

BOARD OF DIRECTORS NEWSLETTER



YMCA OF METUCHEN, EDISON, WOODBRIDGE & SOUTH AMBOY
ROSE CUSHING, PRESIDENT & CEO

April 2022



PRESIDENT & CEO UPDATE

Dear Board Members:

As we greet spring and begin to see the sure signs of warmer weather and longer days, I can feel the energy returning to our branches and staff. Reinvigorated by the promise of a world absent of a pandemic, or at least one held at bay, the excitement has extended to not only our staff, but our members and the community as well. To celebrate, we have a multitude of events coming up, with the majority of them in person. Please visit page 7 for a full calendar.

I am also excited about a new collaboration that is underway with the Raritan Bay YMCA in Perth Amboy, as we continue discussions on how we can align our goals, mission and strategies to maximize our footprint in Middlesex County. One of those goals is to seek funding or grant opportunities from larger organizations to make a greater impact in our communities and set us up for long-term success. In that vein, we jointly applied and have received a \$15,000 grant from NJ Healthy Initiatives to do just that. We look forward to a long and productive partnership with them!

I want to wholeheartedly thank all Board members as we met (and exceeded!) our goal of \$100,000 in Annual Support Campaign donations from you! Right now, we are 63% to our goal of \$370,000; most of this from staff and Board giving. What a tremendous accomplishment! The community portion of the campaign is open now and we are hoping to reach our total ASC goal by the end of April. As you know, these funds are crucial in allowing us to provide programs and services to our community.

I am thrilled to announce that we will be once again holding our Annual Dinner in person! It will be held at the Pines Manor on May 25th and I truly hoping to see each and every Board member there to help us celebrate our accomplishments during COVID-19 and over the past year!

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YMCA OF MEWSA REMEMBERS MARTY JESSEN

We recently experienced the loss of a true hero, a man who dedicated his life to supporting his community of Metuchen, and especially to the YMCA of Metuchen, Edison, Woodbridge & South Amboy, Martin Jessen. One cannot speak of our long history of being able to provide for our community without speaking of Martin Jessen. His lifelong support as a major donor to not only our YMCA, but to Y's nationwide has allowed us to sustain our programs and services, aptly earning him the title of "Man of the Century" by this organization.



Mr. Jessen wore many other hats as well. He served on many community organizations including the Boy Scouts, Rotary Club, Metuchen Historical Association, Metuchen Planning Board, as well as being a founder of the Metuchen Country Fair Committee and serving as Chairman of the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce for many years.

In 1989, Mr. Jessen received the YMCA's Charles S. Edgar Memorial Award, which honors individuals who have greatly served the youth of the community, exemplified community spirit, and has contributed to the community through a variety of organizations and in a variety of roles. He truly embodied all the characteristics this award represented.

Even in his passing, he thought of the YMCA first, asking for donations to our organization in lieu of flowers. He has again made his mark, and will always be remembered as man of integrity and dedication, and generous to a fault.

He memorialized his life in his book, "Marty's Musings: Tales of the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War and New Jersey. The book is available at martyasmusings.us.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Keeping the children of the South Amboy Y's aftercare program at the South Amboy Elementary School takes a village....a village of trained staff who are ready to engage and go the extra mile to keep the positive momentum that the children experienced throughout their school day! You would think that the children are ready to take a nap after the school day ends—awaiting their parents/guardians to pick them up to head home for the evening—but not our elementary school crew!!! They are always ready and prepared for some end of the day physical activities and laughs before winding down to do homework and enjoy an afternoon snack!!! Everyone gets a healthy workout, even our team of counselors!!!!

-Contributed by Gerry Gessie



SOUTH AMBOY Y PARTICIPATES IN ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE!

On March 20th, South Amboy Township held their annual St. Patrick's Day Parade which was a great success! There were between 80-85 pieces in the parade, including bands, pipers and floats, and the South Amboy YMCA was one of them! It was estimated

that over 10,000 people attended the parade!

