centerfield fence.

Dana Powell, mom of senior star player Emerson Powell, who is currently on the injured list, organized much of this event, which has raised more than \$10,000 so far.



Mary Wickman, Gabby Petito's grandmother, leads her family on to the Ward Melville softball field. All photos by Steven Zaitz

"We felt it would be great because this is a team of young ladies to bring awareness to domestic abuse and teach them — and the community — that it does start young. We want everyone to look for the signs," said Powell, who is the head of the team's booster club. "The Gabby Petito Foundation is doing amazing things to protect not just young women but also young men and missing persons."

Members of Petito's family participated in the pregame service and entered the field through the third-base fence, passing through a welcoming line of players holding their bats in an overhead V formation. The procession was led by Petito's grandmother, Mary Wickman, and the family of about 10, who were all greeted by warm applause as they took their place near the middle of the diamond. Ward Melville head softball coach Joe Burger addressed the crowd near the third-base bleachers.

"There are times when our athletes need more than coaching," Burger told the crowd. "They need to be lifted up, be seen, heard and supported. When the pressure of life and the game becomes too heavy, they need to know that we are standing right beside them and that we believe in them."

Ward Melville players, coaches and most of the parents wore special purple shirts for this game that promoted the event on the front of the shirt and Gabby Petito Foundation. On the back, the phrase Love Doesn't Hurt was written inside a heart-shaped border. Bellport donned similar shirts, but theirs were mostly white with purple trim.

Lady Patriots players Isabella Parente,

to escape the cycle of abuse and rebuild a safe life."

Mary Wickman closed the oratorical portion of the ceremony with a heartfelt thank you to the team, the school and the Three Village community. Petito's cousin, Bubba Wickman, a middle schooler in the Middle Country Central School District and a grandchild of Mary, threw out the ceremonial first pitch to Patriots catcher Haley Mauser, as last-minute hugs were shared on and around the field up until the very last moments before the umpire shouted "Play Ball." During this time, the team presented Mary Wickman with a bright yellow, glass-encased softball signed by every member of the team, along with a bouquet of pink and white flowers. As she posed for photos and hugged each player, Wickman was awash with emotion.

"Being a team isn't just about what happens on the field, it's about fighting for something bigger," said Mary Wickman. "And these young women have done just that. To the coaches and the players and the school and the community, I say thank you for taking the time, energy as a force for good. For the love of Gabby, keep leading, keep caring and using your voice to make a difference."

On the field the Lady Patriots certainly made a difference too, as they beat Bellport by a score of 17-5. Senior second baseman Sophie Reed hit a grand-slam home run in the first inning and Ward Melville raced out to a 7-0 lead after just one inning. Starting pitcher Makenna Steinberg struck out 10 Bellport batters for the win.



Signs dedicated to Gabby Petito adorned the grounds near the Ward Melville softball field

SBU Students sail into mythology at 36th annual Roth Pond Regatta

BY MARIAM GUIRGIS
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Stony Brook University students summoned the power of the Greek gods for the 36th Annual Roth Pond Regatta, held last Friday.

The long-standing tradition invites students to put their creativity, engineering skills and teamwork to the test. With final exams approaching, the Regatta offers a chance to step away from classes and take part in a spirited race across Roth Pond using only cardboard, duct tape and paint.

This year's theme, Greek Mythology, encouraged participants to draw inspiration from gods, heroes and legendary creatures. Students reflected that spirit in their boat designs, whether it was through representing the wisdom of Athena, the speed of Hermes or the strength of Ares. Many participants blended humor with mythology in inventive ways, and the theme was evident in boat names, costumes and design details.

Boats were built to carry two to four team members across the 200-yard pond. Some groups spent weeks designing their boats, while others made last-minute improvements to ensure they stayed afloat. Once boats were in the water, the biggest challenge mentioned

by many competitors was the ability to row. As boats started to fill up with water mid-race, success depended on coordination and timing.

The Motorsports Club, racing with their boat Noah's Chariot, managed to win their heat despite the unexpected obstacle mid-race.

"I was in the middle of rowing, I felt my paddle jiggle a little, but I was like 'I should be fine' and I kept going. Two strokes later it snaps on me," rower Jason Jiang said.

Judging was based on a variety of categories including Most Original, Best Titanic (for the most dramatic sink), Best Showcase, Most Team Spirited, and others. The titles of Best Speedster and Best Yacht were reserved for the final heat winners. This year's Speedster trophy went to Scuderia Scooteroni, while The Spirit of Stony Brook took home the Yacht title.

This was Scuderia Scooteroni's third consecutive win at the Regatta which continues their winning streak that has spanned for three years. The team credits one key factor: cardboard sourcing.

"We've been building the same boat for the past three years and clearly the design is effective," the team said. "The trick is to contact warehouses because they have old waste of piles and piles of cardboard."

For The Spirit of Stony Brook, they attributed their win to the improvements made to their boat design. "We made [the boat] too



Scuderia Scooteroni. Photo courtesy Stanley Zheng
big [last year, so] we cut down on the size [and it was] perfect."

Attendees were also able to participate by voting for Wolfie's Favorite, selecting their top three boats in both the Speedster and Yacht categories. The entries reflected wide campus involvement, including residence halls, student organizations, academic departments and cultural groups. Some notable entries included The Sisyphus (Climbing Club), Cerberus (Douglass Hall), Apollo 11 (Aerospace Engineering Club), Poseidon's Wave (Keller Hall), and Hydracraft (Marine Science Club).

