

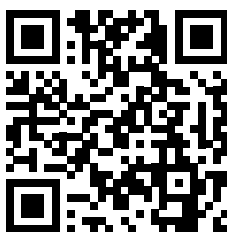


Live Streams

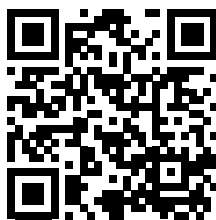
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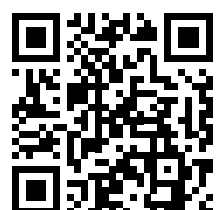
We stop in at the Diwali celebration held October 21 at Franklin High School. More than 1,000 people attended the event, which featured performances, vendors, and food.



Rabbi Eli Garfinkel speaks at the Vigil for Israel, held at Temple Beth El at the start of the Hamas-Israeli War. Garfinkel called for peace and mercy.



A little rain didn't get in the way of the Sister 2 Sister Network and their supporters during the organization's annual Run/Walk for Breast Cancer Awareness.



Higher Than Average Suspension Rate At Middle School Of Concern To District

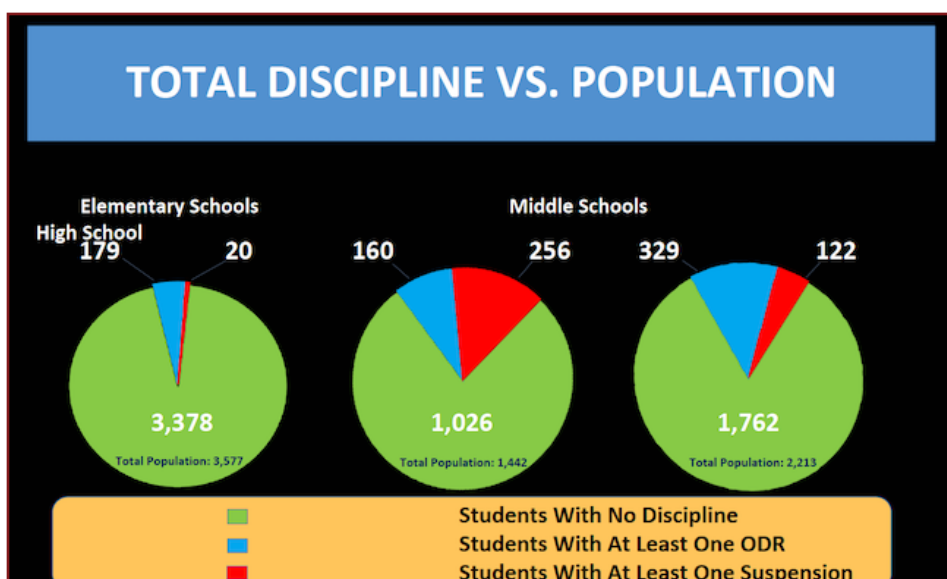
Approximately 18 percent of Franklin Middle School students – nearly one-in-five – were suspended from school in the 2022-23 school year, a reality that concerns district officials.

That number is dramatically higher than the suspension rates at the district's elementary and high schools, which are .8 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

Suspension rates in township schools were just some of the data shared with Board of Education members at the Board's October 19 meeting.

Orvyl Wilson, the District's Director for School Management and Student Advocacy, presented the information during his state-mandate annual report on the Student Safety Data System for the 2022-23 school year.

Speaking of the high sus-



pension rate in the Middle School campuses, Wilson said, "We are very concerned about that and we are looking at what the causes might be. One of the causes might be an over-reliance on suspensions as the way to address disciplinary issues."

"We're looking at that and we will be making some changes," he said.

According to the statistics, 256 of the Middle Schools' total population of 1,442 students were suspended at least once last school year.

In contrast, 20 of the elementary schools' total population of 3,577 students were suspended, and 122 of Franklin High School's total population of 2,213 students were

suspended.

