



## Letters to the editor, April 13



### **Oppose ending the Election Assistance Commission**

There is a movement in Congress to terminate the Election Assistance Commission. With continuing controversy about the accuracy, conduct and participation in elections, this is not the time to abolish the only federal entity devoted exclusively to improving election administration on a bipartisan basis.

The EAC does invaluable work to improve our nation's election systems on a voluntary, nonregulatory basis. It

oversees the federal voting system certification program that sets standards for the upgrade of America's voting machines. Forty-seven states depend on this agency to maintain their voting machines. The EAC also improves accessibility at the polls for more than 37,000,000 disabled voters. Local election officials rely on it to provide best practices on voting and election administration.

The EAC instills confidence in our election system. Rather than eliminating the EAC, Congress should provide the agency with resources and a renewed commitment to sponsoring and encouraging information sharing among state and local officials.

Since 1920, the LWV has worked to guarantee access to the polls for all citizens. We are at the forefront of the battle against voter intimidation and onerous voter ID laws that serve no purpose but to deny the right to vote to vulnerable populations.

Elections are the lifeblood of a democracy. We strongly urge our representatives to actively oppose The Election Assistance Commission Termination Act.

For more information on the LWV, or to join us, please visit our website, [lwvmontclairarea.org](http://lwvmontclairarea.org).

## **Elizabeth Milner**

### **Montclair**

*Elizabeth Milner is the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area*

### **1st Ward cleanup a rousing success**

Today more than ever, local government, businesses, schools, community groups, nonprofit organizations and citizens must work together to solve the problems we all face on a daily basis. When I began my term on the Township Council our public areas – parks, schools, train stations and business districts were in dire need of care in the First Ward – the area that I am honored to represent.

Park benches, trash receptacles, street signs and post office boxes were covered with graffiti. Bus kiosks and park benches were broken and in need of paint. Flower beds, tree pits and flower pots were overgrown with weeds. Garbage was scattered. Sidewalks and curbs were broken – curbs were so bad that tires were punctured when people parked in the business district because the metal supports were protruding.

This was unacceptable for a community rich in pride and steeped in history. The situation could not continue.

Fortunately, there are many community-based organizations in the First Ward — the Yantacaw Brook Park Conservancy, the Friends of the Bonsal Preserve, the Upper Montclair Business Association and various neighborhood groups. In addition, the First Ward is home to Montclair State University.

The township, county, business leaders, neighborhood organizations and citizens came together to tackle these problems. Working with Freeholder Brendan Gill, the sidewalks and curbs on the County section of the

business district were replaced. The municipality did the same on township roads and sidewalks. The Department of Community Services, Montclair School District, United States Postal Service and local businesses cleaned up the graffiti. The Montclair Police Department and the Montclair Fire Department's Code Enforcement Division made sure it did not reappear. New Jersey Transit made repairs to the train stations.

I sought out the help of groups and neighbors, gathering folks to pitch in for an effort that has now become an annual event — the First Ward Clean-up Day. Montclair Township and the Passaic Valley Water Commission provided garbage and recycling bags, paint, brushes, mulch and gloves. Volunteers brought rakes, wheelbarrows and tools. Many businesses donated water, soft drinks and food. College, high school, middle and elementary students pitched in earning community service hours.

The annual clean-up day is now in its fifth year. Volunteers donated their time and efforts in Yantacaw Brook Park, Mountainside Park, Carlisle woods, Upper Montclair Business District, Upper Montclair, Mountainside and Montclair Heights Train Stations, Sunset Park, Bonsal Preserve, and Northeast, Bradford and Buzz Aldrin schools.

Garbage and debris was removed. Park benches and bus stop kiosks were repaired and painted. Weeds were pulled and replaced with fresh mulch. Trees and flowers were planted. Friendships were formed.

The place looks great. And all in time for May in Montclair, the Montclair Film Festival and other spring events.

This is a great example of what can be accomplished when government — municipal and county, schools, businesses, community organizations and most importantly the people of Montclair come together to work for a common purpose for the benefit of all. I am honored to have played a small role and proud to say this is Montclair.