Academic departments also joined the fun, with entries like The Organic Odyssey by the Molecular Science Teaching Assistants and Langmuir's Chariot from the Langmuir Hall Council. The event was as much about participation and school spirit as it was about competition.

Beyond the races, attendees enjoyed a lively atmosphere around Roth Pond. Spectators gathered to watch as boats battled to stay afloat, while sampling food and exploring displays from various campus departments. The event served not only as a showcase of student creativity but also as a celebration of campus-wide community and spirit.

The Regatta was broadcast live on YouTube in collaboration with the School of Communication and Journalism, making it accessible to viewers beyond campus.

Now in its 36th year, the Roth Pond Regatta remains one of Stony Brook's most distinctive traditions. By combining creativity, collaboration, and a bit of chaos, it continues to bring the campus community together in a uniquely memorable way.

Mariam Guirgis is a reporter with The SBU Media Group, part of Stony Brook University's School of Communication and Journalism's Working Newsroom program for students and local media.

BY SABRINA ARTUSA
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For the first time in 8 months, the Smithtown Library building's doors are open. Patrons can once again browse shelves of books on the first floor of the library, previously closed due to the immense damage inflicted by the August, 2024, 100-year storm.

Smithtown Library card-holders were able to visit the Nesconset, Commack and Kings Park buildings during the hiatus, and staff worked out of other branches. Services are still limited, as the community room and much of the media offerings were in the basement.

Smithtown Library Director Rob Lusak said the reopening was "a heartfelt moment." Patrons and public officials turned up on the morning of May 5 as the library doors opened at 9:30 a.m., as they have done many times before. This time, though, the reopening was especially memorable. It reflected the months of hard work from public officials and library staff, as well as the immeasurable support from the community.

After the storm, the displaced employees had to build skills not many librarians

would expect to use. For months, Lusak and his staff coordinated with contractors, learned the nuances of HVAC systems and the technicalities of rebuilding. They hauled soaked debris from the basement and salvaged what they could. They learned how to communicate with the Federal Emergency Management Association. They flew to Michigan, where the majority of the rare-book collection is getting restored. Lusak said 42 of the 46 pallets of books will be restored by Prism Specialties. The remaining four pallets not restored by the company will be restored by library workers..

The circulation staff, Lina O'Brien, Kim Seliger and Mary Bonamo worked at other branches since the storm. Seliger had been at the Smithtown building for 22 years. "I am happy to be back, even in a limited capacity," she said. O'Brien had started at the Smithtown Library as a page, working her way up.

Some staff members lost their belongings and offices in the storm. O'Brien said she saw a note she had written floating away in the video tape that recorded the storm, along with her desk. Assistant Library Director and Building Manager Eileen Caulfield lost her entire office. For now, she set up her computer right by the entrance.

Patrons, too, are happy to be back among the familiar shelves and tables. In the

New chapter for Smithtown Library



A patron sitting at a table in the Cornelia Butler Reading Room. Photo by Sabrina Artusa

children's section, Jack Cotrone played with toy dinosaurs on the freshly steamed carpet floor. "He has been talking about coming back all year," his mother Laura Cotrone said as Jack sat immersed with the toys. "They did a great job – it's beautiful. I felt so bad with all the damage."

The damage required new HVAC and electrical systems, fire alarms and the complete emptying of the basement.

Peggy Micciche, a life-long Smithtown

resident, said she used to visit the library every Tuesday night with her father, continuing her frequent visits into adulthood in order to study genealogy. "It is wonderful to have it back," she said, adding that while she visited other branches, the nostalgic charm of the Smithtown building cannot be replaced.

The library will be closed Friday evening and on Sunday as it continues to undergo repairs. The elevator is expected to be operational in the summer, allowing access to the mezzanine.

Stony Brook named a SUNY Regional Nursing Simulation Center

The initiative will enhance and broaden nursing education with funds totaling \$20.5 million

The Stony Brook University School of Nursing has been selected as a State University of New York (SUNY) Regional Nursing Simulation Center, one of only three in New York State. Governor Kathy Hochul announced the news this month about the selected centers, which will involve an overall \$62 million investment to bolster nursing training at many levels throughout the state.

Stony Brook will receive \$10 million from SUNY, with matching funds of \$10.5 million from Stony Brook University. The total of \$20.5 million will be used to create a new simulation center at Stony Brook that includes the latest simulation technologies to help train more nursing students and enhance the overall experience of nursing education.

