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A portrait of Justice Michael Noriega, a man with dark hair, a beard, and glasses, wearing a black judicial robe over a white shirt and a blue patterned tie. He is standing in front of a wooden bookshelf filled with green law books. His hands are clasped in front of him.

**Hispanic Heritage Tribute
New Jersey Supreme Court
Justice Michael Noriega**



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COMMERCE (SSN 0745-077X) is published 11 times a year for a subscription price of \$35.00 per year by the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey, 365 West Passaic Street, Suite 490, Rochelle Park, New Jersey 07662, (201) 368-2100, Web site: www.commercemagnj.com. Postage Paid at South Hackensack, New Jersey and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to above address.



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KEEP GETTING BETTER

CIANJ Hosts Party for Mexican Independence Day

By Anthony Russo
President, CIANJ

Celebrations run throughout this issue. First and foremost is our tribute to Hispanic heritage. We were excited to get one of the first interviews with New Jersey's newest Supreme Court justice, Michael Noriega, whose

heritage is traced to Peru. His is an inspiring story of an immigrant family's strength and fortitude. The strong work ethic and dedication Noriega learned from his parents helped him ascend to the state's highest court and will serve him well as a member of this highly respected bench.

Each September, we honor Hispanic leaders. Last year we spotlighted one of our board members, Uli Diaz, who is senior vice president of government and community affairs at Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey. For 2023, in addition to our cover story, we also have profiles on Andres Acebo, the new president of New Jersey City University (NJCU), and Marizel Collazo, senior vice president and director of human resources at Spencer Savings Bank. The Q&A format of our profile on Collazo gives a quick and fascinating look at this successful bank executive.



Latin dancers wearing traditional Mexican dress at Mexican Independence Day celebration

Acebo's story has great significance for the Hispanic community, not only because he is the son of immigrants but because New Jersey City University in Jersey City is vital to the Hispanic community in Hudson County. As Noriega pointed out in his interview, Hudson County

has attracted immigrants from throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Their rich cultures, skills and talents have added to our state's strengths. Many of these immigrants' children are pursuing their educations at NJCU and we were pleased to speak with Acebo about his plans for the school. NJCU suffered a financial crisis last year and the new president is working to overcome the issues.

For the first CIANJ is adding an event to its Hispanic heritage tribute. CIANJ is hosting a Celebration of Mexican Independence Day with the United State-Mexico Chamber of Commerce (Northeast Regional Chapter). Mariana Diaz-Nagore, consul of Mexico, will be the special guest at the festivities, scheduled for Sept. 13 at the El Asadero Mexican Grill in Fort Lee.

Mexican Independence Day memorializes the moment when a Roman Catholic priest, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, rang his church bell and gave a call to arms that triggered the Mexican War of Independence on Sept. 16, 1860. Many Americans believe Cinco de Mayo marks independence. But it is more of a cultural festival.

Every year the president of Mexico re-enacts the cry from the balcony of the National Palace in Mexico City. The Cry of Delores is commonly known as the "El Grito de Independence." We hope all CIANJ members will join us in this special celebration. For more information on it, please go to www.cianj.org



Mexican Independence Day parade

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Noriega Sworn in as Newest NJ Supreme Court Justice

By Diane C. Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

Michael Noriega's dad started calling him "Judge" when he began law school. The "courtroom" was their nickname for his study space in their home on the second floor above the family business in Union City.

Through the years, after Noriega graduated from Seton Hall University Law School and became a public defender, and later entered private practice, the father and son continued to talk about him someday going on the bench. They considered it a natural evolution to his career.

"My father had a long-standing vision of me becoming a judge," Noriega said. His father, Carlos, died in 2011. But his words were prophetic because Noriega was sworn in as the newest justice on the New Jersey Supreme Court in July.

Gov. Phil Murphy appointed him to fill the vacancy created when Justice Barry Albin left after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70. Noriega is the only Hispanic on the court and the third to serve there in the state's history. His tenure will have a profound impact since his joining at age 45.

