



News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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Somerset County to Honor 19 Outstanding Women

FRANKLIN – Nineteen Outstanding Women in Somerset County will be honored by the county Commission on the Status of Women at the group's 18th annual awards dinner Friday, March 26, at The Imperia on Easton Avenue.

“On a daily basis, thousands of women who live and work in Somerset County enhance our quality of life by contributing to our communities in so many different and critically important ways,” said Freeholder Director Jack M. Ciattarelli, commission liaison. “It is our pleasure each year, on behalf of the many thousands, to honor a select few for their extraordinary contributions.”

The Commission on the Status of Women presents these awards annually in celebration of Women's History Month in March. This year there are 19 winners in 13 categories. Honorees are women who reside in Somerset County. Recipients by category are:

Arts/Entertainment – Joan Plasner of Watchung. A member of the Watchung Arts Center Board of Trustees for 20 years, she has held various offices within the organization and currently serves as president. Under her leadership, the center has greatly expanded its weekend roster of top-quality concerts and performances and outstanding monthly art exhibitions. She also has been the moving force behind the refurbishment of the Art Center building, the original schoolhouse in the village of Watchung. She holds a bachelor's degree in music education from Douglass College, Rutgers University, and a master's degree in education from the College of New Jersey.

Business – Paulenne Kirschenbaum of Bernardville. Her career has spanned more than 35 years on Wall Street, in positions ranging from broker trainee to branch manager to general partner and investment banker. Her clients have included corporations, individuals and pension accounts. She currently is CEO of Chapin Associates in Chester, a money-management firm founded in 2000, and general partner and manager of the Ridge Oak Fund, LP, a 10-year-old hedge fund. She spent 15 years as senior vice president/investments and senior portfolio manager with Prudential Securities. She completed post-graduate courses at the New York Institute of Finance.

Education – Trudy Doyle of Bridgewater. After serving as Bedminster superintendent of schools for 11 years and assistant superintendent of Hopatcong Borough Schools for seven years, she was one of the first Executive County Superintendents of Schools named by former Gov. Jon Corzine, assuming the post in February 2008. An active member of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators for the past 15 years, she chairs its Professional Development Committee. She began her career as a teacher in Staten Island in the 1970s. She holds master's degrees in elementary education and supervision and administration from City University of New York.

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Education – Linda Bond-Nelson of North Plainfield. Serving as member, vice president or president of the North Plainfield Board of Education since 1992, she has encouraged the development of curriculum and programs that meet the needs of all students and the implementation of a comprehensive technology plan that has included laptops and wireless technology throughout the district. She also has supported collaborative relationships with outside sources such as Rutgers University, Chubb and IBM. Throughout her tenure, she has further developed her board leadership skills through a variety of continuing-education courses and workshops.

Entrepreneur – Anna Louise Bongiovi of Raritan. A licensed funeral director in the State of New Jersey since 1964, she is owner/manager of Bongiovi Funeral Home in Raritan and co-owner of the Somerville Funeral Home. She founded the India Funeral Service, the first such service in the United States, to serve this growing segment of the community. She is the first and only woman in 129 years to win the Distinguished Service Award from the National Funeral Directors Association. She has served as president of the Raritan Board of Health since January 2006 and on many other community organizations, including the Raritan Lions Club Auxiliary and the Somerville Elks.

Environmental Initiatives – Constance Coriell of Bridgewater. As the energy efficiency coordinator for the Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District since 2007, she has implemented the innovative Schools for Energy Efficiency (SEE) program designed to reduce energy waste and energy-related expenses by using low- and no-cost strategies. In her first two years, basic behavior changes by staff and students, along with improvements in building-systems operations, saved the district over 3.5 million kilowatt hours of electricity and \$740,000. Under her leadership, the district received the first Energy Star Leader designation in New Jersey from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Government – Patricia Flannery of Bridgewater. As the two-term mayor of Bridgewater, Somerset County's second-largest municipality, her primary focus has been on land-use issues and controlling taxes. Through years of service on the Regional Center Partnership, she has helped form policies leading to increased shared services and regional planning. The renovation of the municipal complex, a detailed review of the Township Master Plan and the Mayor's Wellness Campaign are among her accomplishments. She holds a bachelor's degree in nursing and served four years on the Township Council, including one year as Council President, prior to becoming mayor in 2004.

Hometown Hero – Eileen Hannaford of Bernards. On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, her husband, Kevin, was killed in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, leaving behind the couple's two-year-old son, Patrick, and unborn son Kevin Jr. Eileen is the founder, president and chairwoman of the Kevin J. Hannaford Sr. Foundation, which raises money and supports children in the Basking Ridge and Bernardsville communities who have lost a parent. As a single parent, she has dedicated her life to helping children who are in the same situation as her own. She also is an active volunteer at the Somerset Hills YMCA, at her church and in her children's school.

Hometown Hero – Terry A. Thompson of Bernardsville. She has been a member of the League of Women Voters for more than 50 years. She joined the Bernardsville Environmental Commission in the early 1990s and has served on the Bernardsville Planning Board since 1998 and the Library Board of Trustees since 2002. She is an active member of Friends of the Shelter, which supports the Somerset County agency for victims of domestic violence. A graduate of Swarthmore College, she later went back to school and received her law degree in 1974 from the University of California at Berkeley. She retired as corporate counsel at Lucent Technologies in 1999.