## **WILLIAM HURLOCK**

### **Montclair**

*William Hurlock is the Township Councilman representing Montclair's 1st Ward.*

### **Ideas and thank yous**

The Montclair Times was rated the best local paper in the state for years. It was sold and is half its usual size. It is filled with ads, it even includes what houses were sold in many counties.

Please put more information in your paper. Please put in when Blue Wave NJ meets.

I believe that more should be said about the closing of the Pathmark supermarket. It has been closed for nearly a year and a half. The A&P in Upper Montclair became an Acme in three days. There is no excuse for that store to be closed. The town obviously doesn't care about people living in the Fourth Ward. Almost every other town has replaced those stores.

Thank you for the article about Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. I expect to see archbishop in May and will give it to him. If you mail anything to the archdiocese it is ignored.

**Virginia Hanley**

**Montclair**

**Remembering Don Rickles**

I first became aware of the genius of Don Rickles while watching the Johnny Carson Show way back when.

Don told a great story: Friends were visiting from out of town. Mrs. Rickles thought it would be nice to bring them to one of the restaurants frequented by famous showbiz celebrities. They had barely sat down when someone noticed Frank Sinatra seated across the room. Don walked over to his friend and asked him if he would come to their table to meet their friends from out of town. Frank said no problem, signal me when you're finished with dinner. Don said their friends were so excited they won't enjoy dinner. Could you come over in a few minutes? Frank said sure just signal me when. In a few minutes Don did. When Frank arrived at the table and began to speak, Don said loudly, Frank, can't you see we're eating? Johnny Carson nearly fell off his chair, me too.

Just the name Don Rickles will always bring a smile to my lips. I'll miss his cutting humor. Genius.

**Vincent Tango**

**Montclair**

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Opinion: What happened to my father's GOP?



By BOB RUSSO

As a teenager growing up in Newark in the 1950 and '60s, I helped my father run his small business while attending great public schools. I saw him support President Dwight D. Eisenhower, his hero from World War II, after serving his country proudly to defeat the dictators of Europe. My father was a "Progressive Republican" who supported New Jersey's popular pro-labor Republican Sen. Clifford Case, Republican Congressman Matthew Rinaldo, Congresswomen Flo Dwyer and Millicent Fenwick. He eventually became a Democrat when the Republican Party nominated right-wing candidates for president and Congress, who tried to undo all the progress for middle class families from the FDR New Deal. "Ike" was the last Republican president my dad felt comfortable supporting, since he continued most of these economic and social policies, even sending troops into Little Rock to integrate the schools!

I have been teaching about American political parties for many years at Montclair State, Kean and Rutgers universities. My students have all studied the important history of the Republican Party, since its first great president, Abraham Lincoln, saved our union and ended slavery. They have marveled at the progressive leadership of our youngest-ever president, Theodore Roosevelt, as he fought big corporations on behalf of the working families and unions from 1901 through 1908. In 1912, TR was forced to run as an independent "Progressive Party" candidate because his own party bosses and wealthy interests prevented him from reclaiming the presidency, even after he won every Republican primary!

What has happened to the party of Abe Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt and Ike? I am a lifelong "Kennedy Democrat" who also admires all of these past progressive and moderate Republican leaders. They worked with many Democrats to pass civil rights legislation and welcomed the diversity and strength that "a nation of immigrants" brings to our America.

When I supported a "Welcoming Community" resolution recently at the Montclair Township Council meeting, I and my colleagues were accused of being "anti Trump." I responded to that unfair accusation by saying "we are not against Trump; Trump may be against us!" We are not anti-Trump or anti-Republican, but we ARE against policies that are anti-Montclair values. The current administration's cabinet appointments are anti-public education, anti-environment, anti-civil rights, anti-affordable housing, anti-union, anti-immigration, anti-universal health care, anti-fair taxation ... in short, anti-Montclair and anti-New Jersey interests and values. We need moderate/progressive Republicans like John Kasich, Tom Kean and Christie Whitman, to retake their party and work with progressive Democrats like Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker, and Jerry Brown, to solve our nation's pressing problems in a bipartisan coalition, "a team of rivals," like the one Lincoln forged during the Civil War. This may seem impossible now, but it has been done in the past, when the Republican Party was at times as "progressive" as the Democratic Party is today!