"As a former public defender and one of New Jersey's most respected criminal defense and immigration law attorneys, Michael Noriega will bring extensive trial experience and a career path throughout our legal system to the judiciary," the governor said. "In addition to this professional profile, Michael's character, integrity and commitment to serving the cause of justice make him the best choice to serve on our state's highest court."

While Noriega said the appointment was a "wonderful surprise," he quickly added the enormity of responsibilities has not been lost on him. As a trial advocate he always approached cases with an open mind to understand all the different facets and reach the best solution for his client. In his new role, however, the dynamics have intensified. "It's no longer that one client or their family. It's now the millions of people in New Jersey and how it will affect them" he said.

Noriega's former law partner, Jon Bramnick, said the new justice is more than ready for the challenge. Bramnick is the founding partner of the Scotch Plains law firm, Bramnick, Rodriguez, Garbas, Arnold & Mangan LLC, where Noriega worked for the past nine years. Bramnick is also a state senator and wholeheartedly supported his former partner's



NJ Supreme Court Justice Michael Noriega



Michael Noriega repeats the oath of office at his swearing in ceremony.

appointment to the bench. "Mike is a person of the highest integrity. He's a terrific lawyer and deeply committed to mankind," the state senator said.

Before joining Bramnick's firm, Noriega ran his own and focused on immigration and criminal law. He had begun his career as a public defender in Essex County and said the head of the office, Michael Marucci had been a great mentor.

Noriega described his old boss as an extremely calm, yet strong leader, whose gentle gravitas could inspire others to follow him into fire. The new justice sees many of those same attributes in Chief Justice Stuart Rabner and is eager to work with him.

Retired Superior Court Judge Camille Kenny is also among Noriega's mentors. As a law student, he interned for her when she was in the criminal division and later clerked for Kenny in the civil part. A former newspaper reporter, the judge was not afraid to mark up the orders and other writing Noriega submitted for approval. He credits her for improving his skills.

"He is one of the most remarkable and wonderful people, I know," Kenny said. "He will do

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Continued From Page 8

a great job because he has the brains, the compassion and the work ethic.” She was among the crowd at the swearing-in who were loud and proud with their applause.

His appointment was especially welcomed by the Hispanic community, and most specifically by Peruvians because his family had immigrated from there. Noriega’s parents had earned medical degrees in South America. His mother, Tery, who beams with pride over his appointment, was an obstetrician, and his late father was a cardiologist. Upon arriving in New Jersey, they both worked for doctors in Hudson County and planned to obtain their licenses here. But Noriega said trying to study for the medical board tests in a foreign language, while working and raising three sons proved daunting for his parents. Ultimately, they became entrepreneurs and opened a travel, insurance and tax preparation business on the ground floor of a mixed-use property they bought in Union City.

Their perseverance and dedication left an indelible mark that Noriega and his wife, Melissa, now impress on their daughters, Emma, Abigail, Rebecca and Kathryn. The new justice is proud of his heritage and touched by the outpouring of well-wishers from the Hispanic community.

Growing up in Hudson County, Noriega well understands that New Jersey’s Hispanic community is a melting pot of many countries, including Cuba, Dominican Republic, South America and elsewhere. “It’s amazing to feel a

“As a former public defender and one of New Jersey’s most respected criminal defense and immigration law attorneys, Michael Noriega will bring extensive trial experience and a career path throughout our legal system to the judiciary,”

community is behind me, suggesting that I’m making them proud even though it’s so many different communities and so many different cultures,” he said.

Since his nomination was announced in May, Noriega was invited to several events organized by the Peruvian community and he was surprised to learn how large and prominent it is throughout the state. “It was quite impressive and really inspiring to know that I was being honored among their ranks,” he said.

