Harrison Herald

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Donations to Harrison Food Pantry and Harrison Holiday Project Presented at Town Board Meeting



BY STEPHEN E. LIPKEN

Supervisor Thomas Scappaticci convened the October 22nd Harrison Town Board meeting, beginning with Girl Scout Troop #2402 Leaders Megan Darrell and Andrea Viehe-Naess presenting a donation of $463 from Mason and Lauren Triano to the Harrison Food Pantry. Mason is four years old and ran a lemonade stand to make money to donate; $246 was donated by Girl Scout Troop 2402; and the Pfizer Foundation contributed $250.

Next, Jenny Schenk and Toni Braiotta of the Harrison Holiday Project said that they work with the community to raise funds for families in need, coordinating with the Department of Community Services, enabling children to submit a "wish list" for items

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A Grandfathers Story Reaches a New Generation

BY ASHLEY KEATING

Before *Mr. Fish: An Under-the-Sea Adventure* became a children's book, it was just a bedtime story my grandfather aka (Poppy) told a long time ago.

Poppy moved to Harrison at age six, when he was in first grade. His years growing up there included playing on a Harrison basketball team in grade school and then raising his family. He also served two years in the United States Army, stationed in Greenland.

To me, he is the grandfather who loved the beach and took us fishing. Some of my childhood memories with him include catching crabs in Cape May. Looking back, the ocean setting of Mr. Fish feels right at home alongside those memories.

Poppy created the story himself and first told it to his daughters when they were little. Years later, he told it to his grandchildren. Although my mother had heard the story as a child, I learned it directly from him.



Vito "Poppy" Sabia and his granddaughter Ashley Keating

During those sleepovers, long car rides and days at the beach, he would tell my brother Jake and I the story of Mr. Fish, and we absolutely loved it every time he told it. There was no printed book

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Board Celebrates Italian American Heritage Month



The Westchester County Board of Legislators celebrated Italian American Heritage Month on last month with a ceremony honoring West Harrison business owner Dave Franze.

Franze, whose parents emigrated from Calabria, founded West Harrison Fitness Center in 1979 and has organized Harrison's free summer concert series for two decades.

Chairman Vedat Gashi, who convened the ceremony, said, "Italian Americans have helped build Westchester for generations. Their spirit of family, hard work, and community is woven into every corner of our county. This year's honorees show what that legacy looks like in action: pride in where you come from, turned into service for the people around you. That is a tradition worth celebrating, this month and every month."

Legislator Jenn Puja (D–White Plains, Scarsdale, West Harrison) said, "Dave Franze represents the best of our Italian American community—a proud son of Italian immigrants, he has spent decades giving his time, energy, and heart to bringing people together in West Harrison and beyond. Dave's lifelong commitment to family, small business, and community embodies the values and traditions of his heritage as he continuously and proudly remains true to his roots."



Jagger Fenton and Jason Crupi Receive 2026 Christopher Mello Award



Rye High School senior Jagger Fenton and Harrison High School senior Jason Crupi received the 2026 Christopher Mello Award at Nugent Stadium on Oct. 17.

Rye High School senior Jagger Fenton and Harrison High School senior Jason Crupi were recognized for their leadership, character and commitment as recipients of the 2026 Christopher Mello Award at Nugent Stadium on Oct. 17.

The award was presented ahead of the annual Rye-Harrison football game. Each year, the memorial scholarship is awarded to one senior from Rye High School and one senior from Harrison High School in honor of Christopher Mello, a 1994 Rye High School graduate who lost his life on Sept. 11, 2001.

Recipients are selected for embodying qualities associated with Mello's legacy, including leadership, competitiveness and academic achievement.

Fenton, a three-year starter and varsity co-captain for the Garnets, has also remained involved with Rye's youth football program. He plans to continue his football career at Holy Cross next year.

Crupi, a two-year captain for the Harrison Huskies, has earned all-section honors and was named to the LoHud Super 11.

This year, the scholarship increased to $7,500 for each recipient to support their education.

The Rye City School District congratulates Fenton and Crupi on receiving the 2026 Christopher Mello Award and carrying forward Mello's legacy through their accomplishments on and off the field.

A Grandfathers Story Reaches a New Generation

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to open. The story came from Poppy, and hearing him tell it was part of what made it special.

Now that I am a mother of two boys, I have begun sharing that same story with my own children. Telling it again made me want to preserve it in a form our family could keep and return to for years to come.

That wish became *Mr. Fish: An Under-the-Sea Adventure*, adapted from Poppy's original story. The book follows Ashley and her little brother, Jake, as they meet a friendly fish who takes them beneath the waves. Along the way, they meet Mr. Crab, Mr. Lobster and Ms. Clam, explore together and play hide-and-seek before returning home.

The project began as a family keepsake—a way to honor Poppy and give his story a lasting place on our children's bookshelves. Recently, I was able to give him a finished copy, bringing the story back to the person who first imagined it.

Sharing the book with other families gives this childhood memory a new chapter. My hope is that parents, grandparents and children will enjoy reading it together and perhaps be reminded of stories within their own families.

