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PUBLISHER/CEO
ANTHONY RUSSO
arusso@cianj.org

PRESIDENT
MILES Z. EPSTEIN
mepstein@cianj.org

ACTING EDITOR
DIANE C. WALSH
dwalsh@cianj.org

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

SIGNY COLEMAN
BETHANY COLEMAN-ATHERTON
MARTIN C. DAKS
BOB KLAPISCH

ADVERTISING SALES

RICH WALTMAN (646) 808-5114
rwaltman@cianj.org

TOM WORLEY (917)-733-5135
tworley@cianj.org

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

MARJORIE CAMPOLONGO
Art Director, Clear Tunnels
mjcampolongo@gmail.com

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Survey Raises Red Flags on Delays in Health Screenings

Lab tests essential

By Anthony Russo
President, CIANJ

The days are getting shorter and there's a refreshing crispness in the air as fall begins. We're energized and focused on the big events of the season. Foremost is the celebration of Manufacturing Day on Oct. 7 with our

colleagues at the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program.

This year we devoted a special section of Commerce Magazine to the manufacturing industry which contributes more than \$54 billion to our state's GDP and supports 400,000 jobs. More than 1,000 people are expected to participate in this year's festivities and we are pleased to be among them.

Women manufacturers will be saluted. To learn how two leading women faces challenges in their industry, we invite you to read the brief profiles on Alexandra Groezinger and Madeleine Robinson, who are featured in this issue. Groezinger is the granddaughter of German butchers, who now heads the family business that specializes in European style meats. Robinson left Wall Street 30 years ago to head LPS Industries, which manufactures flexible packaging.

Our October issue always has a focus on healthcare too. Inside you will find a feature on a clever new Latino health community program, which relies on "promodoras," in the neighborhoods, as well as information about innovations in breast cancer screening. The pink ribbons we see everywhere this month are reminders of the importance of early detection, preventive care and support for the medical community's efforts to stamp out this horrid disease.

We also recently spoke with Steve Rusckowski, chairman, CEO, and president of Quest Diagnostics, about his concerns that as we emerge from the pandemic, overall population health continues to suffer in part due to delayed healthcare. As the head of one of the nation's leading clinical laboratories, Rusckowski said by delaying care and routine health screenings, both chronic conditions and new diagnosis have gone untreated.

Quest operates in the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Brazil, and employs more



Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/yalax

Quest Diagnostics has observed delayed healthcare during Covid is causing delayed diagnoses.

than 48,000 workers. The CEO said "as employers, we need to support our employees to help address this hidden epidemic and get back to prioritizing preventive care."

Rusckowski said lab testing is an important part of improving health and wellness, but employees throughout the nation who are covered by employer-based health plans pay millions in unnecessary out-of-pocket costs each year by not realizing options available within their network or price fluctuations for services within a network, creating yet another barrier to care.

To better understand the primary concerns and desires of employers and employees regarding benefits, employer health programs and safety in the workplace, Quest Diagnostics commissioned a survey of over 400 human resources benefits managers and executives with decision-making authority (HREs) and nearly 850 office workers (employees) at companies with at least 100 workers.

The Quest study found that 63% of workers put off routine checkups and screenings over the last two years, and 77% said that it was difficult to practice preventive care during the pandemic.


Another finding of the study is that HREs and employees share a concern about healthcare costs, with 87% of HREs and 89% of employees worried healthcare costs will increase this year. Further, nine in 10 HREs (90%) and almost nine in 10 employees (88%) believe that

employers need to be able to control health insurance expenses more.

HREs do appreciate the financial burden of healthcare on their workers. Indeed, over three-quarters (77%) say they want to lower healthcare costs for their employees, but don't have the tools to do so.

The Quest Diagnostics CEO said as employers we must take the steps necessary to educate employees about their healthcare coverage and reinforce individual employees/patients' roles in avoiding unnecessary costs. This means employers should establish educational programs that include regular communication through employee channels warning employees about unintended out-of-pocket costs and how to avoid unnecessary charges.

To reduce cost, he said Quest examined its own out-of-network spending, including diagnostics testing. "Many people may not realize the importance of laboratory testing to inform medical determinations and treatment plans. While the lab industry makes up approximately 3% of healthcare costs, 70% of care-based decisions are informed by diagnostics testing," the CEO said.

By offering quality, innovative healthcare solutions at the right price, employers can help improve the healthcare experience for their employees, minimize out of pocket costs and support them in achieving better outcomes, Rusckowski said. 



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azalescik@columbiabankonline.com





NJMEP CEO: 'CHIPS Act Vital for Manufacturing Future'

By Diane C. Walsh
Acting Editor

JOHN W. KENNEDY, PH.D., has been fighting ever since he became CEO of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP).

He is an irrepressible advocate for an ailing industry. “Most people will say manufacturing is dead in New Jersey,” Kennedy said, shaking his head because the 11,000 plants in the Garden State defy the obituary writers.

As an engineer who ran two manufacturing companies during his career, Kennedy is well credentialed to steer the private, not-for-profit organization that’s always ready to roll up its sleeves for manufacturers. He tripled the size of the NJMEP, instituted a variety of training/education courses and sent his staff across the state to help companies be more competitive, work smarter and become more efficient.

Under his leadership, the NJMEP also hosts regular conferences on the State of Manufacturing and an annual celebration of the industry, ‘Manufacturing Day,’ which grew to 1,000 participant this year. He built coalitions with business groups, like the Commerce and Industry Association of NJ, to convince the state lawmakers to convene a manufacturing caucus. The caucus hones in on the issues facing manufacturers and tries to find solutions.

When the pandemic struck two years ago, the shortages of personal protective gear, like masks and gloves, and the supermarkets’ empty shelves, thrust manufacturing into the headlines. Manufacturers were classified as “essential workers,” and were not required to shut their doors like so many businesses during the height of the health crisis.

Americans were baffled by the shortages of goods and supplies, however. The explanations invariably centered on “supply chain.” The needed merchandise was made overseas and the restrictions imposed by the pandemic created huge shipping delays or the raw materials could only be sourced from abroad and they, too, could not be accessed.

The critical shortage of semiconductors became the rallying cry for the supply chain dilemma. Semiconductors or “chips” are key components in everything from cars to telephones to washer machines. Only 12 percent of chips are now manufactured in the United States, compared to about 37 percent in the 1990s. Many foreign competitors, including China, are investing heavily to dominate the industry. The chips shortage illustrated manufacturing’s plight in the United States and its vulnerable position in the supply chain.

Yet, Kennedy emphasizes the problem did not emerge in the pandemic. It’s existed for years and demands corrective measures, he said. “What has to happen is we really have to change the conversation and I’m afraid we can’t any more.

“I’m really scared about it, because if it’s not political, then we don’t want to talk about it,” Kennedy said. Despite his misgivings, however, the manufacturing advocate was encouraged by the CHIPS And Science Act of 2022 recently signed into law by President Biden.

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“We have to recognize the fact that we haven’t invested in our infrastructure at all and our infrastructure includes manufacturing.”

Supply Chain

Continued From Page 9

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, who heads the national governors' association, hailed the legislation for supporting American innovation and global competitiveness and accelerating research and development in semiconductor production. Kennedy said the industry must now make certain the legislation is fully funded.

