

Harrison Herald



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harrisonherald.com

To Our Readership & Advertisers

For the past 25 years, Shoreline Publishing Inc., has published *Westchester Jewish Life*. After much consideration, we have decided to cease publication as of January 2026.

We thank all our loyal readers and advertisers throughout the years.

We will continue to publish our 5 monthly community newspapers and quarterly magazine along with our specialty publications.

Westchester County Celebrates The 50th Anniversary of The Office for People with Disabilities

Westchester County is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Office for People with Disabilities (OFPWD), marking five decades of service, innovation and leadership in accessibility and supporting residents with disabilities across the County.

The Office, which was formally established on January 1, 1975, was originally named the Westchester County Office for the Handicapped/Disabled. Created to help the County comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, it opened as one of the earliest local government offices of its kind, setting a statewide standard for accommodations and support for people with disabilities.

Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins said: "For 50 years, the Westchester County Office for People with Disabilities has been a driving force in ensuring that every resident



— regardless of their unique abilities — can access the services, programs and opportunities they deserve. This Office has led the way in this space since before the Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA) existed, and it continues to shape a more inclusive Westchester County today. Celebrating this milestone reaffirms our commitment to removing barriers, expanding access,

and uplifting the voices of people with disabilities across our County."

Director of OFPWD Carin Horowitz said: "It is an honor to join the Office for People with Disabilities in its 50th year. I am dedicated to continuing its legacy of access, advocacy education and inclusion."

Advocate and Community Work Assistant for OFPWD Jeffrey Zitofsky said: "This anniversary is deeply personal to me. Because I live with the challenges and triumphs of disability, I know it's vital to have a place that listens, advocates and acts. This is what our office does and I'm honored and grateful to not only include, but seek out and embrace our constituents with these same lived experiences to inform our work shaping policy."

Westchester County Board of Legislators Chair Vedat Gashi said: "Fifty

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Maureen Skrilow
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Chrissy Hazelton

Cheers to the New Year!

Grateful for the trust you placed in me this past year. Here's to the year ahead and the opportunities it brings.



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Westchester Nonprofits Sound Alarm on Rising Poverty and Basic Needs Crisis

Westchester Children's Association (WCA), the county's leading independent voice for the children and youth of Westchester, held its 2nd Annual Poverty Pulse Panel Discussion on Thursday, December 11 at the YWCA in White Plains, NY. The discussion was led by a panel of nonprofit leaders who convened to confront what they describe as a widening disconnect between official poverty data and the lived experience of families across Westchester County.

The WCA's newly created online dashboard gathers timely data from five partner organizations: 914 Cares, Feeding Westchester, The Sharing Shelf, West Hab, and United Way of Westchester and Putnam. The dashboard shows that despite newly released data from the Federal Government which points to a drop in the Poverty Rate in 2024 from 11.1% to 7.4%, the demand for basic services like food, housing, and basic essentials continues to grow.

Limarie Cabrera, Director of Data, Finance, and Operations for WCA noted, "the Federal Poverty Rate is not only a delayed measure, but it has not been updated since its creation in the 1960s when food was the primary expense, and



it doesn't adjust for regional costs of living." She added, "Despite the decrease in the Poverty Rate, demand for essential services has been increasing."

The discussion revealed steep increases in requests for essential services including food, clothing, diapers, rental assistance, and utility support.

"I don't believe the poverty numbers," said Deborah Blatt, Founder and Executive Director of the Sharing Shelf. "This year we experienced a 45 percent increase in demand at some points. Month after month, we saw at least 100 additional requests for clothing. The need keeps rising."

Food insecurity trends echoed the same urgency. According to Tami Wilson, COO of Feeding Westchester, "Last year we moved 21.1 million pounds of food. The year before that, 23.2 million," said Wilson. "Those numbers reflect our resources, not the need. If you gave us \$50 million tomorrow, we would still have families waiting for food."

Additionally, helpline and social service responders are receiving increasing pleas from households who have exhausted all other options. "More callers are from working households. It's not that people aren't trying or aren't working," said Avery Zuvic of the United

Way of Westchester and Putnam. "Some are working two jobs and still can't afford utilities or food. They come to us because they've already tried everywhere else."

The panel shared that rising demand strains nonprofit capacity and exposes systemic gaps for families whose incomes don't qualify them for assistance but they still struggle to afford basic needs.

According to Sarah Carmona of 914 Cares, The Urban Institute recently calculated that Westchester County requires more than 8 million diapers per year just to meet need among low- and moderate-income families, a figure nonprofit leaders say demonstrates how official poverty measures underestimate real hardship.