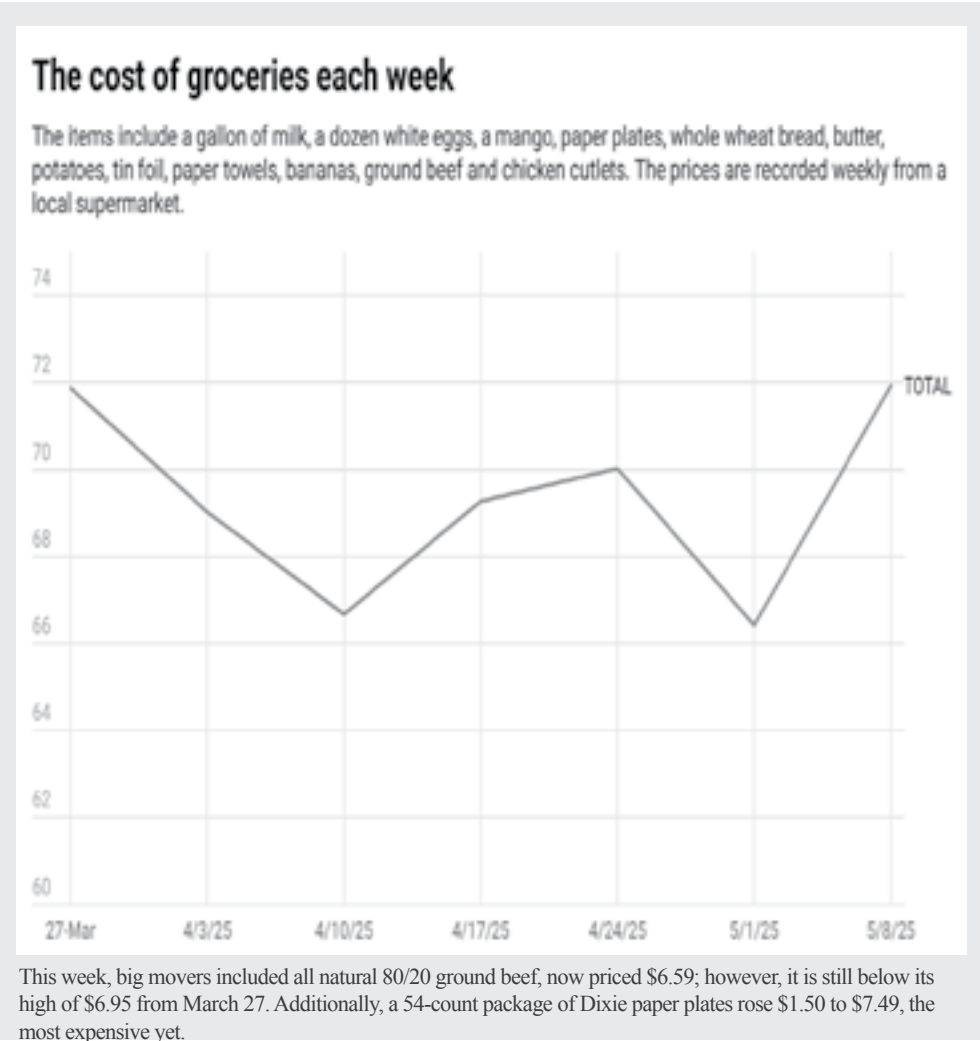
The selected campuses include the University of Buffalo, named the SUNY System-Wide Nursing Simulation Center of Excellence, and SUNY Canton and Stony Brook as the regional centers. Each center will provide training for some of the most needed clinical practice areas in health care, such as labor and delivery, high acuity cases and community health.

According to the Governor’s office, with their investments, each campus has committed to significant precicensure nursing program enrollment growth, leveraging the legislation Governor Hochul signed in May 2023 permitting nursing students to complete up to one-third of their clinical training through high-quality simulation experiences.

“By investing in nurses of the future, we’re investing in the talent of aspiring professionals across our state and in the



Nursing students engage in trauma simulation, guided by an instructor, to build essential emergency care skills in a realistic learning environment. Photo courtesy Amy Prokop



health care workforce we all rely on,” says Governor Hochul.

“As Suffolk County’s only academic medical center, Stony Brook University is proud to be at the forefront of healthcare education and workforce development,” says Dr. William A. Wertheim, Executive Vice President for Stony Brook Medicine. “This designation as a SUNY Regional Nursing Simulation Center reflects our long-standing commitment to preparing the next generation of nurses. Through this important partnership with SUNY, we will expand access to high-quality, hands-on clinical training – helping to address the critical nursing shortage, grow the healthcare workforce and ensure our communities have skilled professionals they need to thrive.”

The center will support a 19 percent increase in precicensure (baccalaureate) nursing enrollment in the first-year post-project completion. There is a projected 27 percent increase over the next five years.

“We are grateful to Governor Hochul, SUNY, and Stony Brook University for this opportunity to expand and enhance nursing education through simulation-based learning,” says Dr. Patricia Bruckenthal, Dean of the Stony Brook School of Nursing. “Our NEXUS Innovation Center epitomizes our commitment to advancing nursing education through innovation and collaboration. By integrating cutting-edge simulation technologies, we are not only enhancing the clinical competencies of our students and students across the region but also fostering an environment where interdisciplinary teams can engage in transformative learning experiences. This center stands as a testament to our dedication to preparing nurse leaders who will shape the future of healthcare delivery.”

According to the plan as a regional center, Stony Brook will significantly expand its simulation space footprint to enhance in-person nursing education. Additionally, the center will leverage advanced simulcast software technology to provide remote learning opportunities across Long Island.

Currently, simulation baccalaureate nursing curriculum is integrated into every clinical course in the School of Nursing. Due to space constraints, students are rotated through the Learning Resource Center in small groups, which enables hands-on experiences in the simulation lab under the supervision of the lab director and clinical faculty. The expansion of simulation training and a new dedicated center will streamline this workflow.

Editorial



A sanctuary restored

For eight months, the Smithtown library was closed. Readers were able to visit other branches, but the library is more than just a place to exchange books.