For our family, every reading carries a connection to Poppy: his imagination, our sleepovers and a little fish who has traveled from his daughters' childhoods into the lives of his great-grandchildren.

The book is available on Amazon: https://amzn.to/47nWRSC

Sacred Heart Greenwich's Student Literary and Art Magazine, Perspectives Earns Top National Honors



Sacred Heart Greenwich is proud to announce that Perspectives, its student-run art and literary magazine, has earned an All American rating, the highest honor awarded by the National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA), along with a Mark of Distinction in the Concept category for its 2025–26 Portals.

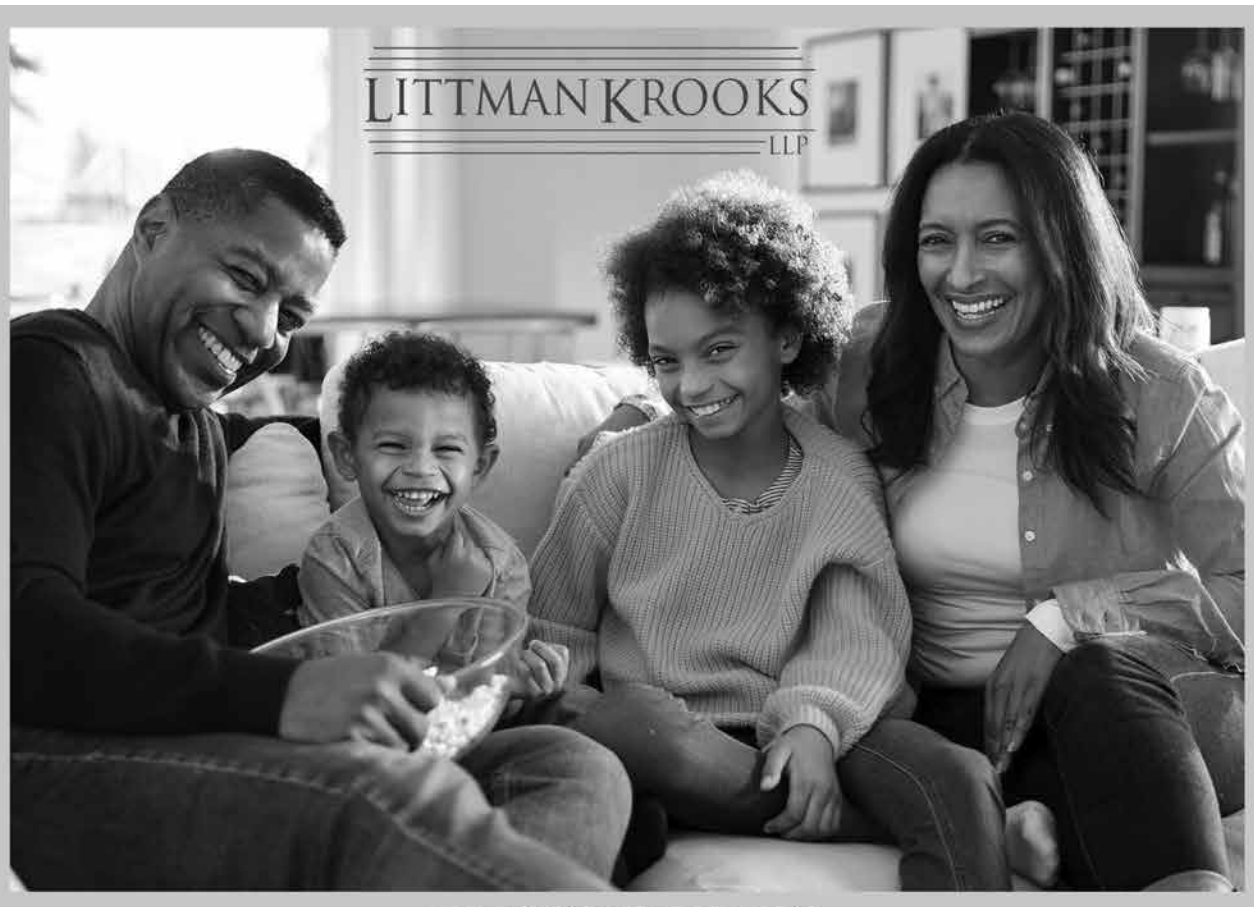
This recognition is part of the NSPA merit awards and critique program, which evaluates student publications nationwide. The NSPA is a national organization supporting student journalists and scholastic journalism advisers, including those who guide literary and arts magazines.

In its evaluation, the NSPA praised Portals for its cohesive and thoughtfully developed theme, noting that it "stood out as dynamic and well developed and remained a cohesive thread throughout the publication." Judges also commended the magazine's overall execution, describing it as "clever and memorable" and highlighting the staff's "professionalism and exemplary skill."

The judges also recognized the publication's creative range, citing its "enlightening literary works, dynamic visuals and logical layouts." They also praised the originality of the student writing, noting that the poetry and prose demonstrated "original thinking," while remaining "fresh, inventive and reflective of students' unique voices."