Housing also remains a key issue for families. "The poverty rate on paper does not reflect the lived reality of families struggling to keep a roof overhead in Westchester." According to Elissa Ramos of Westhab, "In June of this year our shelter capacity was at 90%. In 2024 it was at 71% and we are seeing more and more people. And a spike in families."

Despite rising need, panelists emphasized continued commitment, innova-

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Jenkins Signs 2026 Budget in Face of Historic Fiscal Pressure from Federal Government

Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins officially signed the 2026 Westchester County Budget. The \$2.5 billion dollar, tax cap compliant, budget cuts almost all County Department budgets by 8%, including the County Executive's budget, and eliminates 180 positions, essentially cutting the County workforce by almost 5%.

Jenkins said: "Let me be clear: this budget was not shaped by ideology or politics, but by reality. In uncertain times, our responsibility is to lead, and this budget does exactly that. The \$2.5 billion dollar budget was shaped by one of the most challenging financial climates we have faced in years. The difficulties of 2025 will carry into 2026 and likely beyond, and this budget reflects the hard, necessary choices before us. This budget is a direct response to Trump turmoil coming out of Washington."

Deputy County Executive Richard Wishnie said: "Westchester County has approached this budget with clear eyes and a commitment to protecting our residents. The fiscal instability created

in Washington has forced counties across the nation to make extraordinarily difficult decisions, and Westchester is no exception. Yet even in the face of historic pressures, we crafted a responsible, disciplined spending plan that preserves essential services, avoids layoffs, and keeps faith with the people who rely on us every day."

Director of Operations Joan McDonald said: "As County Executive Jenkins has stated, 2026 will be a challenging year on multiple fronts for Westchester County government. To insure that we did not go into the County reserve fund and to insure that we are property tax compliant, we instituted an



County Executive Ken Jenkins

average 8% reduction in operating costs across all County departments; instituted a hard hiring freeze and eliminated 180 positions from the County workforce. We are able to do this without compromising Westchester County delivery of services."

Deputy Director of Operations Emily Saltzman said: "The 2026 Westchester County budget balances fiscal responsibility with the preservation of vital programs and services for our children, families and seniors."

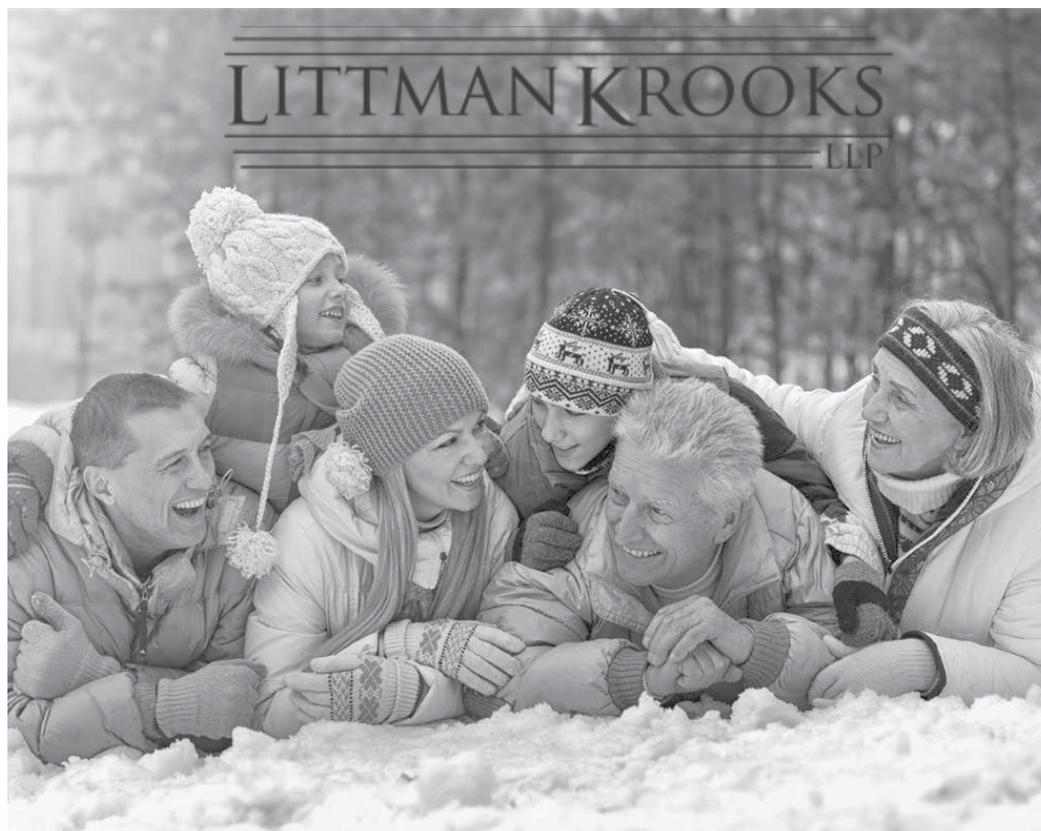
Budget Director Larry Soule said: "This budget reflects a disciplined, data-driven approach to governing in an extraordinarily volatile fiscal envi-

ronment. With federal actions driving up costs and constraining revenues, we scrutinized every line of the budget, made across-the-board reductions, and instituted a hiring freeze to ensure long-term stability. The result is a fiscally responsible, tax-cap-compliant plan without compromising the programs residents rely on."