The library is certainly a hub of ideas and information, full of fiction, nonfiction and history. It is also an essential resource for those who need to use a computer but don't have one, or would like access to free wifi. One of the few places where economic class doesn't play a role, the library provides a haven with no spending expectations. You can learn how to play mahjong or fold a piece of paper into an intricate origami figure. Gardening clubs and sewing clubs meet regularly. Offering a podcast and community room, the library provided the setting for numerous friendly conversations.

Walking through the doors again on May 5, patrons are greeted by friendly staff. In the entrance corridor, a television plays recordings from the destructive rains of August 19 and a sped-up recording of the subsequent work. In one recording, water pushes furniture and shelves around like toys. Books float away and out of the recording. In another, the murky brown water slowly fills the hall until suddenly, the pressure pushes out the wall. In a picture, books lay in piles across the floor—any reader would cringe at the sight. The library is back though, and will return fully in coming months, with the bottom and second floors open and services and programs once again available. However, the status of libraries is precarious as the administration looks to cut funding.

When the Smithtown building closed, many card-holders travelled to other branches. When the federal government began eliminating grants to libraries, we imagined what we would do without an accessible library.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is not guaranteed. While libraries will still exist without the small federal agency, which only employed around 70 people and from the perspective of the federal government is unnecessary, they may not receive grants for programming or internships. Recently, a judge blocked a move to place its employees on temporary leave, giving the institute a reprieve. However, the agency is still at risk of getting washed out; it is possible resources and programs will get carried away by the swift stream of government efficiency.

In the meantime though, the wonderful librarians and administrators at the Smithtown library are ensuring that residents have access to the wealth of knowledge inside.

Letters to the Editor

Common sense approach

As the former chairman of the Huntington Town Zoning Board of Appeals, I worked tirelessly to balance the interests of residents, landowners and prospective applicants.

New York State Zoning Law requires that neighbors and other residents' interests be represented in hearing applicant requests. The burden of consideration by the applicant, under the law, covers at least five explicit considerations for area variances requests: an undesirable change, feasible alternatives, substantiality, adverse effects and self-created hardship. As a board we emphasized careful review of potential undesirable changes to neighborhoods, always lending a sensitive ear to the neighbors.

You may have met me at your door during some of these applications, as I would often take the time to walk a neighborhood impacted and speak to residents instead of putting the burden on them to show up at a ZBA meeting.

Residents shouldn't have to leave their house during a cold winter night, wait hours to speak at a public hearing to fight to defend their zoning and quality of life every time a development application comes up. That is a strict responsibility of the board; residents should not be on the defensive.

Our Town Board and the individuals they appoint have a duty and responsibility to represent us, not simply facilitate development.

The need for the Zoning Board and Planning Board's independence in this Town is paramount if we are to restore trust in the Town's zoning process.

Land-use rules and laws protect our most precious investment, our homes. Good zoning and land-use guidance is the most important responsibility

of Town government, it is what knits our communities and neighborhoods together. Applications for exemptions from prevailing laws deserve careful review, but that review should never be at the disadvantage of neighbors and residents.

Now, more than ever, we need this balanced common sense approach.

John Posilico
*Former Chairman of the Huntington
Town Zoning Board of Appeals*

Questioning "Elder Parole" for cop killers

It's common for politicians to send out "constituent surveys." Ostensibly, the goal is to get feedback from local voters on specific issues. But it would be a rare survey indeed, that did not frame certain questions in ways aimed at getting politically desired responses.

Newly elected Assembly member Rebecca Kassay pretty much followed that template with her May mailer.

A couple of seemingly "feel good" proposals were the Second Look Act, and Elder Parole. Maybe state polls are looking to save some dollars on a staggering state budget that's twice the size of Florida and Texas combined? Money aside, the goal is to give judges and parole boards the power to reconsider early release for "elderly individuals" so long as the felons have "demonstrated growth and rehabilitation."

Here are two important unknowns. What would be the specific criteria for the above mentioned, and how it might be applied to those who've murdered law enforcement officers? This is especially critical because the PBA has cited 43 cop killers released by our NYS Parole Board in just the last 8 years,

As of this writing, waiting on the sidelines to possibly become lucky

number 44, is David McClary. On Feb. 26, 1988, he snuck up behind rookie NYPD Officer Edward Byrne, and shot him five times in the head. The 22-year-old was guarding a witness waiting to testify against a notorious drug lord.

Edward's brother Ken spoke to ABC News. "Referencing the murder he said, "It was a horrible scene, we were in shock. It was just beyond devastation...." "This is always a difficult process because every two years with the parole board we have to reive everything." It's that family's eighth time.

Who has had the most sway in picking and managing the group tasked with deciding which felons will be freed? That would be former governor Andrew Cuomo, and his Democrat heir, Kathy Hochul (D). This board is a direct reflection of their views on policing and made up of a majority of fellow Dems.

One of the members would be Tana Agostini, who was appointed by Cuomo in 2017. She married convicted killer Thomas O'Sullivan while he was still in prison. Tana used her influence as a staffer of the state Assembly committee overseeing prisons in 2013 to advocate for the parole of O'Sullivan. His stint in prison included an escape and biting off part of an inmate's nose. It's hard to see much "growth and rehabilitation" there.