The magazine's visual elements received particular recognition for their "technical merit and creativity." Judges praised the staff's selection and presentation of photography, drawings, paintings and three-dimensional artwork, describing the result as "an outstanding exhibit" that reflects "thoughtful curation and artistic range."

This national recognition celebrates the creativity, collaboration and dedication of Perspectives' student editors, writers and artists, whose work brings the publication's vision to life. The magazine's 2026–27 edition is already underway, continuing a tradition of showcasing the distinctive voices and artistic talents of Sacred Heart Greenwich students. Faculty mentors Dr. Cristina Baptista and Miss Danielle Gennaro expressed their pride in the student editorial team, staff and contributors whose commitment and creativity made this achievement possible.



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Harrison Men's Soccer Tournament Honors Tori DiLeo, Benefits Tough Like Tori Foundation

The Harrison Men's Age 30-and-Over Soccer Program hosted a tournament at Harrison High School on Oct. 10 to benefit the Tough Like Tori (TLT) Foundation, turning a morning of friendly competition into a meaningful tribute to a young Harrison resident remembered for her strength, determination, and the lasting impact she made during her short lived life.

Several teams competed in short round-robin matches throughout the morning, bringing together players and spectators for a community event centered on a shared cause. Onlookers enjoyed coffee and doughnuts while cheering on the teams and supporting the foundation's mission.



Jerry and Nicole DiLeo stand in front of the Tough Like Tori Foundation banner at the Harrison Men's Age 30-and-Over Soccer Tournament, honoring their daughter Tori and supporting awareness and research for rare pediatric kidney cancer.

Before the first match, Nicole DiLeo spoke briefly about her daughter, Tori, her legacy and thanked the players for dedicating the rainy Sunday morning to the foundation. She shared the importance of raising awareness of pediatric kidney cancer and supporting research for children facing these rare and challenging diagnoses. Tori's father, Jerry DiLeo, was also in attendance.

Tori DiLeo was an honor student, an avid tennis player, and a young woman preparing to begin the next chapter of her life at Lehigh University. She died in August 2025 at age 18 from tRCC/PeComa, an ultra-rare kidney cancer that affects approximately only 75 people worldwide.

In Tori's memory, her parents, Jerry and Nicole DiLeo, and her sister, Ani DiLeo, founded the Tough Like Tori Foundation. The organization is committed to honoring Tori's legacy by raising awareness, advancing research, and supporting children battling rare pediatric kidney cancer.

Beyond its research and awareness efforts, the foundation works to make a difference in the local community. Its initiatives include scholarships for local high school graduates, bake sales, the sale of gold ribbons for mailboxes during September's Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and holiday gift collections/a toy drive for bereaved siblings. These efforts recognize not only the children facing cancer but also the families and siblings whose lives are deeply affected by the experience.

Each July, the foundation hosts an annual golf and tennis outing and dinner at Harrison Meadows. The inaugural event raised more than $85,000 to support research, local scholarships, and holiday gifts for bereaved siblings, demonstrating the impact of community involvement and generosity.

The Harrison soccer tournament was another opportunity for community members to come together in support of a cause that touches so many lives. Through events like these, the foundation continues to honor Tori's memory while working toward a future with greater awareness, more research, and better support for children and families affected by rare pediatric kidney cancer.

To learn more about the Tough Like Tori Foundation, visit toughliketori.org or follow the foundation on Instagram at @toughliketorifoundation.

Top Students Celebrated for Academic Excellence by The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth

Maya Prasad from Purchase, has been honored as one of the brightest students in the world by the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth.

Maya Prasad, a student at Louis M. Klein Middle School in Harrison, was honored for exceptional performance on the SAT, taken as part of the CTY Talent Search. CTY uses above-grade-level testing to identify advanced students from around the world and provide a clear picture of their academic abilities.


Maya Prasad

Each year, about 16,000 students from more than 75 countries join CTY. On average, less than 30 percent of students who join CTY qualify for either high or grand honors based on their test scores.

"This is not just recognition of students' performance on one test, but a testament to their curiosity and capacity for learning," said Amy Lynne Shelton, PhD, CTY's executive director. "These students have demonstrated enormous potential, and now we encourage them to seek out experiences and communities that help them challenge and stretch their knowledge, connect with other young scholars, understand diverse perspectives, think critically, and pursue their goals confidently."

Maya has also earned access to CTY's rigorous, hands-on, day, residential, and online courses, which are offered in a range of subjects including History and Social Science, Language Arts, Mathematics, Robotics and Technology, and Science and Engineering.

About the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth: The Center for Talented Youth, a nonprofit academic center of Johns Hopkins University, has been a global leader in gifted education since 1979. CTY identifies and nurtures the academic talents of advanced learners in grades 2–12 through accredited, challenging courses, research, and advocacy. Our vibrant community includes students, educators, alumni, and supporters from across the United States and more than 75 countries. CTY is committed to welcoming bright students from all backgrounds. Learn more at cty.jhu.edu.