Westchester County Board of Legislators Chairman Vedat Gashi said: "This balanced budget would not be possible without the input of residents from every corner of the County and the partnership of County Executive Jenkins. We are operating in a moment of unprecedented instability created by the Trump Administration. The Board has done everything possible to protect essential services, provide for our most vulnerable neighbors, and keep Westchester on stable financial footing. I am deeply thankful to everyone who made their voices heard throughout this budget process."

Legislator and Chair of the Board's Budget and Appropriations Committee

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Jenkins Signs 2026 Budget in Face of Historic Fiscal Pressure from Federal Government

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Jewel Williams Johnson said: “Today, with the County Executive signing the 2026 Budget, we conclude one of the most difficult budget seasons in recent memory—marked by federal decisions that slowed the economy and strained our local revenues. Working together, the Board of Legislators and the Administration made hard but necessary choices: every department absorbed cuts, hiring was frozen, and our nonprofit partners faced significant reductions, even as we worked to restore support and protect critical investments in child care and maternal health. As Chair of the Budget and Appropriations Committee, I am grateful to my colleagues, County Executive Ken Jenkins and his team, our staff, the County workforce, nonprofit partners, and every resident who engaged in this process. Together, we remain grounded, collaborative, and prepared to meet whatever the future may bring, with Westchester families at the heart of every decision.”

Majority Leader David T. Imamura said: “I am happy to support a budget that prioritizes the working people of Westchester. This budget keeps tax increases to a minimum while delivering essential services. At a time when the federal government uses human suffering as a weapon, we have been able to mitigate at least some of the harm imposed by this administration on Westchester residents.”

Vice Chair José I. Alvarado said: “Today’s signing by County Executive Jenkins marks the culmination of a year-round effort to address the diverse needs of our residents during times of unprecedented federal instability. As Vice Chair, I’m proud that this budget demonstrates financial accountability and our deep commitment to the well-being of the people of Westchester. Despite difficult decisions including department cuts and workforce reductions, the 2026 County Budget prioritizes childcare assistance, health programs, and support for our most vulnerable neighbors while keeping the tax increase as modest as possible.”

Majority Whip Terry Clements said: “With County Executive Jenkins’ signature, the 2026 County Budget becomes a testament to our shared commitment to both fiscal responsibility and the priorities of Westchester families during one of the most challenging budget seasons we’ve faced. With critical investments in childcare assistance, health programs, and resources for domestic violence survivors and food insecurity, I’m proud to

support a budget that protects essential services for our community while limiting the property tax increase.”

County Departments to Undergo an Average of 8% Savings Across-the-Board

- Hard Hiring Freeze and Elimination of 180 Positions - \$28 million
- Reductions in Contracts, Technical Services and Expenses - \$34.5 million
- Reductions in Overtime/Hourly - \$11.6 million
- Right Sizing Social Services Relief - \$5.2 million
- Reductions Equipment - \$4.5 million
- Reductions Materials and Supplies - \$2.6 million

Increasing Costs

For the 2026 adopted Operating Budget, the County is facing unavoidable financial pressures from the federal government that are largely mandated or tied to essential services.

The main contributors include:

- Rising Healthcare Costs - \$46.4 million
- Pension Growth - \$14 million
- Transportation and Utilization for Children with Special Needs - \$10 million
- An Increase in Debt Service - \$13 million

Prioritized Essential Services

Despite the mounting financial pressures, Jenkins remained committed to protecting the programs that residents rely on most, maintaining essential services, ensuring that funding continues for the programs that support those most in need, from vulnerable children to critical social services and community resources.

Program funding will include supporting food security efforts, ensuring that victims of domestic violence have the protection and resources they need, offering free vaccine clinics, recycling opportunities, and maintaining free workforce development programs and services including our One Stop, local job fairs, job training and entrepreneurial support. The County has also budgeted to include continuing senior nutrition programming and our TIPS telehealth initiative, and keeping our mobile crisis teams and youth mental health programming in place.

