



Letters to the Editor, March 12: Block scheduling, Turtle Back Zoo

Kudos to school district for work on block scheduling



Memories frequently tend to be short. A year ago, people may forget, Glenfield Middle School went through a difficult year for several reasons. The year finished with a push from central office to change our schedule to a “block schedule,” 80-minute classes every other day, versus our current 40-minute daily class. The rush to change without any real justification, other than attempting to “standardize” all the middle schools, was too much, and the teachers, parents, students, even administrators all rebuffed it. We argued the change was not thought out, well-vetted, or inclusive of the people involved. It was simply done the wrong way.

This week Glenfield went through a successful rehearsal of a new schedule which will include one block of 80 minutes per week plus three 40-minute periods, a compromise that gives the science teachers and others extra time for lessons while maintaining optimal time with our students on a daily basis. The rehearsal follows five-six months of meetings between teachers and administrators to find a good compromise. It is no simple calculation or matrix to change a schedule when lunch, phys ed, the arts, state regulations, etc., are included.

Five plans were presented to the school in the fall and one plan seemed to address the most concerns. I was not on the committee, but I followed it closely and was impressed by the process, the dialogue, and the outcome. The committee solved a problem that many had said could not be solved. Throughout the process, our interim Superintendent was very supportive and open to allowing the school to come up with a viable

plan.

At a time when it seems only the critics of our schools are heard, I want to compliment those involved in our new schedule. This was the same process and thinking our schools went through back in the 1970s when we first started busing and magnet schools, and it is great to see the innovative attitude is still alive and well in Montclair.

Specifically, I want to thank the students, the teachers, the parents, the administrators at Glenfield, the interim Superintendent, and the BOE including Mayor Jackson for their support. Our schools will benefit from innovative changes like these.

PETER VON HOFFMANN

Montclair

The author is a teacher at Glenfield Middle School.

Paving paradise for a jail for animals

How disappointing that a supposedly progressive county is destroying natural habitat to put a zoo and a restaurant in South Mountain Reservation.

The excuse for building zoos is that they 'educate children'. How long will it take before a generation of children grow up to say enough—let's keep what little remaining natural habitat we have for the wild animals, instead of putting 'exotic' animals behind bars.

And the restaurant? As the previous letter writer, George Bretherton said, there are plenty of restaurants in Montclair and surrounding towns. "The park is disappearing under asphalt." And as letter writer Jim Price said, not doing this project would save taxpayers a bundle. I don't want any of my tax money going to this project. Save the wilderness for wild animals!

JOHANNA COXETER

Montclair



Letters to the Editor, March 5

Council's 'no tax raise' claims misleading



While our current council continues to publicize its laudable record of low municipal tax increases, we should all remember that their track record is actually not as good as it seems on the surface because there has been a fundamental change in tax policy during this council's tenure.

This is the first council to have extensively used PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) as the way of generating municipal revenue for all new major redevelopment projects. It is a nifty tool as it allows virtually all — 95 percent — of the revenue from these new projects, including the MC Hotel, Seymour Street, Valley and Bloom, etc., to go to the municipality. Precious little — just 5 percent — goes to the county, and none goes to the schools. This last point is where the major issue comes in.

The council gets to say “look, no tax increase!” But our overall tax burden still goes up every year because the county and (more so) the schools must keep raising their tax rates because they get next to no financial benefit from all of the new development. However, with the massive influx of new residents, more county services must be provided and roads that are increasingly congested must be maintained more frequently. And more students living here will attend schools, teachers and school faculty still need to receive increases in their compensation, and so on.

So what happens? These two portions of the tax levy (county and schools) continue to balloon. Oh, and let us

not forget that during this council's tenure we also got a new 1 percent levy for the library that did not exist before. If one were to take all of these things into account and judge the taxation performance of the current council it will fall more in-line with historical norms. And, at the end of the day what matters most to us as citizens is the amount of our overall property tax bill — not to which specific source (municipal, county, school or library) we are paying those taxes.

Finally, lest I sound like I am complaining about taxes — not at all. I believe in both government's responsibility to assist with the equitable redistribution of wealth and paying one's fair share in taxes for government services. I just don't like it when only part of the story is being told — especially in an election year.

JASON DESALVO
Montclair

The author is former chair of the township Planning Board.

County decisions not the will of the people

The Essex County Freeholders support the expansion at the Turtle Back Zoo, which plans for the clear-cutting of many acres of conserved land and animals parading around a stage like a circus, using Gov. Murphy's state funds which were supposed to be directed towards conservation. Not surprisingly, Joe DiVincenzo's team also supports people being illegally and unethically detained in cages at the local Immigration and Customs Enforcement jails.