"Let's figure it out and work together, instead of demeaning people," Kennedy said. "We have to recognize the fact that we haven't invested in our infrastructure at all and our infrastructure includes manufacturing."

The thrust of the legislation is for semiconductors. It will supply \$39 billion in financial assistance to build, expand or modernize U.S. plants and equipment for semiconductor fabrication, assembly, testing, advancing packaging or research and development. The legislation is administered through the Department of Commerce and it also earmarks \$11 billion specifically for research and development. It will create a public-private partnership to conduct research and prototyping, as well as investing in new technologies and expand workforce training.

The NJMEP head called the legislation "ground breaking for manufacturing." But he said the legislation "does not stop there" because it provides significant support



John W. Kennedy, Ph.D., CEO of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP).

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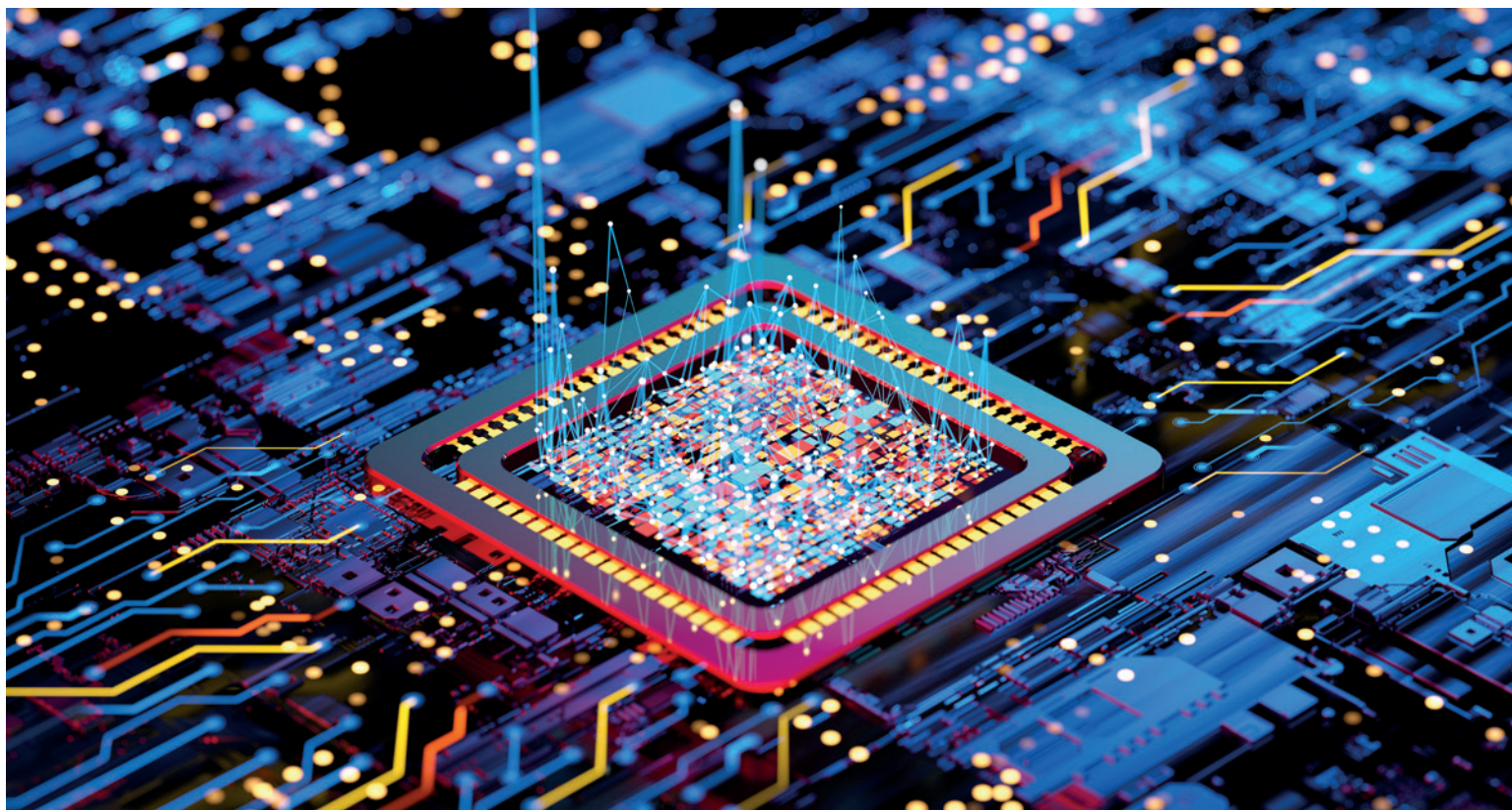


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During the Pandemic, difficulty in obtaining computer chips and the materials to create them held NJ manufacturers back. NJMEP is working to put the state in a position to create these chips domestically.

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Supply Chain

Continued From Page 10

for advanced manufacturing, green energy research and development, cybersecurity and workforce development.

Kennedy urged New Jersey's congressional delegation to support the law. He also worked with Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) on specific wording and testified before Congress in support of the measure.

New Jersey will be among the states benefiting directly from the \$11 billion set aside to establish Technology Hubs over the next five years. The legislation directs the Department of Commerce to create 20 "regional technology hubs" across the country to focus on technology development, job creation and expanding U.S. innovation capacity. It also initiates a "Recompete Pilot Program" to support persistently distressed communities with economic development activities.

Funding was also tripled for the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEPs) throughout the country. "This is incredibly significant but also daunting," Kennedy said, adding "NJMEP has worked hard to sustain growth in our programs but the funding is based upon the expansion of our project feeds driven by our clients."

The NJMEP and its sister organizations throughout the nation receive funding from the federal government. But to draw the federal funds, MEPs must be hired by manufacturers to provide services. Kennedy said it gives his organization "skin in the game" but the new funding will exert more pressure on the MEPs.

Another segment of the bill also aims to combat supply chain disruption by using the MEPs to create a database that will assist businesses with supplier scouting and minimize disruptions. Kennedy said the supply chain tool was defined and development by Menendez, his staff, NJMEP and the American Small Business Coalition. The NJMEP already has a database, according to Kennedy. But he said "it does not go deep enough and needs to provide added information on machine capabilities, staffing highlights, certifications, and projects." He is looking forward to the next generation database—one that will community among state and MEP centers.

Workforce development also receives a boost in the legislation. The National Institute of Standards and Technology Authorization (NIST) is in line to receive a total of \$9 billion and Kennedy said "New Jersey must take home our share." He is pushing for a New Jersey Manufacturing Institute. Kennedy maintains the groundwork has already been done through the efforts of the county college consortium and programs funded by the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development. With input from key players in the state's higher education system, like Rutgers University and

New Jersey Institute of Technology, plus assists from business and trade organization, Kennedy believes an institute can be established to mold workers that will be sought after in manufacturing.

The manufacturing advocate is eager to see the CHIPS Act fully funded. He maintained every other industrialize country invests in its manufacturing sector. If the United State's rebuff manufacturing "we'll be selling out our future and our children's future," he argued.

In New Jersey, Gov. Murphy's latest budget includes \$40 million for manufacturing. The state Economic Development Authority would oversee the funding, which Kennedy described as "unprecedented in my working career."

