



The People's Press

Quarterly Newsletter for Union Township

in Scenic Hunterdon County

Winter 2023

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Letter From the Mayor

Dear UT neighbors and friends -

Getting the chance to be mayor of this extraordinary township in 2022 was one of the greatest gifts of my lifetime, and I'm ecstatic to have this honor once again, for 2023. Our committee is eager to get started on work for the town this year and building upon the foundation we've created together.

Recently, I was asked by one of our terrific elementary school teachers to speak to our second grade students about effective local government and leadership. The preparation to give a "talk" to this unique (slightly intimidating?) audience was a challenging one. I didn't want to speak over their heads or, worse yet, beneath them. What was the message I wished to convey to them, and how could I make it memorable? The exercise forced me to simplify and to clarify my thoughts.

What I came up with for them was that effective local government was about the "three Ls". The first "L" is *listening*. It is critical that elected officials remember that, above all else, they were "hired" by the town to be in public *service*. As such, what is perhaps most important in effective local government is to make sure that a connection with residents and with neighbors is established, so that constituents are heard, the feedback is registered and decision making is informed.

The second "L" is *learning*. Decisions are made and action plans are constructed, but they don't always work out the way you'd expect or prefer them to. Learning from these mistakes often is more useful than being validated by the successes, and such awareness goes a long way in not "throwing good money after bad".

And the third, and final, "L" is *leading from the heart*. It is hard to go wrong when one's intentions are pure and just and ever-mindful of others. When you lead from the heart, it can inspire others and be infectious.

Simple words, simple mantras, admittedly, but it took me a lifetime to acquire them and to try to put them into practice. I strive every day to do right by our community, to live these words and to aspire to achieve them.

This newsletter is a direct reflection of this aspiration. Through the communication vessel that we've created and, more important, through the incredible stories of our neighbors that we feature here, we can *listen* to who they are and what they have to say, we can *learn* from their journeys, and, in emulating them, we can take a page from their playbooks and *lead from the heart*.

I hope you enjoy the vignettes presented in this quarter's newsletter. They represent a true celebration of what this township, our people, and our community have to offer.

Welcome home.

David DeGiralamo, MD DMD



The Township Committee reorganizes and turns to 2023

The Township Committee held its annual re-organization meeting on January 4, 2023. Committeeman Page Stiger was sworn in once again to a three-year term. In addition, and by a majority vote, both Mayor David DeGiralamo and Deputy Mayor Page Stiger were once again re-appointed to their positions for 2023 (Committeemen Richard Lordi and Frank Mazza voted in dissent on both appointments).

The Committee intends to keep a number of items that were developed last year the same this year, including (among others): 1) the continuation of this quarterly newsletter and the monthly mayor's letter, 2) community events throughout the year (including *FinnFest*, *The Hunterdon Games* and the tree lighting), 3) an annual update to the road renovation prioritization list and 4) continued refurbishment of our township website.

The Committee also is considering a number of other items as potential areas of focus for the year, including:

- Audio/video functionality at township meetings
- A social media policy around township communications and a township-sanctioned Facebook page
- An *Octoberfest* event
- More community outreach, including regional "coffee with the committee" events
- A more methodical and wider reaching approach toward locating and obtaining grants
- Possible alliances with neighboring municipalities for shared services and capital equipment purchases

Some new faces at township leadership positions

The township's Planning Board and Board of Adjustment has added two new alternate members to its ranks: Michael Gatanis and Brian Lepore. In addition, Brandi Bartolomeo Machala was elevated from alternate member to voting member.

With Glenn Roth's retirement from his long-held role as township OEM Coordinator, the township committee appointed Matthew Papenfuhs as his replacement. Finally, the Committee has accepted the resignations of our municipal attorney and public safety director and will be seeking replacements.

Grant funding received for township website reconstruction

Through the Hunterdon County Economic Development and Tourism office, the Township Committee applied for, and received, the approval of grant funding of up to \$8,000 from the county for our ongoing website reconstruction. When completed, the website is expected to be more user friendly and streamlined. New features being considered include: live streaming of meetings, a portal for the reporting of power outages and road damage, a prominent Rec Committee section, a resident photo gallery and a Hunterdon County tourism section.

QuickChek facility construction ongoing

Progress on the QuickChek convenience store construction continues at the corner of Perryville and Frontage Roads (at the site of the old Bagelsmith). It is now estimated that the new QuickChek might be fully operational by the end of the first quarter of 2023.

From our township Recreation Committee

Adult and youth basketball are currently underway and the youth 3-8 groups have started their games! Looking to the future in 2023, registration for golf, volleyball, tennis, and spring soccer will open February 1st. More non-sports events are in the works, as well as some new adult activities too! Look for posts, emails, and reminders.

With the New Year also come more changes. We said farewell to three long term and awesome Rec Committee Volunteers and program runners in 2022: Robert Mazurkiewicz, Jens Duerr, and VJ Di Roberto. They will be missed and we are ever grateful for their dedication to the program.

There will be changes to the fees, clear policy on registrations which will be adhered to, and a re-organization of the Committee structure. In fact, the first change has occurred, with Eric Meisner taking over as the new Rec Committee Chairman!

The program has grown wonderfully over the past years and new members are needed to sustain and continue to grow the fun. UTREC is 100% volunteer based, from top to bottom, and we are currently at our lowest committee membership ever, with vacancies needed to be filled immediately! Without U, there is no UTREC.