Donations to Harrison Food Pantry and Harrison Holiday Project Presented at Town Board Meeting

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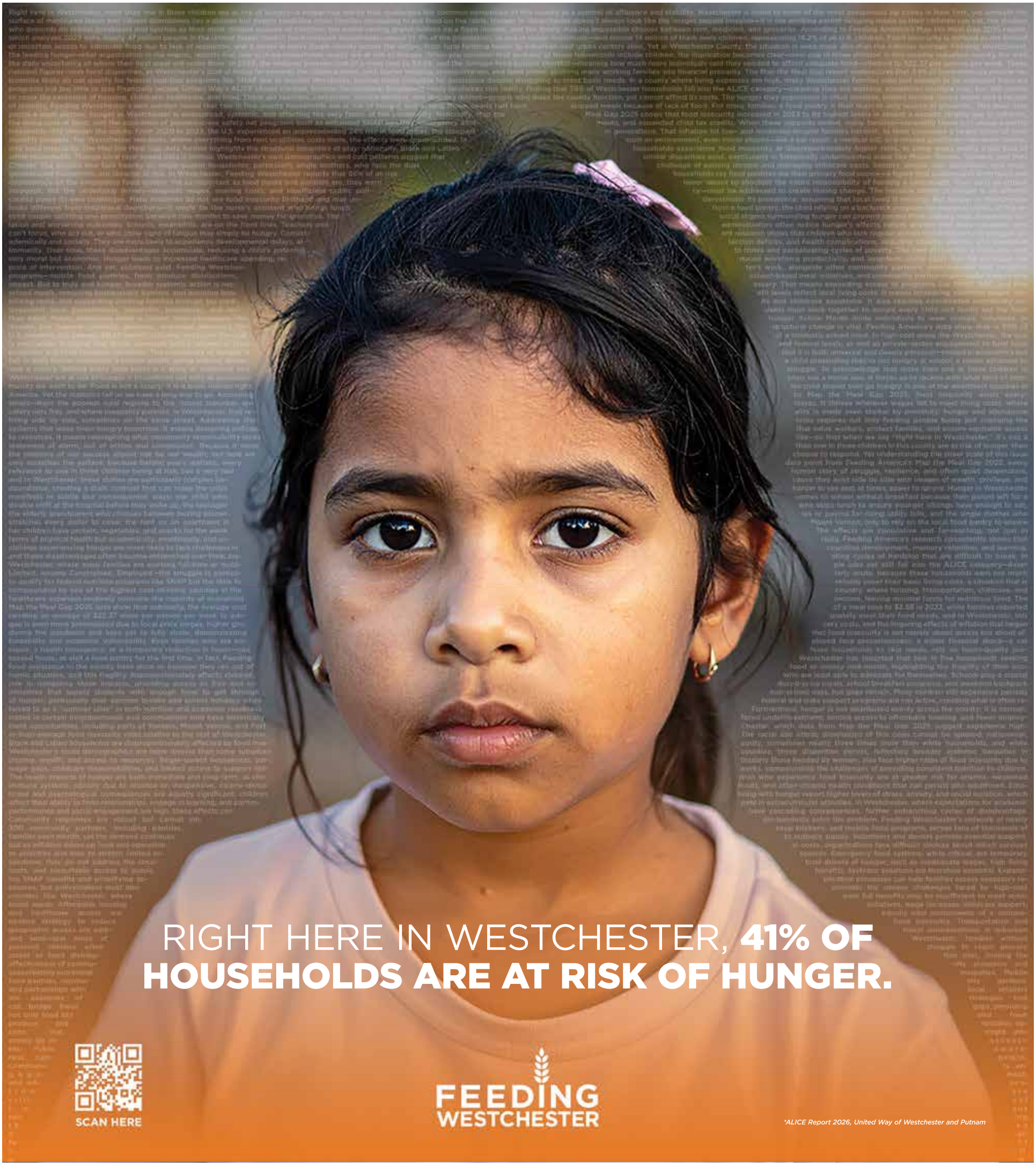
that they want. Schenk thanked the Department of Public Works and Harrison Police Department for accepting drop-off donations at Town Hall.

Schenk thanked the Fire House for creating a toy store for families to come in, shop and pick out toys. Wrapping paper is provided. Wegmans donated over $12,000 worth of gift cards. Underwear and bedding are also available. Contact harrisonholidayproject@gmail.com.

Under Actions and Resolutions, DPW General Foreman Christopher Park requested authorization for the Supervisor to execute the NYS Department of Transportation Snow and Ice Agreement which represents an increase in funding to the Town due to the severity of the 2025-2026 winter.

Harrison Meadows Country Club Advisory Committee Chair Jamie Luhrs and HMCC Advisory Committee member Aaron Beitler presented a proposal to the Board for construction of two dedicated pickleball courts at HMCC. Total estimated cost is $150,000, with $126,000 currently available in the capital fund.