No, we are not anti-anybody, we are pro the great American tradition of progressive leadership which both parties have at many times reflected throughout our nation's history.

*Bob Russo serves on the Township Council as councilman-at-large, and was mayor of Montclair from 2000 to 2004.*

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## Town Square: 4/6/17

**By Bob Russo, at-large Township Councilman**

As a teenager growing up in Newark in the 1950 and '60s, I helped my father run his small business while attending great public schools. I saw him support President Dwight D. Eisenhower, his hero from World War II, after serving his country proudly to defeat the dictators of Europe. My father was a "Progressive Republican" who supported New Jersey's popular pro-labor Republican Sen. Clifford Case, Republican Congressman Matthew Rinaldo, Congresswomen Flo Dwyer and Millicent Fenwick. He eventually became a Democrat when the Republican Party nominated right-wing candidates for president and Congress, who tried to undo all the progress for middle class families from the FDR New Deal. "Ike" was the last Republican president my dad felt comfortable supporting, since he continued most of these economic and social policies, even sending troops into Little Rock to integrate the schools!

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universal health care, anti-fair taxation ... in short, anti-Montclair and anti-New Jersey interests and values.

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*Bob Russo serves on the Township Council as councilman-at-large, and was mayor of Montclair from 2000 to 2004.*



## Letters to the editor, April 6



### **Giving thanks for a new senior center**

March 28, 2017, was an historic day for our Montclair seniors. The passing of Resolution R-17-090: Resolution to Affirm Commitment to Establish a Comprehensive Senior Center in Montclair represents the culmination of a decade long collaboration between the Township Government and the Montclair Senior Citizen Advisory Committee (SCAC). This resolution is testament to the fact that the diversity we celebrate in Montclair includes age diversity.

Retirees are the fastest growing demographic in our Country and we are grateful to the Town Council for affirming the central importance of a senior center as part of its ongoing commitment to making Montclair age friendly. This resolution sends a positive message of inclusion to our over-age-60 residents and a call to action to the SCAC and Township professionals to continue working with all of our community partners to make this vision a reality. Montclair seniors already make a positive difference in this Township every day — through volunteerism, cultural involvement, the grandparent economy, paying taxes . . . ad infinitum. A centrally located, comprehensive senior center will make a positive difference in their lives — a one-stop shop for energizing, engaging and enlightening those who continue to make this community their choice for their retirement years.

We want to thank the Mayor and the entire Council, and specifically Renée Baskerville, Rich McMahon and Bob Russo of the Township Services Committee for bringing this resolution forward. We want to extend our gratitude to Brian Scantlebury, Montclair deputy manager; Sue Portuese, Montclair director of health and

human services; and especially Katie York, Montclair director of senior services/Lifelong Montclair for all of the actions undertaken on its behalf.

## **Ann Lippel**

### **Montclair**

*The writer is chair of Montclair's Senior Citizens Advisory Committee.*

### **Don't waste tax money on leafblowers**

I am far from the only Montclair resident who believes our taxes are unnecessarily high and dislikes this. For years I have protested the installation of Belgian block curbs and spending \$1.1 million a year for premiums on the Garden State Insurance Consortium, for which there are less expensive and more ethical alternatives.

However, it is only in the past few years that the township has been using tax money to pay for leaf blowers. Many objective studies have corroborated my observation that they don't save time, but recently their users have taken more time than the alternatives as they scramble to remove every piece of organic matter from a lawn. A few hours later there is no difference.

Leaf blowers are a terrible waste of money, along with making vulnerable people like my husband sick and damaging the soil so that more expenses are needed to have comparable lawns and gardens as properties treated more kindly.

A March 17 New York Times article reports that using a leaf blower for a half hour generates as much greenhouse gas as driving a small truck from here to Alaska. If we care about our children's future, we will ban leaf blowers altogether.