In his own words, Noriega admits being “big on legacy and tributes and tradition.” Twice in his career Noriega argued before the Supreme Court and Justice Barry Albin grilled him. The justice was a former criminal defense attorney and was regarded as one of the brightest minds on the court. “Those moments stuck out as both contentious and inspiring in the sense that I felt that I had stood my ground with a heavyweight,” Noriega recalled, adding, “now to sort of be taking on that mantle feels particularly amazing.”

To prepare for the new court session that begins in September, Noriega is spending hours conferring with his new colleagues and pouring over caselaw. As he read over a decision that was written by a colleague with whom he had just been speaking recently, Noriega said “it all became very surreal and very emotional in that moment.”

He is eager to do the work his father knew he was destined to accomplish. “It’s wonderful and overwhelming at the same time.” 🍷



Chief Justice Stuart Rabner administers the oath of office to Noriega as his wife, Melissa, holds the Bible.

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The Buzz About New

By Larry Feld
Contributing Editor

When Dr. Audrey Cross-Gambino and her husband, Steve, purchased 104 acres of farmland on the outskirts of Phillipsburg in 2001 with intentions of creating a vineyard, it marked the beginning of her fourth career move. The daughter of a California farmer, Audrey spent years trying not to become a farmer. Acquiring multiple advanced degrees, she became a prominent nutritionist and lawyer and even served in the administration of former President Jimmy Carter. After Washington, Dr. Cross moved east to spend the next two decades at Columbia University as an educator. Until that is, the farm girl from within re-emerged.

"It's one of those crazy stories," Audrey explains. "I was traveling back and forth from California for about six months, taking care of my father before he passed. Being back in farming country I realized how much I loved it." As a result, the couple began searching for farm property in New Jersey, and in 2001, Villa Milagro Vineyards was born.

Establishing the soil and vineyard took a few years of work. A modest grape harvest began in 2005, with commercial wine sales launching in 2007. Today, the operation includes 10 acres of organic grains, 65 acres of rotation crops, and 11 acres of grape vines used to produce Villa Milagro's signature wines. The vineyard produces about 1,800 cases a year, which are sold at the farm, online, and at about a half dozen restaurants.

"We are very much a boutique producer," Dr. Cross notes. Even so, the winery relies on tastings, weekend tours, and live entertainment to bring in the public.

As a board member of the New Jersey Growers Association, Dr. Cross is also an advocate for the industry. "Tourism dollars are needed, but it doesn't have to all originate from Wine Growers Association," she notes. "We would be happy if the state also spent dollars promoting the wine tourism industry. We want consumers to drink New Jersey wines, not California or other regions."

"New Jersey's wine industry is the fastest-growing division of agriculture in the state," notes Devon Perry, executive director of the Garden State Wine Growers Association. Perry describes the industry as a sort of three-legged stool of related businesses. "We have one foot in agriculture, one in tourism, and a third in manufacturing," she explains.

New Jersey's 60 wineries and vineyards generate about \$323 million in economic impact. An important part of the state's growing eco-tourism industry, wine tourism is a \$20 million industry,



Valenzano Family Winery in Shamong, New Jersey is a vineyard, a winery, and a restaurant as well as a di

accounting for 109,000 visitors each year – a number that has grown by 40% since 2011.

The growth of the industry was facilitated by the New Jersey Farm Winery Act of 1981. Back then, there were only seven wineries, as prohibition-era restrictions only allowed one winery for every million residents. However, expansion has been a slow process. Winery business is a complex and expensive business to establish, and

those who have succeeded hail from surprisingly diverse backgrounds. Some owners, such as Dr. Cross, have transitioned from other successful careers to follow their passion.

From Italy to NJ

Angelico Winery, located on 10 acres of farmland in Lambertville, Angelico Winery celebrated its first year open to the public this

Jersey's Wine Country



distribution operation.

summer. After emigrating to the States in 2002, owner Ottavio (Otto) Angelico and his family purchased the former horse farm in 2019. Otto, a chemical engineer by trade, says his passion for wine-making began in Sicily where, as a child, he worked on his grandfather's farm, growing grapes, oranges, and olives. "I love what I do," Otto says about the wine-making process.