Then Town Engineer Michael Amodeo, P.E., CFM requested to enter into an agreement with AlliantGroup, L.P. These services will assist the Town/Village in evaluating, documenting and submitting claims for the federal Energy Investment Tax Credit. The Harrison Recreation Center was designed and constructed with geothermal systems that may qualify for these tax credits. Based on a preliminary assessment of the project, the potential tax credit is estimated to range from $900,000 to $1,800,000, subject to detailed engineering, cost, compliance and tax analysis.


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Calendar of Events



Rohini Devasher: Solar Poetics
Bruce Museum
1 Museum Drive, Greenwich, CT
Through November 29, 2026
Experience One Hundred Thousand Suns, Rohini Devasher's immersive and powerful video installation at the Bruce Museum. One Hundred Thousand Suns (2023) weaves together more than a century of solar observation in a mesmerizing four-channel video installation. Artist Devasher layers historical records from India's Kodaikanal Solar Observatory with contemporary footage and her own decade of astronomical research, creating a meditation on how we observe and record phenomena that exceed human perception. Visit https://brucemuseum.org/exhibitions/rohini-devasher-solar-poetics/



There will be a retrospective exhibition of original oil paintings by artist Georgine Sheridan at City Island's first Pop-up Gallery, located at 149 Fordham Street (behind the laundromat). On view through November, Thursday through Sunday, 10AM - 4PM, or by appointment: 917.860.3264. The exhibition offers an opportunity to experience and purchase works spanning the career of a City Island artist. Instagram: @georgineyoriosheridan.art

The Symphony of Westchester will open its 2026–2027 season at Iona University with an All Beethoven Program on Saturday, November 7 at 8:00 p.m. at the Christopher J. Murphy Auditorium in the Murphy Science and Technology Building in New Rochelle. Conducted by Symphony of Westchester Founder and Artistic Director Barry Charles Hoffman, the concert will feature acclaimed pianist Alon Goldstein as soloist for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3, op. 37 in C minor. The program will also include Leonore Overture No. 3 and Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, op. 68 in F Major, "Pastorale." The new season continues on Sunday, December 13 at 3:00 p.m. with an All Baroque Program featuring music by Handel and Bach. All performances take place in the Murphy Science Building at Iona University, located at 25 Mayflower Ave., New Rochelle, NY 10801, across from Iona's main campus at 715 North Ave. Free parking is available at the top of the hill on Summit Avenue. Tickets are $60 for general admission, $45 for seniors over 65 and $20 for students with valid ID. Tickets and season information are available at https://thesymphonyofwestchester.org/concerts/ or by calling 914-654-4926.

The Yonkers Philharmonic invites you to an afternoon of rhythm, passion, and virtuosity on Sunday, November 15, 2026, at 3:00 pm at Saunders Trades and Technical High School, 183 Palmer Road, Yonkers. The program opens with Pablo Moncayo's Huapango, the exhilarating Mexican showpiece built on the folk dances of Veracruz. Its infectious rhythms and brilliant orchestration have made it a beloved second national anthem in Mexico, and it is guaranteed to set the tone for an unforgettable afternoon. Next comes Arturo Márquez's Danzón No. 2, a sultry, elegant tribute to the Mexican dance halls of Veracruz and Mexico City. Sensual melodies and shimmering textures make this one of the most popular works by a living composer in the concert repertoire. Visit www.yonkersphilharmonic.com

The Household Recycling Day (HRD) events will take place on: Saturday, November 7, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Playland Park, 1 Playland Parkway, Rye. Residents may experience extended wait times. Those who wish to avoid long lines or cannot attend are encouraged to schedule an appointment at the County's Household Material Recovery Facility (H-MRF), located at 15 Woods Road on the Grasslands Campus in Valhalla. The H-MRF accepts the same items as HRDs and is open year-round, Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. At the event, residents can dispose of properly labeled household chemicals, tires, scrap metal, electronics, appliances and other household materials. Document shredding and safe disposal of expired or unwanted medications will also be available. Residents should place items in their trunks or back seats and remain in their vehicles while staff unloads materials in the designated drop-off area. For more information on what to bring to these events, visit Environment.WestchesterCountyNY.gov or call the Recycling Helpline: (914) 813-5425. Residents can also follow the Department of Environmental Facilities on Facebook at www.facebook.com/WestchesterCountyDEF for updates on programs and events.

Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins is proud to announce that the achievements of 61 senior citizens from throughout the County will be honored at the 44th Annual Senior Citizens Hall of Fame Awards Celebration on Friday, December 4 at 11:30 a.m. at the Westchester Marriott in Tarrytown, NY. This year's program will present Muriel Conway of Ossining and Rita C. Mabli of New Rochelle with top honors, and will also honor 59 additional seniors across 29 municipalities and hamlets. As part of this year's event, Mae Carpenter, former Commissioner of the Department of Senior Programs and Services (DSPS), will be honored with the Pioneer In Aging Services Award. Among this year's honorees, four seniors will receive Distinguished Honoree: Sharon Griest Ballen of Scarsdale, Edward Doty of Pelham, Dr. Suzanne D. Phillips of Elmsford, and Hon. Valerie Simmons of White Plains. This year's event is sponsored by: Annual Sponsor – NewYork-Presbyterian; Gold Sponsor – United Hebrew. To purchase a ticket, sponsorship or congratulatory ad honoring one of this year's honorees, visit www.westchesterpartnership.org/hall-of-fame/ or contact Jill Sommer Stern at JillS@EventsToRemember360.com or (914) 218-3968

New Jersey Woman Sentenced to Up to 3 Years in State Prison for Stealing More Than $130,000 from Westchester Employers

Westchester County District Attorney Susan Cacace announced that a New Jersey woman was sentenced to up to three years in state prison after admitting to stealing more than $130,000 from two former employers in Westchester County.

The defendant, Michelle Pennant, 48, of Patterson, New Jersey, was sentenced Wednesday in Westchester County Court before Judge Erin McGoey to one and a half to three years in state prison after pleading guilty on June 17, 2026, to two counts of Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree, a Class E felony, and Criminal Tax Fraud in the Fourth Degree, a Class E felony.

The court also issued restitution orders totaling $138,395.54, including $70,250.46 and $62,548.08 to her former employers and $5,597 to the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

DA Cacace said: "Michelle Pennant betrayed the trust placed in her by her employers, exploiting her position to selfishly steal more than $130,000 for her own personal gain. This sentence not only ensures the defendant serves up to three years in prison but reinforces that financial crimes will not be tolerated and those who commit fraud in our community will be held responsible."

Between March 2023 and April 2024, the defendant stole $70,250.46 from a Westchester-based construction company where she was employed. She also stole $62,549.08 from a home decorating business in Westchester where she worked between April 2022 and April 2024. During this period, the defendant also failed to pay the appropriate taxes connected to this unreported income to the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

This case was investigated by the Harrison Police Department, the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, and the Westchester County District Attorney's Criminal Investigators Squad and Forensic Accountant Michael Frenza.

The case was prosecuted by Economic Crimes Bureau Chief Gwen Galef.


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NxtUpTeens Brings Harrison and Rye Brook Students Together with Local Doctors for Career Exploration

Fifteen high school students from Harrison and Rye Brook gathered in Purchase for a NxtUpTeens career exploration event that offered a firsthand look at the worlds of dentistry, entrepreneurship and business.

Students met with Dr. Michael Graffeo and Dr. Jason Sauer, who shared the personal and professional journeys that led them to careers in dentistry. The doctors discussed their education, experiences and the paths they took to establish their own practices, giving students insight into both the medical and business sides of the profession.



NxtUpTeens Founders Hailey & Derek Graffeo with Dr. Jason Sauer and Dr. Michael Graffeo following the NxtUpTeens Career Night in Purchase, NY, where local high school students learn about careers in dentistry, entrepreneurship, and business.

The conversation went beyond what it takes to become a dentist. Dr. Graffeo and Dr. Sauer spoke about starting and running a practice, building a successful career, overcoming challenges and making important decisions along the way.

Students were active participants throughout the evening, asking questions about the doctors' experiences, career choices and the lessons they learned while building their practices.

"I firmly believe that there are no insurmountable obstacles in life," Graffeo told the students. "If you persevere through adversity and tumultuous times, you will emerge as an unstoppable force."

Sauer encouraged students to pursue careers and goals that are meaningful to them.

"Do what you love, love what you do, and always keep your eye on your prize, no matter what roadblocks appear in front of you," Sauer said.

The event was organized by NxtUpTeens, a youth-focused organization founded by Hailey and Derek Graffeo to help teenagers explore potential careers by connecting them directly with professionals in a variety of fields.

NxtUpTeens provides students with opportunities to learn about careers through conversations with professionals who can share not only what they do, but also how they got there. The goal is to give teens a better understanding of the education, choices, challenges and experiences that shape different career paths.

The Purchase event is part of the organization's broader mission of helping teens connect to their futures as they begin considering college, areas of study and future careers.

For more information, visit www.nxtupteens.org.

Harrison High School Seniors Recognized by National Merit Scholarship Program



Harrison High School seniors have been recognized by the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program for their exceptional academic promise, demonstrated by their performance on the PSAT/NMSQT. Raito Sekine was named National Merit Semifinalist, placing among the top 1% of graduating seniors nationwide. Ron Blaustein, Nils Boman, Zachary Fischman, Atharv Gandhi, Isani Mitra, Flynn Williams, and Sophie Wong were recognized as Commended Students.

Harrison High School Marching Band Performs at It's Great to Live in Harrison Parade



The Harrison High School Band brought music, energy, and spirit to the annual "It's Great to Live in Harrison" Day Parade, entertaining spectators along the parade route. Their performance added a lively addition to the festivities, as the Harrison community came together in celebration. The high school student musicians helped make this annual tradition a memorable celebration of the community and the people who make it special.

