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Mayor's Corner

The Town Council and I wish you all a Happy New Year! We wish you good health, happiness, prosperity and above all, a return to normalcy in the year to come. May 2021 be the year we bounce back in strength, resiliency and the spirit of community. I really look forward to a time when we can hold all of our community events and enjoy getting together at street fairs, music concerts and so much more.

With news about the vaccine, I take comfort in the feeling that the worst of the pandemic may be behind us and a sense of normalcy is around the corner. Please stay tuned to the latest news including vaccination information by visiting our website at www.secaucusnj.gov/virus. We will also be making Swiftreach announcements via email and phone. If you did not already sign up to receive automatic Swiftreach announcements, please visit our website home page, go to the "I want to" tab and click on "register for Swiftreach" link. If you do not have access to the internet, you can call our offices at 201-330-2000 for help.

2020 was a challenging year but that did not stop us from completing important projects and infrastructure improvements throughout

Town. Through State initiatives, NJDOT and County grants and other funds, we have made significant roadway improvements to Meadowlands Parkway, Mill Ridge Road, Humboldt Street, the section of Paterson Plank Road over the Route 3 bridge, Sixth Street, etc. We were also able to upgrade the playground, parking lot and exercise trail at Schmidts Woods, upgrade the Duck Pond and added a new children's park at Mill Creek Point. We have added more police officers and upgraded equipment for our fire department. In 2021, we will continue to focus improving our infrastructure, expanding open recreational spaces and ensuring the safety and security of our residents. Stay tuned for information on construction on a new Senior Center building, improvements on Secaucus Road, Meadow Lane, Front Street and more.

Be well and stay safe. Happy 2021!



Secaucus Artist Lamatina wins ICON 2020 Competition



Secaucus's very own Maleesa Lamatina is a proud winner of the ICON 2020, a competition that honors New Jersey's best musical theater voices. The competition begins with 90 artists and six elimination rounds. Artists sing one selection and are judged on vocal strength, presentation, vocal quality and the "IT FACTOR" (which is how they pull it all together). Maleesa entered the competition all seven years it has been in existence. She has made it to the semi-finals 6 years and into the finals twice, including this year—an impressive accomplishment indeed! Malessa wins a \$10,000 grand prize and the lead role in the winner's dream production.

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Paterson Plank Road
Secaucus, NJ 07094

Secaucus COVID-19 Vaccine Point of Distribution

Mayor Gonnelli and the Town Council place utmost priority on the safety and well-being of our residents. To this end, the Town has opted to organize a COVID-19 Vaccine Point of Distribution (POD) site in Town. This will help vaccinate our town's population right here in Secaucus.

By working to set up a POD, the Town can be a direct receiver of the COVID-19 vaccine, better facilitate the vaccination of our residents and work through the process faster. We feel the decision to operate a local POD will better serve our community.

The Mayor, Town Council, Administration, Health Department, Police Departments and Office of Emergency Management have been working for months to plan, prepare and organize the vaccine efforts. The POD will be activated once the Town receives vaccine supplies. As you may know, there is a limited number of vaccines that can be produced and rolled out so we are uncertain when Secaucus will secure a shipment of vaccine. However, we are fully prepared and ready to have the site operational for our health care personnel, essential personnel and residents whenever the vaccine becomes available to us, which we hope to be middle to late January.

As of now, the Town is awaiting notification on availability of vaccine. We have, through our Health Department, made requests to be a direct receiver of vaccine some time ago. Please be advised that when we do get the vaccine, it will be available in limited amounts. A CDC-guided phased approach will be used to determine what groups will get the vaccine first. A centralized registration system will determine when each individual is eligible to get a vaccine. Once registration is complete, vaccines will be given strictly by appointment only. There will be no walk-ins permitted at the POD site. Under current CDC guidelines, the phases are as follows, in order of priority:

- 1a. Health care personnel and long-term facility residents.
 - 1b. Frontline essential workers and persons aged 75 years and older.
 - 1c. Persons aged 65-74 years, persons aged 18-64 with high risk conditions and essential workers not recommended in Phase 1b.
2. All people aged 18 years and older not in Phase 1C.

Please understand that it will take many months to vaccinate all who wish to receive the vaccine. Therefore, we urge your patience as there will be aspects of this process that are not in our control. For the health and safety of our most vulnerable groups, please refrain from requesting a vaccine if you do not fall into the groups that are scheduled for vaccination. If you know someone who is in a current vaccination phase and may not be aware of our vaccine POD, please share the information with them. However, residents are not required to be vaccinated in our POD and may go wherever the vaccine is available to them.

