

Letters to the Editor, Dec. 19



Driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants

There is a proposal in the New Jersey State Legislature ([S3229](#)) that would allow an additional 719,000 New Jersey residents to qualify for a driver's license. This would benefit not only undocumented immigrants but those earning less than \$25,000 a year as well as those reentering society from the criminal justice system.

Currently, there are hearings and a vote on the bill scheduled for later this month and should it pass, the bill would reach Gov. Phil Murphy's desk sometime at the beginning of the new year. He is expected to sign the bill once it is passed.

At this time there are 14 states plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico that issue licenses to undocumented immigrants.

If you are wondering about the legality of the bill, a federal judge in New York just upheld the law when sued by the Erie County clerk stating that said clerk did not adequately show he'd been harmed by the law, a constitutional requirement.

If you are concerned about public safety you should know that Stanford University researchers found the policy did not increase the rate of total accidents or fatal accidents, and actually helped reduce the likelihood of hit-and-run accidents, thereby improving traffic safety and reducing overall costs for California drivers. This in a state where approximately 800,000 immigrants have obtained licenses since 2015.

Four years after implementing a policy to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, Connecticut has seen a reduction in hit-and-run crashes and a steep decline in the number of people found guilty of unlicensed driving.

The bill in New Jersey, once passed, is expected to generate \$21 million in revenue from permit, title and driver's license fees in the first three years and once fully implemented new drivers would generate \$90 million annually from registration fees, the gas tax and the sales tax on purchases of such items as auto parts, according to New Jersey Policy Perspective a left leaning think tank.

This bill is not just about affording dignity to New Jersey's immigrant families, even though it does that, and it's not just because states much redder than ours have already done this, stated

Raj Mukherji, D-Hudson. Fundamentally this bill is about public safety. As Teresa Ruiz, D-Essex notes, the safest drivers are the ones that are trained, tested and licensed.

Immigrant families are our neighbors and part of the fabric of our communities. They contribute to our economic development and the vibrancy of who we are.

New Jersey's passage and implementation of this bill will grant a much-needed measure of dignity to undocumented immigrants and will certainly benefit us all.

ARTHUR PORTNOY

Montclair

Entire town should decide on rent control

Having twice before failed to win a referendum establishing rent controls in Montclair, proponents are now attempting to accomplish their goal through an ordinance, which requires the votes of four persons—a majority of the township council. I believe the council should follow the precedents established by their predecessors and put this latest proposal to a referendum as well. This is not only because I believe this to be a more appropriate way for such an important issue to be decided, but because I believe rent controls in Montclair will, through time, have pernicious effects on the township as a whole.

While I do not know the provisions of the new ordinance nor how they will be implemented, the application of basic economic principles suggests that a rent control regime that curtails rent increases will have several undesirable consequences.

First, the market value of existing rental properties will be lower than would otherwise be, which will eventually result in property tax assessments on rental properties being lower than they would otherwise be. Since property taxes pay the vast bulk of township expenses, it seems inevitable that this property tax revenue loss will be made up by other property owners. In effect, then, renters will be subsidized by owners of residential and commercial property in Montclair. Unless the rent control ordinance includes a provision for means-testing rent increases, there is no guarantee that all those being subsidized deserve that subsidy, and many likely will not.

Second, the existence of a property tax regime will make Montclair a less desirable town in which to build new rental housing. Since developers of rental housing are currently required to provide some "affordable" apartments in their new buildings, fewer new apartments overall implies fewer new affordable apartments. In fact, unless they are means-tested, effective rent controls will benefit existing renters in Montclair at the expense of reducing the future availability of new affordable apartments to those who really need them.

Reduced new construction of rental apartments in Montclair is likely to have its own effect on property taxes. It seems likely that new rental housing is helping and will continue to help slow the increase in property taxes, since the cost to the township of providing township services to residents of that new housing is probably lower than the additional property tax revenue that new housing will provide. Fewer new rental units will remove this property-tax-ameliorating factor.

An effective rent control ordinance is also likely to cause the quality of the existing stock of rental property to deteriorate beyond what would otherwise be the case, since rental property owners would have less incentive to maintain, not to mention improve, their buildings. A large and growing stock of less-well-maintained rental property in Montclair would not be desirable for most residents.

Finally, based on the experience of New York City, it seems likely that a rent control ordinance will result in regular, well-reported disputes between property owners and renters as permitted rent increases are negotiated. Politics at present are poisonous enough without inviting this new cause of discord.

One must have sympathy for the long-term renters in Montclair who are forced to relocate to less desirable towns. Fortunately, there are nearby, if less attractive,

alternatives to living in Montclair. But being forced to relocate because of the expense of housing in Montclair is not unique to renters—long-time homeowners here have seen very large increases in their property taxes through the years, and some no doubt face severe affordability issues. But no one seems to be worrying about them—in fact, the subsidies to renters that would result from rent controls will exacerbate their difficulties.

The sad truth is that a town of some 40,000 people is unable to contribute meaningfully to the problem of the affordability of housing in the New York metropolitan area. In essence, rent controls are a special pleading for those already renting here. If they are to be imposed, it ought to be done by a decision of all of the voters who choose to voice their opinions at the ballot box rather than the township council.

LARRY D. HAYS
Montclair

Be careful what you ask for

The Upper Montclair Village Neighborhood Commercial Zone, in round numbers, has 440 parking spaces: 320 metered and ADA spaces along with 120 permit spaces.

We know the permit waiting lists are years long. We also know past zoning and planning boards stipulated over 30 of these spaces to be allocated as conditions to previous approvals. We know the train station lot's 68 permit spaces is often at capacity on weekday peak nights between De Novo Restaurant's patrons and commuter parking. It is the remaining 320-space pool of metered and ADA spaces that visitors and patrons will seek out and use.

The new Bellevue Theater application needs 180 spaces. The applicant will argue the 140 remaining spaces can service the 18 restaurants, the fast-food operations like Dunkin, Starbucks, Coldstone, etc., and any other businesses open during movie times with any overflow parking utilizing the adjacent free parking on residential streets. This includes spaces on streets like North Mountain, Braemore, Jerome, Oakwood, Inwood, Northview, etc. Conceptually this could work as long as parkers are willing to park & walk up to 600 to 1,000 feet to their destination.

What will be of most concern is the congestion arising from drivers circulating around to find an open space among the four distributed public parking lots and the various on-street spaces. We won't help them as there is no village way-finding system for parking and the plan relies having the normal parking buffer inventory outside the village on the residential streets. But, my sense is we want a six-screen theater like when we wanted a real big hotel. So, we will just cross our fingers and hope it doesn't take away our Neighborhood Commercial's primary selling point – convenience. If it does, there is always DoorDash & Amazon.

FRANK RUBACKY
Montclair

**Letters to the Editor, Dec.
12**



Councilman ‘gratified’ to aid environment with bag ban

Montclair has long been in the vanguard of pursuing progressive solutions at the local level. By instituting a ban on plastic bags, we are taking a meaningful first step towards environmental justice, and doing our part to protect the health of our planet for future generations. I am proud to have helped lead the fight to ban the use of plastic bags in large retail settings in Montclair and I am gratified my colleagues have agreed to move forward with this ordinance. I urge the council to go a step further and join me in supporting the prohibition of plastic bags in all businesses in Montclair.

Municipalities throughout the state look to Montclair to set an example for responsible, progressive government. By passing the plastic bag ban ordinance we are leading the way for other local governments to follow suit. Working together we can help create a safer, healthier world for our children and future generations to come.

SEAN SPILLER

Montclair

The author is the Township Councilman representing the Third Ward.

Kudos to kind passenger on DeCamp bus

A sincere thank you to the bus driver or passenger who found and turned in the wallet I left on the NYC-bound DeCamp 33 Grove bus that left Watchung Ave. at 6:15 on Thursday, Dec. 5. The contents were of value, and your kindness is very much appreciated.

ARLENE SCHNEIDER

Montclair

Thanks for spotlight on addiction recovery

Thanks for your [Dec. 5 article "Group helps those coping with addiction"](#) and the chance to learn about Jean Grossman's SMART Recovery meetings in Montclair.