-Contributed by Gerry Gessie



SAY Branch Board Member Mary Taylor and SAY Director of Operations Gerry Gessie.



SACC children enjoy the trackless train!



South Amboy SACC children with SACC Coordinator, Andrea F.

JOB FAIR TO BE HELD AT EDISON

**EDISON YMCA
JOB FAIR**

April 13th | 3 - 7 PM | MPR1
WALK-INS WELCOME!

EMAIL CAROLINE.RANKIN@YMCAOFMEWSA.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION!



**SCAN HERE
TO SCHEDULE
YOUR INTERVIEW!**



DUCKS HATCH AT GRACE EARLY LEARNING CENTER!



In February, Grace Early Learning Center had the opportunity to watch ducks hatch! Quiver Farms provided Grace with eight duck eggs, an incubator and a lot of instructions! The children patiently waited to see what would happen to the eggs, wrote predictions, read books, and drew pictures for the ducks. After over a week of waiting, the children were able to watch five ducklings hatch. The parents became very engaged in the process as well and were asking for many updates over the course of the two weeks. What a great experience for the children, families and staff to experience and participate in!



Click on the picture of the eggs and turn up the volume to watch the children's reaction to see a [duck being born!](#)

-Contributed by Samantha Cote

STAFFING AND VOLUNTEER NEWS

WELCOME MELIA PARCHMAN!



Welcome Melia Parchman, Membership Coordinator at the South Amboy YMCA! Melia began her career with the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. as a fundraiser. She has worked with New York Hospital, Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic and Easter Seals in

fundraising and management. She joined the Y as the swim team manager for the Freehold-Old Bridge Y (FOBY), and then became the swim team manager for our swim team, MEY-SABY. At MEWSA, she has served as a Member Services Representative for both the Metuchen and South Amboy branches.

The Parchman family has spent three generations at the Y. Her father learned to swim at a Y in downtown Detroit. Melia learned to swim at the Glen Cove, New York Y. Her daughter learned to swim at the Ventura, California Family Y. "As Membership Coordinator, I look forward to helping other families start or continue on the Y tradition", notes Melia.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE COSTELLO FAMILY!

Congratulations to Joe Costello, Metuchen Branch Board member, and his wife, Jacquelyn, who welcomed their firstborn son, Joseph V. Costello V, on Wednesday, March 9, 2022. Joseph weighed in at 7 lbs. 7 oz.. and is 19.5" long!



CHILD CARE WELCOMES LINDA RUTTER

Congratulations to Linda Rutter, appointed to Child Care branch's newest position, Curriculum Specialist. Linda is Kindergarten teacher at Centenary Early Learning Center, where she has been a teacher for 13 years, and an Educator for all of her adult life.



The Y is a part of her life in every way, professionally and personally, and she is very excited for this new opportunity for growth and service. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her four children and her sweet dog Codey. Her favorite things are her family, friends, country music and challenges like triathlons.

JAN GRAYZEL APPOINTED DIRECTOR EMERITUS

Congratulations to Jan Grayzel, former Association Board member and volunteer for the YMCA of MEWSA who was unanimously approved by vote of the Board of Directors to be appointed as Director Emeritus. This honor is bestowed upon former Board members who have served 10 or more years of continuous service as a YMCA Board member and have created a meaningful and lasting change to our YMCA and communities.



Jan has been a volunteer for the YMCA of MEWSA for over 30 years!

The South Amboy YMCA held a Blood Drive on March 31st with incredible results! Twenty-six (26) people donated blood with four power reds (a process that collects nearly twice the dose of red cells, increasing the impact on patients in need) and a total of 26 previous pints collected, which translates to approximately 78 lives saved! Please visit page 5 for information on more upcoming blood drives.