Meanwhile, let's stop this terrible waste of taxpayer money. I was touched recently when a much praised young Montclair teacher who grew up in town said publicly that because of our high taxes, he must raise his own children in Bloomfield. Let's stop squandering money on leaf blowers.

## **Pat Kenschaft**

### **Montclair**

### **Thanks for an E-Z ride**

EZ Ride For seniors is great. I've used the mini-bus to go to Brookdale ShopRite twice. The first time I was so low on supplies, I spent a fortune.

I knew getting around without my old Camry would be tough, but now there is no excuse about groceries. I'm thrilled and grateful to Montclair's EZ Ride for seniors program. Senior taxis are cool, too.

Thanks Montclair for being senior friendly.

**Joan Adams**

**Montclair**

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## Town Square: 3/30/17

**By Sanford Sorkin**

Montclair patted itself on the back after being designated an Age-Friendly Community by AARP and the World Health Organization. Montclair received the designation in February 2015, and shares the honorific with Princeton, as the only two designated towns in New Jersey. Discussions around the designation seemed to use age-friendly interchangeably with senior-friendly which is probably what they actually mean.

A little research into the designation/enrollment process offers insights into a rather comprehensive program to improve the lives of seniors. It in no way indicates that the community is currently “friendly,” but rather that the town acknowledges that it wants to be friendly, and is aware of the need for initiatives to move in that direction. Acknowledgment is the basic criterion and is probably the most important preparatory step, however nothing beyond noting the need for change is required. We haven’t necessarily done anything, but we’ve documented that we should, therefore “we are friendly” can be the mantra.

*“The AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities is an affiliate of the World Health Organization’s Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Program, an international effort launched in 2006 to help cities prepare for rapid population aging and the parallel trend of urbanization. The program has participating communities in more than 20 nations, as well as 10 affiliates representing more than 1,000 communities.”*

— AARP website

I think it is very important that we are clear about defining “friendly” and then add specificity to the term to

apply it to Montclair. My contention is that Montclair has a long road to becoming senior-friendly. Seniors are definitely not flocking to town, and the seemingly inevitable annual property tax increases communicate a “get out of town” message to seniors who may no longer be working and rely on pensions and savings.

There is a certain amount of irony here. Property taxes continue to go up and our township council tells us that the school system is responsible for the increases even though they have three of the five votes on the Board of School Estimate. The message is don't blame the municipal government, talk to the schools. But tax-paying seniors support the schools without any added burden to the schools. The simple reality is that the cost of remaining in Montclair keeps going up regardless of the reason.

An expectation of reasonable and stable taxes gives us a small insight to an element of the senior-friendly definition. Part of the definition surely relates to finances, and just as importantly, it must address the general needs of seniors such as social activities and transportation.

The definition of senior-friendly I would like to adopt is fairly straightforward:

A senior-friendly town attracts seniors to live in the community, and senior residents of the community view the town as a desirable and affordable place to continue to reside.

Today, we hear too many residents indicate that they will leave as soon as their children graduate from high school. When Montclair loses the senior residents there is the likelihood they will sell to a family with children who will attend our schools. Unless we make some changes, such as becoming truly senior-friendly, we will find ourselves in an unsustainable downward spiral.

Maybe my notion of senior-friendly is incorrect, and it simply means that we are a town that welcomes seniors when they visit to eat and shop. Montclair has budgeted for a senior center, and will probably develop a very responsive transportation system in the near future. There is even the likelihood that the new transportation service will address the important first and last mile. We already know that very few seniors, or anyone for that matter, want to carry groceries home from a bus stop, or negotiate the stretch from a bus stop to a doctor's office. The question remains, are centers and transportation enough? Will it be enough for seniors to not want or be forced to leave, or should we strive to create a community that inspires seniors to move or remain here?

We seem to have a Band-Aid culture. Seniors want a center — we fund a center. Seniors want transportation — we buy a bus and also outsource the service. The larger picture is left largely unaddressed. For a moment we might forget what they want and look at what they need. I believe that affordable housing and affordable property taxes along with reliable transportation operating from morning until evening will be near the top of the list.