The conclusion we must draw is that they support both animals and people in cages. A supposedly progressive Board of Freeholders repeatedly follows the agenda of local politicians who are not accountable to the people who voted for them. Many residents and students have recently protested the zoo expansion, while calls to end the local ICE contracts have been ongoing for many years.

The will of the people is clearly not being accounted for in these two important issues. One definition of a dictatorship is: "A dictatorship is a government or a social situation where one person makes all the rules and decisions without input from anyone else."

While some would argue we are already there on a national level, I wonder if Essex County is heading in the same direction.

DEVIKA GUPTA
Montclair

Plans announced for historic Shultz house

As reported in Montclair Local in June 2019, the Montclair History Center announced that we were at a crossroads regarding one of our properties, the Charles Shultz House (a.k.a. Evergreens) at 30 North Mountain Avenue. Bequeathed to us in 1996 by Molly Shultz, the house is now owned by the Montclair History Center with no restrictions on our use or disposition of it. Despite our deep love and respect for the house and efforts to maintain it as a historic house museum, the substantial and escalating maintenance costs (consuming up to 40 percent of our annual operating budget in recent years) have made MHC's continued ownership financially unsustainable. This is our update to the community on our quest to find another path forward for the property.

After inviting the public to a series of Community Conversations in June, we followed up on the many suggestions that arose. We've considered programming and fundraising ideas and have spoken to regional and national preservation organizations; non-profit organizations; real estate and design professionals; local, county, and state officials; universities; Molly's relatives; and the National Park Service and the Smithsonian. We have worked hard to find a solution that allows us to maintain a museum space on the property, but our hopes for that scenario have dimmed.

MHC has not yet made any decisions on the house's future. We are actively exploring ideas that respect the history of the house and the community and have rejected several outright that did not meet this goal. We remain open to introductions and suggestions, including from real estate professionals who have approached us with creative adaptive re-use concepts for the house. And now, we have also listed the house for sale as a single-family home. While it may not be the right fit for every family, it may be perfect for some family, as it had been for the Shultz family for 100 years.

We are heartened by the support we continue to receive from the community and the love of the house you share with us. Bolstering the home's preservation with a deed restriction that protects it from demolition, telling the Shultz family's story, and respecting our community remain priorities for our organization. We will continue to keep you updated.

ELIZABETH D. HYNES and HELEN L. FALLON

Montclair

The authors are the president and vice president, respectively, of the Montclair History Center Board of Trustees.



Letters to the Editor, Feb. 27

Editor's note: This week's Letters To The Editor section includes several letters from residents announcing their candidacy in the May municipal elections. Montclair Local invites anyone running for office in May to submit a letter explaining why they are running. These should be submitted no later than March 20; after the March 23 issue, Montclair Local will not publish any opinion pieces from municipal election candidates until after Election Day.



Spending millions to destroy the Reservation

There is growing county-wide resistance to plans by Essex County to spend \$8.6 million to destroy more South Mountain Reservation to build another for-profit entertainment venue. The Coalition to Save South Mountain Reservation, comprised of 18 coalition members so far, including many residents of Montclair, has been created to stop this environmental destruction.

Essex County plans to clear cut over 100 mature trees in the South Mountain Reservation to build a 500 seat outdoor amphitheater at Turtle Back Zoo. Animals will be exhibited with bright lights and a sound system five times per day.

What's the downside of this project? In addition to irreplaceable habitat destruction, this will result in more congestion (increasing attendance to 1.2 million), flooding, noise and light pollution and add to climate change. No environmental impact statement has been produced.

This amphitheater is not necessary. The zoo already has an appropriately-sized amphitheater. Millions were

recently spent on an indoor Education Center. Professionals say children learn best in smaller settings.

Since 2003, the county has destroyed 25 acres, carving an amusement park out of the reservation building a zip line, a mini golf course, McLoone's restaurant and multiple parking lots, all at taxpayer's expense. Now the county will seize 1.5 acres for this project and another 10 acres in the future. There is no end in sight.

The Reservation is historic. It was designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted (of Central Park fame) and should be preserved as open space for future generations. Once destroyed, forever lost.

Exploring the forest is an endless source of knowledge and entertainment. And it's free.

The trees removed will be replaced by a 4:1 ratio, but the saplings take 25 years to reach maturity. A mature tree absorbs 11,000 gallons of water and 48 pounds of carbon a year. Our planet can't wait. We are in the midst of a global climate crisis.

While the state of New Jersey has committed \$4 million towards the \$8.6 million price tag, these funds all come from our taxpayer dollars.

The zoo's ongoing expansion hurts animals. Exotic species don't belong here. One giraffe died after surgery for a tooth infection. Giraffes are locked in a barn 7 months of the year because of our cold temperatures. A lion died this summer.

Despite opposition and 11,500-plus petition signatures, the county has posted bids for construction and marked trees for removal. Visit coalitionsmr.org to sign the petition and to find out more.

