



## News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

Mark Caliguire, Freeholder Director • Patricia L. Walsh, Freeholder Deputy Director  
Peter S. Palmer, Freeholder • Patrick Scaglione, Freeholder • Brian D. Levine, Freeholder

---

March 23, 2015

## Somerset County Honors 20 Outstanding Women *Commission Marks 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

Somerset County Freeholder Deputy Director Patricia Walsh, liaison to the county Commission on the Status of Women, joins the commission in announcing the 2015 Outstanding Women in Somerset County award winners.

“We have many women in Somerset County doing amazing things every day,” said Freeholder Walsh. “It is most appropriate that during Women's History Month, we take the time to publicly recognize them and say thank you.” The Outstanding Women in Somerset County awards dinner will be held March 27 at The Imperia in Franklin.

“This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Somerset County Commission on the Status of Women,” she added, noting it was founded in January 1985 with the support of then-Freeholder and later Governor Christine Todd Whitman.

Honorees are women who live in Somerset County. This year's award recipients by category are:

**Arts/Entertainment – Florence Larkin of Green Brook.** She has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the Watchung Arts Center (WAC) for 13 years and currently serves as vice-president of education. As a former school teacher who always advocated for the arts, she has used her insight in overseeing the WAC's very successful children's art classes and children's art summer camp. Working with a fellow trustee, she has been instrumental in developing a relationship with the Watchung Hills Regional High School Art Department to showcase the works of advanced arts students and their faculty in a month-long art exhibition at the WAC. She also is coordinator and host of the Meet the Performers Reception held with each WAC concert and event.

**Arts/Entertainment – Martha J. Weintraub of Hillsborough.** As president of Gallery 14, a prestigious photography gallery in Hopewell, she has advanced photography in Central Jersey. She has had numerous exhibits locally and won Best in Show at Phillips Mill, Pa. Six of her works hang in the new Princeton Hospital, with more in Pennsylvania hospitals. Her work has been published in Color Magazine. In January she had a solo exhibit at the Chapin School in Princeton, together with a lecture for students. Her imagination drives her work; she gathers subject material from her camera and online and produces finished art on her computer.

**Business Management – Cynthia Polanco of Bridgewater.** In December 2003, she became the newest owner of the Exclusive Allstate New Jersey Agency in Branchburg, now known as the Cynthia Polanco Insurance Agency, LLC. After weathering the recession, a divorce and the demands of single-motherhood, she moved her office to another location within the township; subsequently she and her agency made Allstate's honor ring and national conference for the first time in 10 years. Her agency has seen \$2.4 million in sales per year and two consecutive years of approximately 5-percent growth. She has been part of various small-business networking groups for the past eight years. Over the years the agency has partnered with St. Hubert's, two local high schools, the Bridgewater Boy Scouts and other organizations for various fundraisers.

-more-

**Education – Betty W. Barber, Ph.D., of Franklin.** A retired dean of Kean University, she is a native of Charlotte, N.C., and received her nursing degree from North Carolina A&T State University. She completed her graduate education at the University of Pittsburgh with a master's degree in medical surgical nursing in 1971 and a doctorate in higher education administration in 1978. She has held nursing positions in the U.S. and in Germany, where her husband was stationed in the military during the 1960s. She joined the nursing school faculty at Rutgers University in Newark in 1978 and was named assistant dean of mathematics, natural sciences and nursing at Kean College (now Kean University) in 1986; two years later she was named dean of the College of Mathematics, Applied and Health Sciences and Technology and a full professor. She retired in 2003 but now works part-time at Kean as ombudsman assisting faculty, staff and students with conflict resolution issues.

**Entrepreneur – Anna Marie Racioppi of Bernardsville.** She started her own business over 40 years ago, when female business owners were few and far between. After high school, she became a certified shorthand reporter and was hired by Roberts Walsh Court Reporters. After a couple of years, she and a former classmate, Carol Moskowitz, started their own business. After Carol's death, Racioppi continued the business with new partner Ronald Coscia. They grew what was then called Suburban Shorthand Reporting into one of the largest court-reporting firms in the state. After the business was sold in 1994, she was brought in to run and advise the new owners of what is now the largest court-reporting agency in the United States. Along with her business accomplishments, she also has devoted her time to a plethora of charities, fund raisers, local school functions and most recently to Josephine's Place, which serves the needs of women in the economically poor area of Elizabeth.

**Environmental Initiatives – Robbie Lert of Bedminster.** A longtime resident of Somerset County and Bedminster, she currently serves as vice chair of the Bedminster Township Environmental Commission, chair of the Bedminster Township Green Team for Sustainable Jersey and a member of Bedminster's Creative Team. She led the township's efforts to achieve back-to-back bronze certifications from Sustainable Jersey. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and philosophy from Hofstra University. She is a certified financial planner and has a paralegal certification, and has held various positions in the securities industry. Currently she is the owner of LERTSTAGED, a space- and kitchen-design company. She also is a locally recognized artist of modern and contemporary artwork; she recently held a one-woman art exhibition at the Clarence Dillon Library.