I appreciate you shining a light on addiction recovery because so often the focus is on the problem rather than the solution. Especially around the holidays, it's great to know that many recovery options exist right in our backyard. I didn't know about this approach, or the practical tools it offers. Thanks for offering a lifeline to those who might be struggling with addiction or who may know someone that is.

SUZANNE RISS

Maplewood

Letters to the Editor, Dec. 5



MHS lockdown should be a wake-up call

Last week's lockdown at Montclair High School and Renaissance Middle School was a real wake-up call. The district was lucky. No one was physically injured in the incident, and no gun was found...this time. But we don't know if we'll be so lucky in the future.

In our town and across the country, irresponsible gun ownership means children have easy access to guns. While it may be hard to buy a gun in New Jersey, it's easy to buy one in Pennsylvania or Maryland and bring it over the state line. Weak gun laws impact everyone.

Mass shootings garner a lot of attention. But people need to pay attention to what happened last week at our high school. Our children are scared. Our teachers are scared. My friends said that the hour-long lockdown was the worst hour of their lives as they urgently texted their kids who were crouching under desks and hiding in closets. I'm grateful that there was no shooter, but that doesn't mean no harm was done. These children and parents spent an hour thinking an armed gunman was on campus.

This is not OK. 100 Americans die by gun every single day. We

owe it to our children to do more. We need background checks on all gun sales. We must demand that Sen. Mitch McConnell introduce HR8 to the Senate floor, a bill that passed the House, but has been stalled for months since. I'm sick of worrying if our school is next.

Text "READY" to 64433 or go to www.momsdemandaction.org to learn more.

JAIME BEDRIN

Montclair

The writer is a volunteer with Moms Demand Action. She will speak on a panel following the reading of "24 Gun Control Plays" on Dec. 9 at Montclair State University.

Kudos to Payne for cosponsoring climate bill

The Montclair chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby applauds Rep. Donald Payne Jr. for cosponsoring the bipartisan Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act in the U.S. House of Representatives. This groundbreaking bipartisan climate solution to price carbon will give revenue to households and bring greenhouse gas emissions down 90 percent by 2050.

Led by Florida Democrat Rep. Ted Deutch and Florida Republican Rep. Francis Rooney, and cosponsored by 72 other members of Congress, the policy puts a fee on fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. It starts low, at \$15 per ton, and grows \$10 per ton each year. The money collected from the carbon fee is allocated in equal shares every month to the American people to spend as they see fit. Ultimately, the bill will not only cut emissions of greenhouse gases, but also create over 2 million new jobs, lower health care costs and promote energy innovation.

Payne's endorsement comes on the heels of a meeting between

local climate activists Shalini Teneja, Maya Savoie, and Patrick McCarthy with staffers at Rep. Payne's office in Washington DC, as part of CCL's November lobby day. Members of Montclair CCL have been meeting regularly with Payne's office since the local group was founded in 2013, and we are delighted that he has signed on to the bill.

The impact of climate change is already being felt across New Jersey. A recent Washington Post analysis found that New Jersey is one of the fastest warming states in the country. Sea-level rise is also expected to hit New Jersey hard, with ocean levels rising between three and eight feet by the end of the century.

The bipartisan Energy Innovation Act is a critical first step to contain the effects of climate change and preserve a livable world for our children and grandchildren. It provides a common sense approach to solving climate change that's a win-win. It benefits us throughout Essex County by cleaning up our air and giving us monthly dividend checks. We are so grateful to Rep. Payne for stepping up to support this bipartisan climate bill.

ELLEN BERKOWITZ

Montclair

The author is the group leader of the Montclair Citizens' Climate Lobby.

**Letters to editor: Nov. 27,
2019**



Following in my mother's footsteps

In response to the Nov. 21 article on affordable housing ("Is Montclair doing enough?", page 1):

My late mother Mrs. Mary Ann Clermont was one of the core founding members of HOME Corp.

I remember in the early 1980s I was in elementary school at Northeast, you know, up by Applegate Farms, and my mother was working at the Y on Glenridge Avenue front desk, and I remember her marching in a parade and everyone had HOME Corp T-shirts.

When I was in high school she told me how people were coming to her and others in the community telling them the problems they were having paying rent and buying groceries. This was going on from the time I was in grade school – she knew I could understand better as an older teen. In the meantime, I babysat for a few key HOME Corp founders while they attended meetings to fight for fair and affordable housing, more housing and better housing and some were doing health-related advocacy. She had an array of friends all across town and other townships having moved to Montclair from Bergen County by way of the South.

She shared with me how they started putting together this organization HOME Corp that would help people and make more

housing available that Montclairians and new Montclairians could afford so people could raise their families here in our beautiful community. She received a lot of support here through the schools and the extremely caring educators who worked with her to help me because I needed gifted and talented services that Montclair was known for offering that didn't exist anywhere else in public schools that she knew of. The schools here were also a major reason she knew she had to raise me here and felt the same should be for all families with all that Montclair has to offer. The integration, the diversity – the village concept and the importance of family and back then the education. She saw so many people with so much to offer here and she and her HomeCorp friends all had these ideals in common. With all that Montclair has, no one here should struggle or give up their quality of life. She cared about that for everyone in our community. She didn't see color but she saw in color and acknowledged that differences exist but she wanted equality for everyone.

It is my mother's legacy and with that sentiment it was one of my mother's most important dying wishes that I would do my part for all of the people in the Montclair community with regards to fair housing.

I am honored to work with people like my mother who cared and I want to be like her – to help people in the community where she raised me and work with people who have a history in this town of truly caring and doing something about the issues here. I owe this to so many of them, their grandkids and great grandkids, nieces, nephews and their friends.

AHAVAFELICIDAD

Montclair

The author is president the Tenants Organization of Montclair.

Planning board statement on SAFE Streets incorrect

The statement from Planning Board members Martin Schwartz and Carmel Loughman in response to Bike&Walk Montclair's recent statement in support of the Montclair SAFE Plan at the Town Council meeting contains several inaccurate and misleading claims.

First, Bike&Walk Montclair has never been part of a "proposed push to insert bike lanes throughout the township." We do want to help make bicycling and walking safer and more accessible, we are not planning a takeover of the town's streets as they seem to imply.

Second, as we have explained to the Planning Board on more than one occasion, as has Janice Talley, our Town Planner, the Montclair SAFE Plan does not dictate any specific infrastructure solutions, including bike lanes. It merely gives the township a list of proven options for future infrastructure development.

Third, Bike&Walk Montclair is a small nonprofit advocacy group. It has never been our responsibility to make changes in the SAFE plan. We do not have to "submit more data" to "make our case." The SAFE Plan, was funded by NJDOT and drawn up by independent street design consultants NV5 and a 22 person Steering Committee with representatives from our government and local advocacy organizations including Bike&Walk Montclair and makes the case very well, by showing how the township's streets can be made safer.

I did share with the Board examples of complete streets implementation plans that were successful in reducing crashes including extensive biking networks in nearby Passaic County, not a major city and not a milder climate. I shared that research with Janice Talley by email and she said she'd share

it with the subcommittee. It was the Master Plan Subcommittee that was supposed to review the SAFE plan a second time but the subcommittee has not met since last April. This has indeed meant a long delay, whether intentional or not.

Finally, Bike&Walk Montclair is not trying to get the town to adopt a new policy, because the Township already has an infrastructure policy, called Complete Streets, adopted by the Township Council in 2009. So we are unclear what the policy differences Schwartz and Loughman refer to in their response. If they disagree with the town's Complete Streets policy, their argument is with the Township Council, not Bike&Walk Montclair.

DEBRA KAGAN

Montclair

The author is the president of Bike&Walk Montclair.

Montclair is doing enough on affordable housing

The answer to the question posed on page 1 of your Nov. 21 edition, "Is Montclair doing enough?", is yes. The market should be allowed to speak for itself.

A basic tenet of macro economics is "as prices go down, demand goes up and supply goes down." If the market is left alone, equilibrium will occur and the natural price will be revealed. If prices are kept artificially low or subsidized, usually by government action, demand almost always outpaces supply. That's why the sub-headline, "Demand outpacing supply in town with a history of providing," makes perfect sense.