While he is encouraged by the federal legislation, he said the industry must not rest until it is fully funded and then be prepared to work on all the initiatives. 📌



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MANUFACTURING PROFILES

Business Owners Reveal Challenges and Triumphs

By Diane C. Walsh
Acting Editor

MANUFACTURERS PROVED themselves to be the backbone of American industry over the past two years. *Commerce* Magazine talked with a select group of New Jersey manufacturers to learn about their challenges and successes. Each story is unique and gives a special perspective on their experiences.

Alexandra Groezinger Groezinger Provisions Inc Alexian Pate & Specialty Meats

Alexandra Groezinger comes from a long line of butchers, restaurant owners and sausage makers. Her father learned his craft from his father in Germany and brought it to the United States. Her parents opened Groezinger Provisions Inc. 40 years ago in Neptune, when they converted an old hot dog factory to manufacture of their European-style specialty meats.

Groezinger meats are distributed throughout the United States to retailers, delis and other specialty shops that cater to Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and other Eastern European-style markets. The company's other brand Alexian Pate & Specialty Meat is available at high-end grocers and wine and cheese shops across the country and even in the Caribbean, and South and Central America.

Each year the company manufactures more than 1 million pounds of product – and that's a lot of pate at five ounces a package. Alexandra proudly emphasizes the company is certified as a women-owned business. She took over before the pandemic and was grateful Groezinger's could keep its doors open because it was deemed an "essential business." Thankfully, all 30 employees showed up every day since demand skyrocketed. "Pate and sausage are comfort foods and that's what people needed to eat during the height of the pandemic," she said.

The huge sales uptick was like a wave that Groezinger rode. But the pandemic brought challenges too. Shortages of raw materials and shipping delays forced



Alexandra Groezinger
Groezinger Provisions Inc
Alexian Pate &
Specialty Meats



Sean Glasser
BLUETRACK Inc.

Alexandra to better forecast her needs when order products, which are all sources domestically, primarily from the Northeast and the Midwest. The high cost of freight is the latest issue vexing her. And Alexandra said a price increase is not the answer necessarily because most of her customers require a 90-day advance notice—resulting no returns for months.

Facing all the challenges, Alexandra soldiers on. "Our skin got thicker," she said. With an undergraduate degree in psychology and a master's in business administration, Alexandra is prepared. She is ready to shepherd the family business into the future. "We hope to expand and grow and offer more products."

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■ Manufacturing Profiles

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Sean Glasser **BLUETRACK Inc.**

Little did Sean Glasser know it at the time, but the patriotism he showed after Sept. 11, 2001 would become the foundation of his business career.

After the horrific terrorist attacks, Glasser started selling FDNY and PDNY T-shirts to raise money for the victims' families. He was in college at the time and the experience made him realize he could be an entrepreneur. He started selling bike wheel lights, then pens with lights and later lighted key chains. Customers started asking to have their logos on the items. By senior year he brought in a partner and they bought a print shop to facilitate the business.

Within a few years they started selling at trade shows and decided to expand into promotional items. They started with stress balls and the business took off. Now they offer 1,200 different shapes of stress balls and they have expanded into backpacks, key chains and hand sanitizer.

Glasser is the founder and CEO of BLUETRACK Inc., which is described as an innovative company of brands specializing in manufacturing, distribution and e-commerce in the health, safety, stress and specialty industries.

Located in Clifton, the business is now 20 years old. "I would not necessarily recommend it to anyone. It just happened to be what I did and I just kept doing it. There were a lot of hard years and you learn from it. When failure is not an option, you find a way to make it work," he said.

When the pandemic hit, Glasser faced supply chain issues. He was forced to find alternative sources for materials and/or pay higher prices. Often times, Glasser found himself negotiating with suppliers and customers to determine if there was an "wiggle room" with the timeline or the materials. He is grateful for the flexible customers.

"We made it work for people," he said. The most important lesson he learned in the pandemic was to diversify his line. His bottom line was hit hard when trade shows were cancelled during the pandemic. Glasser vowed not to repeat that situation. "Going forward we are going to try our best to diversify and bring all of the process in house so we're not stuck waiting for things outside our control."

Mitch Cahn **Unionwear**

For years Mitch Cahn has been considering ways to bring more automation to Unionwear, the Newark



Mitch Cahn
Unionwear



Madeleine Robinson
LPS Industries, LLC

sewing plant where he has made custom baseball caps, backpacks and other items for three decades.

The pandemic-triggered labor shortage made the company president finally invest in automation. Over the past year he spent more than \$1 million in equipment and software. Manual cutting of materials has been replaced by computer-assisted work. He also automated the sewing operation by "deskilling" many positions. No longer is experience necessary, he said, explaining any machines merely need the operator to push a button. The software investment allowed him to upgrade many processes. For example, he said workers on the floor can now record production, as opposed to the count being done once a day in the office.

Unionwear employs 160 workers. During the height of pandemic, Cahn was short about 25 workers. While 12 workers have been hired since June, Cahn said automation enabled him to meet demand. "It's never been busier," he said.

His company distinguishes itself by using all domestic products. The pandemic spurred a great demand for American made items. Labor unions are among Cahn's biggest customers and their growth over the past two years also lead to a business boom.

The supply chains issues did not affect Unionwear as much as other manufacturers, either because of its reliance on domestic materials. "One of our strengths is our flexibility and ability to respond to demand," Cahn said. Like many manufacturers, Unionwear kept operating throughout the pandemic. It made face shields and hospital gowns to help during the health-care crisis.

As Cahn looks to the future, he wants to grow his markets. His Made in America products are a lot closer

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■ Manufacturing Profiles

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in price to competitors now. He wants to capitalize on his product as affordable. “We’re pushing ourselves out there online,” he said, noting his YouTube video has gotten 100,000 views. For the first time Unionwear will also produce golf shirts too.

Madeleine Robinson LPS Industries, LLC

As a manufacturer of flexible packaging, LPS is in a growth industry, but CEO Madeleine Robinson said her company’s future is being hampered by the labor shortage and supply issues.

Products for the medical industry have always been one of the main lines for LPS. Since the onset of the pandemic, it has been doing a booming business manufacturing the pouches for COVID tests. “But we’re having trouble keeping up,” Robinson said, explaining the biggest supplier of the aluminum foil is no longer making it available due to its concentration in the production of batteries for electric cars.

Her challenges are further exacerbated by labor woes. “I could take on more business. I just don’t have the people,” she said. LPS has hired recruiting

agencies and placed ads online, all to no avail. “And it goes for office help, accounts receivable, sales, marketing, hourly help, it’s across the board. I just don’t know where the people went,” Robinson said.

She has explored automation but found it is not conducive to most of her products because there are strict quality control requirements in medical products and robotic work cannot meet all the tests.

Robinson has been running LPS since 1991. She left a career on Wall Street and took over the family business when her father died. John M. Robinson founded LPS Industries in 1959 in Newark. Madeleine moved it to Moonachie in 1996. It’s ironic that her loyalty to the staff was one of the reasons why she agreed to step into her father’s shoes and now staffing issues are confounding her.

Despite the issues, Robinson will soldier on. The plant was recently certified for bakery products and a “clean room” was added to enhance the medical line of products. Some older products have also had a re-emergence, she said. For example, the packing list affixed to the side of many packages was a commodity taken over by China. But since the pandemic, it has returned to LPS. 📌



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Trusted 'Promodoras' Work f

By Diane C. Walsh
Acting Editor

When you're sick, you turn to those you trust for help.