We will bring you updates on our POD's schedule, eligibility and more as soon as we are provided with additional details. Stay tuned to our website www.secaucusnj.gov for the latest news. We will also be making Swiftreach announcements via email and phone blasts. If you are not part of the Swiftreach system and would like to receive announcements you may sign up on our website.

In the meantime, please continue to wear your masks, make sure you follow social distancing guidelines and wash your hands often. The pandemic is not behind us yet and we need to continue to follow precautions so we can finally turn the corner with COVID-19.

Annual Pet License Due

January is pet-registration month! The Secaucus Department of Health reminds all residents that annual pet licenses are required in Secaucus. We have made it simple and easy to register your cat and/or dog. Forms can be completed and payments made on the Health Department page on our website at www.secaucusnj.gov. Completing the application requires proof of rabies vaccination, so please have it handy. If your pet is not current with the rabies vaccine, you may be eligible for a free vaccine voucher. For more information, or if you have issues with the online form, please call the Health Department at 201-330-2031.



Tax Reminder

Property Taxes are due February 1, 2021. You have several ways to send in your payment:

- Place in secure drop box located in Town Hall vestibule by the police dispatch window. Available 7 days a week. Checks only, no cash in the drop box.
- Pay online at www.secaucusnj.gov – I Want To – Pay – Property Tax tab
- Mail payment check to:
Town of Secaucus
Tax Collector
1203 Paterson Plank Rd.
Secaucus, NJ 07094

For more information, please visit www.secaucusnj.gov or call the Tax Collector's Office at 201-330-2021 Ext. 1.

Gyaltzen Choden: 100-Year Journey from Tibet to Secaucus

As we ring in the new year, leaving behind the unusual tumult of 2020, Gyaltzen Choden celebrates a very fulfilling milestone—he can boast of a century worth of experience at the interesting intersection of countries, cultures and history. A Secaucus resident for several years now, Gyaltzen Choden was born on January 1, 1921 in Tibet. In 1940, he met 5-year-old Tenzin Gyatso, the Tibetan spiritual leader and 14th Dalai Lama. In 1948, Gyaltzen was appointed to the office of the Private Treasury, an entity separate from the National Treasury of Tibet. There was increasing nervousness that Tibetans in general, and the Dalai Lama in particular, would face threats from the Chinese authorities. The newly established private treasury would allow the physical security of the Dalai Lama if the need arose.

For 12 years, Gyaltzen Choden served in his official capacity, and played a vital role at a turning point in Tibetan history. On March 10, 1959, the Dalai Lama was invited to a cultural celebration at the Chinese military headquarters in Lhasa and was advised to appear alone and without security. Fearing an arrest, thousands of Tibetans gathered in the streets around Norbulingka Palace in Lhasa to prevent the Dalai Lama from accepting the invitation. Soon after, the Dalai Lama was advised by his close associates to leave Tibet for India. Gyaltzen and others followed a plan to stay behind in Norbulingka to keep a sense of normalcy on the Palace grounds. For the next few weeks, he stayed at the palace, witnessing a large scale Chinese military attack on Lhasa and the death of thousands of Tibetans. With their own lives in danger, Gyaltzen, his brother Chonzin and three others, decided to escape from Tibet once they got the news that the Dalai Lama had safely arrived in India. They survived the long and dangerous journey on foot and horseback, stopping at a Lhoka, home to the first Buddhist Monastery, helping to prepare a counter-attack to Chinese military exercises. When the city fell, the group decided to head to India right away.



In India, Gyaltzen helped with the process of registering more than 80,000 Tibetan refugees and with getting them asylum status. He later helped launch *Rawang Parkhang* Tibetan Freedom Press, was active in keeping the now-scattered Tibetan community informed, and also helped edit the Dalai Lama's autobiography *My Land and My People*. He was appointed Home Secretary of the Tibetan Government in exile and assisted in resettling tens of thousands of Tibetans in southern India. He oversaw the rebuilding of Ganden, Drepung and Sera monasteries where relocated Tibetans continue their culture, language and traditions as a continuous, collective community. He moved to the U.S. in 2000 and now lives in Secaucus with wife Tsundae Sangmo, his son Tsewang Namgyal and family. Looking back, he reflects on his time with the refugees as the most productive and purposeful part of his life. He gives credit to the practice of compassionate caring for the happiness he exudes even as he grapples with losing his eyesight. At 100, he continues to spread the message of love, compassion and unconditional understanding. We wish Gyaltzen Choden many years of good health and happiness.