My question is: Where will the supply of affordable come from?

Is it the already overburdened property taxpayers who will be paying the bill?

Just asking.

DENNIS CORBO

Montclair

What I'm thankful for

Among those people that I'm thankful for this week I'll include Representatives Donald Payne Jr., Mikie Sherrill and the eight other New Jerseyans in Congress who voted that it's not OK for the president to demand favors from a foreign government in the form of dirt to malign his likely U.S. political opponent in the next election, and that we must investigate and consider impeachment. I'll add to that list our former Governor Christine Todd Whitman, who honorably, almost alone among major figures in the Republican Party, spoke up for the investigation.

I'll be thinking as well of the dedicated and courageous federal civil servants like Fiona Hill and Lt. Colonel Alexander Vindman, who both defied intimidation and vilification from the White House to testify about what they knew of the Ukraine plot.

Most of the social and economic benefits of being an American that we celebrate this week stem from the fact that our country is a democracy and not a presidential dictatorship or a monarchy.

I hope and pray that we'll all rise to the test in the coming weeks and months to take action to defend and preserve our democratic form of government.

Mark Lurinsky

Montclair

The author is co-chair of BlueWaveNJ's healthcare committee.

Streets are dangerous by design

"People drive too fast!"

"Why aren't there more cops?"

"Is everybody on the road crazy?"

We hear this all the time and for good reason; our streets are unnecessarily dangerous.

Every year we see dozens of crashes involving someone walking or biking. Some think it's just bad luck, others shout for more police or signage. Given those choices most call for more police/signage. But unfortunately that is rarely effective. Take this year for example where so far we have had 55 bike/ped crashes. That is more than half of all crashes in both 2017 and 2018 combined, despite running two townwide safety campaigns and doubling the amount of traffic tickets issued last year.

Enforcement and education are not enough; our streets are dangerous by design.

The designs of our streets were largely created during the postwar era. Since then they have become so familiar to us that most of us do not even notice them. Back then engineers primarily focused on moving cars, so public spaces were redesigned to work best for cars. But as cars grew in

popularity, even more public space was remade for them. In some places this changed the core identity of neighborhoods, and not for the better.

This transformation from places made for people to places made for cars went on for years. Neighborhoods became unwalkable with features like giant store-front parking and streets so wide they are nearly impassable but for the young and agile.

Then as most engineers continued to design for cars, some started to question WHO streets are for. They came up with new, safer street designs, many of which focused on one simple idea: reduce the width of travel lanes and people will drive more cautiously.

The idea of designing streets for people and not just for cars has grown slowly over time, but this movement is now widely accepted by the majority of leading traffic professionals. This is for good reason, it has been proven to be the most effective way of improving safety.

In 2016 Montclair received a grant from the New Jersey Department of Transportation to create a plan to apply these concepts here. Professional engineers were teamed up with representatives from our community to research our streets. The product they created was the Montclair S.A.F.E. (Streets Are For Everyone) Plan which was to be adopted into the town Master Plan where it would be used as a guide for future street designs.

Instead the council passed it along to the planning board who questioned not just the validity of the plan but concepts leading traffic professionals profess in which it is based. They requested it be revised to their understanding of traffic safety and stated that they would reconvene later to discuss.

Today the planning board continues to wait for their revisions. They claim they need to see "proof of wider user demand to substantiate the long term anticipated costs." But

that is like requesting to see proof of people swimming across a river before considering building a bridge.

Instead let's focus on the cost of what NOT redesigning our streets will incur. The SAFE plan is just waiting to be adopted and will provide us with options which we can apply to our streets to make them more equitable, environmentally responsive, physically and mentally healthier and SAFER for all users.

Above all we should learn from our past planning mistakes that brought us here. Designing our neighborhoods from places for people to places for cars has made our town less safe and less livable. This is especially important today as development booms. If we continue to design our streets during this boom for cars, there could only be one outcome: more cars will flood our streets and once again change the core identity of our neighborhood, and not for the better.

I implore the leadership in our town to adopt the Montclair SAFE plan and take the first step toward the future to ensure our Streets Are For Everyone!

BILL FEENEY

Montclair

The author is a board member of Bike&Walk Montclair.

**Letters to editor: Nov. 21,
2019**



Something much better for Lackawanna

The 7.5-acre Lackawanna site is our only opportunity to make a big difference in downtown Montclair. Lackawanna Plaza could have a destination market inside our most important town historic site. It could have green space along an exposed Toney's Brook, enhancing the whole neighborhood and providing a pleasant and calmer walk for commuters, shoppers and neighbors. The Lackawanna tunnel under Grove Street could continue to provide a safe welcoming access to Plaza shopping for the public it was built for, not as planned now to be accessible for only the tenants of new luxury apartments. We could have the required parking to attract and support businesses by bringing residents and visitors back downtown if we had a plan suitable for the existing acreage.

Strategically the developers prolonged the review process by making minimal requested changes after each review to wear down the planning board and any opposition. In addition, by not allowing a temporary grocery in the empty market space, they pitted local residents needing a supermarket against those fighting for a better plan. Consequently, local residents pressured the Planning Board and Council to approve what the developers wanted.

A beleaguered Planning Board did their due diligence through

months of proposal reviews but under pressure, in the end accepted changes minutes before the vote. The approved plan allowed for half the required parking and partial destruction of the town's most important historic site for an unknown supermarket chain smaller than previously proposed so consequently space for other undisclosed tenants.

The developer can propose a better plan at any time, instead they like to claim a "few" residents are preventing the neighborhood from getting their supermarket and argue that 190 of the 201 plaintiffs should not be allowed on the appeal. ABetterLackawanna.org is trying to get a better downtown for all of us with this appeal. Anyone who values honoring our history and culture, those who contributed to it and understands how a well planned development can improve a town, should help and support them.

Montclair is home to one of the richest collections of historic homes, many built for some of the most influential citizens in our country's history. Maintaining an attractive historic downtown attracts visitors and new residents who maintain this history. Influential leaders in science, medicine, social reform, business and philanthropy, education, arts and entertainment built these homes when the railroad provided easy commutes to New York. By the 1930's more than 130 Montclair residents were listed in each issue of Who's Who In America. Are we so shortsighted as to destroy an irreplaceable piece culture for temporary retailers rapidly becoming obsolete.

Go to <https://abetterlackawanna.org/> to help with legal fees to continue the appeal. Educate yourself about the lawsuit on the site. Come to events this Saturday as seen on this site.

Write to your mayor and council representatives and ask what they are doing to support this effort. This is Montclair. Get something much better.

LINDA CRANSTON

Montclair

The writer is the founder of SaveMontclair.org.

Montclair thrives when you shop local

Everyone knows about the amazing dining and the incredible gifts and services you can buy in Montclair. But shopping locally is a reinvestment into our own community, with as much as 2/3 of every dollar staying in the local economy.

Shopping locally is really a gift to everyone.

To help this effort, the Township has approved free two-hour parking at all Montclair meters from Nov. 29 to Dec. 26. And, as an added bonus, the Montclair Center BID will be giving out 200 free one-day parking permits to shoppers who present their same-day receipts to us on Church Street on Small Business Saturday, Nov. 30, starting at 10 a.m.

The Montclair Center BID is proud to be a part of Small Business Saturday, a national initiative to encourage everyone to support their local retailers. In a recent study from American Express, every dollar spent in a small business creates an additional 50 cents in local business activity, from employee spending and businesses purchasing local goods and supplies. Shopping locally enriches our community and keeps Montclair vibrant.

On Nov. 30, the retailers and restaurants of Montclair Center are ready to kick off the holiday season with a scavenger hunt for prizes, lunch specials, and even a visit from Santa. You can even help one of Montclair Center's ArtConnects mural artists, Jhonattan Arango, paint his mural at 50 Church Street (come ready to get dirty!). I would like to personally invite

everyone to join us on for the kickoff on Church Street to help kick off the holiday shopping season. Please check out our website, Facebook page and Instagram feeds for all the specials and details this season.