In the middle schools, 160 students received at least one disciplinary report – known as Office Disciplinary Referrals, or ODRs – while at the elementary schools 179 students received at least one disciplinary report and at the high school, 329 students

Continued on Page 7.

Rite Aid To Close Hamilton St. Pharmacy

The Rite Aid pharmacy at 773 Hamilton Street is among 12 of the chain's New Jersey locations that will be closed by the ailing retailer, according to court documents.

Philadelphia-based Rite Aid Corp. on October 15 filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, citing income losses and pending lawsuits alleging its stores filled illegal opioid prescriptions.

As part of its restructuring, Rite Aid said in bankruptcy filings that it will sell more than 150 of its 2,100 stores in 17 states.

There was no word on

when the Hamilton Street store, or any of the targeted stores, will close. Rite Aid has said that it will find jobs for employees in the affected locations at other sites.

The company filed for bankruptcy in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in New Jersey. The company will also sell Elixir, its pharmacy benefit manager.

Rite Aid, which posted \$24 billion in revenue in 2023, employs more than 45,000 people and fills nearly 200 million prescriptions a year, according to its filings.

"Despite its proud heri-

Continued on Page 5.

Assemblyman Delivers \$1.5 M To Youth Center



BIG MONEY – State Assemblyman Joe Danielsen, left, delivered a \$1.5 million state appropriation for the Franklin Township Youth Center during the October 10 Township Council meeting.

A \$1.5 million state budget appropriation for the Franklin Township Youth Center and the Somerset County Action Program was delivered at the October 10 Township Coun-

cil meeting by state Assemblyman Joe Danielsen.

The money will be used to fund a number of programs jointly administered by the Youth Center and SCAP,

Continued on Page 6.

Rabbi Calls For Peace, Mercy, In Wake Of Hamas Terrorist Attack In Israel

The Rabbi of Temple Beth El on Hamilton Street told his congregation that hatred of all Palestinians is not the productive response to the terror attacks carried out in Israel over the weekend by a Palestinian-linked terrorist group.

Rabbi Eli Garfinkel told his congregation and visitors during a special Vigil for Israel that while justice must be meted out to those who

carried out the attacks, mercy must be shown to the majority of Palestinians who are not supporters of the organization, Hamas.

"If you want anger, go watch TV," he said. "I do not want a house of God to become a shrine of rage."

Garfinkel said that he came to the congregation with a message of hope.

"The hope lies in the idea that we could fight the terror

with equal parts justice and mercy," he said. "Those who gleefully machine gunned the innocent ... they must get justice, and lots of it. The problem is that there are 2 million men, women and children in Gaza who do not deserve the punishment."

"If being a Jew is to mean anything ... we must care about the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank," Garfinkel said. "We have to

help them obtain the basic necessities of life, food, water, medicine and yes, even electricity."

"We have to help them because their own corrupt governments do not care about them at all," he said."

Asserting that he is a "Zionist through-and-through," Garfinkel said the fact that Jews have no other homeland other than Israel is why "we

Continued on Page 7.

FRANKLIN REPORTER & ADVOCATE

Monthly Digest

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Chamber of Commerce
2023
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Energy Aggregation On Hold For Now

AGGREGATION ON HOLD – Township Councilmember Ed Potosnak tells the Environmental Commission why the Township is delaying starting the energy aggregation program.

Energy aggregation for township ratepayers will have to wait at least until the Spring of 2024, a Township official said on October 2.

Updating the Environ-

mental Commission on the Township's progress in implementing energy aggregation, which was approved by voters in November 2022, Township Councilmember Ed Potosnak said that now

is probably not a good time to enter into any aggregation contracts because of the current volatile nature of energy prices.

Energy aggregation is when a group partners to buy energy from a single source with the purpose of lowering their energy costs. In Franklin's case, the group would buy electricity from a company other than PSE&G, although PSE&G would still deliver the electricity.

Ratepayers could opt-out of the program at any time.

The program was approved by voters in 2022, and the Township subsequently contracted with Gabel Associates to act as its consultant in finding a third-party aggregator.