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## Montclair Local Voices: Healing the Break in Promises



CORINNA SAGER

By CORINNA SAGER

Recently I did a favor for a friend. I hosted a fundraising event because she's going into politics. I'm proud of her and of course support her. I sent photos of us after the event. No thank you. I sent another email. No word. Sadly — it's not the first time. And it reminded me of other disappointments, and broken promises.

Today we live in a world where people say they'll do things and then don't follow through. Potential clients say they'll call, but never do. My Media, Communications and Visual Arts graduate students at Pace University tell me how desperate they are for someone, just one professional with whom they connected in person, to get back to them when they email or call. But no one does. And my mother says she is tired of the many contractors and vendors who promise their work is guaranteed, but when something fails and she calls them to fix it — they never call her back. What society do we live in today? Is a person's word dead? Is it all just lip service?

I'm tired of lip service. I'm tired of broken promises. I'm tired of people saying they'll do something they won't. What happened to responsibility, guts and honesty?

Today we spend more time online than in person with our loved ones. We post selfies, opinions and photos. But where is the caring about others? The true humanity? The human interaction that requires give and take? Poof. Gone!

We are, however, still human and not machines. We each want to be valued, cared for and respected. So we have to remember to give it back as well. Of course, there are times when things just fall by the wayside, when we have to set priorities, when we are overwhelmed. But if you can't return a call that day, text or email to say when you will call back. And are you really that busy that you can't even write or say thank you for a wonderful dinner or great party?

I'm sick of all this. I want honesty and guts back. I don't want: "I'm sorry for the inconvenience," I want a solution. Just tell me the truth, or don't make the promise. Because guess what — I can handle the truth. It saves me time and effort.

There's an old German proverb: "The way you call into the forest is how it echoes back to you." If you say

you'll call but won't, don't expect others to call you back either. If you're always late, don't expect others to value your time. If you don't keep your promise, don't expect others to keep theirs — and don't be disappointed when you find out they don't. You started the cycle.

The other day a potential client who promised she'd call — actually did. What a pleasant surprise. She kept her word. Three weeks ago a customer service rep from my health insurance promised she'd call me back after she was going to figure out what had gone wrong. I never expected to hear from her (by that time I had called them repeatedly for two months). But she did call me back three days later. And she had actually solved the issue.

I was so delighted I told her that this was the first time in years I could remember a customer rep actually doing this. I thanked her profoundly. She said how nice that was to hear. Yes, it can be done!

So let's cycle back. Let's cycle back to responsibility. Let's value each other's time, each other's expectations, each other's knowledge. Let's appreciate what friends give, what clients offer, what colleagues contribute. And let's keep our promises. Every time. To every person. In every situation. We'll make the world a better place.

*Corinna Sager is an international communications expert and public speaking strategist. She has directed, produced and coached for companies around the world, bringing stories to Life - with Style.*

[www.LifeStyleIntl.com](http://www.LifeStyleIntl.com)

LOCAL VOICES: Local Voices is a forum for residents' essays about issues and subjects that affect them, and will combine individual essays with rotating columns on such subjects as relationships, health, gardening and more. To submit an idea for a series or individual essay, write to [arts@montclairlocal.news](mailto:arts@montclairlocal.news).



## Town Square: 3/23/17

**By Pegi Adam, Lisa Korn, Jim Price, and Jessica Sporn**

A group of Montclair residents worked tirelessly to persuade the Montclair Township Council to declare our town a "Sanctuary City," joining many of our neighboring towns throughout New Jersey. We had high hopes that the Montclair Township Council would seize the opportunity to capitalize on our town's enviable reputation as one that welcomes diversity. Sadly, Resolution R-17-024, passed by the council on Feb. 21, falls far short of our hopes and expectations. It is the weakest of any resolution passed by other New Jersey towns .

Left unknown is this critical question: What kind of leadership will be provided to our manager in the event ICE demands the Montclair Police Department's cooperation? Will the Township Council just sit by, with the excuse that they "have no power over the police?" Or, are we worried about losing federal funds, thus caving in to bullying (which we tell our students never to do)?