Additional Allocated Dollars:

- Low Income Child Care - \$16.6 million
- Access to Counsel Eviction Preven-

tion Programs - \$3.7 million

- Child Care Scholarships- \$2.5 million
- Mental Health Clinic- \$1.5 million
- Federally Qualified Health Centers - \$1 million
- Maternal Health - \$500 thousand
- HERRO Program - \$300 thousand

The \$2.5 billion dollar, tax cap compliant budget means that the average homeowner will pay roughly \$3 dollars more per month to sustain the level of service they have come to expect and

deserve.

Jenkins said: “The chaos and uncertainty coming out of Washington forced hard choices on Westchester County and on every other level of government. Here in Westchester we met that moment with discipline, honesty and resolve. We cut where we had to, protected what matters most, and delivered a budget that keeps Westchester County stable, compassionate, and fiscally sound.”

Appointments, 2026 Preliminary Budget Discussed at Harrison Board Meeting



BY STEPHEN E. LIPKEN

Harrison Mayor Richard Dionisio convened the Wednesday, December 10th Board meeting, beginning with appointments of Vincenzo Aprea and Patricia A. O’Callaghan to the Planning Board; Kim Ryan to the Zoning Board of Appeals; and Anthony Guglielmo to Planning Board of Appeals.

Other personnel actions include probational appointment of Laura Short to Senior Office Assistant—Automated Systems; transfer of Roseann Porto, Office Assistant—Automated from Building Department to Bureau of Fire Prevention. Authorization to accept the retirement of Recreation Department employee Dorothy Klein and appointment of Andrew Spatz to Zoning Board of Appeals. Authorization to accept retirement of Robert Siragusa from the Department of Public Works (DPW) Parks Division; probational appointment of Edward J. Ladin to the position of Fire Inspector at annual salary of \$125,000 and appointing Thomas Foristel as Interim Chairman of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Under Actions and Resolutions, Library Director Galina Chernykh requested holding the Taste of Harrison community event, sponsored by Harrison Public Library Foundation on May 17, 2026. Superintendent of Recreation, Gerry Salvo requested accepting a \$25,000 donation for the Summer Concert Series from an anonymous donor.

The Proposed 2026 Budget was approved by Roll Call Vote. Use of Fund Balance: \$1,400,000; Total Revenues, \$76,717,502. Town/Village Tax Rate by Entity: School Tax Rate, \$1,009.539783 (71%); County Tax Rate: \$281.880044 (20%); Town/Village Tax Rate: \$126.665987 (9%); Total: \$1,418.085814.

In Village Board Business, Village Engineer Michael Amodeo requested awarding the Fremont Street Municipal Parking Lot Project bid to Tony Casale, Inc. at cost not to exceed \$2,306,000.

The project will create additional parking for downtown visitors, and connect Halstead, Harrison Avenues and Fremont Street. Combined lot area will provide a total of 66 public parking stalls, including four stalls for Electric Vehicle Charging, new LED lighting and parklets at Halstead and Harrison Avenue entryways.

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Westchester County Legislators Boykin and Parker Receive Distinguished Service Award

The Westchester County Board of Legislators honored two outgoing members with the Westchester County Distinguished Service Award, the highest level of recognition the Board can bestow. The medals are awarded to individuals who have significantly benefited the general welfare and common good of the County through dedicated public service.

The honorees were Legislator Ben Boykin and Legislator Catherine F. Parker, both of whom left office December 31 having reached term limits.

Board Chairman Vedat Gashi (D-New Castle, Ossining, Somers, Yorktown) said, "Transitions on the Board are always bittersweet, but the departure of these two outstanding legislators seems especially poignant.

Boykin's long service to the public is extraordinary. Serving as NYSAC's 80th president and completing two terms as Chair of the Board during a period of tremendous change are accomplishments unlikely to be matched. He guided the legislature through the pandemic, ushering in technological



advances that kept the Board's work moving forward. He also led the first Board with majorities of women and people of color.

Parker dedicated 18 years to public service—six years on Rye City Council followed by six terms steadfastly representing District 7 on the Board. Her legislative leadership on environmental issues set a high standard for the future, improving quality of life for

the Sound Shore towns she represents and all of Westchester—from advancing flood-control measures, to creating a County Office of Sustainability, to stewarding the management of Rye Playland, a cherished County gem.

County Executive Ken Jenkins said, "I would like to extend my most heartfelt congratulations to my friends, Former Chair and Legislator Ben Boykin and Legislator Catherine Parker,

on their well-deserved retirement from the Westchester County Board of Legislators. Their years of dedicated service, thoughtful leadership, and commitment to the people of Westchester have left a profound impact on our communities.