One of the best parts of my job at the BID is working with the rich diversity of shops, restaurants, spas and services available to all of us downtown. I can tell you that all of your local retailers and restaurateurs are proud to be part of the fabric of Montclair, with its reputation for world-class arts, music, energy and so much more. With a shorter holiday season ahead of us, I urge everyone to show your Montclair pride and shop locally.

I look forward to welcoming you this season.

Jason Gleason

Montclair

The author is the acting director of the Montclair Center Business Improvement District.

Ditch the plastic and the paper

Regarding the Nov. 14 story on the proposed ban on single-use plastic bags ("Plastic begone," page 1), I have two comments regarding the proposed exemption for small, local businesses based on the value of plastic bags to small business marketing.

First, it was both ironic and representative that the photo of the plastic bag in the article was simply printed with the words "Thank you, thank you, thank you." Most, although not all, small local businesses utilize generic bags such as these and do not print their name or logo on the bag.

Second, I bought a heavy-duty reusable bottle-carry bag from Bottle King for a couple of dollars several years ago. We use

it at the local groceries to carry milk, cans, jars, and anything that will fit into the sectioned interior. More to the point, we use it at our neighborhood liquor store, which provides flimsy plastic bags without any store identifier or marketing information. Local stores can sell these heavy duty reusable bags too but choose not to. While an individual plastic bag is cheaper than an individual paper bag, what are the costs when you compare a paid-for reusable bag with scores if not hundreds of single-use plastic bags?

Finally, I applaud the council for working to find a solution to protect local businesses as well as the environment, as well as the many local businesses already offering alternatives to single-use plastics.

JOANN KATZBAN

Montclair

Elected officials should listen to constituents

Activists have raised two issues in New Jersey that demand immediate action from our elected officials. The first is ending the ICE contract in Essex and other counties, and our implicit collaboration with the Trump administration to execute unethical policies against immigrants. The second issue is making New Jersey residents eligible for driver's licenses regardless of immigration status.

The issues are controversial but also connected. The ICE contracts generate millions of profits for the county governments. And shockingly, four out of five ICE detainees either have no record, or have only committed a minor offense such as a traffic violation. So not only are county governments profiting from and enabling ICE policies, local politicians are also enabling a key method for ICE to find

more detainees. The driver's license law would protect these families from the hands of ICE, improve road safety, and coincidentally generate millions in state revenues.

Maybe some of those funds could be used to fill the gap in county revenues once the ICE contracts are ended? Just a thought. Regardless, local elected officials should respond to activists' continued demands to end the ICE contracts and pass the driver's license law. It's the right thing to do.

DEVIKA GUPTA

Montclair

A pedestrian's view

Last Saturday, as yet another pedestrian was run down, I thought of my own accident three months ago. I wasn't surprised by my accident, since I've had so many near misses crossing at green lights in Montclair. I was lucky, having only "minor" injuries, including an eye injury, a head injury without a concussion, and a sacral fracture in my lower back. I can't rake leaves yet, and I can't run (I tried). I went overnight from middle age to old age. I became a burden on my friends, family and colleagues, who were all very kind and supportive and helpful.

I got excellent care at St. Joe's trauma center and staggered home the same night. I thought I was lucky, until the bills started coming (totaling over \$20,000). What, you don't have car insurance? No, I don't have a car. Well, New Jersey is a no-fault state! Blue Cross, which eats up a large portion of my income, didn't tell me that they wouldn't pay most of the bills, which had to go to NJPLIGA [New Jersey Property-Liability Insurance Guaranty Association]. I had to go to the police station in person, hobbling with a cane, to pick up the police report. Obviously lawyers had picked it up before I had, since every lawyer in the county sent me a letter. Even

Blue Cross advised me to get a lawyer to sort through the mess. A colleague recommended a lawyer; I have yet to hear from the lawyer, but I've been dealing with his assistant, and all the attendant paperwork. It feels more like I'm the one at fault than the driver; to date, I don't think their car insurance has paid anything, at least I haven't been apprised of the fact if they have. I'm still out of pocket at least \$200 for medical care.

I feel no animosity toward the driver; she was more traumatized by the accident than I was. But I'd like to live in a country where I don't have to worry about medical bills if I cross at a green light at an intersection and get hit by someone making a left turn. I have no car, so I have to walk everywhere, now in the dark, and I wonder: what happens if I get hit again? The accident is only the beginning – pedestrians, prepare yourself for all the mess and fallout that comes after the accident, and beware.

STEPHANIE WOOD

Montclair

Stop incarcerating immigrants

“Give me your tired, your poor, your struggling masses yearning to be free...”

I am appalled by the amount of money our governments are spending on mass incarceration and the cruelty this imposes on human beings. Repeatedly I read that this is justified in only a small fraction of the cases. Incarcerating immigrants who are seeking safety and an improved life is especially disturbing.

Recently the Trump administration requested \$35 million more for incarceration. We have far better ways to spend our money!

Please join me in writing to our legislators and ask them not to grant this request and to cut the amount spent on incarceration, especially of frightened, innocent immigrants.

PAT KENSCHAFT

Montclair

Letters to the Editor: Nov. 14, 2019



Thanks for story on lawsuits at MHS

On Nov. 1, Erin Roll wrote an article on an ongoing lawsuit against the Montclair Board of Education, that accuses multiple Montclair High School personnel of sexual harassment and a hostile work environment. As a 2016 graduate of Montclair High School, and moreover, as a young woman, I genuinely appreciate the coverage that this case is receiving. I strongly believe that it is important for all to be aware of the social and institutional disparities that women face even here in Montclair.

During my time at MHS, there were many occasions where myself or one of my female peers felt uncomfortable around certain personnel at the school. I never felt the need to take my sentiments to administration because I didn't want to jeopardize the relationships I had with other workers at the school. However, once my younger sister began her journey at MHS, my feelings toward protecting potential predators completely dissipated. Whether it was unsettling comments on her appearance, or the unwarranted graze of someone's hands, I encouraged my younger sister to always speak on things that brought her discomfort. In order for these issues to be exposed and rectified, one must speak up.

With that being said, I have written this letter to thank you and Erin Roll for shedding light on a very serious matter. This situation shows us that even in an affluent, community-thriven town like Montclair, women still face disparities that are oftentimes unbearable. And in order to amend these issues, we must first address them. I will continue to follow this story in hopes that the two female plaintiffs receive the justice that they, and so many other women in this world, desperately deserve.

NAOMI WIGGINS

Montclair

In need of a supermarket now

Ever since November of 2015 when Pathmark closed at the base of Downtown Montclair, Lackawanna Plaza continues to sit vacant. Only two businesses are still open – Popeye's and Robert's Pizza. It seems that the developers that are responsible for Lackawanna Plaza are not considering the needs of the customers.

Considering that we pay extremely high taxes to live in Montclair, we deserve better as a community with the construction of the revamped Lackawanna Plaza. It was supposed to have begun the end of this year but there has been numerous debates going on between the developers and the public. For example, the public feels that the developers are trying to limit the pedestrian access from the north side of the mall.

Being that Montclair is meant to be a pedestrian-friendly town, shoppers who approach the mall from the north would save a few minutes by being able to approach the plaza via Glen Ridge Avenue.

A good affordable supermarket in the lower part of Downtown Montclair is a must. When Pathmark was open, it was in a great location. Many people could walk to the grocery store. For those who need to take public transportation to get to the supermarket, they had so many bus options – New Jersey Transit's 11, 28, 29, and 34M all stop along Bloomfield near the intersection of Gates Ave and Lackawanna Plaza. During the period with the absence of a supermarket in Lackawanna Plaza, people have had to travel to other towns like West Orange and Bloomfield to do their grocery shopping.

The developers should seriously considering putting themselves "in the shoes" of customers who don't drive and need to use the mall. When Pathmark was open, many of its customers didn't drive and lived within walking distance of the mall. If we pay very high taxes, then we expect a lot more out of the Lackawanna Plaza project.