A student-led Rally to Save the Reservation is planned for March 1 at noon in front of the Turtle Back Zoo.

JOYCE RUDIN
Montclair

In favor of restorative practices

I have two children in Montclair public schools and I am a criminal justice reform advocate. Last Sunday I attended a meeting at Glenfield Park organized by the NAACP where we talked about the school to prison pipeline, suspension and detention, and restorative practices sessions at school. Restorative practice is an excellent alternative to punitive methods, which we need to eradicate from school settings, and when it is well used is a fantastic tool to solve conflicts and prevent them from ever happening. This program can only survive with the support of the whole school community and the leadership of school principals and teachers.

Therefore, I urge you to support the efforts for the implementation and expansion of the restorative justice program to all schools and to all students. Don't let it die.

MARIA EVA DORIGO

Montclair

Don't cut Social Security

Throughout my working years I paid social security taxes with the understanding that they would pay for my security after I retired. Now that I'm retired, our president has submitted cuts in such payments in his proposed budget. How unfair!

He has also proposed to cut Medicare payments, just as some candidates are proposing that we expand Medicare. This is just plain scary.

I have written to my two senators and my representative pleading with them to not pass any budget with these provisions. I hope others will too.

PAT KENSCHAFT

Montclair

Loughman announces run for council

I am pleased to announce that I have received official word from the Town Clerk that I, Carmel Loughman, will be on the ballot running for Councilor-at-Large in the May 12, Montclair municipal election.

I am an underdog, long-shot candidate hoping for grassroots support, encouraged by the grit and determination of other women new to public life like our own Mikie Sherrill, who challenged the establishment and won elective office in 2018.

I am particularly interested in efficiency, transparency and accountability of local government. Councilors must be effective stewards of taxpayers' money, balancing benefits to the entire community as they address a myriad of town issues and make difficult decisions.

An independent thinker, political moderate, and pragmatic problem-solver, I see myself in the mold of Amy Klobuchar or Ruth Bader Ginsburg, working methodically and collaboratively with others to get things done.

I am fortunate that at this point in my life I can commit myself fully to public service. I enjoy public discourse and believe that offering my time and talent in the service of others brings immense satisfaction.

My single political aspiration is to be a dedicated local public servant working with integrity and intelligence to

solve the difficult issues Montclair faces. I hold independent views and will be a new voice with new ideas, working hard for all Montclair.

My first challenge was getting enough signatures (420!) to get on the ballot. With that accomplished, I will now be pounding the pavement and knocking on doors to introduce myself and ask for Montclair's vote.

Please visit my website, www.carmelloughman.org, for my background information.

CARMEL LOUGHMAN

Montclair

The author is a candidate for the Township Council in May.

Russo offers to continue on Montclair Council

I'm willing to answer the call of so many voters and residents to continue serving another term on the Montclair Town Council.

I will continue progressive and stable government and fiscal policies started several years ago by the current mayor and council.

I will focus on stabilizing rents, taxes and affordable housing for our growing Senior population and the many working families and middle and lower income residents who want to stay in Montclair.

This includes my continued fight, since the years I was mayor, to get fair state and federal funding for our schools, especially in the area of special education.

Reasonable development to control taxes and preservation of what makes Montclair so special will be the goal of my next years of service to this town I love.

BOB RUSSO

Montclair

The author is currently an at-large Township Councilman, and is up for re-election in May.

Hurlock to run for council re-election

As many of you know, I have been considering whether to run for office in 2020. I have been very fortunate to have the support of so many. After careful consideration and deliberation I have decided to run for the the First Ward seat on the Montclair Township Council. Thank you.

I am running to have the opportunity to continue the good work that we have undertaken over these last eight years — continuing on a path of fiscal responsibility as we pay down existing debt; sustaining our excellent debt rating, which saves us millions of dollars in interest payments, freeing taxpayer dollars for projects; and upgrading and replacing infrastructure in the First Ward, paving roads, replacing curbs, planting trees and upgrading playgrounds.

BILL HURLOCK

Montclair

The author is currently the First Ward Township Councilman, and is up for re-election in May.



Letters to the Editor, Feb. 20

On a quest to honor MHS great Fortunato



As a proud member of Montclair High School's class of 1956, and the class historian, on a committee to celebrate our 64th reunion, I had to step out of the fold to say some special kudos for two very important employees who work in the main office at 100 Chestnut St. All too often words are left unsaid, not so in this instance because both Christa Simon and Monica Smith aided and abetted me, in a daunting reality.

Our beloved longtime football coach Butch Fortunato has not been inducted into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame —

hard to believe as coach Clary Anderson was inducted in 2011. My fellow classmates, Rocky Cifalino and former police chief Tommy Russo, and I have put our nose to the grindstone to investigate what is truly “a slap in the face,” said Cifalino.