Interested volunteers:
Email
uniontwprecchair@gmail.com

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/utcreation

The process of property revaluation is complete

Union Township (by order of the Hunterdon County Tax Board and NOT by the order of the Township Committee) conducted a township-wide revaluation, a program undertaken by a municipality to appraise all real property within the taxing district according to its full and fair value. The Tax Board ordered the revaluation in 2019, due to a failing ratio of assessment value to true value, a lack of uniformity between sales of all classes and the increase of tax appeals due to assessed value exceeding true value. The last revaluation in our town was initiated in 1988, and a re-assessment was completed in 2002.

A revaluation program seeks to spread the tax burden equitably within a municipality. Real property must be assessed at the same standard value to ensure that every property owner is paying his or her fair share of the property tax. The process should be viewed as a re-apportionment of tax burden, toward an overall tax aggregate base requirement that will remain unchanged. The revaluation firm is a registered company with the Division of Taxation.

WHAT'S NEW: The firm completed its inspections, and the valuations and tax estimates were mailed to residents in December. Some residents saw their tax estimates go up, while others saw their tax estimates go down. Key takeaways on the analysis: 1) the township faced a 3% headwind in the sizable reduction in valuation of one commercial property, 2) the majority of residents (approximately 55-60% did not see year-over-year valuation changes of more than 5% and 3) a large number of Union Gap/Union Hill apartments saw meaningful valuation increases, largely due to a relatively low prior valuation.

After January 31, 2023, the only way to contest the valuation is to file a tax appeal with the Hunterdon County Tax Board, as is customary every year. Given that we went through a revaluation process, the deadline with the county is extended one month, to 5/1/23.

For more information, please reach out to our tax assessor, Michelle Trivigno, at (908) 735-8027 Ext. 14 (email: assessor@uniontpw-hcnj.org).

It was a busy year for road projects in 2022

The township undertook a number of road repair projects in 2022, and two of the most significant ones were to Stonebridge/Wolf's Farm Roads (now completed) and to Baptist Church Road. Baptist Church Road repair is being completed in four phases, and once completed, will extend from County Road 579 to southernmost entrance to Hoffman Park.

WHAT'S NEW: The fourth, and final, phase is slated for completion in the April/May 2023 timeframe, once the weather becomes more favorable. The construction contract already has been awarded. At a later date, we will be seeking bids for four additional phases, in total extending from the end of current work to Frontage Road. Finally, the county in October 2022 commenced with the process of fixing the compromised bridge on Baptist Church Road. Owing to weather and difficult site conditions, the completion date on the bridge now has been pushed back to the second half of February.

All meetings are held (unless otherwise stated) at the Municipal Building, located at 140 Perryville Road Hampton, NJ 08827

Township Committee Meeting:

<https://uniontpw-hcnj.gov/township>, 7:00PM
3rd Wednesday of each month

Board of Health:

Immediately following Committee Meetings

Planning Board and Board of Adjustment:

<https://uniontpw-hcnj.gov/planning>, 7:00PM
2nd and 4th Thursday of each month

Recreation Committee:

<https://uniontpw-hcnj.gov/recreation>, 7:30pm
2nd Wednesday of each month

Environmental Commission:

<https://uniontpw-hcnj.gov/enviromental>, 7:00pm
2nd Tuesday of each month

Agricultural Advisory Committee:

<https://uniontpw-hcnj.gov/agricultural>
Chair Scott Eichlin (908) 713-0575

Coming Home to the Comfort of Mountain View Chalet

For Union Township, there is perhaps no longer standing, public facing stalwart than the Mountain View Chalet and the two recognizable fixtures who keep it going. To the more casual and less frequenting patrons, they might simply be viewed as *the guy in the front* – understated, gentle and welcoming – and *the guy in the back* – intense, ever-moving and unflappable. But to those who know the place better, to those who come unfailingly for the birthday dinners or the Seafood Fra Diavolo or the center cut filet, or to those who've had many a club meeting or Sweet Sixteen or repast in the banquet hall, they are, affectionately, Jimmy and Demos.



Demos, 68, is Mountain View's indefatigable force of nature, with a throwback kind of work ethic. Check in on Demos, and he might be cooking, or cutting the grass, or butchering, or fixing the electric. He is the engine that moves the machine. His story – and his uncle Jimmy's story, for that matter – is your archetypal 20th Century immigrant narrative. He was born in Greece, studied a bit of English in school before he got here, arrived as an earnest teen and faked it 'til he made it. Demos took classes at nights in order to get his high school diploma, but in the hours he wasn't studying, he was raised on restaurants. He started as a bus boy, graduated to a behind-the-counter gig (pushing out 3,000 coffees per shift), and shifted to work in the kitchens of bustling diners and New York City nightclubs. He loved the behind-the-scenes food preps, especially baking, and he pitched in where he could, helping to make soups and prepare vegetables and receiving informal apprenticeships from mentors. Eventually, his path led him fifty miles due west of these early experiences, to the kitchen of Mountain View Chalet.

His uncle Jimmy's arrival to the US preceded Demos's by only three years. Faced with the option of becoming a naval captain in Greece or joining his hardworking siblings in the US, Jimmy and his new wife chose the adventure across the Atlantic. He worked as a dishwasher for four years at his older brother's thriving Silver Star Diner in Manhattan, bootstrapping his command of English and obtaining his driver's license along the way. He eventually became a waiter and then a part-owner in 1976 when his brother passed away. Nearly a decade later, after he was bought out from his Silver Star partnership, Jimmy took a chance on a new opportunity alongside his nephew Demos, and in May 1985, the two became owners of the Chalet.