This year Angelico Winery will produce about 1,000 cases of wine with grapes cultivated from their 3.5-acre vineyard. Their tasting room, a neatly-appointed space reimagined from an existing barn that was completed in the Spring of 2022, is welcoming guests every weekend for tastings. His goal is to triple production and build a warehouse with production space and added parking. If he can achieve this level of

production, Otto can finally transition from engineering to the wine business full-time.

"I am in an artisan business," Otto says. "Everything is done by me, my wife, and my kids. You can tell the difference between my wine and something made in a factory," Otto says.

From Hobby to Major Brand

In 1974, Anthony Valenzano's father purchased 9 acres of farm property as a family residence, where the elder Valenzano pursued his hobby of winemaking when it became legal in the early 1980s. In 1991, the father and son team started a business that would become one of New Jersey's most prominent wine brands.


"Between 1994 and 2000, I was working in the restaurant business full-time, with a new wife, a new baby, and building a house on a new farm all at the same time. It was a crazy time," recalls Anthony (Tony) Valenzano, president of Valenzano Winery.

Fast forward twenty years, and the Valenzano Family Winery in Shamong, New Jersey today is a vineyard, a winery, and a restaurant as well as a distribution operation, with about 65 full-time employees, producing over 70,000 cases of wine each year.

"Between the two farms, we have about 60 acres of farmland with about 30 acres of vineyard production," notes Tony, who quickly admits the winery's success is derived from understanding limitations. "At some point, we decided that we were really good at making wine but there are others in New Jersey who are exceptional growers."

So, while Valenzano produces a lot of wine, it also buys a lot of fruit. "We are one of the primary purchasers of fruit in New Jersey," Tony says. Valenzano has also committed to clean energy initiatives, investing in both geothermal heating and solar arrays for running the production facility.

Using internal salespeople and trucks, Valenzano self-distributes wines to about 900 retail outlets and restaurants across the state. Tony is also an expert promoter. In addition to attending about 30 events each year, the company produces the Valenzano WineFest, a two-day event held every September for the last 20 years. Featuring twelve New Jersey wineries, entertainment, and food, the program attracts over 10,000 attendees.

Tony is confident about the future. "When we started 25 years ago, it was difficult to sell New Jersey wine in New Jersey. The industry is different now. Consumers are thrilled to visit local wineries, local farms and buy local products. It's such a different market; so much more enjoyable now." He concludes. 

Spencer Savings Bank Executive Formed by Hispanic Heritage

By Diane C. Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

As part of COMMERCE Magazine's celebration of Hispanic Heritage, we wanted to share stories from leading Hispanics from throughout the state, including Marizel Collazo, Senior Vice President and Director of Human Resources at Spencer Savings Bank. Here is the conversation we had with her.

Q.: Why did you choose a career in banking?

A.: Banking is a multifaceted industry that can provide rewarding careers. It is an industry that offers a wide range of job roles and a large variety of opportunities, including career progression. A career in banking offers both a competitive salary and excellent benefits. It also offers an opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives in so many ways – with employees, customers and larger community. I found all of this very appealing in choosing a career.

Q.: How long have you been with the bank?

A.: 16 years

Q.: Did you have other positions with Spencer Savings Bank previously, what were they?

A.: I was hired as the AVP of Human Resources and held that position for about a year and a half and then promoted to Director of HR.

Q.: What is your education background?

A.: I attended Rutgers University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree, with a major concentration in psychology.

Q.: Where did you grow up?

A.: I grew up in Newark, New Jersey and later moved to the Hudson County area.

Q.: From where did you and/or your family immigrate?

A.: My parents migrated from Puerto Rico. I was born in New Jersey.

Q.: Is your Hispanic heritage important to you?

A.: My Hispanic heritage is very important to me and has strongly shaped the person I am today. I treasure the culture and values passed on by my parents and take great pride in being able to pass them on to my own children. They are rooted in family, community and service. My Hispanic heritage taught me the true meaning of community and service.