JOHN LEVAI

Montclair

Time for NJ to allow drivers' licenses for all

On Monday, Nov. 4, Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York signed a bill into law allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license. This is a life-altering change for many people, and a tool in the ongoing struggle for immigrants' rights. By ICE's own account, 50 percent of its detainees were located through traffic violations. A driver's license law would lower the number of violations and lessen the number of people jailed by ICE. It's time for New Jersey to pass such a law.

Though Gov. Murphy would surely sign a bill if it reached his desk, Assembly Speaker Coughlin and Senate President Sweeney are refusing to allow driver's license bills out of committee. We need to call our senators and assembly members to lean on Coughlin and Sweeney to get this done.

In the meantime, the right bill must be written. Like New York's new law, ours must guarantee privacy to ensure that DMV records cannot be used by federal agencies to track undocumented persons.

I encourage everyone who cares about immigration justice to speak out in favor of driver's licenses for all.

ANTHONY LIOI

Montclair

Lackawanna fight continues

Why should all be outraged about the short-sighted, and ill-conceived development in Montclair's Commercial district and most urgently, Lackawanna Station?

1ST: The decision to approve the Lackawanna developer's application by Montclair's Planning Board was in direct defiance of the unanimous recommendation of the Montclair Historical Preservation Commission (HPC), and every architectural, planning, preservation and supermarket consultant hired by the township and the Planning Board to advise them.

2ND: There is presently a lawsuit filed and funded by over 200 friends and neighbors to appeal the Montclair Planning Board's approval of the plan by Pinnacle Development and Hampshire Properties. The appeal is based on substantive and procedural defects in the decision.

The developer's tactics was a strategy of divide and conquer. The Fourth Ward and others were guided by an expectation that a full-service supermarket was to be integral to the project. A ShopRite supermarket was bandied about for months and months, setting clear expectations, especially among the traditional Pathmark shoppers who felt the loss of Pathmark created hardship. Once the expectations were set, the applicant clearly and unequivocally created a false dichotomy, telling residents and the Planning Board that preserving the historic train station (a National, State and Local designated landmark in Montclair's Town Center Historic District) would preclude a lease to a supermarket. The applicant cultivated conflict between those who sought the preservation of the historic train station and residents of the Fourth Ward. This classic divide-and-conquer seemed nuanced with racial undertones and socioeconomic conflict. The needs and ambitions of both groups were never in conflict. This was a cleverly manufactured tactic.

The developer's tactics was a strategy of bait and switch. What was actually, incredulously, voted on was not the project that had been applied for and presented over the previous 24 months. After two years and hundreds of hours of discussion, the applicant produced a tenant only on the actual night of

the vote. Instead of a 49,000-square-foot supermarket promised to the Fourth Ward, Brian Stolar suddenly revealed LIDL, a 29,000-square-foot specialty market that is approximately half the size of what was promised and represented in sworn testimony. Ironically, LIDL promotes itself on its website as open and actively willing to embrace historic buildings.

Montclair is at a critical intersection. Literally, Lackawanna can and should be an important anchor to Montclair's main commercial district. The Lackawanna site is a critical gateway to Montclair and a bridge connecting the Fourth Ward commercial and residential district to the rest of Bloomfield Avenue and the township. Most critically, its central location in town, with little creative effort, could link and create visual and pedestrian continuity to promote vibrancy and activation of the full length of Bloomfield from the Montclair Art Museum to Bay Street Station. A good plan would activate and bring continuity to the full-length Glen Ridge Avenue. Lackawanna is perhaps one of the top 10 most trafficked intersections in Essex County. As presently approved the site will become a Route 46/10 big-box site with an astoundingly inappropriate 375-foot-deep parking lot, entirely defiant of the prescriptions of Montclair's Master Plan and entirely disruptive and deadening to four important streetscapes.

The developer of Lackawanna developed The Siena, Valley & Bloom, The MC Hotel, The MC Residences (under construction), and The Seymour Street/Wellmont project (under construction). Consider these buildings. No matter what you think of these projects you might want to ask: "How is a single lead developer developing every major commercial project in Montclair? Simultaneously?"

Pinnacle incredibly was granted a variance due to "hardship." This "hardship" is entirely self-created by their desire to build residential multifamily units on top of existing parking lots, east of Grove. Go seek a variance for a self-created hardship in any other community and see how far you get. For

this privilege, Pinnacle will demolish the most architecturally rich and most important historic site in Montclair. You think parking downtown is hard now?

Where is consideration for sound planning principles? Where is the kind of thoughtfulness our beautiful township deserves? Our planning board and our township planner are failing us. We should all should be outraged.

DAVID GREENBAUM

Montclair

The writer is a member of the township's Historic Preservation Commission.

Don't take voters for granted

On Election Day, we entered the voting booth and did something we have rarely if ever done in the fifty plus years since we cast our first votes – we chose not to vote for any candidate running for Assembly in the 34th District. While we are registered Democrats and candidates Giblin and Timberlake generally vote in synch with our values and concerns, not one of the candidates on the ballot made any effort to contact us prior to the election to let us know who they were and why we should vote for them. (We did get a robocall on Election Day from Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill asking us to support the Democratic candidates, but without citing any reason other than they were Democrats.)

In short, the Democrats took our votes for granted, and the Republicans obviously did not think outreach would sway us – probably correct, but you never know, do you? This also applied to the candidates running for other county positions as well.

Over the past two years that Giblin and Timberlake have served, we have not received any mailing or email telling us what they have done in office, how their work has promoted issues we care about, or any other news about their service. They have not held any town meetings in Montclair that we might attend, or otherwise made attempts to reach out to us, their constituents.

Obviously both Giblin and Timberlake won their district with overwhelming support from the party faithful. We realize that our lone dissents were not sufficient to change the outcome of the election, but hopefully this letter will lead them to take heed and at least pretend that they work for their constituents instead of the other way around.

BILL BEREN & JOANN KATZBAN

Montclair

Letters to the editor – Nov. 7, 2019



Praise for MAU and Senior Bus

I recently fell in my home and broke my left arm. I called the Montclair Ambulance Unit pronto and it took EMS professionals Tim and Evan less than eight minutes to come to my location. While bringing me to Mountainside emergency, Tim put my injured arm in a special temporary splint to keep it from moving. Later in the ER I was put in a cast; located a surgeon the next day with Active Orthopedics who performed a distal radial fracture operation on Oct. 22.

Currently I am clad in a cast and cannot drive my car for an undetermined amount of time.

Being a tenaciously independent person a year or two north of 65, kudos also to our Montclair Township for providing their superb senior bus service: ezride.org/routes/montclair-senior-bus.

I called them at 201-939-4242, ext. 1, was registered as a client and made a trip yesterday to Brookdale ShopRite.

Leo, one of the drivers for Montclair Senior Bus, picked me up at the entrance to my residence at a specific time; conveyed me to Brookdale ShopRite, collected me at an agreed-upon time, carried my bags and helped me to put them in a cart at my residence to bring inside myself (never straining my injured southpaw). Met a few other senior Montclairians on the route home.

One can make reservations with the Montclair Senior Bus to be driven anywhere in our township to local doctors, Mountainside Hospital, my bank in Upper Montclair, A&P, Brookdale ShopRite, a friend's home. Cost: no charge.

I am so pleased and proud that our Montclair Township joins other classy towns around the U.S. in providing these helpful ambulance and hospital services.

If you are or are not a senior, it's good for you to know about this.

WILMA A. HURWITZ

Montclair

The author is a public relations consultant and freelance writer/reporter for Montclair Local.

Let immigrants get drivers' licenses

Immigrant groups have been lobbying the state legislature for 15 years for the right of undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses. Like everyone else, they need to drive to get to work, bring the kids to school, visit a doctor, in short, to have a life.

Assemblywoman Annette Quijano is the head of the judiciary committee that the bill was referred to; she is also one of the bill's primary sponsors. The legislation has been sitting on her desk for months. In Mitch McConnell style, she and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin refuse to let the bill out of committee and put it up to a vote. In the senate, Steve Sweeney has shut down the bill in the same manner, refusing to let the sponsors of the legislation, Sens. Vitale and Cryan, promote their own bill.