Imagine the unrelenting heartache, revisited every 24 months by long "suffering NYPD families, who are sitting in front of an NYS Parole Board that has released an average of five cop killers yearly since 2017. We can bet these kinds of "feel good" proposals feel anything but good to them. Let's remember and help protect slain, heroic police officers and their grieving loved ones,

Hard "No" on survey query number 7.
Jim Soviero
East Setauket

WRITE TO US ... AND KEEP IT LOCAL

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Opinion

How long can we sniff each other’s butts before it becomes socially awkward

Dear Paw Landers,
I’ve never written a letter like this before. Truth be told, I’ve never written a letter of any kind.

But I understand you live far away and that you dispense valuable advice that I could use in my everyday life with the guy and his family.

The guy spends most of his days sitting at this thing typing, so I guess I can do it for an hour or so, which, you know, is more like seven hours for him.

I was thinking of asking you about that rumbling noise that scares me so much when it gets incredibly dark out and when the ground gets wet. Those sounds make me want to find cover somewhere, but no matter where I go, I can still hear it and feel the terrible

vibrations. It’s like if a pack of, you know, us were running around the neighborhood, growling so loudly outside the door that we caused the floor to vibrate a second or two after a flash of light.

No, no, I’ll save the questions about those noises for some other letter. This one is about the delicate social business of interacting in the neighborhood.

You see, my guy varies in his social energy and interests. Some days, he speaks with everyone we run into and bends down to pet other dogs.

That doesn’t bother me, the way it did with Fifi last week, when she complained that her owner pets other dogs more readily and happily than she pets Fifi. I’m fine if my guy wants to scratch other dogs behind their ears or rubs their back. Frankly, there are times when I think he needs a hobby to get out all of his scratching, squeezing and high-pitched voice energy that he reserves for me and, once in a while, for small people when they come to the house.

Other times, he barely waves or acknowledges people and their pets. He’s either staring into his phone and talking to himself or he’s making lists out loud and telling himself what he needs to do that day.

When he does stop to chat with neighbors and their companions, he often talks about me while the other human talks about their dog. I’m kind of tired of hearing about how I don’t like to swim, how I’m not that high energy and I don’t fetch.

Everyone doesn’t have to fetch or swim, right? But, then, he also talks about how sensitive I am and how supportive I am whenever anyone is feeling sad in the house. Hey, we all have our strengths, right?

When he’s chatting, sometimes about me and sometimes about the weather, I’m not always sure how long the pause in our walk will go.

I sometimes sit or lay down near him, while other dogs jump or sniff around me. Other times, I’m so happy to see one of my neighbors that she and I try to tie the two leashes into a knot in the shape of a heart. My guy and the neighbor never

see it, but it’s so obvious to us.

Every so often, I meet someone intriguing and, you know how it is, right? I have to sniff them, the way they have to sniff me. The question is, how long can I sniff their butts before it becomes socially awkward, either for them or for the humans?

I mean, I can tell when my guy is in an intense conversation about something, when his voice drops or shakes and I want to help him. At the same time, I have this need to sniff.

Clearly, sniffing butts at the wrong time or for too long can become a problem for the guy and the other person.

If we do it too long, their conversation ends and he walks away, muttering and puling on me until we get inside.

So, what’s the ideal, allowable butt sniffing time? And remember that none of us is getting any younger, so, you know, if you could write back soon, it’d help. You can’t see me, but I’m looking up at you with my big brown eyes and wagging my tail. That usually works with the guy.

Thanks to our sixth grade teacher, we won the education lottery in NYC

Tuesday was National Teacher Appreciation Day, which reminded me of Miss Rigney, who changed my life.

Miss Rigney was my sixth grade teacher in the perfectly ordinary elementary school

I attended. Housed in a cement building, in the midst of a residential area, it served the neighborhood according to the rules for education in mid-century New York City, with two classrooms and two teachers for each grade. I was assigned to 6A. Next door was 6B.

Soon after entering sixth grade, we became aware of the goal for the coming year. We needed to pass the Hunter Test for the honor of the school and our own benefit.

The Hunter Test, we discovered, was a one day affair that, if successfully navigated, would win us admission to Hunter College High School where classes started with

seventh grade and ended with graduation from high school. Open to students from each sixth grade in all five boroughs, a handful of us would be eligible, after scoring well on a standardized test in fifth grade, to travel to the school on the appointed day to take the test.

I liked the sound of that because it was the closest junior high school to where I lived. I sympathized with those students who would have to ride from Brooklyn, Queens and even Staten Island.

There were several special schools throughout the city whose admission was via a challenging test: Stuyvesant, Bronx High School of Science and Brooklyn Tech were three. They were also public schools and were run by the Board of Education with the idea of giving some students a head start.

But Hunter was different. It was initially started in 1869 as a model school in which to train teachers who were matriculating in Hunter College and was administrated by the Board of Higher Education. Its 1200 students in six grades “represent the top one-quarter of one percent of the City” based on the test scores, according to the school. It was

composed of all girls for its first 105 years. The student-teacher ratio was 13:1, and its faculty for the most part had advanced degrees.

“Aim of the entire course through which the Normal students pass is not so much to burden the mind with facts as it is to develop intellectual power, cultivate judgment, and enable the graduates to take trained ability into the world with them,” wrote Harper’s Magazine in 1878.

Now we kids didn’t know any of this. I just wanted the shortest commute, and it was impressed on us that Hunter was a good place to be. So we prepared for the test, which was months away, with the coaching of our teachers, four girls from 6B and two from 6A.