Q.: Does your heritage help you in your position at Spencer?

A.: Spencer is a community bank located throughout the state of New Jersey, one of the nation's most diverse states and home to people from many cultures, races and ethnic groups. My heritage has helped me at work because it allows me to connect more with others and understand many different groups of people. People, culture and business success go hand-in-hand. The more you understand people, the better you will be at your job – especially in a field like human resources. I'm proud of my Hispanic heritage and feel like it truly provides me with great insights into many cultures, not only my own.

Q.: What does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you?

A.: Hispanic heritage month is a time to celebrate our roots, history, culture and vision for the future. From our independence to the accomplishments we have made as Latinos, it's a time of celebration and of great pride. As a unified group, from different Latin-American countries, our collective culture is celebrated, contributions and accomplishments recognized and shared values reinforced and championed. It's also a time to look ahead for continued growth opportunities and success.

Q.: What do you enjoy most about your position at Spencer Savings Bank?

A.: Spencer is one of New Jersey's strongest community banks. As part of the bank's senior management team, I truly enjoy playing a significant role in the bank's continued success. I have a great partnership with our CEO and Executive Management team. Together, we take great pride in growing the bank and serving the business community exceptionally well – including the small business community. I enjoy working with people here and encouraging their professional growth and development. I take great satisfaction in hiring the right people and then helping them fulfill their potential and thrive in their jobs at Spencer.

Q.: What are the biggest challenges for human resources at the bank?

A.: Unemployment is at historical lows and many companies struggle to fill open positions on a timely basis. The biggest challenge for our team is the same faced by many companies, their ability to attract and retain top talent.



Marizel Collazo, Senior Vice President and Director of Human Resources at Spencer Savings Bank

Q.: What changes do you see coming in HR in the next few years?

A.: Employees are the core of every organization. In continuing to build a strong company, leaders must attract the best talent and build an outstanding workforce. The HR industry will continue to focus on this and continue to see change.

The future of HR has completely transformed post-pandemic and the standard work environment will continue to change as we have seen a rise in remote/hybrid working. Evolving technology trends such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) will also continue to play a big role impacting talent acquisition and employee management processes. We will also continue to see more purposeful creation of a diverse workforce to shape best practices.

The industry will continue to focus on developing employee health and well-being programs, improving remote policies/procedures, maintaining strong company cultures, etc. Overall, there will be more demand for strong leadership, strategically implemented technology and employee development opportunities. 📌

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NJCU Relies on New President to Untangle Financial Woes

By Diane C. Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

Little did New Jersey City University know when it fell into financial crisis that its champion was right on campus.

Andres Acebo, a son of Cuban immigrants, intent on serving his Hudson County neighbors, filled the leadership vacuum when NJCU needed it most. He stepped up to help the foundering institution even before he was named president.

When a huge deficit was uncovered last summer, the talented young lawyer was executive vice president and general counsel to NJCU. “I tried to bring people together on campus to ground ourselves around the sense of community and mission,” he said.

NJCU has a unique role in the state’s system of public universities because many of its students are their families’ first generation to attend college. And even more startling is that their median family income is only \$42,000. “No one can make our unparalleled commitment to a mission of economic mobility for some of the most underserved and under-represented populations in the state,” he said.

The new president needs only to look around him to see the school’s impact. His wife is an alumnae and many of his own teachers, as well as nurses and community social workers, are graduates. NJCU opened in 1929 as New Jersey State Normal School at Jersey City. Its original focus was educating and preparing teachers. Over time it was renamed New Jersey State Teachers College and later Jersey City State

College, and 25 years ago this month, as its curriculum broadened, it became a university.

When Acebo was named interim president in January he became the second Hispanic in the history of the state to lead a public higher educational institution, following Dr. Carlos Hernandez, who served as the 11th president of NJCU from 1993 to 2012.