The law would require immigrants to pass the same test as everyone else, so on that score, it's a plus for public safety. But what's really holding it up is money. There are three county jails being used to detain immigrants, in Essex, Bergen and Hudson. Essex alone rakes in \$40+ million a year in ICE contracts.

Approximately 50 percent of the immigrants detained by ICE are the result of traffic stops. This is how the counties keep the beds in the jails full and maximize their contracts. Allowing the immigrants to get driver's licenses would result in a shortfall to county revenue. Quoting Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr. from the New York Times on Oct. 14, "Government cannot fund itself entirely on property taxes, so it is important that government find other sources of revenue." Apparently, profiting from human misery is now an acceptable "source of revenue."

If you disagree, please call Coughlin at 732-855-7441 and Sweeney at 856-251-9801 and ask them to put the bills up for a vote.

JIM PRICE

Montclair

Creation of a 'civilian task force'

Concerning the creation of a "civilian task force" at the ICE Detention Facility in Newark, all I can say is that it's about time that this appears to be moving forward.

Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr. has been under fire for quite some time for the conditions there. When investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, their scathing report issued a long list of dangerous and inhumane conditions at the facility. It's not unfair to say the place was dysfunctional even by ICE standards.

What did DiVincenzo have to say about it then? He asserts that not only has he fixed what's wrong at the jail, but these problems were also simply an "anomaly." He refers to the Essex County Correctional Facility as "one of the most

professionally run jails.” In fact, the history of the jail is one of secrecy and obfuscation. And abuses continue to be reported.

What is Mr. DiVincenzo saying now?

“We promised we would appoint a Civilian Task Force, and these are tremendous first steps in that direction,” DiVincenzo Jr. said. “We believe the task force will provide us with a different perspective on our correctional facility and provide additional transparency that will help us continue to operate the ECCF at the highest level.”

Reading this statement carefully makes one wonder about its author’s true intent. Are we really in search of “a different perspective” about the facility? Is the task at hand to “provide additional transparency”?

This is a Faustian bargain – \$50 million to run a Trump-complicit, brutal incarceration scheme. While a truly independent task force made up of credible individuals from a variety of concerned groups that makes its reports public may be a good first step, I for one have serious doubts that this is what will come to pass.

A better solution would be for Essex County to end the ICE contract and be done with the business of detaining immigrants. We’ll all sleep better at night.

ARTHUR PORTNOY

Montclair

Simchat Torah on Church Street

In my 33 years of living in Montclair, I have shopped, dined and protested on Church Street. But never could I have imagined what transpired on Church Street Monday evening, Oct.

21, when four local synagogues gathered to celebrate the joyous holiday of Simchat Torah.

So there we were, hundreds of us, reciting the “Shema” and saying Torah blessings before and after the reading of the Torah. In the middle of the street, in between Anthropologie and the diner, in between one police officer and one police car blocking traffic, we completed the annual Torah reading and immediately began the next cycle. It was easy to accomplish, as we rolled open the Torah in its entirety for all to hold and see.

The fabulous grassroots Klezmer band encouraged everyone to sing and dance, as we embraced the Torahs and each other.

Next time I am on Church Street, as I remember standing with pro-choice and anti-Muslim-ban signs, I will also remember saying Kaddish (the memorial prayer) for my mother as the Jewish community congregated under the stars in strength and joy.

Kudos to the Montclair Police Department and shopkeepers for making this event possible. “Yasher Koach” to our rabbis, cantors and organizers who had the vision to unite us in celebration.

MERRILL SILVER

Montclair

Editor’s note: See Local Listings for a photo of the Simchat Torah celebration provided by the author.

Responsibility to preserve

Lackawanna Plaza

It amazes me that the deliberation about the Lackawanna Plaza redevelopment as proposed continues.

If ever there was a more cut-and-dry case for Montclair demanding the preservation of a historical structure, this is it. Montclair literally exists as the urban suburb that it is because of Lackawanna Station. It was designed by an award-winning architect. It was re-envisioned in the 1980's by another brilliant architect. It remains completely intact and in place designated as a national, state and locally registered historical structure.

In addition to its stature as a National Historic Landmark, it is located within a designated Montclair Historic District. The entirety of the site is included in its historic designation report. These are matters of law, fact and public trust, not just opinion. We simply cannot conveniently ignore our responsibility to preserve this structure. For these reasons, BOTH Montclair's Historical Preservation Commission AND the Planning Board's own architectural advisor have rejected the developer's plan currently being discussed.

However, a high-quality grocery store is very much needed in this area of our town and fellow residents have had to endure an incredibly lengthy process as the Developer has presented what seems like an endless stream of variations on the same theme – lots of residential units, huge required parking variances and a massive grocery store worthy of Route 46 that can only be built if we demolish the majority of Lackawanna Station. Why? Because of a lack of vision and the unwillingness to employ great design that could turn what would otherwise be another ho-hum, box-store-style development into a true region-wide destination – NOT because it's what's best for our town.

But economics and politics make strange bedfellows and the

owner of this property has very shrewdly made it seem that the only way for a grocery store to be built on this parcel is for us to simply ignore the responsibility that we have to preserve what is arguably Montclair's most important remaining historical structure when in fact the reality is that with thoughtful design, we can easily have both.

Throughout this excruciating process we have collectively allowed ourselves to accept that a grocery store and completely preserving Lackawanna Station must be mutually exclusive. They are not.

Our township has the right to expect that any development taking place on this parcel provides that Lackawanna Station be completely and thoroughly preserved in its entirety AND that a grocery store of a certain size must be a part of the approved development. If the owner of the property does not like these stipulations, they can sell the parcel to someone who will accept them.

And just to be clear, I am NOT in favor of relegating the historic train sheds to merely being glorified ornamental parking lot structures. That is historical desecration, NOT preservation. Build the grocery store within the existing station.

We have seen time and again throughout both our region that high quality adaptive reuse of historical structures can be truly transformative to communities – the High Line and Chelsea Market in Manhattan, and the former Bush Terminal in Brooklyn (now Industry City) just to name a few. In every case, when high quality redevelopment that respects history is undertaken, the benefits to the community far outweigh what would exist were these historic structures razed and replaced with typical run of the mill development.

My personal opinion, and one that I would be fiercely fighting for were it still on the Planning Board? Mandate that any

development taking place on this parcel of land both completely preserves Lackawanna Station AND includes a much-needed grocery store.

JASON DESALVO

Montclair

The author is the former vice chair of the Montclair Planning Board.

Letters to the editor, Oct. 31



Go to the polls

The League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area urges all registered voters to go to the polls on Tuesday, Nov. 5 to exercise their right to vote and have a say in America's future.

Every vote counts, and our votes make a difference.

Voters can check their registration status, find the location and hours of their polling location, review the rules for registration and voting by mail, and link to other important election events by going to state.nj.us/state/elections/.

Voting brings us together as Americans. This election is about our jobs, our health, our communities, our security and our future. Take control and commit to vote on Nov. 5.

SUSAN MACK

Montclair

The writer is the voter registration chair of the League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area.

History Center thankful for successful home tour

The Montclair History Center thanks those who helped make our Harvest Home Tour on Oct. 5, 2019 a big success. It was a wonderful day to stroll through four centuries of diverse homes and historic properties.

First, we thank the private homeowners and The George for graciously allowing us to visit. Each stop was a delight. We are also grateful to the members of the recently formed Montclair Chapter of Questers (an international organization dedicated to the study, conservation and preservation of historical objects for the benefit of today and tomorrow), who enthusiastically spearheaded this event and worked hard on it from start to finish:

Cathy Peter, Marcella Perez, Joan Barrett, Suzanne Miller, Nancy Simonic, Wendy Grotyohann, and Daryn Sirota. We also thank the many, many volunteers at the houses.

Of course, nothing at the Montclair History Center happens

without the creative energy of our dedicated and hard-working staff—led by Jane Eliasof, with Erin Benz, Susanne Costa, and Diane Israel—who never cease to amaze us.

To the Montclair History Center's tremendous volunteers...you are always there when we need you and we are so very grateful. The Montclair History Center also thanks the ticket-holders, who share our interest in Montclair's architecture, and the advertisers in the event booklet.