Only Miss Rigney, a trim, freckle-faced redhead with a gentle manner, who seemed old to me, but was maybe 28, stayed after school twice a week and drilled Carol and me with a workbook. When we didn’t do the homework she then gave us, both arithmetic and English, she was uncharacteristically stern with us. It was clear that this was a challenge she wanted us to surmount.

On the day the results of the Test were sent

to the school, the principal called the six of us down to her office, along with the teachers, and with a great deal of excitement, opened the envelope and read the results out loud. Carol and I had been admitted; no one had from the other class.

There was screaming and moaning. Miss Rigney smiled, quietly congratulated the two of us and returned to her classroom. I was happy because I thought I should be. I knew my parents would be pleased, but I had no understanding of what had just happened.

I had no idea that my life would be unalterably changed — that I would be attending what was thought to be one of the finest high school in the country, ranked number one by The Wall Street Journal, one of only 225 pupils, with some of the most accomplished teachers for whom teaching was an art, that I would mingle with far more sophisticated students, and because of them, freely explore the City.

I had a remarkable high school education. When I landed in college, I was immediately offered second year standing because of my AP classes. Miss Rigney knew.



Between you and me
BY LEAH S. DUNAIEF



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Former Selden church bookkeeper indicted for grand larceny

Suffolk County District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney announced on May 2 that Stacey Hirsch, 48, of Saint Lucie, Florida, was indicted for Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, for allegedly embezzling funds from a Selden church.

According to the investigation, between June 2022 to May 2023, Hirsch, formerly of Centereach and a former bookkeeper at the Selden church, allegedly stole about \$80,000 from the church's bank account.

Hirsch allegedly did this by writing checks to herself and her husband without authority or for any legitimate church related reason or expense. She allegedly used the money to pay her credit card bills, which included charges for food, numerous restaurants, shopping, and other everyday expenses. She also allegedly used the money to pay for utilities and other household expenses.

The alleged theft was discovered after the church board learned that the church's bills were not being paid.

The treasurer reviewed the finances for the previous years and discovered that, as a result of her alleged theft, there were insufficient funds to pay the church's

legitimate expenses. Hirsch was fired after the discovery and moved to Florida shortly afterwards.

On April 10 Hirsch was arrested in Florida and was thereafter extradited to Suffolk County. On May 2 Hirsch was arraigned on the indictment before Supreme Court Justice Timothy P. Mazzei for Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, a Class C felony.

Justice Mazzei ordered Hirsch released from jail without bail because her charge is considered non-bail eligible under current New York State law, meaning prosecutors cannot ask for, and judges cannot set bail.

"Financial crimes against community institutions not only damage their operations but undermine the trust that binds our community together," said District Attorney Tierney. "We intend to pursue this case vigorously to send a clear message that those who exploit positions of trust for personal gain will face the appropriate consequences under the law."

Hirsch is due back in court on June 5 and faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted on the top count.

— SUFFOLK COUNTY D.A.'S OFFICE

POLICE BLOTTER

The following incidents have been reported by Suffolk County Police:

E-bike rider killed in Commack hit-and-run

Suffolk County Police Major Case Unit detectives are investigating a hit-and-run crash that killed a bicyclist in Commack on May 2.

A man was riding an e-bike eastbound on Hauppauge Road, when he was struck from behind by a small white SUV, also traveling eastbound, in front of 68 Hauppauge Road, at 11:57 p.m. The driver then fled the scene.

The man, Aryan Saini, 20, of Central Islip, was transported to Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center in West Islip, where he was pronounced dead. Anyone with information is asked to call 631-852-6555.

Road rage in Kings Park leads to arrest

Suffolk County Police arrested a man following a road rage incident involving a handgun in Kings Park on April 30.

Christopher Tartaglia was driving a 2015 BMW X5 eastbound on Cortez Drive, just east of Indian Head Road, when he began tailgating the vehicle in front of him while honking his horn repeatedly at approximately 6 p.m.

The other vehicle pulled to the side of the road to allow Tartaglia to pass. Tartaglia pulled alongside the stopped vehicle and threatened the driver while pointing a handgun in his direction before driving away. The victim called 911 to report the incident. Fourth Precinct Patrol officers, along with members of the Community Support Unit, located and arrested Tartaglia at his residence a short time later. A Ruger LCP Max was recovered as well as another firearm and a legally owned rifle.

Fourth Squad detectives charged Tartaglia, 57, of Smithtown, with Criminal Possession of a Weapon 2nd Degree and Menacing 2nd Degree. Detectives are asking anyone with information on the incident to call 631-854- 8542.

Mastic man dies in house fire

Suffolk County Police Homicide Squad and Arson Section detectives are investigating a residential fire that killed a man in Mastic on May 5. Police responded to 911 calls reporting a house fire, located on Overlook Drive, at 6:40 p.m.

Two residents, John and Maryann Gaeta, escaped the fire. Their son, Frank Gaeta, 56, was found deceased on the back deck. John Gaeta, 80, and Maryann Gaeta, 81, were transported to Stony Brook University Hospital for smoke inhalation.

A firefighter with the Mastic Fire Department suffered burns at the scene and was transported to a hospital for treatment. The fire is under investigation but appears non-criminal.

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.