During his tenure, both as legislator and Chair of the Board, Legislator Boykin guided his colleagues through

Senator Shelley B. Mayer Delivers 5,867 Donated Diapers to Westchester County Diaper Bank at the Sharing Shelf

On December 10, State Senator Shelley B. Mayer hosted a diaper drive at her annual Holiday Party and guests generously donated 5,867 diapers to the Sharing Shelf in Port Chester, to benefit the Westchester County Diaper Bank. The following day, Senator Mayer dropped off the diapers to support families throughout Westchester County. This year's diaper drive more than doubled last year's success, surpassing the 2,485 diapers donated in 2024.

According to the National Diaper Bank Network, in 2024, 46% of families with young children under four-years-old reported struggling to afford diapers. This report, though similar to the 47% reported in 2023, is a staggering increase from 33% in 2017. On average, families in New York spend between \$100 and \$120 per month on diapers, which are not covered by SNAP or WIC benefits.

The data also shows that strain in affording diapers can have real implications on the family's life – particularly the mother's. Mothers experiencing diaper insecurity also report profound feelings

of loneliness and hesitation asking for help out of fear of judgment and social exclusion. Further, 71% of mothers experience diaper insecurity, compared to 31% of women who do not struggle to afford diapers.

Senator Shelley Mayer said, "I am so proud and deeply grateful to live in a community that consistently steps up for friends and neighbors in need. For the second year in a row, I invited guests to my holiday party to bring diapers for the Westchester County Diaper Bank. At a time when so many are working hard to make ends meet and feeling their own financial pressures, and while the cost of diapers is so high, I continue to witness the best of our community. As an optimist, I remain firm that when we each do what we can, no matter how small the gesture, we can make life better for all. Thank you to everyone who donated diapers and to The Sharing Shelf for your partnership and work providing support to families across Westchester."

Deborah Blatt, Executive Director of the Sharing Shelf, said, "We are



thrilled to benefit from Senator Mayer's generous drive again this year. Diaper need is a reality for a growing number of Westchester families. According to the Urban Institute, it would take 8,076,000 diapers to ensure all low and moderate income families in Westchester have the diapers they need for their infants

and toddlers. These diapers will help The Sharing Shelf chip away at some of that monumental number. We also hope Senator Mayer's drive inspires others to get involved and organize more collections, allowing us to ease the burden and help keep infants and toddlers clean and cared for."

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Westchester Nonprofits Sound Alarm on Rising Poverty and Basic Needs Crisis

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tion, and collaboration across organizations. The YMCA's Executive Director Tiffany Hamilton asked participants, "What will you do with this data? Will I use it to influence and inform grants to tell the whole story of what exists in one of the wealthiest counties in our country? Will I use the data to inform legislation and advocacy agenda that yields real results? Because the children are watching, who will take this data and use it to change various systems?"

Adam Rabinovitch, Executive Director of WCA, concluded the event with a call to action to join Westchester Children's Association advocacy efforts to strive towards the goal of cutting child poverty in half by 2032. "This will take policy changes including expanding cash assistance to meet basic needs and ensuring child tax credits are received by families that qualify for them. We all must continue to rise up and support our children."

Anyone can sign up to receive advocacy alerts from WCA at www.wca4kids.org and learn more about poverty in Westchester by visiting the Poverty Pulse Dashboard on the site.

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BOTH HIPS REPLACED. HOME THE SAME DAY. THAT'S EXCEPTIONAL.

Jaime was told he would need two hip replacements, several months apart, which meant time away from work and family. Dr. Jakub Tatka at the White Plains Hospital Center for Orthopedics & Spine Surgery performed a minimally invasive anterior approach to replace both hips in just two hours, and the expert team had him walking out of the hospital that day.



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Table Hopping with Morris Gut: My Favorite Culinary Encounters of 2025!

I enjoyed many fine culinary experiences this past year. Here is a short list of favorite dishes and dining venues you should try not to miss in 2026! Winter Farmers Markets, too...



HEARTY SUNDAY ROAST DINNER AT JILL'S

Partners Ro Flanagan, Shane Clifford and Chef Brendan Donohue, proprietors of popular Jack's Bar & Kitchen, a popular Irish American tavern in Eastchester, premiered Jill's Bar & Restaurant in Mamaroneck, across from Harbor Island Park. Jill's, a colorful ode to modern Ireland, serves a winning combination of gastropub favorites and modern-Ameri-

can and European specialties along with a good dose of hospitality. The Fried Chicken Sandwich is a winner. There's also Truffle Parm Fries, Chili Roasted Cauliflower, Lobster Cobb Salad, Braised Beef Short Ribs, Ahi Tuna Bowl. Hearty Sunday Roast. Jill's, 100 W. Boston Post Road, Mamaroneck, off the corner of Mamaroneck Ave. Happy Hours. Weekend brunch. Closed Mondays. 914-341-1776 www.jillsbarandrestaurant.com