Acebo completed his undergraduate studies at Brown University and obtained his law degree from Rutgers University. In his private practice he had a broad array of clients, ranging from labor unions, municipalities, and public schools to closely-held businesses. He was recognized as a Rising Star by New Jersey Super Lawyers, a Top Latino Lawyer by Latino Leaders Magazine, a Top Lawyer under 40 by the Hispanic National Bar Association, and as a Diverse Attorney of the Year by the New Jersey Law Journal.

Even though his law practice was thriving, Acebo said he began rethinking his career path during the pandemic. His youngest child became gravely ill and was hospitalized for weeks. His extended family lost loved ones also. “I began thinking what am I doing with my career? Yes, I’m finding professional success but it’s not engendering personal fulfillment,” he recalled.

“I wasn’t looking to be president, but when the opportunity emerged, I tried to answer that call to serve.”

Joseph Scott, chair of the NJCU board of trustees said Acebo was identified as the primary candidate to lead the university after an extensive search for an interim leader. “His history of accomplishments in our time of crisis are impressive. He has been appointed with unanimous support of the executive committee of the Board. He has the support and full confidence of both the Board and our organized labor units on campus, and an excellent rapport with our legislative stakeholders,” Scott said.

To address the \$20 million deficit, Acebo knew the first order of business was to sit down with the school’s unions. More than 90 percent of the workforce is unionized. He strived to establish trust. “I wanted them to recognize that I wasn’t going to ask anything of them at the bargaining table that I wasn’t prepared to ensure that management was not doing first,” he said.

The unions’ concessions helped Acebo cut the deficit in half within three months. While he is certain “not everyone was happy,” the interim president proudly noted 83 percent of the union workers ratified the agreement.

Resolving NJCU’s financial issues will be a multi-year, multi-phased operation, he said. Acebo is working with the governor’s office,



Andres Acebo, President of NJCU

state legislators and the secretary of higher education to resolve the school’s financial woes. His efforts led to a \$13.8 million allocation in the state budget enacted July 1.

And while fiscal concerns remain a priority, Acebo is also intent on enhancing NJCU’s value proposition. “We have to recognize the population we serve are seeking credentials and degrees as a means towards economic mobility,” he said, adding, “These are young adults and non-traditional students who are literally coming to this campus because that piece of paper that they get at commencement will change the financial security and circumstances for themselves and their families.”

The new president’s action plan calls for making certain that students’ credits from county colleges are easily transferred to NJCU, shortening the time to complete a degree. “And that’s important for so many of our students,” he said, as he underscored his hope to keep out-of-pocket costs at less than \$1,000 a semester.

NJCU will also focus on enhancing its core programs, like nursing and teaching. Acebo proudly points to a teaching internship program that pays students while they are shadowing teachers or tutoring and covers the costs of their licensing exams.

His goal is to propel his students to be “life-long learners” who see NJCU as a place where they can also be retrained and upskilled to meet the constantly changing job demands.

Acebo is confident NJCU will overcome its financial challenges. “The focus has to be singularly placed upon the students we serve.”



Andres Acebo with Antonio Flores, president of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities.



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Outstanding Leaders Receive Honors

CIANJ's toasted its "Enterprising Women" for their dedication and strengthen at a reception last month where more than 100 people celebrated these extraordinary leaders from every industry.

Forty-four women were nominated by their peers this year for honors in the annual "Enterprising Women" tribute hosted by CIANJ and Hackensack Meridian Health.

The reception featured an award presentation in which "Platinum" and "One to Watch" winners were announced, along with honorees from each industry category. The Platinum recipients were women who ascended to the top tiers of their professions, while "One to Watch" honorees, are at the start of their careers and showed great promise. The selections were made by our panel of judges, who are all members of the CIANJ Board of Directors. They included: Paige Dworak, president and CEO of CareWell Health Medical Center; Sally Glick, business development advisor for CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen LLP) and Kim Vierheilig, president of buildings and facilities at STV.