The early days of ownership for Jimmy and Demos were rough: the two men worked around the clock, building their business and making it their own. They pumped into it their savings, but took nothing home for a year and a half. Vendors were lenient and friends were generous when the bills came due, and the two men ultimately resolved all debts over time. Jimmy and Demos invested and endured, and eventually, the business hit its stride. Seafood buffet Thursdays became a popular draw, well known throughout the county, and on Friday and Saturday nights, the restaurant overflowed with dancing and entertainment in the room where the bar is now. Lunches were a robust part of the business when Foster Wheeler was brimming with employees and the Montblanc pen factory in Bloomsbury was still around.

By the mid-1990s, Jimmy and Demos set their sights on much-needed interior renovations. The restaurant area required replacement of its dark wood, its frosted windows and terrible carpeting. The banquet hall boasted a tired chandelier, paneling and wallpaper and a stage so cumbersome that it nearly took up half the room. The energy, the commitment, the upgrades worked. The business has thrived in the up years and survived in the down, with the community supporting them every step of the way. The recent COVID years were particularly harrowing, but patrons threw them lifelines by ordering takeout, and their 10-15 person staff remained reliable and consistent.

After nearly forty years of ownership and labor, Jimmy (now 77 and approaching retirement) and Demos are nothing but appreciative of their customers, of the experience and of the choice they made to leave the fast pace of city life to come to Union. "We've always served good people here", Demos says. "They've supported us through the years and check in on us, and we try our best to treat them with love, too. It's a small-town feel, and it's paradise."

About Our Schools



From Our Superintendent Nicholas Diaz, EdD...

We are proud to share that our elementary school principal, Mrs. Rhonda Pevorus, has been named the 2022 Educational Leader of the Year by Centenary University and Visions Federal Credit Union. This award recognizes school leaders who have transformed educational practices and positively impacted the culture and climate in their school community. More than 20 school leaders were nominated for this award. Congratulations to Mrs. Pevorus!

Our **elementary school** students are preparing for their annual spelling bee, which will take place next month. Students in grades 1-3 will compete to determine the school's best speller. The winner will move on to the regional competition later in the year. In addition, both of our schools are partnering with the American Heart Association (AHA) to promote heart health. They hope to win new recess and physical education equipment from the AHA through their efforts.

Our **middle school** students also are working hard to connect with their surrounding community. In December, our Student Council organized a robust animal shelter drive where they delivered carloads of needed items donated by our families. Additionally, our students will be making Valentine's Day decorations and sharing them with a local nursing home as a way to spread joy and love! The middle school is focusing on promoting positive character traits in an effort to recognize students who go above and beyond in areas such as leadership, respect, and responsibility. Each month, two students per grade level are nominated by their teachers and celebrated with a phone call home and a morning announcement "shout out".

Information From Our Local School Board...

The Union Township Board of Education looks a bit different this year, with two new members filling open seats and a new Leadership Team. The new BOE is comprised of the following members: Lou Palma (President), Dan Allen (Co-Vice President), Cortney Dominianni-Smith (Co-Vice President), Michael Kokoszka, John Malone (recently elected), Caitlin Piontek (recently elected), Christine Soltys-Robitaille, James Teipel and Suzanne Wunder.

Information sessions were held to educate the public on the bond referendum that is taking place on January 24th, in order to consider the funding of an upgraded HVAC system at the middle school and the replacement of all doors at both schools. The HVAC has been an item on the long-range facility plan for some time, and the passing of the referendum by the town (should it occur) would open up the opportunity for state aid to support its partial funding. In addition, the replacement of doors (also potentially eligible for state aid as a result of the referendum passing) was identified previously by the BOE on its review of school security.

The BOE encourages public attendance at meetings, which are currently being held in person at the UT elementary school media center/library and there is no longer a virtual attendance option provided. There are two times during the BOE meeting for public comments, but if you would like to offer feedback or correspondence of any kind in advance, then please submit it directly to BOE President (Lou Palma) at lpalma@uniontwpschool.org and/or to Superintendent Dr. Nicholas Diaz at ndiaz@uniontwpschool.org.

About Our Schools

Getting to Know Your Newly Elected School Boardmembers

I want to thank the community for the support to continue to serve on the board of education. I've been a member of the Union community for the past 10 years, and I reside in Brass Castle with my husband Patrick and our two children (Caylee, 8th grade, and Ian, 5th grade). We moved to this area to enjoy its beauty, its safety and the strength of the school system. I initially became interested in running for the board when it became necessary for me to advocate for my son who needs to learn differently. I took the time to learn about the school system, what services were available to mainstream special education children and what challenges the school system faced. Through my journey, I realized I have the passion to ensure that *all* children deserve to have the support, tools and space to learn in a way that is best for them. I also want to ensure that our communication with our families remains strong and that the community has a voice in these decisions.



**Courtney
Dominianni-Smith**

I am a lifelong resident of Hunterdon County. My wife Susan and I have three small children, all attending our elementary school. I work as a management consultant focused on technology in both K-12 and Higher Education. I decided to run for the school board because I want to see my children have the same experiences I had growing up in this area - the experiences that made me want to return as an adult and contribute back to this community. My job gives me the vantage to see how the current challenges/opportunities faced by UTS are addressed at other schools/districts across the country. For much of the last decade local districts were anticipating ongoing decreased enrollments. In Union Township, we now have the opposite problem. The pandemic shifted people's viewpoints on where they wanted to raise their families. With younger families moving back to the Township and major residential development projects underway we must work to find solutions for both our children and community that will improve their quality of education, while also not putting undue burden on the community at large. I am excited at the opportunity to contribute to the enrichment of our students, our families, and our community.