INDIAN STREET FOODS AT MUMBAI KATTA

Anita Gawde is a dynamo. At one moment she is greeting entering patrons, the next she disappears into the kitchen, the next she is on the dining room floor touting her menu: the tasty street foods of regional India. Anita and her husband Jayant Gawde have been marking their 1st. Anniversary with vibrant specialties plated with pizzazz. We recently feasted on a tasty tour of savory small plates: Samosa Chaat, Sabudana Vada, delectable Chicken Kathi Roll, ending with their delicious Chicken Masala and crispy crust-ed Shrimp Fry. The Kesar Phirni, their version of rice pudding, was a festive dessert. Anita and her friendly staff will

help you with the menu. Mumbai Katta, 227 Westchester Ave., Port Chester. 516-953-3265 www.mumbaikatta.com

ITALIAN OUT OF A DINER AT TRATTORIA VIVOLO

Cited by Forbes Magazine, Chef-owner and personable host Dean Vivolo serves his robust regional Italian cuisine out of a vintage diner just across from Harrison's Metro-North station. Sit at the counter, tuck into a booth, or take a table in the rear greenhouse and enjoy the surprising contemporary and traditional flavors emanating from his kitchen: tasty thin-crust-ed pizza; Crostino di Polenta topped with wild mushrooms, gorgonzola, and tomato sauce; Linguini Nere with bay scallops; Grilled Lamb Chops; Lasagna Bolognese al Forno; and wonderful Spaghetti a la Vongole. Fine wine list. Sparkling lights in the evenings. Seasonal outdoor patio. Free parking. Trattoria Vivolo, 301 Halstead Ave., Harrison. 914-835-6199 www.trattoriavivolo.com

TENDER BRISKET & BURGERS AT SMOKEHOUSE TAILGATE GRILL

Partners Mike Hoffer and Justin Zeytoonian re-opened their new industrial-designed BBQ restaurant in The Rockwell, a new building along North Ave., New Rochelle, near IONA. It is directly across from the shuttered original which they founded in 2007. The well edited menu includes a good selection of craft beers along with signature Tacos, BBQ Chicken and Racks of Ribs. Recently, we ordered their popular Brisket, and it was flavorful and tender. The Tomahawk Burger is prepared with Pat La Frieda beef and is a satisfying winner. The original Smokehouse Tailgate Grill is located at 587 North Ave., New Rochelle, not far from IONA College. (914-813-8686). Their second location: Smokehouse Tailgate Grill, 320 Mamaroneck Ave., Mamaroneck. (914-341-1655). www.shtailgate.com



ARTISANAL PIZZA FENICE

In just 3 years, John Gristina, proprietor of Pizza Fenice in Pelham, has become a pizzaioli to be reckoned with. The

buzz about his traditional and non-traditional pizzas and Italian/American fare have reached across the area often drawing lines of patrons to his cozy take-out pizza shop. (There are a few tables if you can score them.) Our recent indulgence: his Sunday Sausage & Peppers Pizza was an entirely decadent experience loaded with flavor. We finished it over two days. A must try! Pizza Fenice, 304 5th Ave., Pelham. 914-633-3332. www.pizzafenice.com

WINTER FARMERS MARKET'S RIGHT NOW

So, winter just started and you miss visiting your favorite farmer's market. Some of our most popular markets operate all winter, and while you may not get all the spring/summer/fall harvest can produce, it's still a good place to pick up a variety of artisanal goods such as meats, cheeses, jams, breads. Here are some markets worth a winter's drive. Check ahead for times and dates. Happy grazing:

Larchmont Winter Farmers Market, Metro-North upper lot, Chatsworth & Myrtle Blvd., Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., year-round. www.downtoearthmarkets.com

Hastings-on-Hudson Winter Farmers' Market, Commuter Parking Lot, across from Metro-North station, 134 Southside Ave., Hastings-on-Hudson. Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. www.hastingsfarmersmarket.org

Pleasantville Farmers Market, Metro-North Parking Lot, 10 Memorial Plaza, Pleasantville. Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. to 12, through March 2026. www.pleasantvillefarmersmarket.org

Irvington Winter Farmers' Market, Main Street School Auditorium, 110 Main St., Irvington. Sundays, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. www.theirvingtonfarmersmarket.org

Gossett's Farm Market, Gossett Brothers Nursery, 1202 Rt. 35, South Salem. Year round. Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. www.gossettbrothers.com

Cold Spring Indoor Farmers Market, Boscobel House and Gardens, 1601 Rt. 9D. Garrison. Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. www.coldspringfarmersmarket.org

(Morris Gut is a restaurant marketing consultant and former restaurant trade magazine editor. He has been tracking and writing about the food and dining scene in greater Westchester for 30 years. He may be reached at: 914-235-6591. Email: gutreactions@optonline.net)

Senator Mayer Announces Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Enrollment is Open to Assist New Yorkers with Cost of Home Heating

State Senator Shelley B. Mayer announced that enrollment is now open for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). This program can help eligible New Yorkers heat and cool their homes. Eligibility and benefits are based on income, household size, primary heating source, and the presence of a household member who is under age 6, age 60 or older, or permanently disabled.