Fundraising initiatives like this are vital to a small non-profit like ours. On behalf of the entire Montclair History Center Board, thank you to all involved for the support, enthusiasm and participation that made the Harvest Home Tour 2019 a success. Looking forward to next year's tour.

ELIZABETH HYNES and HELEN FALLON

Montclair

Hynes is the president of the Montclair History Center Board of Trustees and Fallon is the vice president.

Urge representatives to act on Energy Innovation Act

As a member of the Citizens' Climate Lobby, I hereby urge people to phone or write to their representatives and urge them to co-sponsor HR 763, the Energy Innovation Act. It would place a tax on carbon use and sales and divide the proceeds equally among all U.S. adult citizens.

Then write or call Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker and ask them to introduce a similar bill in the senate. Their numbers are 202-224-4744 and 202-224-3224, respectively.

Climate change is a terrible threat to human life, within the lifetime of children alive today. As a gardener, I can already see significant effects.

Nov. 6 is the day CCL hopes the congressional lines will be flooded. Please write and/or call.

PAT KENSCHAFT

Montclair

Letters to the editor, Oct. 24



Reasons to protest

I am not a demonstrator. And when I do protest, my full presence is often interrupted by self-consciousness: sometimes it's ambivalence about the cause, or a questioning of the effectiveness of demonstrating. So let's just say I was more than a bit surprised that as a consequence of the force of my

clap (read: big hands = loud) and the volume of my chant (you don't have to say it: loud talker) I came to observe myself leading, sans megaphone, an emboldened call and response chant from the back of the fray just a few weeks ago on Broad Street in Newark.

I feel an urgency to reflect publicly on this experience, to write a protest editorial for protestors like me; we who protest sporadically or half-heartedly or not at all. I want to write a love letter to those of us who rarely demonstrate but feel the protest in our hearts when we breathe in the reality of this exquisitely fouled up version of America and don't know what to do about it. This is me. This is us. I've gleaned something from this most recent experience that I've gleaned before and then forgot, and I'm pretty sure it had been revealed to me a dozen times prior as well. It's worth sharing the good news: it is not and should not be our responsibility alone to solve the world's problems and yet, the solutions to the world's problems are contingent on our showing up to call them out and to bear witness to suffering.

The demonstration happened on Oct. 3, a rainy Thursday afternoon. We assembled to speak against the human rights abuses of our government against immigrants and the blood money collected in Essex County for housing detainees in our jail. We were cold, it was damp. We formed a human chain and stopped traffic on Broad Street in Newark at rush hour. Some were arrested.

Protesting is awkward. I can name a thousand reasons, or maybe 14, why you would be inclined not to do it. Reason No. 3 is that you don't have one one-hundredth the experience of an actual immigrant fighting discrimination or deportation and yet you need to stand next to this person and find something to chat about between rallying cries. Reason No. 12 is that the neo-nazis with bandanas over their faces might kick your ass on your way back to the car. I'm not proud of the awkwardness and I consider myself fortunate to be able to

embrace the fact that the awkwardness itself is an implicit acknowledgement of extreme privilege. I'm white and rich. The last thing that made me want to write congress was the cost of my health insurance premium. My back ain't exactly up against the wall.

So sure, it's awkward. And that's also reason No. 416 to do it. In the awkwardness lies the truth if we're brave enough to face it. Mine is that I'm basically a shy privileged white man who has nothing in common with the person who cleans the halls of my kid's school or mows my neighbor's lawn but feels compelled to say something about the debasement of this person and their family. To feel it and not act when an opportunity presents is a failure of democracy. You don't need to find your voice as a protestor before you go to the demonstration. You find your voice as a protestor at the demonstration. And if you don't, you can still bear witness and stand with the person whose back really is up against a wall.

This is not the advice of someone who learned the lesson, this is coming from a person who needs to relearn the lesson each day. People of conscience let's be seekers together. Let's bear witness to suffering and use our voices together. Let's pray more with our feet.

DAVID GAYNES

Montclair

In solidarity with Shant'a

Last week I was waiting my turn at the hair salon, scrolling my Facebook while I found a post on a page I am part of called Conversations on Race-Montclair. Someone posted a Facebook Live video that Shant'a Tia Sawyer had posted on Oct. 8 after leaving the Montclair YMCA, where she and her family are members.

As I was listening to her, I started feeling agitated and enraged. She was describing an incident of “microaggression” as Shant’a called it or plain racism that African Americans suffer on a daily basis. The (white) woman asked her “Do you live around here?” When Shant’a said that she lives in Newark, the woman started inquiring about how long it takes her to get here, and kept making comments about how far it is and even dared to ask her if there is no YMCA in Newark. Shant’a said in her video that there were around 10 adults with their children in the room and that everybody might have been able to listen to this conversation. Although two people said the words “I am sorry,” and another person shook his head in solidarity, no one really tried to stop the white woman from continuing her racist comments. We really need more than sympathetic looks and “I am sorry” at this point if we want to eradicate this type of behavior in our communities. White people need to intervene and stop this type of behavior in its tracks.

Therefore, I propose that the YMCA – which was not responsible for the white woman’s behavior but the incident happened in its facility – organize a restorative justice session, where Shant’a, the white woman, people who were that day in the corridor, Y authorities and professionals who know how to conduct this type of events, give all the opportunity to talk, express their feelings, and explain the pain caused by the woman’s words, to make this woman accountable.

White people need to intervene in any way possible. It is a problem that we are all responsible to fix.

Shant’a you are welcome in Montclair. Please come back.

MARIA EVA DORIGO

Montclair

Response to letter on Mount Carmel Church

I am writing in response to Tom Russo's letter in the Oct.17 Montclair Local.

For the record, the Rev. Benny Prado never advised parishioners to "boycott" the tricky tray fundraiser.

This is exactly what he posted in the bulletin: "We appreciate and are grateful for all community contributions to support St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish. However it is important to note that the tricky tray event for Nov. 3 sponsored by Religion and More, Inc. and the Community Outreach Program, which is promoted as a fundraiser for Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, is not sponsored or authorized by our parish and therefore, we cannot ensure where donations are contributed. If you have any questions, please contact the office."

CATHERINE MULROE

Montclair

Turtle Back Zoo thrives with new amphitheater

It has been almost 25 years since a large crowd of children, parents and teachers gathered in the parking lot at Essex County Turtle Back Zoo to save this treasure from being closed. Today, Turtle Back is a thriving, dynamic destination where our 900,000 visitors annually see endangered species and learn about conservation and the importance of animals.

When I was serving as freeholder president, the blue ribbon panel I commissioned to study the zoo recognized its potential as an educational and recreational facility and recommended it be kept open. Since I became Essex County executive in 2003, one of my initiatives has been to transform Turtle Back into a first-class facility. During the last 17 years, we have modernized the infrastructure, created new natural habitat

themed animal exhibits and introduced amenities to enhance our visitors' experience.

Our latest project is to create a new amphitheater for educational programs. Our current amphitheater is not conducive to this type of activity and does not have space where animals can be kept before the presentations begin. Therefore, we rely on the four classrooms in our Education Building to present these enrichment programs, which is hardly adequate space to meet our daily needs.

On an average day, we welcome about 2,200 children from various schools and recreation programs, but only have space to provide just 150 students with the opportunity to participate in an enrichment program. In the past, groups that came to the zoo passively learned about the importance of each animal by strolling along the paths, watching the animals and reading the signs. Now there is greater demand for an interactive experience. The planned 500-seat addition will provide the opportunity to significantly increase the audience we currently reach with our educational programming and help satisfy requirements of the three nationally recognized organizations that accredit the zoo.

Like many of our projects, the amphitheater is being partially funded with a grant, this one a special appropriation from the state. Relying on grants, NJ Green Acres funding, corporate and philanthropic contributions, Zoological Society of NJ support and individual donations have enabled us to invest over \$75 million of improvements at Turtle Back Zoo without placing a large burden on our taxpayers. In fact, the zoo is unique in that it has been a self-sufficient facility for the last decade, meaning the revenue collected from admissions covers operating costs. This fiscal success contributed to Essex County earning its first-ever AAA bond rating, the highest rating available and the gold standard for financial stability and strength.