This notion was well understood by Mariam Merced, director of Community Health Promotions at RWJBarnabas Health's Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick.

For the past 30 years Merced has worked to improve health outcomes and the quality of life in at-risk communities, such as the Latinx neighborhoods in Middlesex County's New Brunswick and Perth Amoy.

One of newest methods she adopted was popularized in Latin America and the Caribbean to overcome cultural barriers, language issues and other concerns that impede healthcare.

Merced sends "promodoras" in the neighborhoods to encourage people to visit their doctors, complete preventive screenings and follow-up on their provider's instructions.

"Trust is a big issue if you're undocumented and don't understand the system," she said. "We needed trusted messengers in the community who can make the link between the hospital and the community."

Ten women are already working for RWJBarnabas in the roles and Merced said there are plans to add seven more. Not only are they trained in healthcare, but computer skills and strategies for effective outreach.

"We want to motivate people to take care of themselves and their families," Merced said. "We have been very successful with people who would have fallen through the cracks," she said. "Now we are reconnecting them to address their healthcare needs." When the promodoras go into homes, their fundamental concerns are healthcare but they often provide support and information on housing, domestic violence, proper nutrition or other issues which affect health and well-being.

Merced is working to duplicate the promodoras approach in other hospital across the RWJBarnabas system and develop a certificate program for the staffers.

The program is an outgrowth of community needs assessment. The study found that Middlesex County has a larger portion of African-American and Latinx residents than the state. The latest figures from 2019 showed 21.3 percent of the county's population is Latinx, compared with 20.7 percent statewide. The study also found in 2016 some 28.9 percent of the families in New Brunswick were living in poverty, as compared to statewide figure of 36 percent. Unemployment levels in New Brunswick also exceeded the statewide levels, at 5.4 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively.



RWJBarnabas has been working on an outreach initiative to improve healthcare outcomes for Latinx co

For Latinx Community Health



Photo: RWJBarnabas Health

Students create herb gardens as part of YES, a program bringing students and seniors to promote living well.

Merced said the study documents the at-risk nature of the community. It also defined the top issues that impact a community's health. These include: access to care and services, which can also involve transportation and insurance; preventative care and vaccinations; and nutrition and physical activity.

Using the study's findings, RWJBarnabas Health developed programs and strategies, like using promodoras, to overcome the community barriers to healthy living.

Often the hospital will partner with community organizations also, Merced explained. For example, she has worked with the Puerto Rican Action Board and the Perth Amboy public school system to provide access to health services, like flu shots and mammograms. "In this way, we become part of the fabric of the community," she said.

During the pandemic the program director showed her personal commitment to community outreach. When data showed that New Brunswick had one of the lowest vaccination rates in the state, largely driven by hesitancy among the Latinx population, Merced personally drove around the neighborhoods with a bullhorn, announcing the vaccine clinic information and answering questions. She and her team knocked on doors and visited parks to engage with the community, and vaccination rates quickly improved from 41 percent to 59 percent between April and June 2021. 📈

Photo: RWJBarnabas Health

communities.

Experts Warn 'Working from Home' Can Strain Employees' Mental Health

Interaction lowers stress

By Diane C. Walsh
Acting Editor

Leading healthcare providers and insurers participating in a roundtable discussion concluded that the COVID-19-motivated trend to “work from home” should be eyed with extreme caution because it is causing mental and behavioral health issues.

Dr. Robert Brenner, president of clinical integration and physician enterprises at Valley Health System, said “guard rails” need to be imposed to prevent employees from burning out as they stare into a computer screen all day in virtual meetings.

“Should we stop at 50 minutes or 20 minutes at get a bio-break?” Brenner asked rhetorically as the roundtable discussed workers’ isolation and stress. “We need to come through this with guard rails to increase engagement,” the physician said.

When the pandemic struck more than two years ago, many businesses closed their doors and sent their employees home to stop the deadly disease from spreading. For the most part, technology enabled many employees to function remotely. But it comes at a cost.

“You’re working more hours than you did in the office and you’re missing the interaction of co-workers—having lunch together, interacting over coffee, engaging. It’s an important



Dr. Robert Brenner

piece that employees don’t have today,” said Al Bowles, the vice president of health plans at Quest Diagnostic, a nationwide clinical laboratory. He said it is imperative to return to workplace engagement.

The Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ) invited Brenner, Bowles and other experts to share their opinions on COVID-19’s impact on workforce health and employers’ response. The other panelists participating in the thought-provoking conversation were Michael Maron, president and CEO of Holy Name Medical Center, John Sarno, president of the Employers’ Association of New Jersey and Joseph Vizzoni, medical director of AmeriHealth New Jersey.

All the healthcare providers were troubled by challenges of communicating and providing accurate information during the pandemic.

“You’re working more hours than you did in the office and you’re missing the interaction of co-workers—having lunch together, interacting over coffee, engaging. It’s an important piece that employees don’t have today.”

Maron said “the flow of misinformation was continual. Yet people were looking for absolutes. When it comes to medicine, rarely is anything absolute. We had to adapt, adjust and modify.” Brenner said the medical community was constantly grappling with the lack of information. “We had to make decisions based on best judgment.”

Vizzoni said as a health insurance provider AmeriHealth found “everyone made their own decisions about what was best of them and for their families based on their own unique circumstances and their risks.”

Working from home is not an option for everyone. Maron cited his hospital as an obvious example, but he conceded some functions, such as medical billing can be done remotely.



Michael Maron

In today’s tight labor market, working from home is often construed as a job perk. “We have to help guide them through it. I don’t think we’ve hit bottom on this yet. People are doing a strong reassessment of what’s important in life and how they want to live their lives,” the hospital CEO said.

Sarno said working from home is a privilege afforded to a small percentage of the workforce. There is also a “generational component,” he said. “Most bosses are of a mindset that they need to watch you work, not to spy or surveil you, but as a boss I have a comfort level walking around and seeing people busy.”

Even though there have been calls for a hybrid work model, allowing employees to stay home a few days, Brenner said it should be approached with caution. He warned it could bring more stress and further erode the corporate culture that supports engagement.

In their discussion the panelists were all in agreement that COVID-19 is now a part of the fabric of life. “It’s something we’re going to be living with like the flu,” Brenner said. Vizzoni noted that during the height of the pandemic preventive care was postponed but now as people are adjusting to the new norms, screenings and well visits have resumed.

Quest Diagnostics commissioned a study of more than 400 health plan executives and

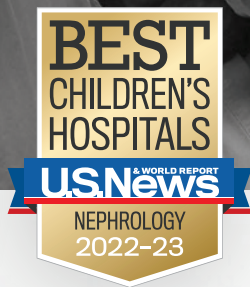
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**Hackensack
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KEEP GETTING BETTER

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health benefits managers and found that 60 percent of workers put off routine check-ups and 75 percent found it difficult to practice preventive care during the pandemic. The results have led health plans to work with employers to improve benefit options as a means of combating the tight labor markets and the resignations roiling many businesses, Bowles said.

Sarno said, however, many employees are struggling with the new and greater responsibilities they face regarding their employees' health. Many human resources managers and departments strained during the pandemic to provide accurate information and advice to employees.