**John
Malone**

I moved to Union Township with my husband and our three wonderful children, Angelina (age 6), Leo (age 3), and Luke (age 2) in November 2020. We chose this district because of the reputation for academic achievement, small class sizes, and the extraordinary sense of community. It has been an absolute joy and pleasure to be a part of a close-knit neighborhood. My career as a provider credentialing specialist has afforded me the opportunity to work from home while raising my children. Education should provide our children with the skills they need to keep learning throughout their lives. As a member of the school board, I am committed to creating opportunities for all children to learn and grow in a safe and secure environment. It is important that we address achievement gaps that are present in our current curriculum model. Through quality program instruction and a planful review, we can advance student achievement in our district. Together, with our wonderful community, we can set up a bright future for our children. I look forward to listening to the community and implementing policies that will better serve the needs of all of our students.



**Caitlin
Piontek**

Student Spotlight

Laying the Foundation for Union's Field of Dreams

Everyone knew it would be senior Sara Roberts who would take that corner.

As far back as two years ago, at an otherwise humdrum practice, it was made clear that Sara – the team's playmaker and strategic mind – was the one with the chops to make that fast, clean pass if ever there was a need for a precision strike or an all-important inbound. It would come from her stick, and hers alone.

As was largely expected, the Group 3 State Field Hockey Championship this past November between North Hunterdon and Clearview proved to be a battle of defensive wills, the ball rebuffed on either side of the midfield like an interminable tennis baseline volley. The two powerhouses duked it out in a scoreless tug of war for most of it, until Clearview broke free with the lone goal, the singular blemish on North's ledger, late in the game. Time ticked down to zero on the big board. The opponents' cheer section, a huddled throng of devoted supporters, were so bubbled over with expectation, they chanted down the last five seconds in taunting unison from the dimly lit bleachers, the final rhythmic pulsations of their echoing voices cueing Clearview's coronation as champions. They didn't hear the last-second foul called on Clearview in the circle, leading the North inbounder to take her lonely walk to the corner. With no time left in regulation and with trusted stick in hand, Sara got her shot to make that fast, clean pass after all.



The final play of course involved Lauren Masters, the assistant coach's daughter and the team's ice-veined Christian Laettner. Lauren, the Louisville D1-bound Iron Award recipient, was the winsome face of the franchise and leader all season, equal parts champion of accountability and sunburst of positivity. So determined and strong, she might've intimidated her peers with her presence if she didn't morph, at just the right times, into an unashamed goofball and lick their faces. Lauren knew when to turn on the heat and when to hit the pressure release valve. This team was *her* team, her heartbeat, and it was her ball to strike on the final play.

But she didn't. Clearview advanced on Lauren in the circle, swarming her like an intentioned blanket of bees. Smartly, she passed up her shot to sophomore Annika Hoyer, and the ball deflected off to Maggie Sampson, another senior on the team. Less suffocated by the defense, Maggie took the shot from a compromised angle but somehow found the back of the net. New life, and overtime in the championship, for the cardiac kids – on a reliable inbound, an intelligent pass from their leader and a fortuitous shot for the ages.

While the title game was technically played atop the well-tended-to turf field at Bordentown High School, south of Trenton aways on the 295, the first steps to get to that field left imprints ten years prior, and 45 minutes northeast of it, on the well-trodden grass of Finn and Millbrook Parks. Amy Masters, and other passionate Union Township moms, spearheaded an effort to jumpstart a more robust junior field hockey "feeder program" for the area. When Amy took over the UT Rec Committee's Junior Lions program in 2012, it counted 40 girls as members and ran up as far as the *sixth* grade. With no immediate outlet for group play, the graduates were forced to take a sabbatical from the sport for two years before having the chance to play again in high school. Amy, herself a former field hockey player, and her volunteer team expanded the program in short order, creating an unrivaled field hockey funnel for girls throughout the county, from Union to Clinton to Alexandria to Kingwood, and from kindergarten through *eighth* grade. By 2013, the roster had swelled to more than 150. All the while, the UT Rec Committee, including advocates like Jens Duerr and Jack Hara, helped to shepherd the program to success, providing funds and resources for the fledgling effort whenever needed. The program has endured and thrived ever since, the torch passed successfully to Jenny Methven four years ago and the next generation of engaged mothers.

Ten years from the creation of that "farm system", and on that Bordentown field for the championship, were 22 young women, 19 of whom counted themselves Junior Lions alumnae. And four of the six seniors on this year's team were from Union Township: the aforementioned Roberts and Masters, Sarah Bisson and Addie Coster.

The girls became women standing (and running) at each other’s sides, having known one another since their early days: Halloween door walks, pool parties in the Roberts’ backyard, study sessions, everything. The Junior Lions experience gave them another reason to spend more time together; their bonds were solidified long ago.

Sit with the four around a table, weeks removed from the title game, and the link between them is obvious. These healthy-hued heroines *know* one another – their frequencies so tuned in, they could easily complete each other’s sentences but respect one another enough *not* to do so. They are graceful in their words, gracious in their listening. It is apparent immediately why their mothers (Maureen, Lisa, Nicole and Amy) call the team’s character a “once-in-a-lifetime” blend. Last year’s champions were the culmination of the program’s algorithmic upward progress: when the veteran-laden team won, it was a sigh of relief and not unexpected. This year’s team brought *youth*, making the character of the remaining veterans more critical. There’s coachability and support and empathy and positivity between them, writ large. They count their mothers (and friends’ mothers) as role models, and not surprisingly, they aspire to become teachers, healers, therapists and mothers themselves. Ask them a field hockey question, and they answer with the polish of a well-traveled guest on a talk show circuit. Ask them about their experiences together, and their hearts soar. There is love in the room.