Police Department Unveils Hybrid Vehicles

On December 11, 2020, the Secaucus Police Department unveiled two (2) new “hybrid” Ford Escape Police Vehicles. These “hybrid” Ford Escapes will primarily be used on extra-duty traffic details in construction zones, where the vehicle normally sits idle for extended periods of time. Since the vehicles are “hybrid,” power for the vehicle will be drawn from an electrically charged battery, during a vast majority of the idling time. Therefore, the emissions from gasoline fumes released into the environment will be greatly reduced.



During one experiment by the Secaucus Police Department’s Vehicle Mechanic, Scott Petruzzello, the “hybrid” Ford Escape sat idle for five (5) hours running on the electrically charged battery, and only engaged the engine for thirty-three (33) minutes.

“Hybrid” police vehicles will also come at a cost savings to the taxpayer, which is a primary concern of Mayor Michael Gonnelli’s administration. The cost savings will stem from a reduction in the amount of gasoline needed for the vehicles and wear and tear on the vehicle, since the vehicle partially runs off of battery power. These two (2) “hybrid” Ford Escapes were purchased for \$26,879.41 each, with fees paid to the Town of Secaucus when a police vehicle is stationed at a construction zone.

“With the purchase of these Hybrid police vehicles, everyone wins,” Chief Dennis Miller said. “Police Officers will have a new vehicle to use, the taxpayer will be saving money and the Secaucus Police Department will be doing its part in helping the environment.” “Also, three (3) “hybrid” Ford Interceptor Utility Vehicles have already been ordered this year, which will be used for regular patrol duties. These patrol vehicles will be put into service during the Spring of 2021 and through attrition, we will be transitioning our entire fleet to “hybrids,” Miller said.

Mayor Gonnelli stated, “What a great addition these two vehicles are to our fleet. One of the main goals of my Administration is to be mindful of the environment whenever making purchases and these vehicles certainly do just that. I am so pleased we were able to add to our growing electric/hybrid vehicle fleet.”

“These new vehicles are an important part of Secaucus’ commitment to our ‘green’ municipal fleet and produce fewer emissions. In doing so, we will have healthier air as well as long-term energy and cost savings,” Town of Secaucus Environmental Coordinator Jennifer Schneider said.

Elms Residents Get Serious About Pumpkin Decorating

We missed bringing this to you earlier, but we could not let these pictures just sit in our archives. Residents at the Elms of 5th Street participated in a pumpkin-decorating competition in October. They had a lot of fun while putting in some serious effort! We cannot bring pictures of all the creations but here are the two top spot winners.



First place winner Mary Jacobucci (pictured) and her daughter, Mary Jane Raess created an elaborately decorated pig ballerina and second place winner Margaret Cruz (pictured) and her granddaughter, Eden Mojena, came up with a candy-corn puffer fish. Very creative! Congratulations to the winners and all participants.



Fire Chief Carl Leppin



Every two years the all-volunteer Secaucus Fire Department selects a new Fire Chief. This year Fire Chief Carl Leppin III hands over the reins to incoming Fire Chief Joseph Schoendorf who will lead the department until 2023.

Chief Carl Leppin joined the Fire Department as a Junior Firefighter with Engine 4, Ladder 1 in 1996 and later transferred to Engine 3. Though Carl joined as a volunteer at the request of other members, he couldn’t be happier about his decision. After the first few responses to fire calls, he felt “there is no sense of accomplishment better than this.” This fuels his duty as a fireman and led him to be chosen Captain and Lieutenant three times each. Carl is also the Town’s Construction Official, a job he says is intertwined with his role as Fire Chief. Knowledge of construction codes also informs his ability to navigate fire safety systems in buildings.

When Carl took over as Fire Chief in 2018, he had a set of goals he wanted to achieve for the Fire Department. His list included equipment and facility upgrades, robust recruitment, enhanced training, modernizing standard operating guidelines and focus on the newly formed Marine Division, now part of the NY-NJ Regional Fireboat Taskforce. With the support of Mayor Michael Gonnelli and the Town Council, he supervised the procurement of grants for a state-of-the-art rescue boat, new motor for Marine 2, new gas meters, and the COVID-19 PPE grant. Carl is especially proud of the new rescue boat and improvements to the Marine Division which he says, “more than paid off the investment, having been used for many marine rescues including fires and stranded boats.” In the last two years, the Fire Department also procured a new generator for Engine 1, approved fire alarm systems for Tower 2 and Rescue 1, purchased and upgraded extrication tools for Ladder 1 and Rescue 1, and completed upgrades to Rescue 1 buildings. In addition, the Mayor and Town Council approved the purchase of 12-14 sets of gear a year (gear expire every 10 years and must be replaced; old gear is donated to countries that do not have gear). Work is also in progress to replace the engine at Engine 2. The standard operating guidelines were updated to current standards.