UPCOMING EVENTS

9

APR

11am-2pm

at Oakcrest
Community
Pool

HOLI FESTIVAL



16

APR

11am-2pm

at Oakcrest
Community
Pool

EGG HUNT



21

APR

6-7pm

Virtual
Event

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION WORKSHOP



APR-
MAY

Various (click on
location for info)

**METUCHEN
EDISON
PISCATAWAY**

BLOOD DRIVES



30

APR

&

1

MAY

HEALTHY KIDS DAY



4

MAY

5-7pm

at The
Parlor at
Hailey's

BEER TASTING



14

MAY

11am-2pm

At Oakcrest
Community
Pool

OAKCREST FEST



20

MAY

6pm

Virtual
Event

BEER TASTING



TOGETHERHOOD FOOD SECURITY UPDATE

-By Marisha Wignaraja



As an integral part of its mission to effect lasting and meaningful change, the YMCA of MEWSA (Metuchen, Edison, Woodbridge and South Amboy, and now, Piscataway, our newest branch) is deeply committed to mobilizing communities to fight food insecurity. “We are seeing more need as families are struggling to meet basic necessities,” noted Christine Tolley, Director of Operations at the Metuchen Y. “Through my 30 years of serving the Y, I know that people are comfortable reaching out to us when they need something, since the Y is central to our communities.” A key partner in the Y’s food security efforts is the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen Food Pantry (FPCM Food Pantry). Chrissy and Sarah Teti, part-time Food Pantry Coordinator, communicate often, letting each other know about individuals and families that need food, clothing, and shelter. Sometimes help is immediate or a phone call away, at other times, it is more complicated. They rely on a network of partners and volunteers to meet the need.



Sarah Teti, Lorraine LeSter & Wendy Kukowski at the Food Pantry



Pantry wagon with Linden Avenue food donations

It’s Wednesday morning and Sarah, Wendy Kukowski, Lorraine LeSter and a team of local volunteers are shopping with clients at the Food Pantry. As they check-off items on a shopping list based on family size (milk, pasta, and canned meats and vegetables), they are also discussing food plans for the week, sharing recipes, and getting to know their clients better. Despite COVID, transportation, and other restrictions, there is an average of 150 to 200 individuals shopping for their families at the Food Pantry each month—at least double the numbers served in 2019 and 2020. The majority of clients are single moms with multiple children, older adults with disabilities and single adults with mental health challenges from Metuchen and Edison, but others come from Woodbridge, Highland Park and Perth Amboy. The Food Pantry serves anyone in need, regardless of zip code.

It is Sarah’s job to organize volunteers, refer clients to additional services, like housing and utilities support, and work with the Church on funding to keep things running. Lorraine, wearing several hats, including Metuchen YMCA Board Member, and Co-Chair of the FPCM Mission & Outreach Commission, and Wendy, fellow co-chair and the daily operations leader for the Food Pantry, are responsible for training volunteers and running the monthly Commission meetings. Despite COVID challenges, these three leaders and their volunteer team work even harder to get clients access to critical lifelines as “nobody should be denied something as basic as food.”

A family or individual is food insecure when they do not have access to enough nutritious food for an active and healthy lifestyle, including when they must make choices between food and other basic needs like housing and healthcare. The COVID pandemic has only amplified these challenges. In addition to devastating health consequences, COVID has also created financial, educational, social, and emotional burdens on families due to job loss, disruptions in education, and social isolation.



Linden Avenue Street Drive Team

Expansions of federal, state and county-level safety net programs like SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) and school meals, and charitable support, prior to and during COVID times, have supported many New Jersey families during the pandemic. However, the need is still high as approximately 8.4 percent of New Jersey households are without adequate food.

Every week, Paul Edcomb, Association Board member, Metuchen Branch Board Member and leader of the Togetherhood Service Committee, tallies food, gift cards and cash collected through in-branch food drives and member-led street drives in local neighborhoods. He shares the latest stats (8,047 food items and \$2,197 in cash and gift cards collected in 2021) with Y

volunteers to say thank you and inspire them to do more. Rich Husar and Kathy Higgins, a husband-and-wife team from Edison as well as Y members, are all about action. With Paul, they lead the Y's efforts to conduct food drives and support member-led street drives in local neighborhoods, ready to transport contributions to the Food Pantry. They see themselves as part of the YMCA food security team.