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Journalism – Jessie Havens of Montgomery. For 25 years, she chronicled the history of Somerville and Somerset County through her weekly column, “Hindsight,” in the Somerset Messenger-Gazette. She has lived in the Belle Mead section of Montgomery since 1974 and is ranked as an authority on local history. She spearheaded the now-annual celebration of the Battle of Bound Brook and currently is involved in the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area. In addition to her newspaper column, she co-authored “Somerset County: 1688-1938” published by Somerset Press in 1976 and wrote “Somerset County: 300 Years of Progress” in 1990.

Law – Susan Sturges Spagnola of Hillsborough. She is a former assistant corporate secretary and assistant general counsel and de facto ethics officer at JPMorgan Chase & Co., where she held a variety of positions with an emphasis on federal bank regulatory matters and business ethics. She served as secretary of the Board of Directors of The Chase Manhattan Bank, N.A., and as general counsel and secretary of private banking subsidiaries of JPMorgan Chase in Florida and California. She received her bachelor’s degree from Skidmore College and her law degree from Pennsylvania State University. She currently is president of the Hillsborough Education Foundation.

Medicine – Lisa Jordan-Scalia, D.O., of Bernardsville. She trained in the family medicine residency at Somerset Medical Center from 1997 to 2000, serving as Chief Resident her final year. She and her husband, Joseph Scalia, D.O., took over Raritan Family Healthcare in 2000. In residency, Dr. Jordan volunteered for free clinics, including women’s wellness exams for the uninsured. She also volunteered to help with the care of Hurricane Floyd victims at the Bound Brook High School shelter in 1999. While attending Rutgers University, from which she graduated in 1992, she was a volunteer with the Big Brother/Big Sister Program and president of the Children’s AIDS Network.

Public Service – Barbara A. Lucas of Branchburg. She was employed in the Somerset County Clerk of the Board’s office for 31 years, working with 21 different freeholders over the course of her career. She served as deputy clerk before becoming clerk of the board in January 1995, and retired at the end of December 2009. She initiated a number of programs including telephone training, the “Facts At Your Fingertips” guide to county offices, the county’s first Wellness Fair and the computerization of the Freeholders’ Office. She was known by the public and media representatives as a go-to person for information or referral on virtually any topic relating to county government.

Public Service – Karen Brodsky of Bedminster. The executive director of the Bernardsville Public Library has been described as a “librarian extraordinaire” who has fostered a climate of excellence at the library. Under her direction, the Bernardsville Library has had consistently high rankings. In 2009, it was rated the top New Jersey library in its population category and the second overall in the state by a national ranking service; the same year, it received the top rating in New Jersey from Library Journal. Her deep commitment to the community also is reflected in her yearly participation in planning the Bernardsville 9/11 memorial service at the library.

Public Service – Sharon Brienza of Bound Brook. She has had over 20 years of experience in municipal government as both a clerk and administrator, and is currently teaching a course in municipal finances at Rutgers University. As Branchburg Township Clerk, she has served as president of the Municipal Clerks Associations of both Somerset County and New Jersey and has been a member of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks for over 20 years. She was named Clerk of the Year in November 2009 by the Municipal Clerks’ Association of New Jersey. She also has been publicity chair for the Somerset County Governing Officials Association for over 10 years.

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Social Services – Rachel Baker-Blackwell of Franklin. As a social worker for Franklin Township, her primary responsibilities are providing welfare services to the township's diverse population. She has seen a 200-percent increase in her client base as a result of the global and national economic crisis. Under these trying and stressful conditions, she treats each client with professionalism, respect and dignity. She holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Connecticut and is a Certified Holistic Health Counselor and a long-standing member of the National Association of Social Workers.

Social Services – Judy Ronzo of Branchburg. A former builder, she has a passion for affordable housing and currently serves as director of property acquisition for Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity. In this role, she works to create collaborative relationships with municipalities across Somerset County, identifying land suitable for the construction of affordable homes. Through her efforts, the organization has agreements in place to build more than 20 homes in the next three years. She also serves as the housing advocate on the Somerset County Advisory Council on Disability Issues and has served as property acquisition liaison for her church.

Volunteerism – Jeannette Brown of Hillsborough. A retired chemist, she has lectured at numerous career days and special scientific outreach programs at all educational levels, and especially for women and minority students. After being diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in 2005, she became an active member of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and a fundraiser for its "Light the Night" campaign, raising more than \$10,000 in the past two years. Her leukemia is in remission; she serves as a patient advocate for others with the disease. She also is a member of the board of HomeSharing Inc. and currently is writing a book about African-American women chemists.

Volunteerism – Elizabeth Baldwin of Hillsborough. She has donated her time and energy to a number of programs and causes. In 2007, she co-created Camp H.E.A.R.T. for children with disabilities and coordinated the Hillsborough Mayor's Wellness Campaign. She has submitted grant applications for the township's Inclusive Playground Project and last year obtained a United Way grant for Hillsborough's "Peer Night Out." When a former coworker of her husband's died suddenly on Christmas Eve 2008, leaving a wife and two small children, she took the reins of a fundraising effort to help keep the family afloat financially while the widow completed her nursing degree.