Where is our gumption? Where is our outrage at a government that exercises free rein to intrude on and disrupt the lives of people in our community who are contributing mightily to the quality of our lives, documented or not?

Nowhere is the word "sanctuary" used in the resolution. When a resident addressed the council on the absence of the word, he was told that "the words don't really matter; it's the spirit of the resolution." He responded, correctly that "indeed words do matter."

Words do matter; they are all we have to express our thoughts and ideas. Without precise words, verbiage such as that used in this resolution is merely sound and fury signifying nothing. How can it be that Montclair, a town that portrays itself as welcoming and embracing diverse racial, ethnic, religious and national origins, refuses to take a definitive stand as a protectorate of all those who live and work and attend school in our midst, regardless of their documentation.

The Township Council should be paying attention to recent arrests, as immigration agents "feel new freedom to deport immigrants." (New York Times). In Virginia, ICE waited outside a church shelter where undocumented immigrants had gone to stay warm. In Texas and Colorado, agents sought out foreigners in courthouses where they had arrived for hearings on other matters. At Kennedy Airport, passengers arriving after a five-hour flight from San Francisco had to show their documents before being allowed to deplane. Muhammad Ali's son was held and questioned after arriving from a trip to Jamaica. A children's book author from Australia en route to a conference in Milwaukee was detained and insulted at LAX (she said she might never return to the U.S.). In West Frankfort, Ill., agents arrested a pillar of the community who had lived and operated a business there for 20 years. Residents were surprised and outraged. They thought the president only wanted to "get rid of the bad eggs."

It can't happen here? ... Oh, yes it can. And what will tolerant Montclair's response be when it does?

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## Letters to the editor, March 23



### **The importance of a full-service market**

With due respect to Mr. Goldman in his March 16 letter to the editor (“Why another Shop Rite?”), he has completely misread both the situation and the needs of the neighborhood.

A store like ShopRite that would fill a hole, i.e., a neighborhood full-service supermarket for people whose nearby options are nonexistent, is exactly what is needed in the plaza. Wegmans? Way too small a footprint

and too urban a location for this chain. Fairway? Love it, but not a full service market, barely able to keep its Woodland Park store open after bankruptcy, and its staples are limited and way too expensive for the average shopper. Trader Joe's? A niche store that, again, is not anything close to a full service market, nice though it may be for the occasional trip.

He comments that ShopRite is already "easily accessible" in two other locations. I disagree with his definition of easily accessible in terms of having a neighborhood store for this part of the town. The right move was made aiming to replace one full service market with another. Hopefully, the wheels will be going faster than we're all anticipating.

**Steve Cohen**

**Montclair**



Letters to the editor, March 16



To the editor:

In 1981 my parents made the decision to buy a house in Montclair, a decision I'm sure they would number among the best of their lives. For over 25 years, which included my entire childhood, they were thrilled to be an active part of a thriving community with wonderful public schools, a vibrant artistic and culinary culture and a diverse population.

In the end, however, as with so many of my friends' parents, high taxes eventually forced them to leave the community they loved so much.

In 2013, when my wife and I were choosing a town to raise our family in, we could only think of one community we could truly imagine being a part of. As a family of modest means, we struggled greatly but finally succeeded with the difficult task of finding a home in Montclair priced for a middle-class family. With the announced reassessment, we are going to have to take a hard look at whether it is financially feasible for a family such as ours to continue living in the hometown that we love so dearly. While we appreciate the difficult realities that those managing a municipal budget face, we believe that this increase will disproportionately affect middle-class families like ours, especially in this age of stagnating wage growth. We would hope that the town shares our interest in keeping Montclair economically diverse and will take steps to address this serious concern, so that when the time comes, my children can avoid having to choose between saving for retirement and raising a family in the town they love.