At first blush, Sarah Bisson appears the most delicate and taciturn of the four and the first to show emotion when discussing things personal. But to her peers who’ve run alongside her in battle, she’s the defensive bulwark of the team and a downright beast. It is Sarah who is the only one who they on occasion transform into a *verb*: when opponents are taken down by her juggernaut defense, they are said, cheekily, to have been *Bissoned*. Her friends adore this delicious juxtaposition: within the kind, gentle friend and late-night academic tutor of her peers lies a fierce warrior with a belly of fire.

If Roberts and Masters are the drivers at the front of the bus, and Bisson is its steel frame, it is Addie Coster who leads from the back. Although she doesn’t receive as much playing time as her senior sisters, it doesn’t stop her from leading from the sidelines, in particular taking the younger players under her momma-hen wing, ever reinforcing and encouraging. Like her mom, Lisa, Addie is a born educator and inspirer through work ethic. She’s the one the other girls are convinced will be a teacher one day and surrounded by the largest family.



This team of Union senior sisters is just that: a *union*. “The lessons on leadership and camaraderie came from their moms”, a prideful Maureen Roberts notes. “But they chose to listen. They chose to live it.”

So do you believe in miracles? Did you see it unfold as they lived it, the improbable overtime, for a team that won games by the skins of their teeth all season? Did you expect the midfielder Roberts, already 62 minutes of tireless play in the tank, stealing the ball from her attacking opponent, harnessing momentum and slicing her clean, fast pass surgically through the defense to the golden turf shoes of a streaking Masters? Can you picture the dash down the field, the reverse chip from the left and the ball finding a way past the outstretched goalie and into the net for the title? Can you imagine the moms and dads on this journey: the purchasers of jerseys and gear and fees, the unheralded drivers to countless away games over the years, the eager high fivers and the driers of tears, the preservers of what was possible for their daughters and the path to get there – rejoicing as a coordinated mass of bleacher bouncers two minutes into overtime that evening, jubilant jolts of joy, sending love over the field under a cloudless November sky? Would you have envisioned that these girls, borne from backyard get-togethers and the grass fields of Finn and Millbrook Parks, would become young women, champions and leaders by never getting down, always remaining positive and always supporting one another?

Believe in miracles. Believe that an earnest, energetic group of dedicated youth from Union and beyond, the pride of the Junior Lions, could capture magic in a bottle for a moment in time and teach the adults, and even their older selves, what they’ve perhaps forgotten: that a team of individuals can work as one and can lead from the heart.

Sara Roberts stands at the ready to deliver the inbounder. Take it in. Prepare for the shot. *Goals.*

At Your Doorstep

Meet the Mainstays of Main: Rich Hummer and Lisa Burd



Rich Hummer is your kid next door. Literally. Gazing out from the window of his farmhouse-turned-colonial home on Main Street, the 44-year-old can see the bedroom of his childhood home, where his mother still lives. The Hummer clan is nearly synonymous with Union Township, having been mainstays here for decades. The patriarch, his recently passed father Leo, was perhaps the most recognized Hummer. Known by many as the “garage door guy”, Leo installed garage doors all over New Jersey, including the ones in Brass Castle, Oak Knoll Village and Union Gap, and when he wasn’t working (which was rarely), father Leo “invented” the local Friday night ritual of cooking for the North Hunterdon football team. Twenty six years later, Rich’s old teammates still remember his dad and those dinners.

Rich was one of the team’s running backs back then, and he still has the frame of one: compact, solid and purposeful. He looks like he could run through a wall if needed, and the wall should be nervous. Rich earned his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, with a minor in sociology, from Westchester University, then put himself through the Somerset County Police Academy, graduating in 2003. He was hired by the Greenwich Township Police Department almost twenty years ago and, at 35 in 2014, became one of the younger police chiefs in the area.

His girlfriend, Lisa, 48, was born in Missouri, but grew up mostly in Bethlehem Township. They knew of one another peripherally as kids; Rich and his father even installed her family’s garage door decades ago. Lisa is an Ethel Hoppock, North Hunterdon and RVCC grad, where she earned her associate degree in Fine Arts. She was a soccer goalie back in the day: bruised frequently and, much like her present-day persona, never quitting. Lisa became the municipal clerk for Bloomsbury Borough in 2004, earned her Registered Municipal Clerk Certification through the Center for Government Services at Rutgers University and was appointed administrator in 2006. A decade later, she then split her time in Greenwich Township, as well, serving as Clerk/Administrator in both municipalities. Staying on top of new state regulations can be challenging, but the difficulties of the job are more than outweighed by the joy of interacting with the public: being able to hear their concerns and to help them find solutions. Rich sees these qualities from her daily: smart, caring and always there to help. Lisa, in turn, describes Rich as compassionate and a devoted, goal-setting “man of his word”.