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2026 Vizient Quality and Accountability Ranking. Ranked #1 out of 122 participating comprehensive academic medical centers, with lowest O:E mortality rate, and length of stay in the top 5% of all comprehensive academic medical centers. Ranked #1 out of 70 participating ambulatory networks. CMS Hospital Acquired Conditions Reduction Program, lowest complication rate among comparable tertiary hospitals across the United States. Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services: Unplanned hospital visits. October 2024, best among academic medical centers in New York state.
*2026-2027 U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals, our rankings reflect data from: Tisch Hospital, Kimmel Pavilion, NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital, NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn, NYU Langone Hospital—Long Island. Four-way tie for the most #1 national rankings.

Before December 31: Year-End Financial and Estate Planning Opportunities

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

As 2026 draws to a close, many people focus on holiday preparations and making plans for the new year. However, the final months of the year also offer valuable opportunities to reduce taxes, support loved ones, and make important financial decisions.

Take Advantage of Annual Gift Tax Exclusions: One of the simplest ways to transfer wealth to the next generation is through annual exclusion gifting.

In 2026, you can give up to $19,000 to any number of individuals without using your federal lifetime gift and estate tax exemption. Married couples can give $38,000 per recipient, subject to gift-splitting rules.

For example, a married couple with three children and five grandchildren can transfer up to $304,000 in 2026 without reducing their lifetime exemptions.

To qualify for the annual exclusion, you must complete these gifts by December 31, and the funds must clear your account before year-end. Certain gifts to trusts do not qualify for the annual exclusion, even if the amount gifted falls within the annual exclusion limit, unless the trust contains special provisions that allow the gifts to qualify. Also, unused annual exclusions do not carry forward to future years.

Gifts that exceed the annual exclusion do not automatically trigger gift taxes. Instead, these gifts reduce your available lifetime federal gift and estate tax exemption and require you to file a gift tax return.

Pay Tuition and Medical Expenses Directly: Many families overlook another valuable gifting opportunity: paying someone else's tuition or medical expenses directly.

Federal gift tax law allows you to pay qualifying tuition expenses directly to an educational institution without using your annual gift tax exclusion, regardless of the amount. This applies to tuition at qualifying schools, including private elementary and secondary schools and colleges. It does not extend to room, board, books, or other educational expenses.

For example, grandparents can pay a grandchild's college tuition directly to the university and still give that grandchild an additional $19,000 in 2026.

Similarly, you can pay qualifying medical expenses, such as a family member's surgery, dental care, or other medical treatment, directly to the medical provider without using your annual gift tax exclusion, regardless of the amount paid.

The key is making payments directly to the institution or provider rather than reimbursing the individual.

Consider Funding a 529 College Savings Plan: For families interested in helping children or grandchildren with future education expenses, a 529 college savings plan offers another tax-advantaged opportunity. A special five-year election allows an individual to contribute up to $95,000 in 2026 to a beneficiary's 529 plan and treat the contribution as spread over five years for gift tax purposes. Married couples can contribute up to $190,000. However, this election uses the annual gift tax exclusion for that beneficiary for five years, meaning that additional gifts to the same beneficiary during that period will require reporting on a gift tax return.

Review Retirement Distributions and Charitable Giving: If you are subject to required minimum distributions (RMDs) from retirement accounts, confirm that you have satisfied your distribution requirements before year-end. Failure to take an RMD can result in significant tax penalties.

Individuals age 70½ or older can also consider qualified charitable distributions (QCDs), which allow them to transfer up to $111,000 in 2026 directly from their IRA to qualifying charities. These distributions can satisfy all or part of an RMD while excluding the qualifying amount from taxable income.

For those who regularly support charitable organizations, this can be more tax-efficient than withdrawing funds and then making a donation.

Consider the Impact of Gifts on Long-Term Care Planning: Before making substantial gifts, consider whether you or your spouse might need long-term care in the future.

While annual exclusion gifts offer federal estate and gift tax advantages, they are not automatically exempt from Medicaid transfer rules. In New York, gifts made within five years before applying for nursing home Medicaid can create eligibility penalties, even when the gifts fall within the annual gift tax exclusion.

This distinction is particularly important for older adults considering transferring assets to children or grandchildren.

Start Planning Before the Deadline: Year-end planning involves more than minimizing taxes. It provides an opportunity to use available financial and benefits strategies while protecting your long-term security.

Whether you are considering gifts to family members, helping with education expenses, or evaluating retirement distributions, thoughtful planning before December 31 can help you enter 2027 with greater financial confidence.

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.

Table Hopping with Morris Gut: Where to Celebrate Diwali!