**Environmental Initiatives – Cindy Malinchak of Warren.** She has owned her own commercial construction business – Environmentally Based Green Building, LLC – for nine years, succeeding in an industry that is represented by few women. She was named Leading Woman Entrepreneur for New Jersey in 2011 and 2012. She is a strong advocate for the "green initiative" and teaches classes for green associate and building valuation in New York. She is a LEED AP and a member of the United States Green Build Council who has completed many projects for the military, United Nations and commercial accounts. She also is very generous with her time, volunteering as a speaker at youth organizations and apprentice programs. She is active in the Mount Vernon, NY, and Philadelphia, Pa. areas educating unemployed women, minorities and veterans for entry-level placement in the construction industry.

**Government – Shannon Marie Snook of Bridgewater.** As former deputy coordinator in the Somerset County Office of Emergency Management (SCOEM) for three years, she was a key SCOEM point of contact during Superstorm Sandy and other emergencies. She acted as liaison to law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, elected officials, private-sector executives and government officials on the federal, state and local levels. She holds certifications in numerous federal- and state-level disaster-management protocols, including incident command, hazardous materials and others. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from William Paterson University and a master's degree in criminal justice from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and recently switched careers to join the Somerset County Sheriff's Office as a sheriff's officer.

-more-

**Hometown Hero – Courtney Newman of Hillsborough.** A lifelong Hillsborough resident, she is the founder of Steps Together, a volunteer-based organization dedicated to inspiring the community to pay their blessings forward and support families facing a medical crisis. Steps Together provides financial support and offers to establish a web presence for the families that are assisted, thereby serving as a point of contact in the community for fundraising efforts made on a family's behalf. The organization also shares knowledge of tools and resources used by families facing a medical crisis. In 2013, Steps Together supported nine local families, allocating \$35,033; last year \$93,451 was allocated to serve 21 families. During those two years, Steps Together also has donated \$17,208 to the Somerset Health Care Foundation, supporting Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset.

**Hometown Hero – Sonal Shah of Bernards.** Born in Ahmedabad, India, she earned her bachelor's degree in economics and psychology from Saint Xavier's College and her law degree from Gujarat State University. After moving to the U.S., she worked for 25 years at Bell Laboratories, AT&T, Lucent Technologies and Telcordia. An active volunteer in charitable and community organizations, she ran for municipal office and was awarded the 2009 Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Distinguished Public Service. Diagnosed with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in 2012, Shah has become a passionate ALS advocate. She has advocated for increased funding for ALS research on Capitol Hill, championed an annual New Jersey ALS Awareness Day and headed the top fund-raising team at the central New Jersey Walk to Defeat ALS. She has just published a memoir, "My Life, Legacy and ALS."

**Information Technology – Jackie P. Taylor of Hillsborough.** A Somerset County resident for over 12 years, she currently is executive director at Ernst & Young, providing key leadership in the firm's Human Resources Technology enablement practice in the Americas. She previously was employed at PVH Corp., the global apparel company that owns Calvin Klein and other leading brands. Prior to that, she worked for global-systems company Sapien, where she won awards as the only female lead in the organization. In her corporate roles, she has been a strong advocate for diversity and work/life balance. She is a published author of two books, one for youth and one for parents. She also is founder of Success Ladder Enterprises, an academic-coaching center for girls and boys in Hillsborough. As a member of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens, she volunteers as a guest speaker and has conducted workshops for single parents.

**Journalism/Media – Audrey Blumberg of Hillsborough.** She is owner of The BReeze, a monthly newspaper and news website covering Bridgewater and Raritan. She is responsible for selling all of the advertising, writing a majority of the content and laying out the paper. With the consolidation now occurring in local media, The BReeze often is the only source that residents have regarding local government, schools and events in those two communities. She previously was a local editor for the Bridgewater Patch hyperlocal media website and a municipal reporter at the Hillsborough Beacon/Manville News. She won New Jersey Press Association awards four years in a row for reporting and writing. She holds a master's degree in media studies from The New School and received her bachelor's degree in journalism from The College of New Jersey.

**Medical – Michèle Samarya-Timm, MA, HO, MCHES, REHS, DLAAS, of Franklin.** For over 26 years, she has built a reputation of promoting and implementing community-centered, efficient and prevention-focused public health programs and services for the residents and businesses of Somerset County. She joined the Somerset County Department of Health in 2009, coming from the Franklin Township Department of Health. She was instrumental in the township's passage of a hand-washing ordinance – one of the first such ordinances in the U.S. She also has advocated for food-safety training and has assisted in the county's many drive-through flu-shot clinics. Among her many credentials, she is a licensed Health Officer and a Registered Environmental Health Specialist; was among the first in the U.S. to become a Masters Certified Health Education Specialist; and is the only woman ever to achieve the professional distinction of Diplomate Laureate in the American Academy of Sanitarians.