Potosnak said Gabel recently recommended that the Township wait on finding a source.

"They recommended we not go out at this time because with everything happening in Ukraine, energy prices have spiked across the world," Potosnak said.

He said that the third-party energy suppliers set their prices based on a three-year average, and new prices will be set in April 2024.

Under the program, township ratepayers would save at least 5 percent over what they now pay PSE&G, and that a certain percentage of the electricity delivered is created sustainably.

Sewerage Rates To Increase In November

Customers of the Franklin Township Sewerage Authority will notice a slight increase in their quarterly bills as a 10 percent rate hike takes effect in November.

The rate hike was included in the Authority's 2023-24 \$16.9 million budget, passed in August and recently approved by the state.

The current hike comes in the wake of an identical 10

percent rate hike in the 2022-23 budget year.

The rate increase is higher than what was anticipated last year, when FTSA executive director Joe Danielsen told Authority commissioners that he foresaw an increase of at least 3 percent this year.

Danielsen told the commissioners at their October 3 meeting that two factors drove this year's increase.

The first, he said, was inflationary pressure. Prices for materials for needed projects, he said, have skyrocketed.

The second factor in the rate increase is a \$600,000 appropriation that, by law, is to be paid to the Township for use in the budget's general fund.

"The only way to achieve everything would be to increase the rate by 10 percent,"

he said.

The rate hike will generate about \$1.3 million more for the Authority, Danielsen said.

The rate hike will cost ratepayers about \$36.30 per year, Danielsen said. He said that brings an FTSA customer's total bill to about \$390 per year.

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FTPD ‘Tuesday Night Talk’ Focuses On Psychological Security



SAFETY TALK – Community leaders and law enforcement officials discussed safety measures in light of violence spurred by the Hamas-Israeli war.

Religious, political and law enforcement leaders were brought together online October 17 for an installment of the FTPD’s Tuesday Night Talks, this one dealing with security in the wake of the Israeli-Hamas war.

Hosted by Township Public Safety Director Quovella Maeweather, the roughly hour-long conversation touched more on the psychological aspect of safety, rather than the physical.

Besides Maeweather, on the panel were Mayor Phil Kramer, Somerset County Prosecutor’s Office Chief of Detectives Francisco Roman Jr., Rabbi Eli Garfinkel of Temple Beth El, Pastor Jamin Powell of Community Baptist Church, Imam Syed Rizwan Rizvi of Masjid-e-Ali and the Muslim Foundation, Alex Kharazi of the Franklin Township Interfaith Council, FTPD Officer Adam Tuvel and FTPD Officer Abdul-Aziz Oudeh.

Maeweather said the impetus to hold the panel came after recent world events, including the October 7 terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas fighters, and the call for violence against Jews on October 13.

“Our main objective tonight is to build unity and comfort during this time,” she said.

She said the conversation would “address how these events are impacting our community members, within our religious institutions and within our police department as well.”

Roman said that while there are no specific threats in Somerset County, “we remain highly vigilant and make sure that anything that gets reported gets disseminated to

our partners.”

Roman said the Prosecutor’s Office works with the Regional Operations Intelligence Center for any information, then passes that information down to the towns for further dissemination.

“We continue to monitor the situation overseas,” Roman said. “We have an intelligence unit as well as counter terrorism unit.”

Kramer praised Maeweather for how she has shaped the police department to reflect the diversity of Franklin Township, and also Garfinkel for the speech he gave at a vigil for Israel at Temple Beth El on October 11.

In his speech, Garfinkel called for peace and mercy in the wake of the attack.

“I applaud the director for what she’s done with the force, and I have to applaud the Rabbi for setting such an incredible example at the vigil,” Kramer said. “I am in awe of him and what he did and the great courage he showed.”

“Those words would not have come out of my mouth had it not been for some very honest conversations that I had with prominent members of the Muslim community in Franklin, most notably Alex Kharazi, who opened my eyes to perspectives that otherwise I would have not spent any time thinking about,” Garfinkel said.