Your household may be eligible for a Regular HEAP benefit if: your household's gross monthly income is at or below the current income guidelines for your household size, you receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, you receive federally funded Temporary Assistance (TA) or you receive Code A Supplemental Security Income (SSI Living Alone).

For more information and to find out if you qualify, visit: <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/>. Senator Mayer's office is also available to assist. Please call 914-934-5250 or email smayer@nysenate.gov

State Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, "I am very pleased that New York State has opened applications for Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to help ease the financial burden for eligible households this winter and keep their homes warm. When my Senate colleagues and I return to Albany in the new year, we will continue working hard to pass legislation and take meaningful action to address the utility affordability crisis. In the meantime, HEAP benefits will provide relief to many households in need. I encourage everyone who is eligible to apply and, as always, my office is ready to assist."



Disinheriting a Family Member from Your Estate Plan



BY BERNARD A. KROOKS, CERTIFIED ELDER LAW ATTORNEY
SPECIAL GUEST CONTRIBUTOR: AMY C. O'HARA, CERTIFIED ELDER LAW ATTORNEY

Disinheriting a family member is a sensitive and often emotional topic. It must be handled carefully. Many people assume that they are entirely free to leave their property to whomever they choose. However, New York law has specific rules that protect spouses and restrict the ability to disinherit them. Understanding who can be disinherited, how to do it properly, and the potential challenges involved can help ensure that your estate plan truly reflects your intentions and is upheld after your passing.

The most important limitation under New York law concerns spouses. A spouse cannot be completely disinherited unless there is a valid prenuptial or postnuptial agreement in which the spouse waives the right to inherit, or they signed a waiver of right of election in line with state law and requirements. Otherwise, even if you write a Will leaving your spouse nothing,

New York's "right of election" gives the surviving spouse the legal right to claim approximately one-third of the estate. This includes probate assets, those that pass under the Will, as well as certain non-probate assets, that pass outside the Will, such as joint accounts, payable-on-death designations, and even certain property transfers made before death if done to intentionally deprive the spouse of inheritance rights. This rule underscores a key principle of New York law: spouses are protected and disinheriting one is legally difficult unless both parties knowingly agreed to it in advance.

Children, on the other hand, do not have the same protections under New York law. Many people are surprised to learn that a parent is legally permitted to disinherit an adult child for any reason, or for no reason at all. The key is clarity: a Will must make it unmistakably clear that the omission was intentional and not accidental. Estate litigation often arises when someone is left out of a Will with no explanation, leading disinherited family members to challenge the document.

When someone decides to disinherit a child or other family member, the Will should directly address the decision. Sometimes a person writes: "I make no provision for my son John, not for lack of affection, but for reasons personal to me." Other times, the document simply states that the individual is intentionally

excluded or that they are receiving \$1 to clearly demonstrate awareness and intention. Contrary to popular belief, leaving someone \$1 is not necessary, and in some cases can even be insulting. A well-drafted statement of intentional omission is usually sufficient and preferable.

It is also important to understand that disinheritance does not automatically prevent legal challenges. A disgruntled family member can still attempt to contest the Will by claiming that the person who created it lacked mental capacity, was unduly influenced, or did not execute the document properly. The more contentious the family dynamics, the greater the risk of post-death litigation. To minimize challenges, individuals should take additional steps, such as executing the Will under attorney supervision (which creates a legal presumption of validity), and adding a "no-contest clause," which states that any beneficiary who challenges the Will risks losing their inheritance. A no-contest clause can deter challenges, but it only works if the person being discouraged has something to lose; if they were already receiving nothing, they have no incentive to refrain from contesting.

Additionally, many people forget that disinheritance in a Will only applies to probate assets. If a family member is named as a beneficiary on a life insurance policy or retirement account, or as joint owner of a bank account, those assets

pass outside the Will. Therefore, part of effective disinheritance is ensuring that all beneficiary designations, account titles, property deeds, and trust documents consistently reflect the estate plan.

Disinheriting someone is rarely done casually. Whether the motivation is estrangement, financial irresponsibility, lifetime gifts already made, or personal reasons, it is wise to consult with an experienced estate planning attorney to ensure that the wishes are expressed legally and effectively. Outside of spouses, New York law allows individuals broad discretion, but it also provides protections and safeguards to prevent unjust or accidental outcomes. Crafting a careful and thoughtful estate plan not only ensures that your intentions are honored but also reduces the likelihood of painful disputes among those you leave behind.