“I got my work ethic from my dad and my heart from my mom”, Rich offers, and these energies in particular come forth in the work he does for others. In 2019, following the passing of 13-year-old Collin Perrone, the son of a colleague, to brain cancer, Rich ran at least five miles a day every day outside for a year in Collin’s honor. He set up the *Conquer Children’s Cancer* fund to raise money and awareness for childhood cancer. This year, he is closing in on 400 straight days toward his 500-day goal. Rich has run through numerous injuries, including a painful bout of plantar fasciitis, which forced him to run in work boots to prevent further tissue irritation. He has run through COVID and food poisoning and bronchitis and shin splints and sheets of ice. The obvious *Forrest Gump* reference gets lobbed his way, and he chuckles at it for a moment, but then re-centers the conversation: “Kids with cancer don’t get to take the day off from it, so why should I? Collin’s my hero; I’m just his foot soldier.” And Lisa just completed work on her eighth annual *Project Be A Hero*, a volunteer group she founded to assist Wounded Warrior Project in 2015, when they helped to raise over \$12,000. Since then, the group has raised funds every year for a number of recipients, ranging from homeless families to 911 responders with cancer and other health issues to retired US military working dogs needing medical care. This year’s campaign likely will push aggregate donations since inception to more than \$100,000.

The couple is proud to call Union Township home and to remain the mainstays of Main. “Everything is at our fingertips here”, Lisa notes. “The mountains, the ocean, the parks, the cities, all of it.” And Rich loves the nostalgia of his hometown, too. “Everyone who grew up in Union seems to love that they grew up here”, he adds. “Just when you think you know a lot about this place, you meet someone who knows even more. The history here is amazing.”

Community Chest

Birds of a Featherman Stick Together

Walk through the garage and up the three steps. Head into the kitchen, as the aroma of what's on envelopes you, and shout your hellos over the sizzle. Drop off the wine and toss your coat on the pile. Let's begin. It's Friday Night Lights at Marge Featherman's home on Hilltop Court, and whether this is your first time or not, you've been here before.

You like sausage and peppers?, she asks with keen interest as you walk through her door. She has sweet ones and hot ones brewing, and you'll no doubt have them both before the night's over, but she'll still scramble and throw something else on the stove if it makes you happy.



Marge, now 81, is throwing a dinner party, as she does every Friday. Seriously. Every Friday. She has been doing it ever since she lost her beloved husband and “hero”, George, to cancer, to dementia and, ultimately, to multi-organ shut down. Three-plus years and counting now. Sometimes it's wings for four. Sometimes it's too-much-to-eat, family style platters for a shoulder-to-shoulder eighteen. Whatever. The door's open, so come on in.

Marge has that half Irish, half Italian tough dame swagger: she'll hit you with that white-haired sass when it feels right and throw the Neapolitan napalm when you say you're full. *Have a second scoop of potatoes*, and she'll tell you her stories, the kind of out-there, no-way stories only wide-open hearts can live. She grew up in Rahway, the extroverted, joyous baby of the six siblings, the only public high schooler, happy but poor. In her mid-twenties, she met George at the car wash in Elizabeth where she worked. He was in a broken, hapless marriage and wanted to date her. She told him to bring in the divorce papers and maybe she'd think about it. They were married fifty years. *Do you want some salad?*

For nearly three decades, George and Marge lived in Whitehouse, where they owned and operated Mountain View Stables Farm. The couple raised pigs, raised two kids and raised hundreds of Christmas trees, which they sold at cut rates to the community for years. Eventually, they retired from the farm and moved to Union, in a house the Feathermans have called home for twenty years.

It was neighbors John and Chris Clark who most likely talked her into it. Three years ago, upon George's passing, the three thought it might be a neat idea to lift her spirits to have a neighborhood dinner party, and so they got it going. Over time, the Friday evening supper club grew to include more friends, more family, more loved ones. Even through a pandemic. *We knew we were gonna lose our minds alone in the house all day with this COVID crap, so we had to stay together.*

Some folks swoop in and out through the weeks as once-in-a-whilers. Others are more regular, practically with their own assigned seats 'round the table. The FM radio from the living room blares the evening soundtrack, a welcome array of tunes everyone knows, from the teens to the old timers. They come with appetites, they come with laughs, and they come with love, and newcomers are welcomed in as long-lost friends, enticed to come back next week for the clams. *Just don't be a phony, and you're welcome here any time.*

The table is cleared by a couple spritely guests, as the dessert is prepared in the kitchen. It's an obvious time for reflection and taking it all in: The food. The fullness. The fun times they've shared.

George isn't there, of course, but in many ways, he's the reason they're here and he has a permanent seat at the table. He would be happy to witness it all: his wife among loved ones, this community of neighbors, this gorgeous flock of doves, congregating around their white-haired wonder.

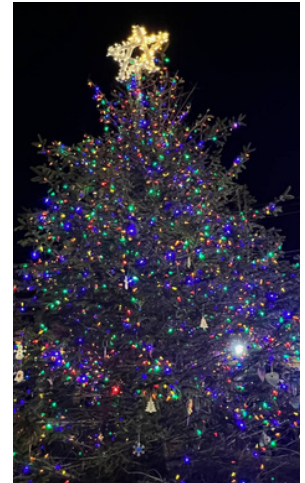
But never mind that. It's Friday night. *I make the best homemade whipped cream. Do you like peach cobbler?*

Around Town

Union Comes Together to Host its Second Festival of Lights

Our 2nd Annual Tree Lighting celebration built upon the success of our inaugural event last December with an even larger event for all! The celebration took place on Friday, December 9th, from 5-8pm, at our municipal building, and we estimate that 600-700 people were in attendance!