Diwali, the Hindu 'Festival of Lights', is a major holiday throughout India and the rest of the globe. It is a fine time to enjoy the vibrant colorful flavors of India culture and cuisine. It peaks on Nov. 8th this year, but the celebrations continue all month. It is marked by rituals, parades, and plenty of good food. Here are some local spots to take in those exotic flavors. Dine in or take out:

Coromandel Cuisine of India, 464 North Ave., New Rochelle. 914-235-8390 The best Indian take-out in the Queen City. You may remember them from their former Division St. location. www.coromandeltogo.com

Coriander-Modern Indian, 154 Larchmont Ave., Larchmont. 914-235-1306 Proprietor Shawn Nagpal and his team offer a modern touch to their regional Indian cuisine. www.corianderny.com

Mumbai Katta, 227 Westchester Ave., Port Chester. 516-953-3265 Anita and Jayant Gawde have opened a vibrant ode to flavorful regional Indian street food. They will mark the traditional 5 day festival Diwali. Anita is a dynamo in front and back of the house. www.mumbaikatta.com

Neha Palace, 27 Meyer Ave., Yonkers at Cross County Shopping Center. 914-476-5900 Diya Ramchandani's big, elegant restaurant and catering venue serving Halal cuisine. www.nehapalaceyonkers.com

Marigold Cuisine, 434 White Plains Road, Eastchester. 914-202-9455 Michelin recognized chef Hermant Mathur, who was personal chef to the Prime Minister of India, offers a creative modern take on India cuisine. www.ordermarigoldrestaurant.com

Shirley's India, 1 Leroy Place, New Rochelle. 914-632-6736 Take out only. Kerala specialties. Catering and live action stations. https://www.shirleysindia.com/home

Kokum Grill & Wok, 2 Eastchester Road (corner of North Ave.), New Rochelle. 914-265-6279 The new kid on the block near IONA. www.kokumgrillandwok.com

NH44 Indian, 219 E. Hartsdale Ave., Hartsdale. 914-574-5262 Jeevan Pullan and Rashan Balan named their restaurant after the longest highway in India. Indian specialties with aplomb. www.nh44indian.com

(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)

Westchester County Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service

Together with the Westchester County Department of Emergency Services, the Westchester County Fallen Firefighters Committee, Westchester County Volunteer Firefighter's Association, Westchester County Association of Fire Chiefs, Westchester County Association of Fire Districts and the Westchester County Career Fire Chiefs Association hosted the Westchester County Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service. The annual event recognized Westchester County firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins said: "We come together today to pay tribute to those firefighters from Westchester County who gave their lives in the performance of duty. We owe these firefighters – and all those who loved and lost them – a great debt of gratitude. These men were dedicated to keeping their communities safe, and they paid for that commitment with their lives. May we never forget the 12 firefighters who are being added to this memorial wall this year, and all the other heroes who were memorialized before them."

President of the Westchester County Association of Fire Chiefs Stuart Bayer said: "Each year we gather on a Sunday in October, not to mourn, but to honor the memory of firefighters from across Westchester County who made the ultimate sacrifice while protecting the communities in which they served. Every year, as we read aloud their names and the departments they represented, we join their families in remembering their heroism and letting them know they are not alone in their loss. There are years we are fortunate not to have to add a name to

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Westchester County Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service

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the monument. Sadly this year we add 12 more names from six departments. Their memory and their legacy will not end with a plaque on a wall, but rather will remain in the hearts and minds of their brother and sister firefighters who know that when the alarm drops and they head out of their stations to answer the call, they will do their jobs without hesitation and in so doing, honor those that gave their lives doing the same. And, every year we will gather to honor and remember them all."

In October of 1991, Westchester County established a permanent Fallen Firefighters Memorial in front of the Richard A. Flynn Fire Training Center in Valhalla. The memorial consists of a life-sized bronze statue depicting a firefighter assisting a fallen comrade to safety. Surrounding the statue on the brick walls of the training center are bronze plaques, containing the fallen firefighter's name, department and date of sacrifice.

In 2026, 12 additional names will be added to wall. The Westchester County Fallen Firefighters Memorial, and the annual memorial service, serve as a lasting tribute to all Westchester County firefighters who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

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The Friends of White Plains Hospital's Annual Gala

The Friends of White Plains Hospital's Annual Gala which was held October 3 at Westchester Country Club in Rye. The event, which raised nearly $1.5M for the hospital, highlighted David Wasserman's remarkable journey from stroke to recovery, made possible through coordinated care by teams from White Plains Hospital, Burke Rehabilitation, and Montefiore Medical Center - underscoring the life-changing power of collaboration across Montefiore Einstein.



Richard and Cristina French of Harrison, Richard and Dawn French (Credit: Lori Adams, NY Vintage Camera Works Ltd)



Nancy Gilbert, Racquel Lividini-Gilbert of Larchmont and Tina Lividini (Credit: Kelly Vasami, NY Vintage Camera Works Ltd)



William Null, Lauren Thaler, David Wasserman and Kate Solomon (of Scarsdale), Susan Fox and Jeffrey Menkes (Credit: Chris Kayden, NY Vintage Camera Works Ltd)



Dawn French, Frances Bordoni, New Rochelle residents Pamela Weber, MD and Kaare Weber, MD, with Susan Fox and Charles Noyer (Credit: Chris Kayden, NY Vintage Camera Works Ltd)



Lisa and Gary Matthews of Mamaroneck with Susan Fox (Credit: Chris Kayden, NY Vintage Camera Works Ltd)



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