There have been concerns about the impact the amphitheater will have on the environment. Since 2003, as the zoo has expanded from 30 to 40 acres, we have followed the stringent guidelines set by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and the NJ Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act to address runoff and erosion. The retention basins and modern drainage systems we have installed when making improvements help reduce run off and address long-standing flooding issues that existed in South Mountain Reservation long before Turtle Back opened 56 years ago.

In addition, we are estimating that about one acre of land from South Mountain Reservation will be needed for the amphitheater, which is just a small piece when considering the reservation encompasses over 2,200 acres. I am a great proponent of open space preservation: We have increased the number of open spaces in the Essex County Parks System from 17 to 23, planted 20,000 new trees throughout Essex County and preserved over 500 acres in our densely populated county, including adding 55 acres to South Mountain. I believe enhancing our educational component is a reasonable use for the land.

The amphitheater isn't designed to attract more visitors, just to enhance services to those we currently welcome. In addition, a 500-car deck (our third parking facility) opening in December will provide more on-site parking and reduce the number of vehicles parking on Cherry Lane. As I promised, an updated Turtle Back Zoo Master Plan will be completed by year's end.

We have created something special in which all residents of Essex County should take great pride. Along with Turtle Back Zoo, we created the South Mountain Recreation Complex where residents enjoy the walking path around the Orange Reservoir, picnic pavilion, paddle boating and playground. I want Turtle Back Zoo to continue to thrive and, along with the complex, be an attraction that promotes economic development, invigorates

the local economy and encourages Essex residents to spend their money where they live.

Just like 25 years ago, let's rally in support of Turtle Back Zoo so people of all ages can continue to experience the wonders of the wild, gain an appreciation for animals and become the next generation of environmental stewards.

JOSEPH N. DIVINCENZO JR.

Roseland

The author is the county executive for Essex County.

Letters to the editor, Oct. 17



Freeholder Brendan Gill responds to letter from constituent

I wanted to take this opportunity to respond to Michael Laser's letter to the editor published in the Sept. 26 edition

of Montclair Local. First and foremost, it has always been my policy to respond to citizens who contact me directly, and to provide answers to questions asked by the public during Freeholder Board meetings.

With respect to the issue of transparency, it is my hope that our new website will allow all members of the Freeholder Board to share their views publicly, and address various issues of concern in a transparent fashion. Two specific issues that have garnered a great amount of public attention are Essex County's contract with ICE, and the need to replace county voting machines.

Over the last year, I have met with community organizations, members of the county administration, the clergy, and a multitude of concerned citizens on these issues. During this process, I have been open in expressing my position, while doing my best to keep the public informed.

Regarding the voting machines, I have been an active leader in advocating for Essex County to purchase machines that employ the use of optical scanners and verifiable paper ballots for quite some time. I have stated this on record at multiple Freeholder Board meetings, and I articulated this position in an op-ed published by the Star-Ledger on April 22, 2019. This op-ed, titled "The Urgency of Protecting our Voting Process, Our Elections, and Our Democracy," can be found on our new website. Additionally, I recently participated in a nationwide Secure the Vote Rally with organizations such as BlueWave NJ, Our Revolution Essex, and the SOMA Action Committee to make my position clear on the need for the county to purchase and implement these machines.

As part of the Essex County's pilot program, this upcoming election day, Nov. 5, 2019, voters at the Montclair Fire House on Pine Street will use machines that employ optical scanners and verifiable paper ballots. Although the Essex County Board of Elections will make the final decision on the purchase of

these machines, I am confident that we can meet the goal of having them in place at all Essex County polling places by the general election of 2020.

Protecting the accuracy and veracity of our election results is an issue of the highest urgency. As president of the Board of Freeholders, and as a citizen who values democracy, I will continue to advocate for the exclusive use of paper ballot voting machines throughout Essex County.

My position on the County's contract with ICE consists of three points of focus: Providing universal legal representation for undocumented detainees being held in the Essex County Correctional Facility due to their immigration status; establishing an Independent Citizen Oversight Committee of the ECCF; and implementing a plan for Essex County to engage in a responsible wind-down of the contract.

Earlier this year, county administration accepted my proposal to provide funds in this year's budget for the legal services of undocumented detainees. I am proud of this significant first step on the pathway towards universal legal representation, and I will continue to work towards that goal. In addition, I have been working with the ACLU and the county administration on implementing the first Independent Citizen Oversight Committee of a county correctional facility. During this process, I will continue to encourage the administration to wind down the contract with ICE in a responsible manner.

As a lifelong resident of Montclair, I care deeply about the concerns voiced by our community on these issues, and I have done my best to respond. Our community has a history of activism and engagement, and it is great to see the continuation of this legacy.

BRENDAN GILL

Montclair

The author is President of the Essex County Board of Freeholders.

Archdiocese, Rev. Benny Prado show their colors

I've been struggling with writing this letter in condemning the Archdiocese of Newark, and the Rev. Benny Prado, while at the same time being diplomatic and respectful.

After giving this matter much thought I have decided that they do not deserve diplomacy nor respect but instead, deserve condemnation, because they have acted disgracefully with another slap in the face to the parishioners of Our Lady Of Mount Carmel Church.

In the Sunday, Oct. 6, church bulletin for St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish, the Rev. Benny Prado – I'm sure, with the approval of the Archdiocese of Newark – placed a special highlighted notice to all parishioners to boycott the Tricky Tray fundraiser scheduled for Nov. 3.

This Tricky Tray is sponsored by the (Community Outreach Program) for Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, in which all the revenue raised would be for the betterment of Mount Carmel.

Last years fundraising generated over \$28,000 that well paid for our boiler. How low can they get? We have an air conditioning system that has been inoperable for over three years, a roof that needs repairs and leaks in the ceiling so bad that a section of the church has been roped off for the safety of the faithful attending mass.

The Archdiocese and Rev. Benny have stated publicly they don't have the money to make the necessary repairs. Nonsense. They found money to make all repairs at Immaculate Conception Church with no problem.

To add insult to injury, they have cut our masses to 4:30 p.m.

on Saturday and 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, and for the past four months Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church has been without music at the Saturday mass. Immaculate Conception Church has a full schedule of masses with music.

I can go on with the disgraceful way we have been treated for the past four years, however I think the readers of this letter get the picture.

To make such a public statement in favor of boycotting the Tricky Tray, after all our attempts to raise money to make the necessary repairs; to eliminate our traditional feast that has been going on for over 100 years and any other money generating events: it is obvious they want us to fail, so that they have a legitimate reason to close Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church and cash in on the property's value.

I urge all parishioners of St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish, as well any other citizens, to disregard such a negative and un-Christian message from the pastor, a supposed servant of Christ, and to instead purchase tickets to our Tricky Tray. For tickets and more information, email communityoutreachprogram3@gmail.com to reserve a private table, or an individual seat.

Let's show The Archdiocese of Newark and the Rev. Benny Prado what true Christians are made of. With help we can combat the disgraceful way parishioners of Our Lady Of Mount Carmel Church have been treated since the inception of the Rev. Benny Prado as our pastor.

If the Archdiocese of Newark and the Rev. Benny Prado are serious about keeping Our Lady of Mount Carmel open, may I suggest that you use the \$80,000 you stole from us in the merger – the \$5,000 per month generated by renting our parking lot to Mountainside Hospital, the \$2,000 in rent for our rectory for the past three years, and the endowment money left by a parishioner solely for use by Our Lady of Mount Carmel

for the repairs and upkeep of the boiler and air conditioning system.

May God bless America and Our Lady of Mount Carmel church.

THOMAS J. RUSSO

Montclair

Celebrate Spring! Celebrate May in Montclair!

Every spring, Montclair residents enjoy the colorful splendor of tulips and daffodils that cover our town. Since 1979, "May in Montclair" has donated tulips for planting in our schools, parks, and business districts.

This spectacular floral display, which draws visitors from all over, is a source of pride for our town. May in Montclair needs your donations so they can purchase the bulbs for planting. Please Think Spring! and donate to May in Montclair.

MARCIA ALMEIDA

Montclair