A sub-committee of township officials and residents was created eight weeks prior to the event to organize the evening and included Mayor DeGiralamo, Committeeman Lordi, Rec Committee members Corey McCormack and Eric Meisner, school board member Kara Cherney and volunteer Dan Dix and myself. Said Mayor DeGiralamo: "This was our first event that we have done a second time", Mayor DeGiralamo. "As a result, we were much better prepared for this experience. Our tree planning team worked pretty seamlessly together, and once again, our community came together to volunteer for it, too. I'm proud of what we've created and now sustained."



Numerous eateries donated food and desserts for the occasion, including: Pattenburg House (chili), Jerzees (pizzas), Dominick's Pizza (lasagna, sausage and peppers, pasta), Mountain View Chalet (chicken tenders), Clinton Station Diner (sandwiches), Designer Dawgs (hot dogs), and ShopRite (cookies, brownies and sweets).

We had some returning staples this year for our lighting ceremony, including the tree and lights (thank you again, Dan Dix), tree ornaments by our Union Township elementary school students, a Santa appearance (thank you, Pattenburg Volunteer Fire Company), a s'mores making station (thank you again, Michael Fariello and our adult and kid volunteers) and a photo collage presentation (thanks to all those who submitted photos to us). New features this year included "DJ Primetime" Scott Farrell, a "KidsZone" featuring games and crafts (thank you, Corey McCormack) and the placement of a nine-foot menorah (thank you to Rabbi Eli Kornfeld and Chabad of Hunterdon County for the incredible donation to our town). Finally, and as a last-minute and surprising addition, resident Dan Ingram created more than a hundred customized tree ornaments, marking this year's occasion and highlighting our recently crafted township logo.

The event could not have taken place without the efforts of many, including our amazing Roads crew (led by Kory Fleming), the OEM/CERT/logistics team (led by Dan Dix and OEM Coordinator Glenn Roth), Pattenburg Volunteer Fire and nearly forty residents/volunteers, who assisted with the set-up and take-down of tents, tables and decorations, as well as working the food and drink stations throughout the evening. It was a perfect way for the township to wrap up its community event calendar for the year, which included our first-ever springtime spectacular *FinnFest*, the epic multi-municipality competition *The Hunterdon Games* and the return of our Union Township Community Day. "I can't get over how much spirit has returned to our town this year", resident and volunteer Mary Glacken noted. "It felt like the whole town was there, and it was great to see so many faces I hadn't seen for some time. Union is back!"



Leadership in Focus

Seeing the Town from the Eye of the Stiger



Page Stiger is the gentleman in the room.

The Union Township committeeman and octogenarian usually is the one who listens first, considers options next, then charts the path for his peers. Close your eyes, and his words, in baritone voice, thoughtful and reasoned, arrive like a comfortable offering from a *Prairie Home Companion* episode. Page grew up not in Lake Wobegon, but a Jersey kid. His family was hit hard by the economy – his father, ever-frugal, was forced to scrap his own college plans to provide. Page, the jovial, somewhat disruptive oldest child of three, shared a cramped room with his younger brother, growing up more at odds with one another than at peace. When Page wasn't working around town (starting at \$0.35/hour mowing lawns and painting and running a paper route), he and his brother made good use of the outdoors, playing baseball on the field down the road or tennis a few blocks away.

A major turning point was his matriculation at The Citadel, and he counts his college tennis coach, Colonel Bunch, a strong influence. "I lacked discipline, so I needed The Citadel", Page reminisces. "I was just an average student then, but I interviewed well." He survived his *plebe* year, muddled through his second, then flourished at the end, with the courses and professors of business administration inspiring him. After a requisite two years in the US Army, as an Artillery Officer, Page spent time in a Hawk missile unit in Key West (the area still hot from the Cuban Missile Crisis), then got shipped to Fort Sill, where he managed a Pershing missile battery. Upon leaving the Army, he returned to Jersey. Soon after, at the Millburn Train Station, he ran once again into Sandy.

They knew each other in high school but never connected. Sandy, two years younger, had previously been underwhelmed by the "tame" Page, but perhaps his time at The Citadel and the Army gave Page stronger resolve. Though he had considered Sandy out of his league, he made it clear, to himself and to others: "*That's the woman I'm gonna marry*". And that's exactly what they did, following a brief courtship. When Page is not calling Sandy his "bride", decades later, he refers to her as "my oak". Flexible, loving and compassionate. They welcomed their first daughter, Michele, then Laurie two years later. Their third, Christine, died in her youth from a neurodegenerative disorder. The care required for her was all consuming, and through it all, the family endured. "A lot of couples wouldn't have survived that sort of thing", Sandy offers. "But our relationship was built on love and understanding. We made it through." The Stiger family spent time in Cedar Grove and Bernardsville before moving to Union in 1998. They chose their 60-acre property for the pond, its privacy and its ideal setting to train dogs (raising about seven of them, including Tucker, their six-year-old black Lab). The colonial farmhouse is from the early 1800s, the low ceilings and exposed beams adding to its charm.

Page's five-decade career has ranged the gamut, from computer sales for IBM to multinational lending to private banking for a major New York bank. He then joined Summit Bancorp, where he was asked to manage the human resources (HR) team. It's the HR portion of it that gives him the most pride, having worked in the business for large companies and then his own in the back half of his career. Page seems to thrive off the development of, and investment in, *people*, and unsurprisingly, he called his own HR LLC "Human Capital Consulting".