Garfinkel likened the reaction of Jews to the October 7 attack to the reaction of Americans to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

“I think we feel as though we sustained a very serious trauma,” he said.

Community Art Show Debuts

What may become an annual tradition kicked off September 30 in the Municipal Building on DeMott Lane.

Called the “Not Quite Wine and Cheese Art Opening,” the event featured artworks in a variety of media created by nearly two dozen township residents.

The idea for the art show was broached by Mayor Phil Kramer, who said that as he goes door-to-door campaigning for re-election, he notices many pieces of art in residents’ homes.

“Sometimes they invite you in, and sometimes they have fabulous art on the walls, and sometimes they’re the artist,” he said.

“That happened enough times that I said, wow, we should have a show ... where all the artists are from Franklin, and let people share because we have so much to share,” he said.

Kramer said he brought the idea to Saffie Kallon, the township special events coordinator, and she ran with it.



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Announcing the FR&A Monthly Digest Spansih Edition!

The Franklin Reporter & Advocate is proud to welcome the first edition of the FRA's Monthly Digest in Spanish!

The idea for the Spanish edition sprung from a meeting of the new FR&A Hispanic Initiative with leaders of Franklin Township's Hispanic community.

The meeting was called by FRA co-publishers PJ Parker and Bill Bowman as a way to gauge what issues are important to our Hispanic community, and how best to reach its members.

While stories in this edition of the Monthly Digest will be run in Spanish, ads will appear in English and Spanish.

The newspaper, which is free, will be distributed in retail and other outlets frequented by the Hispanic community.

If you have any suggestions for stories, distribution sites or advertising, please contact either Editor Bill Bowman at editor@franklinreporter.com, or Advertising Director PJ Parker at ads@franklinreporter.com.

Life Stories

Lee Bolden Hampton, N.B. Cop



Lee Bolden Hampton was born on September 13, 1939 to the late Joe Bolden and Georgia Hampton in Guntersville, Alabama.

Brother Lee confessed Christ at an early age. He joined Mount Zion Ministries Family Worship under the pastorate of his uncle, the late Reverend Edward Alex-

ander. Brother Lee remained an active member of Mount Zion under the pastorate of Bishop Eric Samuel McMillan until Brother Lee's health began to fail.

He joined the United States Air Force in 1957, served in the specialty rate of Air Police Flyer for two years, and then received an honorable discharge. Afterwards, he served as a police officer with the New Brunswick Police Department for forty-one years, and then he retired. He was united in marriage to Maria P. Edwards on July 12, 2013 and they lived in Franklin Park, New Jersey until he was transferred to hospice care at RWJUH. They frequently visited the Franklin Park Diner and IHOP on Route 27 in Franklin Park.

Brother Lee departed this life on September 29, 2023 at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Brother Lee leaves behind his loving wife, Maria; his stepdaughter, Preslaysa (Daren) of Virginia Beach, Virginia; his brother, Donald Moore (Reverend Joyce) of Hendersonville, Tennessee; his step-grandchildren, Samuel and Hannah; several cousins, nieces, nephews, family, and friends.

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Rite Aid Is Scheduled To Close Hamilton Street Pharmacy



Continued from Page 1.

tage, a confluence of operational and financial factors have stressed Rite Aid’s financial condition and necessitate a comprehensive reorganization,” the company said in its filing.

Among those factors cited by the company in its filing are \$4 billion in debt, inflation, increased labor costs, declining reimbursement

rates from third-party payers and poor-performing stores.

The company also faces more than 1,600 opioid-related lawsuits, it said in its filing.

“The Company’s extensive litigation portfolio is expensive to manage, has drained liquidity, required substantial time and attention from key executives, and complicated the ability to

explore out-of-court alternatives, particularly when combined with other operational headwinds,” the company said.