“All these upgrades and equipment are useless if we don’t have firefighters to use them,” reflected Carl. Extra efforts made by ex-chief Raymond Ciecuch and Donald Ciecuch over the last two years added 46 more to the team--12 Junior Firefighters, 17 Auxiliary Firefighters, 1 Probationary Firefighter and 16 Firefighters. New sessions for marine, extraction, high-rise and intercompany training ensured that all fire personnel are adequately prepared for any emergency. Carl always reminds firefighters to “never stop learning, and never to be afraid to ask questions.” As he passes the baton to new Fire Chief, he shares this piece of advice--“Be proactive and think ahead so decisions are made not just for today but for the future as well.” Thank you Chief Leppin for a well-served two years.

Chief Leppin thanked all members “for entrusting me with this position and allowing to serve as Fire Chief. I thank incoming Chief Joe Schoendorf and Battalion Chief Fred Schneider for their tremendous support. I wish them as well as incoming Battalion Chief Larry Marciano the very best,” he added.

We will bring pictures from the January 5th swearing-in ceremony in the February Newsletter.

The Giving Spirit and Helping Hands Spread Holiday Cheer

It is said, where there are hardships, there are also helping hands. That certainly the case in Secaucus. In 2020, the number of families need more than doubled. However, generous donations, countless helping hands and the immeasurable impact of the giving spirit made the holidays a bit more cheerful. Santa Claus was especially happy to have the help Mayor Michael Gonnelli, the Town Council, the Department of Social Services, the DPW and a team of elves from Town Hall who helped spread holiday cheer throughout Town. Secaucus also received generous donations from several businesses in the area which were prepped, packed and delivered to families, civic organizations, daycares, schools, shelters, food banks and more. Facebook was flooded with posts from residents who were pleasantly surprised by holiday gift bags delivered to their doorsteps. The Town even held a free hand-sanitizer drive-by event thanks to generous donation from two businesses. Santa Claus spent a lot of time in Secaucus, starting with a drive through town and appearing at the virtual tree-lighting ceremony on December 5th, then making appearances at Zoom classrooms, firehouse-led drive-throughs and more. Santa even showed up at the Mayor's Office to hand out gifts to employees. At the same time, thanks to the annual toy and food drive donations, many families shared some extra smiles, albeit behind masks. All these make Secaucus a community that truly cares. Thank you to all who donated, organized, prepared and delivered happiness in the form of holiday deliveries!



Hospital Donates Holiday Gifts



On Monday, December 21st, Hudson Regional Hospital President and CEO, Dr. Nizar Kifaieh donated 300 \$25-gift cards to Mayor Michael Gonnelli, as Town Councilwoman Orietta Tringali, Councilman Bill McKeever, Santa Claus and families who received holiday gifts looked on. Donated gift cards will be distributed to Secaucus families in need. Throughout the year, the Hospital has not only been a reliable partner in the area's fight against COVID-19, but has also been a strong community partner. The Mayor and Town Council thank the Hospital for their yearlong efforts, from art shows that encourage students, to various donations to help the community. We wish the hospital continued success.

Knights of Columbus Coat Drive

Mary Immaculate Council 12769 along with Msgr. Peter B. O'Connor Assembly 1543 recently ran their annual coat drive for the homeless. They were able to distribute over 25 bags of coats for adults and children who are homeless. The coats were greatly appreciated by the various shelters that received the coats. With the combined effort of both the Council and Assembly, they were able to sort the various coats and bag them. A shout out goes to those Knights including Paul Pinkman, Master of the New Jersey 1st Regiment, Sal Manente Sr.

Assembly Commander, Rich Steffens and Neal McGarrity, Past Grand Knights who helped sort and deliver the coats. The Mary Immaculate Council would also like to thank Mayor Mike Gonnelli and the Town for their assistance in obtaining some of the coats, which collected at Burlington Stores and delivered by the Town to the Knights.



Christmas Tree Pick-up

The Secaucus DPW makes it easy for you to properly discard Christmas trees. Just remove all lights and decorations and place trees curbside after 5pm any day from January 2 to 31st. There is no need to call to schedule a pickup. DPW trucks make trips around the Town's streets and will pick up trees discarded at curbside. Simple and easy!

Secaucus Honey

Fresh, local

The Perfect Gift for Any Season





1 / 2 LB. JAR = \$10
1 LB. JAR = \$20
PROPOLIS = \$10

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