Page has spent much of his last two decades in community service, through his involvement with 4-H, on the vestry at St. John's on the Mountain, on the township's School Board, and, since 2018, on the Township Committee and Environmental Commission. His finance chops are brought to bear on budgeting, and his analytic acumen is utilized for his assessment of township roads. He has leveraged with success his HR skill set in much of what he does, with a "steady as she goes" philosophy. When problems arise, as is wont in municipal decision making, he steps up to quell interpersonal bluster and to strive for resolution. Sandy describes Page as generous with others (giving them the clearing to be themselves), fair and understanding. Similar descriptors are used by Page's daughters: they adore his devotion, his unsmothering support and his ever-present sense of humor.

The compliments come quickly for Page within the Stiger household, and why not? He has been, for decades, the doting husband, the compassionate father...and surrounded by women, the gentleman in the room.

Odds and Ends

From our Environmental Commission (UTEC)...

We are a ten-member group, with two members who are liaisons to our Township Committee and Planning Board. The Commission's main goals are to advise and to educate our governing bodies and residents on environmental matters and ways to protect the environment, to advocate for environmentally friendly development, to participate in community events, and to facilitate public outreach to promote the protection of our natural resources.

Last year, members of the Commission attended and manned tables at *FinnFest* and Community Day and hosted an Environmental Commission Day at Finn Park. We also organized a community clean up, hosted a well testing program for residents, and handed out reusable shopping bags at dumpster days. This year, we are looking to support a tree planting effort at Finn Park. As our residents know, the emerald ash borer has decimated the ash tree population in Union (and across New Jersey). Our town is removing many of the dead trees in the park and along township roadways. This is a monumental effort. UTEC is taking some action to help replace the trees, and you can be part of this effort! Please refer to upcoming newsletters for more details about a tree planting day at Finn Park. Participants also will receive a sapling to plant on their own properties.

The township's Environmental Commission meets on the second Tuesday of the month, at 7pm at the municipal building. Our contact information is utec@uniontwp-hcnj.org. Please join us and be a part of bringing back the green!



...And a different shade of green



The 8th Annual Friendly Sons of St. Patrick (FSSP) St. Patrick's Day Parade will step off at 3:00 PM on Sunday, March 12th, 2023, and it will be bigger than ever with more bands, more marching groups, and more attractions. The Parade will be the centerpiece of a series of events being held in and around Clinton, NJ to mark St. Patrick's Day. The Parade will highlight Irish American traditions and culture, including six Pipe and Drum bands, along with world class Irish dancers, musicians, singers, public service groups, veterans, vintage cars, canine groups and much more. Parade Co-Chair Brian Manning added "For many years now, the Friendly Sons have organized the St. Patrick's Day Parade. It has grown to be the largest single-day event in Clinton, family-friendly and entertaining for all ages young and old."

Bill Wilson, pivotal to the organization's philanthropic efforts, has been named this year's Parade Grand Marshal and Don O'Keefe, the organization's treasurer for many years, has been named the Irishman of the Year. In addition, this year's celebration will have more Union Township representation than ever before, as **both the honored Super Student and Special Olympian of the parade are proud residents of our township!**

This year, the parade will be the centerpiece of a number of events held on St. Patrick's Weekend of Clinton. Events include: the Clinton Sunrise Rotary Children's Party on March 11th (12pm - 3pm), the Traditional Irish Pub Night on March 11th (5pm - 9pm), the FSSP Parade on March 12th, and the Parade After Party on March 12th (immediately following the parade and featuring the band The Amish Outlaws at the Red Mill).

The People and Contacts Behind Our Town

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Local Event Calendar

COUNTRY LINE DANCING

Muddy Waters Gastropub
BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP, NJ
Dates: Wednesday evenings
Time: Starting at 7:30pm

SWEETHEART'S WEEK

Downtown Clinton businesses
CLINTON, NJ
Dates: 2/7 - 2/14
Times: Regular business hours

VALENTINE'S DAY DINNER

Jerzees Pizza
BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP, NJ
Date: 2/14
Time: 4pm-8pm

BREAKING INTO THE VOICEOVER WORLD

Bucks County Playhouse
NEW HOPE, PA
Dates: Mondays, 2/13 - 3/6
Time: 6:30-8:30pm

HAIRSPRAY

State Theatre
EASTON, PA
Date: 2/18
Time: 7pm

THE BOOK OF MORMON

State Theatre
EASTON, PA
Date: 3/7 - 3/9
Time: 7pm

RUN OF THE MILL 5K

Clinton Community Center
CLINTON, NJ
Date: 3/11
Time: Starts at 8am

FRIENDLY SONS OF ST. PATRICK ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

Main Street
CLINTON, NJ
Date: 3/12
Time: 3pm - 5pm

ST. PAT'S PARADE AFTER PARTY

Feat. Amish Outlaws
Red Mill
CLINTON, NJ
Date: 3/12
Time: Starts at 5pm

2nd ANNUAL MAYOR'S FUNDRAISER

Feat. Jimmy Leahey Band
Pattensburg House
UNION TOWNSHIP, NJ
Date: 3/17
Time: 8pm-11pm

OLIVER!

Music Mountain Theatre
LAMBERTVILLE, NJ
Dates: Fri/Sat/Sun, 3/17 - 4/9
Times: Vary by date

EASTER EGG HUNT

Clinton Community Center
CLINTON, NJ
Date: 4/1
Time: 11am - 1pm

EASTER EGG HUNT

Finn Park
UNION TOWNSHIP, NJ
Date: 4/2
Time: 11am - 1pm

FINNFEST!

Finn Park
UNION TOWNSHIP, NJ
Date: 5/7
Times: TBD