Joining this team are Gabriella St. Fleur, the Y's Director of Childcare and Youth Services and the Teen Leaders Club, making and delivering food packages to local area food pantries; Nelson Li, volunteer Manager of the Metuchen Farmers Market and former Metuchen Y Board Member, mobilizing market farmers and shoppers to donate fresh fruits and vegetables, bread, other items and cash to the Pantry; Y members from Edison, Lesley and Stuart Briggs, who support the Pantry by delivering food to clients without transportation; and the many Y members who have coordinated street drives in their neighborhoods. This team is committed and determined as "this is an opportunity to give back." Food Pantry volunteers distribute the food to clients and use cash collected by the Y and other partners to help families and individuals in need. They know that they are making a difference, but there is always more to do.



Members of the Teen Leaders Club make sandwiches and food packages

Lack of transportation to stores and food pantries, limited access to nutritious food, the high cost of food, space to store food, and supply chain problems that make necessary food items hard to find are some of the challenges identified by our leaders and volunteers. To counter these obstacles, Sarah encourages clients to use several food pantries to meet their needs, volunteers drive supplies to clients without transportation, and the Food Pantry has applied for County funds to expand their physical space to store food, also hoping to apply for a transportation grant, when possible. The Y continues to raise awareness, engage volunteers and work with partners to meet these challenges—the food bins and collection jars are out year-round at the Y, the Teen Leaders Club would make sandwiches every day if they could, street drives will be a key focus for 2022, and Chrissy and Paul would like to expand the Y's impact and be at more tables where food security is being discussed. This is the path to lasting and meaningful change. If you are interested in volunteering, providing support, and/or partnering with the Y, please contact Christine Tolley at christine.tolley@ymcaofmews.org or 732-548-2044.

The Y's Togetherhood Service Committee was Lorraine's first volunteer gig, post retirement. She credits Togetherhood and the Y with connecting her to the Food Pantry. Lorraine, Sarah, Wendy, Chrissy, Gabby, Paul, Kathy, Rich, Lesley, Stuart, Nelson, the Teen Leaders Club, neighborhood street drive organizers, and others are amazing leaders, inspiring volunteers to act. They are an integral part of the Y's food security team. This, according to Lorraine, is "a Y success story."

EDISON Y COLLABORATES WITH HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Edison YMCA has recently collaborated with the Edison Housing Authority located in North Edison on a mentorship program offered to teens from low-income families. Based at the housing authority, the program gives 5th to 7th graders hands-on technology education, working in teams to learn programming languages and design. This gives them an opportunity to be exposed to knowledge in the field of STEM studies not available to them in middle school and opens up opportunities in computer science and IT careers later in life. The 10-week program has successfully run twice and is scheduled to run again, this time engaging families in South Edison as well. Using curriculum provided by [GoIT](#), the teens create an app that addresses real world problems, such as poverty and gender inequality, which is then presented to their peers, parents and other officials. A winner is voted on at the end of the program. Erin Siemers, Director of Operations at the Edison Y, noted that there were many unexpected outcomes to this program, including improvement in school studies, an increase in social/emotional abilities and an avid interest in technology. To date, 25 teens have participated in this program.

-Contributed by Erin Siemers



BOARD MEMBER ALKA ANEJA RECEIVES AWARD



Board member Shelley Telson (l.) and Rose Cushing, President & CEO of YMCA of MEWSA (r.), are on hand to help Alka accept her award (center).

Congratulations to Board Member Alka Aneja, who was recognized by Mayor Sam Joshi and the Edison Municipal Council at their “Women Matter” celebration, held during Women’s History Month. Alka received an award for her outstanding charity work through her nonprofit, “Humbled By Your Service”, which was formed during COVID-19 to address pressing needs in the community caused by the pandemic. Her nonprofit held PPE drives for local hospitals, food and water drives to feed hospital staff, as well as coat and toy drives for families in need. She also created and hosts her YouTube Channel, “Soul Talks with Alka”, which showcases women who shine through adversity.