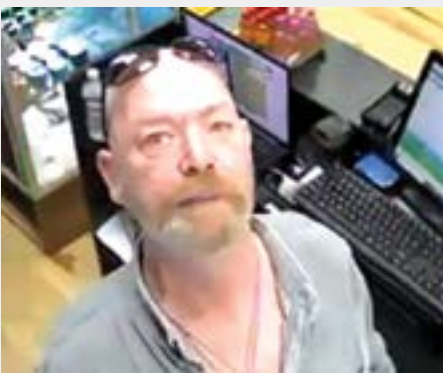
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Do you recognize this woman? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for alleged petit larceny

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Second Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public's help to identify and locate the woman pictured above who allegedly stole bedding from Target, located at 124 East Jericho Turnpike in Huntington Station, on April 18 at approximately 5 p.m.



Do you recognize this man? Photo from SCPD

Wanted for alleged harassment

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and Suffolk County Police Fourth Precinct Crime Section officers are seeking the public's help to identify and locate the man who allegedly harassed an employee of Mr. Vape & Smoke, located at 114 Main Street in Kings Park, on April 20 at approximately 1:15 p.m.

— COMPILED BY HEIDI SUTTON

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

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To have information such as this notice sent right to your email, sign up with county email listservs available at <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/site-cleanup/regional-remediation-project-information/environmental-cleanup-email>

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(3 times). Holy Mary, I place this cause in your hands. (3 times). Holy Spirit, you who solve all problems, light all roads so that I can obtain my goals. You gave me the divine gift to forgive and forget all evil against me, and that in all instances of my life, you are with me. I want in this short prayer to thank you for all things as you confirm once again that I never want to be separated from you in eternal glory. Thank you for your mercy toward me and mine. The person must say this prayer 3 consecutive days. The request will be granted. This prayer must be published after the favor has been granted. W.R.H.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS TOWN OF BROOKHAVEN

PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE IV, SEC. 85-55 (B) OF THE BUILDING ZONE ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF BROOKHAVEN, NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS WILL, IN ACCORDANCE WITH OPEN MEETINGS LAW, HOLD THE FOLLOWING, AT ONE INDEPENDENCE HILL, FARMINGVILLE, N.Y.:
1. A PUBLIC HEARING ON WEDNESDAY, **MAY 14, 2025** (2ND FLOOR AUDITORIUM) COMMENCING **AT 2:00 P.M.** (THE PUBLIC HEARING WILL BE LIVE STREAMED OVER THE INTERNET AT <https://brookhavyennportal.civicclerk.com>, TO CONSIDER THE MATTERS LISTED BELOW and 2. A WORKSESSION ON MAY 14, 2025, (PUBLIC DINING AREA 2ND FLOOR)

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TIMES OF MIDDLE COUNTRY
4. Melba Zaida Canet, Melba L. Canet Pabon, Gustavo Pabon, 86 Forest Rd., Centereach, NY. Location: West side Forest Rd. 1472.34' South of Edwin St., Centereach. Applicant requests rear yard variance for existing one story residence addition; rear yard and side yard variances for existing shed. (0200 44200 0200 007000)
5. Dulcy Romero, 196 Stanley Dr., Centereach, NY. Location: East side Stanley Dr. 595' North of Linda Dr., Centereach. Applicant requests rear yard variance for existing pool house with outdoor shower. (0200 44200 0400 040000)

24. Maria Zavala, 4 Dusk Dr., Centereach, NY. Location: East side Dusk Dr., 625' South of 43rd St., Centereach. Applicant requests minimum and total side yard variances for existing one story residence addition. (0200 44200 0500 014000)

30. Lady Johanna Garcia Molina, 25 Manhasset Ave., Selden, NY. Location: North side Manhasset Ave., 120' West of Adirondack Dr, Selden. Applicant requests height variance for existing 6 ft. high fence located in front yard; permission for existing finished basement on a 50 ft. lot (not permitted). (0200 54000 0300 041000)

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Comsewogue High School senior Samghabadi scores \$10K Taco Bell Scholarship

BY DANIEL DUNAIEF
DESK@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

The odds haven't always been in favor of Emma Samghabadi.

The Comsewogue High School senior and Port Jefferson station resident was born under two pounds and spent over a month in the neonatal intensive care unit at Stony Brook Hospital.

After maneuvering through a period her parents Jennifer and Pedram Samghabadi described as "touch and go" for a while, she flourished and is poised to graduate from high school in June and enter college this fall.

A gifted singer and performer, Samghabadi, who recently played Velma Kelly in a teen edition of "Chicago," applied for the Live Más scholarship through Taco Bell, where she has been working since last summer.

Samghabadi spent close to three months putting together a two minute video describing her passions, which include performing, singing, and serving as a conservationist.

On April 25th, Samghabadi, 18, was working at the drive through window at Taco Bell and learned that she had won a \$10,000 scholarship, which she will use at the University of Rhode Island.

"It was a complete surprise to me," said Samghabadi, who was thrilled when her managers and coworkers celebrated her scholarship with balloons and congratulatory posters in the dining room of the restaurant. "All my managers were there and my regional managers were there as well."

Indeed, Samghabadi called her mother, who works as a registered nurse and her father, who is a social worker, to celebrate.

Jennifer Samghabadi was "overjoyed, proud, grateful and also humbled" with the scholarship.