The pandemic required employers to be immersed in their employees' health, fielding questions and posting guidance with continual updates. Sarno explained. The demands created better workplaces in some business, while others muddled through, he said. The experience left him questioning whether business is ready to embrace preventive care.

For the larger self-insured business, Sarno said, data is available to determine the need and calculate whether it makes financial sense. But for small and mid-size companies, the return on investment may not be apparent.

Maron recognized it is difficult for some employers to establish a wellness program because it's an investment in the long-term, when some employees only stay on the job briefly. Sarno said if small businesses do adopt a wellness program it's a "leap of faith" done to boost morale or other purposes.

While the employer's role in preventive medicine may still be in dispute, telemedicine is clearly expanding in healthcare. Maron said it is pivotal for the future of the industry. Its popularity is grounded in its convenience. He



Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/Meeke Media

A hybrid work environment gives employees the benefit of working at home, but also allows for the social and collaborate options,

predicted a "huge role" for telehealth and explained "it maintains the connectivity that is critical to help keep people moving along."

Behavioral health easily adapted to the telehealth platform, according to the speakers. Maron said video calls allowed doctors to make accurate assessments during the pandemic. Reliance on telehealth probably peaked during the height of the pandemic but panelist said its use will expand, especially in behavioral health, because of the ease, convenience and confidentiality it offers.

Vizzoni said young and old adapted to telemedicine. "It's still used consistently," he added.

Brenner expects the experiences of the pandemic have also opened the door to "digital health." From the comfort of their homes, patients are able to interact on a digital platform, allowing their healthcare providers to monitor their blood sugar or other vital signs. As technology advances, Brenner said there will be greater reliance on digital health. 📌

This article is based on a healthcare roundtable sponsored by CIANJ. For more information on the organization's events go to cianj.org.



Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/mapodile



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Working from home can be a benefit to some, but many people find the isolation difficult.



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Covid Pushes Innovation in Breast Cancer Screening

Women returning for tests

Compiled by Diane C. Walsh
Acting Editor

Breast cancer screenings dropped over 87 percent during the height of the pandemic because women were encouraged to stay at home and fears of contracting COVID-19 kept many from having their annual check-ups.

The Centers for Disease Control reports there has been an uptick in the past year, as pandemic restrictions eased and preventive care again became a priority. Yet, healthcare providers are concerned that the delays could have an impact on the future cancer care outcomes.

October's traditional focus on breast cancer has taken on a new emphasis this year. Commerce Magazine decided to speak with leading providers to discuss what new approaches or innovations in breast cancer awareness are being implemented in the wake of the pandemic.



Hackensack Meridian John Theurer Cancer Center
Dr. Deena Graham
Hackensack University Medical Center and Palisades Center

The pandemic has changed the way we live our lives. One

of them is especially alarming: fewer women have been going for regular mammograms — which find breast cancer early, when it is most curable. At Hackensack University Medical Center, we're making sure patients receive the most effective breast care under the safest of conditions.

We continue to take all steps possible to reduce your risk of contracting COVID-19, including screening patients and visitors, mandating mask wearing, sanitizing our facilities, and encouraging everyone to get vaccinated.

Social media is helping us spread the word about the importance of breast cancer screening and new treatments. Telehealth appointments are available in most circumstances for follow-up visits and second opinions.

Genetic counseling and testing are available to identify people at increased risk of breast cancer so we can tailor individualized screening programs for them. If you're diagnosed with breast cancer, we'll match you with targeted treatments that take aim at the biology of your tumor, giving you only the treatments you need and sparing you from the side effects of therapies that may not work. Don't delay — if you're due for a mammogram, make an appointment today!



Hackensack Meridian Jersey Shore University Medical Center
Roshani Patel, M.D., FACS
Medical Director, Breast Surgery

In the height of the pandemic, we have had to use more technology to communicate with each other rather than via in-person visits. By the same token, we have used Zoom and other formats to provide web-based learning for our patients. The media is a critical tool as we can reach patients on the internet through web-based articles, Facebook, magazines, journals, TV, or newspapers.

Using these avenues help us connect with patients to encourage them to seek help if they note an issue, sooner rather than later, and assure them that we have safety measures in place. In addition, for many patients, telehealth and using their e-chart has been a great initial step to reach out if they have a problem. This improves our care coordination and decreases in-person office visits. For patients who may not have smartphones or internet access, a phone call is all that is needed to get them the help they need at any of our facilities.

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Modern technology has created more accurate methods for diagnosing breast cancer in its early stages.

Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/Mark Kostich



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**RWJBarnabas Health,
Rutgers Cancer Institute
of New Jersey**

**M. Michele Blackwood, MD,
FACS**
*Medical Director for Breast Services,
RWJBarnabas Health
Chief of Breast Surgery,
Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey*

More effective treatments for breast cancer are continually evolving through research and clinical trials at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey together with RWJBarnabas Health, and our goal is to ensure patients with breast cancer have the ability to participate in them. As New Jersey's only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, we're able to provide access to clinical trials not available at other hospitals, clinics or doctor's offices, as well as access to some of the most advanced, targeted treatments and medicines available.

One such trial at RWJBarnabas Health in collaboration with Rutgers Cancer Institute, I-SPY2, is evaluating a more personalized treatment approach for patients with stage 2 or 3 breast cancer who require treatment before undergoing surgery. Following a genomic profiling of the tumor prior to treatment, each participant starts on the treatment regimen ideal for the tumor. After several weeks of treatment, the participant undergoes a repeat scan to measure the level of disease left in the breast; if the clinical response is not evident, another medicine is used and assessed. This will serve as a model that our experts will use in many years to come in treating our breast cancer patients.



**RWJ Barnabas Health
Rutgers Cancer Institute
of New Jersey,
Rutgers Robert Wood
Johnson Medical**

Bruce Haffty, MD, MS
*Chair of Radiation Oncology,
RWJ Barnabas Health*

Associate Vice Chancellor for Cancer Programs, at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

While the pandemic has affected many aspects of breast cancer care across the globe, experts at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey continue to work with breast cancer patients to personalize their comprehensive treatment plan, which in some cases, may include proton therapy. Proton therapy is a non-invasive and painless type of radiation treatment that can precisely target and deliver high radiation doses to a tumor to kill cancerous cells. Rutgers Cancer Institute and the Laurie Proton Therapy Center at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital New Brunswick, an RWJBarnabas

Health facility, are one of only two programs in New Jersey to offer this select form of treatment.

While Proton therapy is not offered for the majority of patients with breast cancer, patients who have previously received radiation therapy and need additional radiation therapy to the same region can benefit from this approach as it minimizes damage to nearby tissue and critical organs, such as the heart and lungs. There is an ongoing clinical trial at Rutgers Cancer Institute in which investigators will evaluate if there is a benefit in selected patients when the breast and regional lymph nodes require treatment.



St. Joseph's Health System

Jane White
Vice President of Oncology,

As hospitals began to fill up with COVID positive patients in March of 2020, many healthcare facilities put a pause on cancer screenings. Additionally, some treatment procedures were also postponed in an attempt to re-deploy clinical resources, reduce potential exposures to COVID-19 and preserve personal protective equipment. Now that most facilities have reopened, women have begun rescheduling their annual mammograms and other cancer screenings.