Last year I was able to compile a dossier of over 22 pages of comments lauding coach Fortunato from his former athletes, including our astronaut Buzz Aldrin, which was sent to Montclair High School’s athletic director, to no avail. We seemed to not be able to make this happen until the above-mentioned Hall of Fame advised, they are now changing the format for nomination, and a coach must come in now on his “high school record.”

When I called my alma mater’s office, and spoke to Monica about locating Fortunato’s high school record she said, “Come on in.” And when I did, there was the indomitable Christa Simon, waiting with the exact yearbooks that she would be only too glad to photostat and make copies. I had to pinch myself that not only could we be prepared for the nomination, we were immediately able to connect with employees, who knew about him and were shocked that “our hero” was still not lauded. Monica was even wearing an MHS Mountie sweatshirt! To top it off they presented me with the gift of a page from the yearbooks of my uncle (class of 1929), my mother (class of 1930) and my aunt (class of 1930). Now that’s class!

Montclair Mountie spirit and caring continues to exist. To top it off, when we were leaving, Monica told us to tip-toe out very quietly as music director and Grammy winner Dr. Boyce Inness (no relation to Montclair’s famous artist George Inness) was conducting the Madrigals singing in the lobby. I left to the “sound of music.”

Please know greatness exists on all levels of the day in the life of visiting Montclair High School 64 years later.

GRANGE LADY HAIG RUTAN

Montclair

County is paving over paradise

I’ve spent many happy hours hiking and just relaxing in South Mountain Reservation, one of the few places of natural beauty left in Essex County, and in recent years I have been dismayed by the growing number of “improvements” that have come along with depressing regularity.

With all the restaurants in Montclair and surrounding towns why would another one be needed in the Reservation? If people really wanted to eat there wouldn’t a picnic on a nice day be a more sensible alternative? Such amenities are hardly in keeping with the intentions of the park’s designers and builders and mean more traffic and more parking lots to accommodate the patrons.

The park is disappearing under asphalt.

And now in the name of education some sort of amphitheater is proposed where wild animals will be penned

up for the edification of young children. Wouldn't it be better for kids to be able to see the fauna native to our area in their natural habitat? Let the deer, wild turkeys and grouse roam free and leave the lions and giraffes to their native environment south of the Sahara, while saving the taxpayer a bundle like Jim Price says.

GEORGE BRETHERTON

Montclair

Bus ride reflects faith in humanity

I was in line for the 7:30 p.m. #66 bus last night. A tiny Hispanic woman, about 80-years-old, had an Upper Montclair ticket for the bus but spoke no English, so she couldn't tell where she would be getting off the bus. Two very concerned women were trying like crazy to help her, using a few Italian words they knew, which weren't quite translating. I looked around and didn't see anyone who looked like they might speak Spanish, which was very strange for me since I lived in Los Angeles for the last 30 years. Finally, a young man in line with a backpack and guitar came up and tried to use Google Translate. He seemed to be able to figure out where she should get off the bus. Then another guy comes into the line and hears the language struggle. He spoke good Spanish, but there were still questions about how she was going to get to the address she had once she got off the bus in the dark, so the young man with the guitar decided to sit next to her in the front to help with getting her where she needed to go.

Then another woman boards the bus, not realizing you need a ticket instead of cash. She was traveling with her son and was stressed about waiting another hour for the next bus. About four people on the bus offered tickets to them and would not accept any cash for them. Then the woman who gave them two tickets was reimbursed by another man on the bus who gave her a \$10 bill for being so nice. They went back and forth and finally she accepted the money, still protesting that it was not necessary. During the ride, other people joined in on making sure the Hispanic lady was going to be ok.

These riders of the 66 restore my faith in humanity.

LYNN HENDEE

Montclair



Letters to the Editor, Feb. 13

Turtle Back Zoo a waste of taxpayer money



This is about the Turtle Back Zoo, the waste of taxpayer money, the ongoing destruction of South Mountain Reservation and bad education. The Essex County Executive, Joe DiVincenzo, intends to build an amphitheater in the zoo. Though the budget has not been finalized, the county received 4 million from the state after Joe's early endorsement of candidate Murphy. The freeholders (the guardians of the purse), are expected to add \$4.6 million more on top of the \$600K they have already allocated for design plans. The zoo's footprint has doubled in the past ten years to 40 acres including McLoone's Restaurant and a mini-golf course.

Joe's justification for the amphitheater is education. He wants children to come by the hundreds to see exotic animals like giraffes and lions. These animals are native to the savanna and range freely over many miles daily; in Essex County, the giraffes are kept indoors for half the year because — cold weather. This is called animal cruelty. Hundreds of children watching an event in an amphitheater is not education, it's entertainment. Real education happens in small groups where teachers and students interact, ask questions and think out loud together. The only lesson taught in this amphitheater will be that cruelty to animals is wrong.