Seth Orlofsky

Montclair

*The writer is the son-in-law of Montclair Local staffer Elizabeth Oguss.*

To the Editor:

Regarding your page 1 story about efforts to bring in a ShopRite supermarket to replace the defunct Pathmark that was in Lackawanna Plaza: the efforts should be directed at finding a different store that would provide Montclair residents a new option not readily available presently. Has anyone solicited Trader Joe's? This would be a natural for Montclair, and there are no other Trader Joes reasonably close to most of the Township. There's a Trader Joe's on Route 3 in Clifton, and one in Millburn. ShopRites on the other hand are already easily accessible, in Essex Green or Brookdale. We don't need another ShopRite. We do need a Trader Joe's.

If that's not possible, have there been any efforts to interest Fairway, or Wegman's, two fine chains that offer different items than standard grocery stores? There's a Fairway on Rte 46 in Totowa, but no others, and there are no local Wegman's.

Montclair would benefit much more with one of these other stores instead of another ShopRite. By the way, don't get me wrong — I love ShopRite, and shop very frequently at the Essex Green store. But we have enough ShopRites around already.

Emanuel Goldman

Montclair

To the editor:

Thank you for bringing our township newspaper back to our energetic residents.

It reflects the heartbeat of Montclair and we need it, we want it, and we will support it.

Patrizia Cioffi

Montclair

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## Town Square: 3/16/17 – Why Voting Matters in New Jersey

**By Cynthia M. Rogers, voter service chair, Montclair Area League of Women Voters**

No doubt diligent voters in Montclair and throughout New Jersey are still questioning how our presidential election system resulted in the election of a candidate who did not win the popular vote and, indeed, garnered only 41 percent of our state's votes. While the League of Women Voters officially supports the direct election of the president (more on that later), it is urgent that New Jersey voters now direct their focus on the elections of 2017, where one person/one vote does hold.

2017 is an election year for New Jersey, and on Nov. 7 we elect a new governor, as well as the entire state Senate and Assembly. June 6 is Primary Election Day, when voters who have registered as Democrat or Republican can cast their vote for the candidate they want to see on the ballot in November. If you are not currently registered to vote, May 16 and Oct. 17 are, respectively, the last days to register to vote prior to those election dates.

Why should you vote in New Jersey in 2017? Consider how state government impacts our lives. Will we maintain the overall effectiveness of our public schools? Will we protect the open spaces and natural resources of our Garden State? Will we have a safe and efficient highway and mass transportation system? Will there be adequate affordable housing for all of our residents? What about those most vulnerable: the poor, children in foster care, behavioral health consumers, those in residential treatment centers? Will we maintain humane standards of safety and care? What about our criminal justice system, our court system, our state economy, and how we raise money for all of the above?

To vote in the NJ state elections of 2017 is to directly impact state policy on all of these issues, particularly as the federal government shifts more responsibility to the states.

Additionally, if you prefer to focus on the national scene, consider that on Nov. 6, 2018, the entire US House of Representatives — including Rep. Donald Payne Jr. of the 10th Congressional District and Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen of the 11th — and one-third of the U.S. Senate (including Sen. Robert Menendez) will be up for

re-election. This will be prime time for voters to evaluate the choices made in the 2016 federal elections and the actions that are taken over these two years.

Why does voting matter in New Jersey and every other state? As Benjamin Franklin famously answered a group of citizens who asked him what kind of government the Constitutional Convention had created, “a republic, if you can keep it.”

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization founded in 1920 when the long-fought battle for women’s suffrage finally resulted in the passage of the 19th Amendment. It encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase public understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

While the League is strictly nonpartisan, it does take positions on certain issues, particularly where voting is concerned. The League will therefore be in the vanguard of movements to increase voter registration and turnout, oppose efforts to restrict voting rights, and promote better understanding of the candidates and issues. In 1970 the League of Women Voters began advocating for the direct election of the president and vice president and the abolition of the Electoral College. The League also supports the National Popular Vote Compact as one acceptable means of achieving the direct election of the president short of the abolition of the Electoral College, which would require a constitutional amendment.

To read more about elections in New Jersey and the League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area, go to [www.njelections.org](http://www.njelections.org) and [www.lwvmontclairarea.org](http://www.lwvmontclairarea.org).

Cynthia M. Rogers is the voter service chair on the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area.