"The odds [of winning] are very, very low," her father said. "This was her exhibiting her unique mix" of passions.

Out of 500 scholarship applications from New York, Taco Bell awarded 13 at this level, which is just over two a half percent of the state's entries.

The Taco Bell Foundation has been awarding these scholarships for 10 years, with some notable past winners including Mato Standing Soldier, a film and TV composer who was named to Forbes 30 under 30 List for 2023 and Brooke Taylor, who is dancing on Broadway in Moulin Rouge.

Samghabadi gave her scholarship entry considerable thought. The scholarship is based on a student's passions, social impact, personal presentation and educational goals and does not

include any reference to a grade point average or standardized test scores.

"As soon as I started finding pictures, I was already thinking about what I wanted to talk about," Samghabadi said.

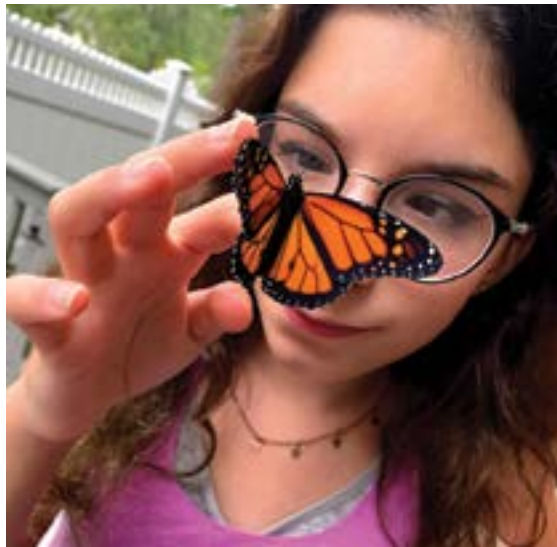
Editing the presentation to under two minutes was a "struggle," she added.

The work paid off, as a Taco Bell Foundation spokeswoman suggested that Samghabadi's video embodied the key traits they seek in an applicant: strong passion, a focus on social impact, clear educational goals and compelling storytelling.

Samghabadi, who has a weighted grade point average above 100, has impressed her high school teachers.

Rosa Artelo, who teaches Samghabadi's Advanced Placement Class and was also her instructor for Advanced Spanish in 10th grade, described her student's potential as "unmeasurable."

Artelo suggested that Samghabadi is "not just a great student, but she's truly an amazing person."



Emma Samghabadi with butterfly on her finger. Photo courtesy Jennifer Samghabadi

Artelo, who wrote a college recommendation for Samghabadi, recalled a time when her student helped her manage through the strain of a stressful situation.

"She's so positive and is looking for the best of everything," said Artelo, who has been teaching for 26 years and believes Samghabadi stands out among her many students.

An early curiosity

When she was five, Samghabadi found a large green caterpillar in a hibiscus bush, which she brought home.

She and her parents looked up how to care for it. The caterpillar formed a cocoon and

emerged as a moth.

After that, Samghabadi was hooked, establishing a monarch butterfly way station where she has released over a hundred of the orange and black insects that, while not endangered are threatened by a loss of habitat, pesticide use and climate change.

Dedicated to conservation and marine biology, Samghabadi has worked as a volunteer at the New York Marine Rescue Center in Riverhead.

She tells visitors about the only effort in the state to rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles and seals. She has also helped with beach clean ups and, in 2023, became scuba certified.

Samghabadi's favorite animal is the manta ray, which she hopes to study in college.

From "The Lion King" to community theater

Around the same time that she found the green caterpillar, Samghabi, saw her first Broadway show.

Watching "The Lion King" sparked an interest in performance and theater.

Samghabadi has been an extra in short films and commercials as well as in the movie "Uncut Gems."

As a 10-year old, she spent a day on set as an extra, sitting behind Adam Sandler in a movie theater.

She has performed in several shows and goes through cycles of singing different Broadway songs in the house.

These days, she's using her soprano voice to belt out "Sweeney Todd" in the house.

Samghabadi is open to combining her interests in conservation and music. At some point, she would like to conduct research on bioacoustics. She could also envision using music as a part of public outreach for conservation.

Despite all her commitments, including working with second graders to help teach them Spanish, Samghabadi is able to enjoy leisure activities with her friends by organizing herself.

"I have a set plan for what I need to do each day," she said.

Multiple scholarships

Samghabadi's talents and dedication have earned her other competitive scholarships.

She will receive \$84,000 over four years as a part of the inaugural Schilling Scholars Program at the University of Rhode Island. She will also receive \$68,000 from the presidential scholarship at the university.

The New York Elks Association recently awarded her a \$1,000 scholarship.

Samghabadi is the second generation in her family to work at Taco Bell, where her favorite meal is the Cantina Chicken Bowl.

When he was earning money for college, Samghabadi's father Pedram worked at the restaurant chain.

Samghabadi's parents are grateful for the life their daughter has lived and the energy and passion she brings to her interests.



Emma Samghabadi at NY Marine Rescue. Photo courtesy Jennifer Samghabadi

"You can't be thankful enough," said Pedram Samghabadi. "We still cannot believe what we went through" in the first year of her remarkable life.

Their daughter, whose singing they will miss when she attends college, gave them a preview of what was to come early in life.

"She was dancing in the crib," her father said.



Emma Samghabadi after singing with the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra in 2022. Photo courtesy Brian Kacharaba



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