JIM PRICE
Montclair

Improving our democracy for 100 years

The League of Women Voters turns 100 on Feb. 14. Our founders achieved the impossible by passing the 19th Amendment 100 years ago. Today, The League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area honors their work by continuing to improve our democracy so every voter can play a role in shaping our country.

Soon, New Jerseyans will participate in the Census, and the next decade hinges on an accurate count. New Jersey receives almost \$23 billion annually in federal funding for Medicare, infrastructure, and other programs. The Census is not just about distribution of massive funding, but also about the political power of our communities at the state and federal level.

Following the Census, states must redraw the lines of our voting districts to account for population changes. However, the redistricting process is often manipulated as New Jersey's system allows two partisan teams to work behind closed doors, developing new maps for political gain. The public cannot access records or drafts of maps and public hearings are not required.

Through our Fair Districts campaign, we are working to end gerrymandering and make our redistricting process transparent and independent. Voters should choose their politicians, not the other way around.

On the 100th Anniversary of our founding, The League of Women Voters remains a strong, vital ally to voters. We are ready for the next 100 years of defending democracy and empowering voters. Join us at lwvmontclairarea.org.

ELIZABETH MILNER

Montclair

The author is a board member of the League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area.



Letters to the Editor, Feb. 6

Attacks on social media hurt school district



Your excellent [Jan. 30 report on Montclair's achievement gap](#) ("Inside the Gap," page 1) laments the high turnover in leadership in the school district and its impact on sustaining a program to close the opportunity gap. You need to look no further than your page 2 story, "Controversy," [about parents accusing the interim schools superintendent of racism] for a cause.

It seems to be impossible to serve in a paid, volunteer, or political position in Montclair without being savaged, sometime frequently, on social media. The attacks are shared and amplified in the social media echo chamber, often by people with no direct knowledge of the "crime."

Why, then, are we surprised that we cycle through multiple school superintendents? Why are we surprised when school board members (volunteers) resign to protect their families from abuse? Why, given our track record, would any talented sane person want to serve here?

DAVID GRILL
Montclair

Third-grade math achievement is predictive

The Jan. 30 article on the achievement gap ("Inside the gap," page 1) raises many important points. Alas, it mentions math only once, and doesn't discuss the need for improvement in the first three grades. The 85-page Achievement Panel Advisory Report mentioned in the article also did not mention K-3 math although it did observe that the long-term achievement of students can be predicted by their achievement in third grade.

The change in math achievement of students whose K-3 math education has improved is often dramatic, but Montclair has refused to address this issue, as has New Jersey. When I asked 75 New Jersey African American

mathematicians in the 1980's what could be done to increase African American participation in mathematics, the response was uniform and emphatic. "Teach mathematics better in elementary school. The way it is now, if you aren't taught it at home, you don't learn it at all, so any ethnic group that is underrepresented will remain so until elementary schools change."

I then won grants for helping third grade teachers learn more mathematics. The results were dramatic. Classes that had had medians of 20th percentile in math on standardized tests were quickly getting 60th percentile averages.

Montclair has been shameful. It refused to support teachers participating in my programs. Two participated anyway, but afterward one was switched against her will to teach social studies full time.

What can be done? I am no longer active in this, but our township has some excellent math teachers in the middle and high schools who with released time probably would enjoy performing miracles that would make their lives easier in the long run.

PAT KENSCHAFT
Montclair



Letters to the Editor, Jan. 30

Questions arise with MKA field upgrade



Montclair’s educational institutions are key contributors to the values and attraction of our town – and we all benefit from good relations between local institutions and neighborhood residents. But in the [Jan. 23 story about the Montclair Kimberley Academy seeking to upgrade athletic fields at its middle school on Valley Road](#), our neighbor David Parker makes important points about the necessity for the Board of Adjustment to consider impacts on “all the neighborhood” from the proposed construction, fencing, structures, etc. proposed by the school.

One impact that doesn’t appear to have been discussed so far is the potential increase in demand for parking on our local streets during game days since — as reported — the intent of the upgrades is to permit two ball games to be played at the same time. Will doubling games also double attendance and traffic?

MKA has made recent efforts to institutionalize common sense and respect for local residents (and their driveways) on the part of school parents and visitors who are using our local streets. But that historically hasn’t always been the case. Is the school proposing any new safeguards regarding traffic on game days?

These matters also touch on questions of notification in advance of past and future public hearings. As a resident of Brunswick Road, living just half a block from the corner of the school property that is the most congested neighborhood intersection on school days, I’m surprised not to have received any notice of this recent hearing. I would hope the entire neighborhood will receive notice of the next hearing given the broad impacts on neighborhood traffic, area drainage, noise, etc. These are institutional impacts that go beyond the likely impact caused by a variance for a single residential property.