However, it is still incredibly important to continue educating community members about early cancer detection. As part of the newly formed Passaic County Cancer Task Force, representatives from hospitals, community and church organizations are planning events and outreach initiatives to study county health disparities related to cancer and find concrete ways to improve access to quality care.

An important approach is to continue to meet patients where they are and use trusted voices (for example, faith-based organizations, local pharmacies, community physicians) to continue to provide education about the importance of screening as well as ensuring women feel comfortable and safe when they come into a screening facility by maintaining COVID-19 precautions. Also, using funds from the New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (CEED) Program, we were able to provide many underserved community members with breast cancer screenings.



**Star and Barry Tobias
Women's Health Center,
CentraState Healthcare
System**

John Pellegrino, M.D.
*Breast Surgeon and Director,
Star and Barry Tobias Women's
Health Center, CentraState
Healthcare System*

In an effort to make preventive healthcare more convenient for women, especially after the challenges of the COVID pandemic, Centra-

State Healthcare System is now offering mammograms that do not require a prescription.

Patients who are 40 or older with no symptoms and due for a routine mammography screening can simply make an appointment with the Star and Barry Tobias Women's Health Center. If an abnormality is detected, the nurse navigator will contact the patient's physician or help find one. Self-referred mammography is covered by most insurances, just as it would be with a physician prescription.

By removing one step in the process, we are making it easier for women to get their annual mammograms. Thanks to this program, we have seen a spike in routine mammograms, and have been able to catch abnormalities that might not have been discovered had these patients waited to get a physician referral for mammography. If a potential problem is discovered, I am available on site for an immediate consult. This program is not available to women who need diagnostic mammograms, and those who use Medicaid will need a prescription for all imaging studies. For more information, call 732-294-2778.




**Valley Medical Group
The Icahn School of
Medicine, Mount Sinai**

Laura Klein, MD,
*Director, Breast Center,
Valley Medical Group
Clinical Assistant Professor of
Medicine, The Icahn School of
Medicine, Mount Sinai*

One in eight women are diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. At Valley's Breast Center, our team recommends women of average risk schedule a mammogram annually starting at age 40, for early detection.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a decline in mammogram scheduling. We are now seeing an uptick in appointments attributed to the ease our patients experience when scheduling. Our center offers the option of making screening appointments with same day results because we recognize that some patients may be anxious if additional imaging is required. Same day result appointments are offered Monday through Friday, during specific daytime hours and must be requested when scheduling an appointment. We also offer screening mammogram appointments on weekdays, weekends, including early morning and evening hours.

This uptick is also attributed to the innovative technologies at our center as part of our commitment to superior breast cancer detection and an improved mammogram experience. We have introduced the SmartCurve breast stabilization system, which provides a more comfortable mammogram, and Clarity HD high-resolution 3D™ imaging technology, which provides the highest resolution 3D™ images to identify cancers early. We also offer the Quantra™ Breast Density Assessment Software, which provides more reliable breast density scores. 

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COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CARE

Recession? This Economic Slowdown is Something Different

By Leroy Roberts
Contributing Editor

As Alfred E. Newman used to say, “What, me worry?” When it comes to predicting the state’s economy, the emerging downturn may be worth worrying about, but for reasons that we have not ever experienced before. Unlike prior recessions, we are just shaking off two years of pandemic-driven disruptions and all the structural changes it has inspired, from a work-from-home labor force to shortages in everything from TP to vehicles.

There is no shortage of conflicting economic news, however. Two-quarters of down earnings have signaled the start of a recession, yet the state still has a shortage of labor and a budget surplus. There again, while we have a shortage of labor, some major corporations have announced preemptive layoffs.

Meanwhile, the increasing cost of goods continues to spawn inflation, even while fuel costs trend downward from their springtime highs. Interest rates, too, continue to rise as the Federal Reserve attempts to curb inflation that some feel was caused at least in part by the government’s infusion of trillions of dollars into the economy during the pandemic. And of course, lingering COVID-related supply chain shortages disrupt production and add further pressure on prices. No doubt, this economy is

full of contradictory indicators—some cyclical, and some structural.

What about New Jersey?

So far, only a few sectors in New Jersey’s economy—namely real estate—are experiencing a significant downturn (off 19.8% in July over 2021) in sales. Even so, the fall season is seeing recession talk transform into preemptive trimming. Recent actions include predictions of lower earnings, scrapping of growth plans by giants like Amazon, and workforce reductions from Google and Goldman Sachs, among others. The stock market, too, is responding by purging value.

What do the experts think about New Jersey’s ability to weather this economic downturn?

“Pundits will tell you we are in uncharted territory,” jokes James Hughes, Ph.D. University Professor, Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning and Dean Emeritus of the



James Hughes, Ph.D. University Professor, Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning and Dean Emeritus of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

“Lower to middle-income workers will experience the economic pain of this recession, while wealthier neighborhoods will likely see this downturn as more of an inconvenience.”

Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. “The truth is, we don’t really have a clue.”

With that said, Hughes provides a bit of economic history to use as a reference point for judging our current economic situation.

“Between 2010 and 2020, the nation expanded employment creating 22.7 million jobs, or about 2.2 million jobs a year for a decade,” Hughes notes, adding that in New Jersey, we gained about 405,000 jobs in that decade.

Unfortunately, when the pandemic shut the economy down, March through April of 2020 succeeded in wiping out all of the job gains of the prior decade, and then some. Nationally, we lost a staggering 29.9 million jobs in what Professor Hughes refers to as a two-month recession. For New Jersey, job losses were even more severe: the state wiped out 732,000 jobs, or nearly double the jobs created in the prior ten years of economic expansion.



Daren Silverstein, President, and CEO of The CLI Group



Kristen E. Crouchelli, CPA, MBA, PSA, Senior Manager for the Nonprofit and Social Services Practice at SobelCo

The good news, of course, is that the economy rebounded. From April 2020 through July 2022, the nation created nearly 22 million jobs, bringing the nation back to pre-COVID employment
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levels. In New Jersey, we recovered 722,500 jobs—almost, but not quite—a full recovery.

“With recent job history as our guide, it would seem logical that New Jersey will fare about the same as the rest of the nation in terms of the recession’s impact.”

However, Hughes predicts New Jersey’s recession will impact lower-income families and urban areas harder than wealthier suburbs. “Lower to middle-income workers will experience the economic pain of this recession, while wealthier neighborhoods will likely see this downturn as more of an inconvenience.”

For example, raising interest rates is making home ownership less affordable. However, higher rates—the government’s solution to raging inflation—is a double hit to worker’s paychecks. Inflation reduces the buying power for everyone, while higher rates make large ticket purchases, including vehicles and homes, less attainable. Professor Hughes explains that these realities are reducing the value of savings and leading to reduced spending. “One obvious sign,” Hughes observes, “is when shoppers begin shifting from brand names to house brands.”

What about NJ’s Business community?

“If we continue to see online retailing slip, that will be bad news for New Jersey,” Hughes predicts, noting that 13% of the State’s employment is involved in the warehousing and logistics industry.