-more-

**Public Service – Regina Tegeler of Bridgewater.** She has worked tirelessly over the past 25 years advocating for the developmentally disabled. She has been a member of the New Jersey Developmental Disabilities Council since 2011 and that same year became president of the executive board of PLAN NJ, which provides lifetime assistance and planning services for this population. She worked to develop three group homes in Bridgewater and Our House Inc., using special funds available to the township. She has been a member of the Special Needs Ministry of Immaculate Conception Church in Somerville since 2009, organizing monthly Sunday evening mass for individuals with special needs and their families. She is a member of the executive board of the Midland School Alumni Association, helping to plan and implement programs for the school's adult alumni.

**Social Service – Joanne Polito of Franklin.** A member of St. John's Episcopal Church in Somerville for over 40 years, she worked at the church's rummage sales and later formed a committee that established the From the Heart Thrift Shop. In 10 years the thrift shop has made over \$60,000 that has gone back into the community. She and her husband Michael, who have three children and two grandchildren, have lived in Somerset County for 42 years. She is a former member of the Hillsborough Woman's Club and ran the book sales as a volunteer at Somerset Medical Center. At St. John's she has been a vestry member and property warden.

**Sports – Stephanie Johnson of Somerville.** She has taught swimming at the Shimon & Sara Birnbaum Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Bridgewater for 15 years and is currently aquatics director there. She holds multiple certifications in American Red Cross CPR, life-guarding and first aid. She has been training and certifying life guards in the community for approximately 14 years. In 2013, she agreed to coach the newly formed JCC Special Olympics Swim Team. Last fall, she started a new swimming program at the JCC for children ages 3 through 12 with special needs. She also contributes her time to the Somerset County Special Olympics and organizes volunteers for the nonprofit's competitions. Wanting to do more for the special-needs community, she co-initiated the JCC's first Prom for Adults with Special Needs, which was held at the JCC in October 2014.

**Volunteerism – Lisa Frey of Franklin.** Employed full-time as a chemist for Merck, she also donates freely of her time to various organizations. She served on the Franklin Township Food Bank Board of Trustees for nine years (2005-2014) and as treasurer for most of her tenure. She has volunteered on the planning committee for the annual the Tour de Franklin race, which benefits the food bank, and has served as chairperson for the past four years. She also is an alumnae admissions representative for her alma mater, Mount Holyoke College; a member of the Domestic Violence Team in Franklin Township; and a member of the planning committee for an annual charity horse show at Briarwood Farm to benefit the Hunterdon Cancer Center.

**Volunteerism – Laurie Richmond of Bridgewater.** She is president and co-founder of the Elle Foundation Inc., a nonprofit organization that grants final wishes to children battling a recurrence of cancer. The Elle Foundation was started by her daughter, Lauren "Elle," just before her passing from a brain-stem tumor in December 2008. Lauren's final wish was to give a purpose to her journey. The Elle Foundation is the only wish-granting organization whose mission is to grant final second wishes for children with a recurrence. Richmond also works with child-life specialists at pediatric oncology units to create "Moments of Joy" for children battling cancer and coordinates events at the Somerset Patriots stadium for the children and their families. She also has been a CCD teacher at Blessed Sacrament Church in Martinsville for the past 12 years and is a member of the Somerset Hills Newcomers and Neighbors.

-more-

**Volunteer, High School Level – Giana Giorello of Branchburg.** Giana’s impressive art skills already were being recognized in middle school. Two years in a row her artwork was selected for Somerset County Teen Arts and further chosen for display in another “honors” show at the county offices. At the 2014 Teen Arts Festival she also performed a solo dance routine. While in middle school Giana was awarded the Student Rotarian Award for "exemplifying the mission of Rotary International by providing service to family, friends, school and community on a daily basis" at the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Awards Evening; she also was named Rotary Student of the Month. At Somerville High School she was named female 9th-grade Student of the Month for October 2014. She is involved in the Art Club, Concert Choir, set crew for the Drama Club, and field hockey. She also is a longtime member of Girl Scouts and volunteers regularly at Midland School.

**Shirley Noble Lifetime Achievement Award – Estelle Julian of Hillsborough.** Her community activities have been many and varied. For over a decade, she has been dancing with the Hillsborough Senior Rockettes, bringing song and dance to assisted-living residences and a veterans’ hospital. About eight years ago, she was appointed by the Somerset County Board of Freeholders to serve on the Advisory Council to the county Office on Aging & Disability Services; in this role, she has visited nutrition centers to ensure access to food counters for seniors in wheelchairs, to monitor food handling and refrigeration and to provide feedback on recreational programs offered to participants. She also recently offered career opportunities to three homecoming soldiers through the recruiting office in Somerville; she provided financial assistance for real estate school, helped them find suitable housing and guided them to apply for health care at Lyons Veterans Hospital. In recognition of her many community endeavors, she was lauded by the Freeholders as a “Profile of Positive Aging” honoree in 2010.