Separately, it seems disingenuous for MKA attorney Trembulak to suggest that the school’s plan magnanimously “would also benefit the neighbors” by improving drainage. I recall that the potential for flooding and drainage problems was raised by adjacent property owners but downplayed by MKA at the time the school undertook the major surface regrading and “upgrades” that brought their playing fields to their current state. Fixing problems they caused shouldn’t be represented as a gift to the neighborhood. Rather, we should be asking what steps will the Board take to ensure MKA’s new drainage solutions will actually achieve what their past efforts failed to deliver?

One final note: reading the report of the proposal, it sounds as though new fencing and structures like dugouts will be closer to the Central Avenue curb line than MKA’s present fencing. If that is the case – will the Board

make the requested variances contingent on creation of a sidewalk along Central Ave. in place of the present rough grass-covered verge? A sidewalk there would conform with other neighborhood streets and encourage visitors to stay out of the vehicular roadway of Central.

TONY HERRLING & JANE HABURAY
Montclair



Letters to the editor: Jan. 23, 2020



Enforcement could help fill coffers

Like many towns across New Jersey, Montclair has its budgetary woes. Here are a couple of ideas to help fill the coffers:

Pass a law making it illegal to go over the posted speed limit in a motor vehicle. Then ticket and fine anyone violating that law.

Also, pass a law making it illegal to use a commercial leaf blower between, say, Jan. 1 and March 1. Then ticket and fine anyone violating that law.

In addition to the added revenue, such laws would lessen air and noise pollution, make pedestrians and cyclists safer, and help keep Montclair a pleasant place to live.

ROB HENKE

Montclair

Thanks to Mernin, Harris for their work

I wanted to extend my thanks to Ms. Anne Mernin and Mr. James Harris for all of their hard work and dedication to the children of our district over many years.

I was so saddened to hear of the anonymous attack on Ms. Mernin's character and the rush to judgement of Mr. Harris after a lifetime of service.

While I condemn what Mr. Harris said, he admitted his wrong and apologized. Shouldn't this begin a process of dialogue and healing?

Both Ms. Mernin and Mr. Harris have given countless hours of their time and energy on behalf of our schools and deserve better than this. It takes an army of volunteers to make a town great. It is worth reflecting on how we treat our volunteers lest we have none to complain about. Their departures are truly our loss.

DEIRDRE BIRMINGHAM

Montclair

Encourage dialogue before we attack others

James Harris is an honorable man; he always has been. He does not deserve to be castigated for speaking out on his views.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s James and I served on the Montclair Civil Rights Commission. The commission worked diligently implementing a very successful town-wide "Conversations On Race" program. James was instrumental in the success of the program.

Small group settings were scheduled where conversations were held on racial views.

People spoke their mind and the dialogue was honest and frank. We were able to hear and discuss opinions from a variety of residents. We did not always agree and yet, no one was rebuked. We understood that our most important communication skill was “listening”

Furthermore, James has dedicated a major part of his adult life as a constant worker advancing the Montclair and statewide issues of the NAACP.

Let us all take time to listen before we berate.

Sandra Lang

Montclair

Dr. King and the Citizen Police Academy

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is a national hero, not a criminal, as was insinuated by Ms. Kirsten Levingston, in the Jan. 16 Welcome to Montclair column (“Kumba-bye? Why not open up the Citizen Police Academy?,” page 20).

I believe Ms. Levingston using Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (or any one’s name), as an example for a person as a criminal with an arrest record, who would not be eligible to participate in a Citizen Police Academy was an insult to Dr. King and all the many other freedom fighters who died and were arrested in sit ins and marches for African Americans to achieve equality for civil rights and the right to vote in these United States of America. Before the passage of the 1960s Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other people died, were arrested and marched for, blacks did not have the same civil rights and voting rights as whites in the United States of America.

Therefore, for Ms. Levingston to insinuate that “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. whom we celebrate this weekend, would not have been able to participate,” in a Citizen Police Academy, is an offense to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and to the 1960s civil rights movement where many people died, were arrested and marched, so that all Americans could have the same freedoms in these United States of America.

SHARON STURDIVANT-BALDWIN

Montclair



Letters to editor: Jan. 16, 2020



Time for action on ICE

In this time of great unrest in our country, with impeachment, war, climate change and many other crises on the horizon, we can still act locally to make change. New Jersey is known for having progressive policies, but are we known for being fast to action and instigators of national policy change?

One way to make a potentially significant impact on national immigration policy is to stand up and voice our opposition to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. This rogue, corrupt organization has been wreaking havoc on our civil rights since 2003. In our backyards, there are ICE jails in Essex, Hudson and Bergen counties illegally and unethically jailing thousands of refugees. Even worse, our county governments are profiting from these prisoners and claiming to be progressive beacons of hope at the same time. This does not feel right from either an ethical or policy perspective.