New Jersey’s nonprofit community is another vulnerable sector, even though signs of financial weakness don’t seem to be imminent. “So far, we have not witnessed any of our nonprofit clients experiencing hardship due to the economy,” notes Kristen E. Crouchelli, CPA, MBA, PSA, Senior Manager for the Nonprofit and Social Services Practice at SobelCo, a Livingston, NJ-based accounting firm. Kristen says that if the state’s economy continues to sputter, her clients are well-prepared if forced to make difficult decisions.

“We may see clients dipping into their rainy day funds, tapping into their lines of credit before they resort to cutting or capping services to their communities,” Kristen relates.

Another concern for New Jersey, according to Hughes, is any further rise in interest rates. If the Federal Reserve continues to increase rates in order to curb inflation, New Jersey’s real estate, construction, and manufacturing sectors, industries that are directly impacted by finance rates, would be hurt.

For small manufacturers like The CLI Group in Paterson, supply chain issues and the impact of experienced craftspeople quitting or retiring remains more urgent than recession fears.

“As far as the recession goes, who knows?” says Daren Silverstein, President, and CEO of The CLI Group, a custom lamination service and digital printer of wallpaper and upholstery products. “At this time, we are not seeing any slowdown, other than being unable to get materials to complete orders. There is no historical data to understand how all the cash the government pumped into the economy and subsequent COVID-related supply chain issues will impact our business in the near term.”

While he feels the pricing issues will work their way down eventually, the shift in the workforce poses a different, perhaps longer-term challenge. “Industry lost a lot of experienced people—hard to replace people—

cold winter, the ongoing war and Russia’s cut-off of fuel supplies may mean higher global costs for fuel in New Jersey. It may also impact supplies as the USA may be forced to send allocations to our European partners.

Another Unknown: China. In spite of China’s recent expansionist saber-rattling, their current economic slowdown has curbed their fuel consumption and kept global supplies abundant. An uptick in use by this economic superpower could tighten supplies and hurt domestic growth.

While global actions may negatively impact New Jersey’s fortunes, there are other uncontrollable factors much closer to home.

And Then There is NYC

According to Professor Hughes, New York City is New Jersey’s one of the most important and uncertain economic factors to impact our state’s recession economy.

“About 400,000 New Jersey residents work in New York City,” Hughes notes. “Work-from-home, while creating problems for New York City’s economy, has been good for New Jersey,” Hughes suggests. The reason is logical: Homebound workers are taking lunch hours eating and shopping in New Jersey instead of on the streets and restaurants of New York City.

Another factor with a great impact on New Jersey is congestion pricing. If New York moves ahead with its proposal, will New Jersey respond with some kind of tax incentive for commuters to offset these higher commuting costs? Or, will we see large-scale job loss and resignations from lower-wage earning New Jersey workers who simply cannot afford to commute to the city for work anymore?

Preparedness Tips For NJ’s Businesses

What can small businesses do to prepare for this economic downturn? According to Professor Hughes, the advice is somewhat obvious.

“The basics still work,” notes the Professor. “Keep a close eye on costs. Don’t over-expand and definitely anticipate that revenues may be leaner, so spending needs to be adjusted accordingly.”

Not Just a Cycle: Also a Structural Change

Hughes added that during this recessionary period we are also in the process of absorbing structural changes in the economy that create some unknowns.

“If work-from-home or some hybrid becomes part of the new normal, and online retail continues to overtake bricks and mortar retailers, we will see further structural changes in New Jersey’s economy,” the professor suggests. 📌



during COVID,” notes Daren. “We’ve seen companies discontinue successful product lines because they have lost expertise. It forces us to qualify new vendors and often pay more.” Daren says.

While supply issues seem to be improving slightly, Daren says that price increases continue. “Unfortunately, I think we are experiencing a degree of price gouging at this point,” he suggests.

New Jersey’s Economy is Globally Connected

New Jersey’s economic fate is impacted as much by global factors as it is by local spending and labor. Specifically, if Europe experiences a

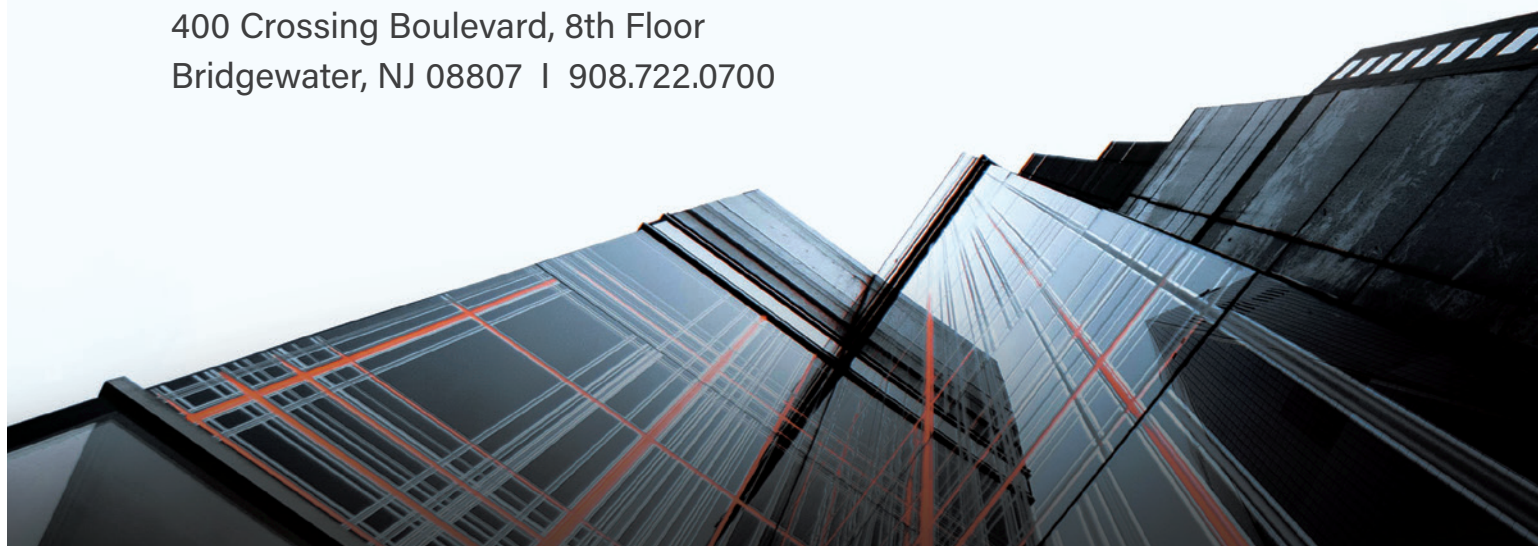


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LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Challenging Communication

By Steve Adubato, PhD
Freelance Contributor



communicating in challenging situations:

Know your audience.

Who are your key stakeholders? Who do you need to communicate with in a credible fashion around an existing crisis or potentially challenging situation? Knowing your audience will help you craft your message.

We all must present and communicate in pressure-filled situations. It could be a critical meeting where you need to persuade others to action. Or you are communicating to the media regarding a particular incident. Consider the following tips for

Don't try to memorize your presentation.

It never works. Plus, even if you get the words right, your presentation will be stiff and stilted, rather than conversational and fluid. Lose the script. Instead, jot down three or four key themes or messages and have them in front of you for reference.

Prepare for the Q&A.