“It became evident that a restructuring through chapter 11 would best position Rite Aid for long-term success,” the company said in its filing. “An orderly process with support from key creditors should help the Company maintain trade credit and obtain post-petition financing to preserve thousands of jobs, continue operations in chapter 11, and take the necessary steps to right-size the business for a successful emergence.”

“And Rite-Aid will work to develop consensus among all constituencies on an expedited basis,” the company said.

Despite the imminent closing, Franklin is still served by a number of pharmacies, including Somerset Park Pharmacy on Easton Avenue, Township Pharmacy and Walgreen’s on Hamilton Street, and CVS on Elizabeth Avenue.



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Franklin Township Youth Center Commemorative Plaque Unveiled

Supporters of the Franklin Township Youth Center gathered at the Lewis Street facility on October 19 for the unveiling of a commemorative plaque.

The plaque lists the names of the people responsible for bringing the center to fruition.

The center, which was dedicated on May 14, 2022, recently celebrated its 1-year anniversary.

Township Councilwoman Kimberly Francois, who championed the Youth Center for more than a dozen years before it was built, said the Center shows that Franklin “cares about its people.”

“I’m a product of a government that cared about me,” she said. “I want to commend the township for investing in our youth. I want to commend everyone who was involved in making this happen.”

Windy White, Deputy Director of the township’s Recreation Department, said that every day there are between 60 and 100 youths in the Center.

“Anything that it takes to make sure this building is successful is what our staff does.”

Beau Byrtus, the township’s Recreation Director, said that “Being a part of this has been a wonderful experience. It’s something that touches you really to your soul.”

The Youth Center, he said, is “a one-stop shop for the youth of Franklin.”

Danielsen Delivers \$1.5 Million For Youth Center

Continued from Page 1.

officials said.

Speaking of the Youth Center and SCAP, Danielsen (D-17) said, “Together this dynamic duo of programs provides our township with a true sense of community by the many services they offer daily.”

But the programs don’t happen without “the talented and committed staff” and funding, he said.

Windy White, the Township’s Deputy Director of Recreation, said Youth Center staff are “very eagerly looking forward to working with our partners at SCAP.”

“It will be for our wonderful young people,” she said. “Every day we have young people, mostly middle schoolers for now ... they love the staff, they love what we have to offer thanks to all of you. This money will help us expand what I call our Triple A programming, that’s athletics, academics, and art.”

SCAP Director Mark Harris said that “great partnerships” with the Youth Center would help SCAP to expand its own programming.

“Some of this funding will also go back into the community, where services are needed most,” he said. “We’ll also do community needs assessments, so we’ll go into the community to see what we need in the community ... no one will be left behind.”

“This youth center and this partnership with SCAP is evidence of the work we do in the community,” said Beau Byrtus, the Township’s Recreation Director. “Groups like the police, the Board of Education, the Township, SCAP, all of these groups come together to provide opportunities for the youth of Franklin.”

“It reaffirms what we all know to be true, and that is that the state of New Jersey, Somerset County and Franklin Township care about our kids and they care about our future,” he said.

Township Councilwoman Kimberly Francois, who for 15 years agitated for the Youth Center to be built, said that it was one of her dreams for the Center that SCAP would be involved.

“Now we’re here, we have some money to do it, we have plenty of programs we can spend the money on ... and we’re going to spend it well,” she said.



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Vigil Held At Temple Beth El

Continued from Page 1.

have to have mercy on the average Palestinian who just wants to go to work, come home and have a decent life. For the sake of Israel and the reputation of the Jewish people, we must show mercy to those who have not harmed us.”

“If Israel holds on to hatred and rage, it will become weak,” he said. “The Jewish state must mix military might with mercy.”

Mayor Phil Kramer told the congregation that the weekend attack left him with the same feelings he had after the 9-11 terrorist attacks in this country.

“I remember the shock and hopelessness of 9-11 because I feel it now,” he said.

“How do you even begin to process what has happened?” he said. “What is the strategy when the events are beyond words? I console myself by remembering the

history of the nation of Israel ... is perseverance in the face of what would seem to be insurmountable odds.”