New Jersey should defend the legal and civil rights of refugees and end ICE contracts in these counties. Say no to the ICE jail in your backyard. Better yet, let's create a state-wide ban on public and private contracts with ICE, and send a strong signal against ICE at the national level.

DEVIKA GUPTA

Montclair

We need to stand united

I welcome the apology of James Harris for his unfortunate remarks during the recent forum at our Montclair Fire Headquarters. I continue to condemn all forms of bigotry, racism and anti-Semitism. My entire career in public service has been devoted to uniting all of Montclair, and providing a bridge among all of our diverse communities, with past forums such as our highly effective "Conversations on Race" during the years I served as Mayor. I urge us to re-institute these useful roundtables as instruments for fighting anti-Semitism and "undoing racism".

Montclair is a unique community for others to follow as a model for good government & positive race-relations. Let's all heed Rabbi Katz's call that we should address the issues at the root of the problems that were discussed, such as affordable housing & gentrification, and "chart a mutual path forward of learning and growth". There is no room in Montclair for anti-Semitism or racism. There is room for improved communication & mutual respect!

BOB RUSSO

Montclair

The author is an at-large Township Councilman.

Idling cars and more

We keep reading in the paper about Montclair cars being stolen while idling with nobody in them. Why would anyone do such a thing? It seriously damages the engine of a car to idle for more than 30 seconds. Worse, it causes climate change, which is becoming a serious problem.

We are also concerned about the number of times we see someone not slowing down for the yellow lights at a pedestrian crossing. Human life is precious!

Pedestrians are not all innocent either. We have witnessed some crossing the street in dark clothing after dark, apparently without checking the car traffic. Not safe! We were taught as children to always look both ways for traffic when preparing to cross the street and not stepping out if cars were coming. Now we know it is crucial to look for cars coming around corners too - and out of driveways.

Why don't we read about meetings of the Pedestrian Safety Committee and the Traffic and Parking Committee? Both are still needed in Montclair.

PAT KENSCHAFT and

FRED CHICHESTER

Montclair



Letters to the Editor, Jan. 9



Harris should step down as Montclair NAACP officer

Editor's note: The following letter was sent from Montclair NAACP executive committee member Cary Chevat to president Al Pelham and committee members on Sunday, Jan. 5.

As the only member of the Jewish community on the NAACP executive committee, I am outraged at the anti-Semitic comments by James Harris as it was an attack on my faith. What I find even more troubling is the lack of response by leaders of the Montclair community. The silence is deafening.

After reviewing the 15-plus minutes of Mr. Harris's uninterrupted hate speech, for me the most sickening part was the polite applause he received at the end of his comments. We know full well that had a white person made racist comments at that meeting, the response would have been immediate and overwhelming, as it should.

I am a lifetime member of the NAACP, and want to remind my fellow freedom fighters that civil rights are not just for African Americans. I am asking our NAACP members to join me in solidarity to denounce these hateful comments against the Jewish community.

In his comments, Mr. Harris conflated "crime" and "hate crime" as if to minimize the recent anti-Semitic attacks. He knows better. A hate crime is when a white cop kills a black man in his living room. Hate crimes are why "Black Lives Matter" is such an important issue. A hate crime is when a gay couple is beaten for holding hands and a hate crime is when Jews are attacked by a machete in their house while praying.

Do you know what anti-Semitism looks like in Montclair?

Do you need armed guards at your church? All the Jewish temples in the Montclair area now require armed guards and round-the-clock security. Does your church have uniformed police with long guns and bomb sniffing dogs for Christmas services? That is the Jewish experience during our High Holy Days. Worshipping God should not be an act of courage.

This unfortunate incident provides us an opportunity to come together as a community. I appreciate the support offered by several members of the executive committee. I would like to extend an invitation to the executive committee and any interested NAACP member to attend a Friday evening service with me at Temple Ner Tamid in Bloomfield. If you have never experienced a Jewish religious service, I think you will see that our similarities are greater than our differences.

The damage done by Mr. Harris's comments is far-reaching and has devastated the relationships not just between Jews and blacks, but the entire Montclair community. While I appreciate your efforts as well as Mayor Jackson's to find meaningful remedies to this crisis, the silence by many of our elected officials and community leaders is shocking. Congresswoman Mikie Sherril is one of the exceptions, with a powerful statement against hate in Montclair.

While I appreciate the service that Mr. Harris has provided the community, I would hope he would take this opportunity to reflect on his actions and determine what is in the best interest of the NAACP.

It is my recommendation that we request Mr. Harris immediately step down as an officer of the Montclair branch of the NAACP.