Bernard A. Krooks, Esq., is a founding partner of Littman Krooks LLP. He was named 2021 "Lawyer of the Year" by Best Lawyers in America® for excellence in Elder Law and has been honored as one of the "Best Lawyers" in America since 2008. He was elected to the Estate Planning Hall of Fame by the National Association of Estate Planners & Councils (NAEPC). Krooks is past Chair of the Elder Law Committee of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel (ACTEC). Mr. Krooks may be reached at (914-684-2100) or by visiting the firm's website at www.littmankrooks.com.

Westchester County Celebrates The 50th Anniversary of The Office for People with Disabilities

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years ago, the Westchester County Board of Legislators led the creation of an office dedicated to ensuring access, dignity, and opportunity for residents with disabilities. That leadership helped set a standard that still guides our work today. As we celebrate this milestone, we remain committed to building a more inclusive and accessible Westchester."

Chair of the Board's Human Services Committee and Legislator Nancy Barr said: "Congratulations to the Office for People with Disabilities on reaching this milestone; this Office is a valuable resource which has only become more important over time. In 2020, I was pleased to help formalize the Advisory Council for People with Disabilities, which serves as a voice

from people with lived experiences to help guide the County's policy and programs. The result has been improved and expanded programs, additional partnerships, and the inclusion of new voices from the impacted community."

In its earliest years, OFPWD focused on program accessibility, employment opportunities for people with disabilities, physical modifications to public facilities, and ensuring equal access to County-administered services. Early achievements include a survey of all County-owned buildings to identify and eliminate physical barriers (1979), the provision of sign-language interpretation for public programs and appointments, and program design for Westchester County's ParaTransit System (1983). The Office also pub-

lished resource guides to help residents more easily identify services available to them.

In 1977, the Office was recognized by the New York State Department of Health, Education and Welfare as a leader in service provision for the disability community. In 1978, the Office formed a council made up of community members with disabilities, County staff and service providers, ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience guided its mission and priorities. In 2020, Westchester County reinstated the Advisory Council on People with Disabilities.

Fifty years later, OFPWD continues to serve as a critical resource for information, referrals, technical assistance and advocacy for individuals

with disabilities and their families. The Office also serves as the ADA Coordinator for Westchester County, advising on compliance with State and Federal disability rights laws and supporting local government activities to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability.

The Office's services include:

- Information and referral
- ParaTransit application processing
- Advocacy for constituents, County staff and County departments
- Service connections
- Site surveys to ensure equal access
- Education and community outreach

For more information about OFPWD, visit our website or call 914-995-2957.

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West Harrison Man Arrested for Possessing and Sharing Child Sex Abuse Material

Westchester County District Attorney Susan Cacace announced that Richard Salerno, Jr., 46, of West Harrison, was arrested and charged with Promoting an Obscene Sexual Performance by a Child, a class D felony, and Possessing an Obscene Sexual Performance by a Child, a class E felony.

Salerno was arraigned in Rye Town Court on Dec. 11 and pleaded not guilty to the charges. Bail was set at \$5,000 cash/\$10,000 bond/\$25,000 partially secured bond. The defendant subsequently posted bail.

The defendant is scheduled to appear next on Jan. 13 in Harrison Town Court.

DA Cacace said: "As I promised during the campaign, crimes against or involving children are a top priority for my administration. We will seek to hold accountable anyone who targets, exploits or injures children as part of their criminal conduct."

On two separate occasions in 2024 and 2025, the defendant possessed and/or shared media of children being sexually abused, according to a felony complaint filed in the case.

Salerno's employment history includes work for the athletics department of an area school district in the late 2000's.

Anyone with additional information about this defendant is asked to call the DA's tip line at (914) 995-TIPS (8477).

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Edward Shapiro, President and Publisher
es@shorelinepub.com

Cynthia Pena, Editor, Art Director
shorelineproduction@gmail.com

Nancy Coveney, Editor
nancy.coveney@shorelinepub.com

Lauren Levine, Advertising Account Executive
levinelaur@gmail.com

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Licensed Associate R.E. Broker | NY & CT
C: 914.450.8338 O: 914.341.1561
julia.brasesco@compass.com

Taylor McKenna

Licensed R.E. Salesperson | NY
C: 914.774.2128 O: 914.341.1561
taylor.mckenna@compass.com

Hope Stone Brasesco

Licensed R.E. Salesperson | NY & CT
C: 347.276.6511 O: 914.341.1561
hope.stone@compass.com

Annalise Stack

Licensed R.E. Salesperson | NY & CT
C: 914.282.5619 O: 914.341.1561
annalise.stack@compass.com

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