“Here in Franklin, we are unified in our grief and stand as a community of one,” Kramer said.

Echoing Garfinkel’s message, Kramer said, “We must respect the citizens of all nations, we must respect the citizens of Palestine as we do the citizens of Israel.

Walk/Run For Breast Cancer Support

More than 100 runners and walkers showed up at Colonial Park on a rainy October 7 morning determined to accomplish what they signed up to do: raise money for the Sister2Sister organization and help women suffering from breast cancer.

This was the 18th running of the organization’s Run/Walk 4 Life, always held on the first Saturday of October, National Breast

Cancer Awareness Month.

There were actually more people taking part; Sister2Sister co-founder Dorothy Reed said more than 300 people signed up, with many of them doing the walk or run virtually, in their own neighborhoods.

“This was the best year we’ve had,” Reed said.

The organization, headquartered at 1201 Hamilton Street, “provides sanctuary, support, education, advoca-

cy and breast cancer related programs for minority and underserved breast cancer survivors,” according to its web site.

The annual event “honors the memory of woman who lost their battle to breast cancer and is a celebration of life for jubilant survivors,” according to the web site. “Funds raised help support outreach and educational workshops to families and communities.

Rate Of Middle School Suspensions Concern District Admins

Continued from Page 1.

received at least one disciplinary report.

On the positive side, 95 percent of elementary students had no disciplinary problems, while that portion was 71 percent of middle school students and 80 percent of high school students, according to the data.

Overall, Wilson said, “We would expect that the majority of our students respond well to correction and are meeting the behavioral expectations and that’s what these (data) show.”

Wilson said that while the number of ODRs did increase from the 2021-22 to 2022-23 school years, strict

comparisons shouldn’t be made.

“The 21-22 school year, although that was a ‘normal school year,’ it really wasn’t a normal school year because we still had students who were quarantined, students who had to miss school because of pandemic issues,” he said.

“The 22-23 school year really was a full school year for all of our students,” Wilson said. “The numbers are really not apples to apples in this particular case.”

The five top types of behavior that result in ODRs in the elementary schools are physical aggression, non-compliance, disruption, inappropriate language and

unsafe objects, Wilson said. In the middle schools, the top five behaviors are disruption, physical aggression, non-compliance, inappropriate language and misuse of electronics.

Misuse of electronics in the middle schools increased from 31 incidents in the 2021-22 school year to 71 incidents in the 2022-23 school year, Wilson said.

“One of the trends that seems to weave its way throughout our discipline is the fact that the use of social media plays such a major role in how students interact, how they develop relationships with each other and sometimes how they behave,” he said.

In the high school, the top five behaviors leading to disciplinary action are cutting class, non-compliance, disruption, physical aggression, and tobacco, Wilson said.

Wilson said that in the high school, suspensions have given way to removal of student privileges as an effective disciplinary action.

In addition to peer mentoring, counseling and the District’s positive behavior program, students having the ability to socialize after school again can help with shedding the negative behaviors, Wilson said.

“We are able to begin working again with com-

munity partners such as the (Franklin Township Youth Center) and (Somerset Community Action Program) to provide the kind of services and activities to our young people that enable them to get back together again as groups and interact with each other, build those relationship and social skills that are important for their group,” he said.

Also part of the report is the District’s Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying, or HIB, report.

The number of investigations into complaints of HIB increased from the 2021-22 school year to the 2022-23 school year from 74 to 167,

Wilson said.

He said the number of confirmed incidents also rose from 23 in the 2021-22 school year to 53 in the 2022-23 school year.

By school, the breakdown of confirmed allegations from last school year to this one are:

- Elementary, which went from 5 to 18 incidents.
- Middle, which went from 16 to 31 incidents.
- High school, which went from 2 to 4 incidents.

“We are continuing our focus in those areas and our teams are continuing to work with students, with communities, with parents, to address harassment, intimidat-



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