Cary Chevat
Montclair

Comments by Harris must be condemned

I recently learned of the comments made by James Harris wherein he singled out and made hateful comments about a religious group.

I find it extremely disheartening that people, especially community leaders, spread their hate instead of trying to spread love and make the world a better place for all of us to live. This country has come a long way in terms of civil rights for minorities. We should all strive to lift each other up instead of tearing each other down.

I also learned that Mr. Harris is a member of the Montclair Chapter of the NAACP, the same town where he made the statements. The website confirms that he is the first vice president and education committee chair of the organization. Although the statements were not made by the group itself, sadly I did not yet see any other members of his organization disavow his statements. In my book, failure to do so would qualify them as a hate group, along with any other groups that do not condemn such abhorrent behavior.

Michael Sacarello
Montclair

We must unite against hate

We spent Sunday tramping across the Brooklyn Bridge with the “No Hate. No Fear” solidarity march called in response to the recent series of violent anti-Semitic incidents in our area like the targeted murders in a Jersey City kosher grocery.

We are part of a Black/Jewish interethnic family who moved to Montclair thirty years ago in search of a diverse community to raise our daughter. Going to events like the march, recent rallies in support of immigrant rights and other actions that stand against victimization and racism have been a regular part of our personal agendas over the years because they express our values. We believe strongly that targeting of any group for violent attacks or discrimination is an assault on all of us. We have been happy that our community reflects our values.

It's from this perspective that we question the remarks made at a local forum by James Harris, a leading Montclair resident who serves as chair of the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, as reported in the on-line press. Mr. Harris was unable to speak about the horrendous targeted killings of three at the Jersey City market without also disparaging the “not friendly” “folks with long black suits and curly locks”, in reference to members of the Hasidic Jewish minority to which two of the attack victims belonged.

Mr. Harris should be mindful that any targeted violence against any group has to be opposed in our strongest voices. FULL STOP. This means without any extraneous grievances against victims. We need unity and his words were harmful.

It's doubly sad that Harris speaks as someone concerned with education and he has long been associated with

one of the civil rights movement's most respected institutions, the NAACP.

We add our voices to that of Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill and others who are saying that Harris owes Montclair's diverse community an apology.

Mark and Florence Lurinsky
Montclair

Need creative solutions to township parking problem

I agree with Jan. 2 letter-writer Michael Vassallo ("Parking problem plagues Montclair downtown"), who argued that shoppers are discouraged from venturing to downtown Montclair due to the difficulty of finding parking spaces. My wife and I also rarely patronize stores or restaurants downtown because of the parking problems. However, the solution does not necessarily have to lie with increasing the number of parking spaces downtown. There is no open space for new parking lots, and encouraging more auto traffic would just add to pollution and congestion.

Instead, Montclair needs to think creatively about providing frequent, convenient public jitney service that would bring residents from Upper Montclair and the South End to town center. Such service could run up and down Grove and Valley Road from Upper Montclair, and along either South Mountain or Harrison and Elm Street to serve the South End of town. An east west route along Bloomfield Ave would connect the two services to shops along Bloomfield Ave and to the Bay St Train Station.

To be successful, such service would have to run every 15 minutes during peak evening and weekend hours. To cover the operating costs of such services, fares could be set equal to what it would cost to park downtown. This would not only help bring Montclair residents and MSU students to downtown Montclair for shopping, dining and entertainment, but would also make more parking available for out of town visitors who wish to enjoy Montclair's growing and lively downtown scene.

BILL BEREN
Montclair

The author is a member of Montclair's Transit Advisory Committee.

Letter-writing campaign for impeachment trial

The Montclair High School chapter of High School Democrats of America is running a letter-writing campaign among members of the club and the community-at-large. The letters are addressed to moderate Republican and Democratic senators who appear to be somewhat on the fence about the conviction of President Trump. The letters are meant to express the necessity of non-partisan voting, the magnitude of Donald Trump's

actions, and the urgency of a fair, unbiased Senate trial process. We encourage members of the community to join us in this meaningful effort and reach out to the people who set a historic precedent for our democracy. The senators we are writing to are Senator Romney (R-UT), Senator Murkowski (R-ME), Senator Gardner (R-CO), Senator Collins (R-ME), Senator Manchin (D-WV), and Senator Sinema (D-AZ).

The addresses of the offices of these senators can be found at their respective government websites.

If you do choose to write a letter to one or multiple of these officials, please do not do so in a manner that is at all aggressive or reflects poorly on the Montclair community. The goal is to convince these individuals that we believe that they have it in themselves to do the right thing, our goal is not to attack or alienate them.

Please take a few minutes to send a letter, the more letters these senators get, the more likely they will be to consider the interests of American democracy!

OWEN DUNCAN
Montclair

The author is a member of the Montclair HS chapter of High School Democrats of America.