Alka is very deserving of this award!

EDISON HOLDS FUNDRAISER FOR ANNUAL SUPPORT CAMPAIGN

The Edison YMCA branch Aquatics Department held a fundraiser by creating an aquarium in the lobby! Members can visit the Welcome Center and purchase their fish to decorate and display in the building. All proceeds go to the Annual Support Campaign.

-Contributed by Caroline Rankin



GIVE NOW

CHILD CARE STAFF RECEIVES TRAINING

On Saturday, 2/26, Early Education staff members attended a professional development event hosted at Colonia Learning Center. After a healthy breakfast, they were welcomed by Rose Cushing, President & CEO of YMCA of MEWSA. They then participated in two training sessions about supporting children's social-emotional development through play and professionalism in the field of early childhood education.

On Saturday, 3/12, our School Age staff members attended a professional development day that tackled topics including Supervision, Dealing with Challenging Behaviors, Team Building & CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health).

We are excited to get our professional development back on track and in-person after a long break due to COVID restrictions!

-Contributed by Cindy Shields



SUMMER CAMP OPEN HOUSES

**GREAT SUMMERS
START AT THE Y**

Last Saturday of each month from March-May!



REGISTER NOW!

YMCA OF MEWSA SUPPORTS UKRAINE RELIEF EFFORTS

Centenary Early Learning Center Holds Clothing/Diaper Drive

The KINDergarten children at Centenary Early Learning Center, along with an organization called Dobrotvoret, decided to hold a clothing and diaper drive for Ukraine. The drive was a huge success with an entire truckload of items collected, including diapers, clothing and beautiful, homemade blankets donated by Center families as well as the community. All items were shipped to aid orphans and refugee children in Ukraine. A second shipment of donations will be sent out with the help of a Ukrainian family from our Center, the Ryzhuks.



Metuchen YMCA Helps Girl Scout Troop 80461 in Collecting Supplies

The Metuchen YMCA partnered with Girl Scout Troop 80461, comprised of third graders from Campbell Elementary School, to collect first aid supplies for the Ukraine as part of their Philanthropist badge.

The troop was able to secure free shipping and the supplies will go directly to specific hospitals in the Ukraine in need. The Metuchen Y was happy to help them out in this charitable endeavor!



Lyft and YMCA Partner to Support Ukraine Relief Efforts

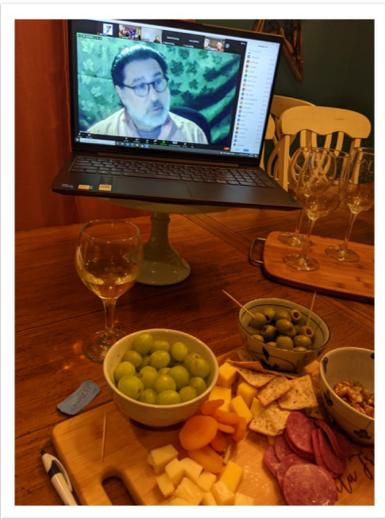
The rideshare app has expanded its existing Round Up & Donate partnership with the YMCA to *drive* donations to our World Service Campaign during this critical time. Find out more [HERE](#).



Please check out our website for more information and for ways that you can help!

ymcaofmews.org/about-us/diversity-inclusion/responding-to-the-crisis-in-ukraine

2ND ANNUAL WINE TASTING FUNDRAISER A SUCCESS!



A TOAST to the second annual virtual wine tasting fundraiser, held on Friday, March 25, 2022! More than 70 people joined us LIVE and a total of 51 wine packages were sold. The fundraiser was a success raising more than \$7,000 which will go to the Annual Support Campaign.

Everyone had fun sipping delicious wines while learning about the characteristics and stories behind the bottles. A special thank you to Board Member Jay Elliot who once again facilitated this event, our host, Joe Brandolo and to The Wine Cellar of Cinnaminson, NJ, for providing all the wines.