No matter how effective you think your presentation is, you are likely to face a challenging series of questions afterward. Consider the three toughest questions you are likely to be asked. Then, practice answering each question, in 20 seconds or less, and "bridge" or "transition" back to your main message.

Stay within the goal post.

When responding to a question, imagine a football goal post, where everything inside the goal post are your key points and themes that you will use to achieve your desired goal. Anything outside the goal post are areas and topics you want to avoid.

Practice makes progress.

There is no substitute for practice. Recruit some trusted colleagues to engage you in a Q&A prior to your actual presentation. This will allow you to refine your main message and practice your delivery and timing, while receiving feedback. Practicing in this fashion will give you more confidence that you are truly prepared for the real presentation or Q&A. 💪

Steve Adubato, PhD, is the author of five books, with his newest, "Lessons in Leadership 2.0: The Tough Stuff", to be published later this year. He is an Emmy® Award-winning anchor with programs airing on Thirteen/WNET (PBS) and NJ PBS who has appeared on CNN, Today Show and NPR. Steve Adubato's "Lessons in Leadership" video podcast with co-host Mary Gamba airs Sundays at 10 a.m. on News 12+. For more information visit www.Stand-Deliver.com



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Mid-Term Races Heat Up: Focus on New District 7

Census results in new lines

By Diane C. Walsh
Acting Editor

Across the state voters will be electing their congressional representatives next month for the first time since the 12 districts were redrawn.

Every 10 years the congressional map is revised based on the U.S. Census results. For some voters it means they will be casting their ballots in new districts with incumbents and challengers unfamiliar to them, said Micah Rasmussen, executive director of the Institute for New Jersey Politics at Rider University.

"It's a chance for voters in New Jersey to reflect on how they think their congressional delegation is doing and make adjustments," he said.

In a state already known as a Democratic stronghold, the redistricting added to the party's strength, expanding its base in many districts. But Rasmussen said there was one clear exception—District 7. The GOP got a 19,000-vote bump in this district where incumbent Democrat Tom Malinowski faces a challenge from Republican Tom Kean Jr.

This year's race is a rematch between Kean, a former state senator, and Malinowski, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor during the Obama administration.

When Republican Leonard Lance's retirement left the seat open in 2020, Malinowski narrowly

beat Kean by 5,300 votes with President Biden at the top of the ticket. Voter turnout was pegged at 72 percent that year. But mid-term elections, like this year's races, do not usually draw many voters. During the last mid-terms when the U.S. Senate race was the top of the ticket, only 56 percent of New Jersey's approximately 6 million voters cast ballots.

Rasmussen said the rematch between Malinowski and Kean was expected and it's being closely watched. While a 19,000-vote swing is significant, the political analyst said it is not impossible to overcome. "But it further complicates (Malinowski's) path to re-election," he said.

In Rasmussen's estimation, "Kean has the wind at his back" with an aggressive grassroots campaign. He said the Republican National Committee is "throwing money into the race" because it is seen as a highly competitive and could help tip the scales for a GOP majority in the House.

State GOP Chairman Bob Hugin said Kean, the son of former Gov. Tom Kean, is mounting a smart campaign. "It's incredibly exciting to see the maturity, growth and strength of his campaign. I could not be more pleased at what he is doing for himself and for his party," Hugin said.

Hugin, who was the unsuccessful candidate against U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez four years ago, well understands the Democrats' grasp over the state. But he emphasized that despite

his party's loss in the gubernatorial race last year, Republicans won 134 local races.

"We have a very energized base," the GOP chairman said. His Democrat counterpart, Leroy Jones is just as optimistic for his party's prospects, however. He met with the leaders of the congressional campaigns early in September to coordinate their efforts.

"I'm confident of strong results," Jones said, adding that the party is working with its partners in the labor unions and social activist organization to get out its message.

Last spring as President Biden's favorable polling dropped and the bad economic news mounted, political commentators were expecting a giant wave of Republican voters that would return power to the GOP. Rasmussen said at least three of the incumbents Democrats among the 10 in the delegation were considered vulnerable. The tight races included District 5 in the northern reaches of the state where three-time Rep. Josh Gottheimer is challenged by Republican Frank Pallotta. Democrat Andy Kim, the incumbent in District 2 was also expected to face a tough challenge against Republican Bob Healey. Pundits predicted Rep. Mikie Sherrill, too, could be in an uphill battle against Republican Paul DeGroot for her second term in District 11.

But Rasmussen said "the environment changed quickly." He contended the U.S.

Continued On Page 36



Micah Rasmussen



Tom Malinowski



Tom Kean Jr.



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Supreme Court decision that struck down *Roe v. Wade* and returned the abortion rights issue to the states has energized Democratic voters, especially women. He maintained “this is not the cycle we thought it was going to be.”

The Democrats’ confidence could also be based on the benefits they received in the redistricting. An analysis done by Rasmussen shows the Democratic pluralities grew for incumbents in Districts 3, 5 and 11.

For example, in District 5 in 2020 when Pallotta first tried to unseat Gottheimer, he lost by 32,000 votes. Under the new map, there are 18,000 more Democrats in the district and 21,000 fewer Republicans.

Democrat voters grew by 17,000 in District 3 also. The GOP base was reduced by 20,000 voters, giving Kim a 37,000-vote cushion in his re-election campaign. When he was first elected in 2020, he won by 33,500 votes.

Sherrill’s District 11 saw a 39,000-vote swing toward Democrats in the redistricting. In the 2020 race Sherrill beat her opponent by 29,000 votes. The incumbent also had \$6.1 million on hand in the June 30 campaign finance report file, compared to \$280,000 in DeGroot’s account.

Hugin said the new congressional map is an example of “bad gerrymandering” aimed at diluting the Republicans’ votes. There are only two Republicans in the N.J. delegation: Rep.

Chris Smith from Manchester who is seeking his 22nd term in District 4 and Rep. Jeff Van Drew, a former Democrat who converted to the GOP, and is seeking re-election South Jersey’s District 2.

The Republican chairman said the November elections are tremendously important for the nation because “wrong decisions” are being made in Washington, D.C., on economic, social, educational and cultural issues. He bemoaned the rising inflation and increasing gas prices. “We’re seeing no solutions on the horizon. We’re in for a decade of terrible economic performance if we don’t have a better result in this election,” he said.

The New Jersey GOP is investing in a strong get-out-the-vote campaign, Hugin said. “The people in the state and across the nation are standing up and they will move the country and the state back in the right direction.”

Yet, Democrat Chairman Jones was equally impassioned in his contention that his party must continue in its leadership role. He said the mid-term election are critical because “our democracy is at stake.”

He said the Supreme Court ruling on abortion and recent voting and civil rights cases “over the last several months have been an assault on our rights. ... We’re at a critical point in our democracy and we must work to preserve it.”

Jones maintained the country’s economy is trending in the right direction and the new

infrastructure bill will improve communities and the quality of life across the nation.

The Democratic party head said he is ready to spend “wisely and strategically” to get the vote out. “We will push turnout of Democrats, Independents and unaffiliated voters looking for a better future in New Jersey, looking for a federal government responsive to the needs of everyday people.” 🗳️



Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/LETTET

Young people registering to vote has increased in record numbers during this election cycle.



Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/SeventyFour

Many New Jersey voters will cast their ballots in new districts since the congressional map was redrawn based on the latest U.S. census.

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