-Contributed by Elizabeth Bennett



UPCOMING BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

April 27

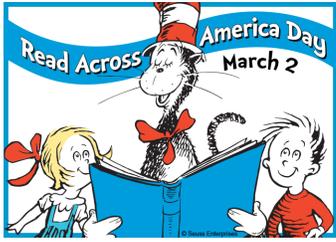


May 25 (Annual Dinner)



June 22

CHILDREN CELEBRATE READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY



Read Across America Day was launched in 1998 by the National Education Association (NEA). It is a day to encourage children to read and falls on March 2nd, which is coincidentally also the birthday of Dr. Seuss.

motivation and awareness.

Pictured are children and teachers from Avenel Learning Center and how they spent their day!



YOUTH & GOVERNMENT PROGRAM UNDERWAY



Participants in the Youth & Government Program is hard at work writing their legislative bills which will be presented at the YAG Conference from April 7-10th. This is the second year that this program has run; both programs have been possible through a grant from the New Jersey State Bar Foundation.

For more information on this program, visit ymcaofmewsa.org/programs/upcomingprograms/youth-government



-Contributed by Gabrielle St. Fleur

GRANT AND DONOR RECOGNITION

Allstate Foundation Helping Hands Grant	\$500	Operating support and program funding.
PepsiCo Smiles in Action	\$5,000	To support our focus areas of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.
NJYMCA State Alliance	\$35,000	To support social isolation, learning recovery and safety around water for seniors, youth and under-resources communities.

<bits & pieces>



Centenary Early Learning Center Kindergarten children enjoy PJ's and Pillow Forts Day as they study day and night skies.



Metuchen branch holds a "Souper Bowl", collecting 173 cans of soup that went to the First Presbyterian Church food pantry.



Metuchen Y preschoolers celebrate St. Patrick's Day with a parade!



Metuchen children taking cooking class to learn how to eat healthy.



Camp Directors attend the Tri-State Camp Conference in Atlantic City to prepare for the BEST. SUMMER. EVER.

L. to r.: Bryan Elsasser, Dan Hontz, Gabriella St. Fleur, Meghan Doriety, Lori Frago, Bradford Lindsey, Shyby Joy



Edison Y staff member Fatima Rivera created a fun and interactive bulletin board encouraging members to contribute ideas.



Edison staff hold their first in-person, all staff meeting. It was a great opportunity for everyone to get to know each other and they are looking forward to more!



The Raritan Valley Riptide Swim Team, who train at the YPCC, are heading to the Sun Kissed National Invitational. We wish them good luck!



The YMCA of Metuchen, Edison, Woodbridge & South Amboy

Invites you to join us at the

A N N U A L D I N N E R

Celebrating 100 years of service to the community

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

6:00 p.m. Reception

7:00 p.m. Dinner and Program

Pines Manor

Edison, New Jersey

For more information, call Catherine Haugh at 732.516.2083 or visit
ymcaofmews.org/giving/special-events

PLEDGE FORM

UPCOMING MEETINGS

APRIL

- 1** PROPERTY COMMITTEE
9:00 a.m.
- 8** INVESTMENT COMMITTEE
9:30 a.m.
- 12** FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
6:00 p.m.
- 13** BOARD GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
6:00 p.m.
- 19** SOUTH AMBOY BRANCH BOARD
6:30 p.m.
- 20** FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE
5:30 p.m.
- 27** BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S MEETING
6:00 p.m.

MAY

- 5** CHILD CARE COMMITTEE
6:00 p.m.
- 6** PROPERTY COMMITTEE
9:00 a.m.
- 11** EDISON BRANCH BOARD
5:30 p.m.
- 12** DEI COMMITTEE
6:00 p.m.
- 17** SOUTH AMBOY BRANCH BOARD
6:30 a.m.
- 18** FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE
5:30 p.m.
- 18** METUCHEN BRANCH BOARD
8:00 a.m.
- 25** ANNUAL DINNER
6:00 p.m.



MISSED AN ISSUE?

All Board newsletters can be found on the YMCA website at

<http://www.ymcaofmews.org/about-us/association-newsletter>