This year's Platinum honorees were: Lara Abrash, CEO of Audit and Assurance at Deloitte; Donnalee Corrieri, chief of communications

and marketing at Bergen New Bridge Medical Center and AnneMarie Sullivan, founder/CEO of Spectrum Works.

In the One to Watch designation, the winners included: Kathleen Patel, CEO of the Factor Group; Brielle Freda Seminerio, operations manager at Brewster Washers and Bisola A. Taiwo, director of real property at Gibbons Law.

The industry selections by the judges included: Accounting, Tifphani White-King, a national practice leader at Mazars; Environmental, Rayna Laiosa, senior manager at The Chemours Company and Michele Zolezi, general manager at Pure Soil/Earle Companies; Healthcare, Dr. Monica Dhingra, director of psychiatric residency, Bergen New Bridge Medical Center; Higher Education, Bhavna Tailor, executive vice president at Eastwick College and Jennifer D'Angelo, senior vice president of healthcare at New Jersey Innovation Institute; Human Resources, Corinne Collina, human resources manager at Earle Companies; Infrastructure, Priya Jain, president, Mace North America Ltd.; Law, Rhonda Carnioli, co-chair technology practice at CSG Law and Mary Gabriel, deputy managing partner at McCarter & English; Manufacturing, Marcia Frieze, CEO of Case

Medical; Marketing, Katie Sword, chief marketing officer at NJPAC; Logistics, Tracy Denora, executive director of NJ Warehousemen and Movers Association; Non-profits, Jill Johnson, executive director of the Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership; and for Real Estate and Development, Abigail Polizois, co-founder Legacy Development Group. 📌



August *COMMERCE* Magazine celebrated all nominees for the *Enterprising Women* awards.

REAL ESTATE

Interest Rate Hikes Roil Market

Leaders in the commercial and residential real estate market took center stage at a recent CIANJ conference, discussing how the Federal Reserve's rate hikes are reverberating through the industry, complicating deals, and pressuring the market.

CIANJ President Anthony Russo moderated the discussion as Max Custer, a director at JLL Capital Markets, lead off by stressing that "transaction velocity" was down as much as 60 percent due to the rate pressure.

Along with Custer, the other panelist included: Stephen Benoit, assistant vice president of leasing and finance at Hartz Mountain Industries, Jeremy Billig, CEO and President of McLaren Engineering Group, Sarah M. Drennan, an executive vice president at Terrie O'Connor Realtors and Bill Hanson, SIOR, a former CIANJ chairman and preside of NAI James E. Hanson.

There have been repeated rate hikes this year from the Federal Reserve. The moves are designed to reduce liquidity to the financial markets and tamp down high inflation. At its July meeting the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates

.25 percentage points, bringing the federal fund rate to a target of 5.25 to 5.5 percent.

The climbing rates have had a chilling effect on homeowners who are now reluctant to sell because their next mortgages will not compare to the low 2 to 3 rates they now enjoy. Drennan said the low inventory impacts affordability and prices out many first-time buyers.

In an illustration of how extraordinary the market has become, Drennan said a recent two-family home that needed "a ton of work" sold for \$500,000 above the asking price. "Anything that comes on is flying off," she said.

Despite reports of prices dropping, she said in her territory, which encompasses Bergen County and parts of New York, they are continuing to skyrocket. "The median price just last month was \$600,000."

Benoit said the rate pressures are making it more difficult to get loans on office buildings than multi-family or industrial properties. Hanson agreed that deals are becoming more complicated and consequently less attractive. The 15 bidders that might have been vying for a given deal in the past are no longer, he said,

adding that the end price may be the same, but the competition narrowed. It's a more challenging environment, he said.

CIANJ regularly brings together experts in real property to discuss the latest issues and trends in the market. For more information are programs is available at cianj.org. 📌



Despite repeated rate hikes, Bergen County housing prices continue to rise.

All Star Code Opens Door to Careers in Technology Industry

By Diane C. Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

Abolaji Awoyomi was a high school sophomore with a budding interest in web design when he took the six-week intensive course offered by All Star Code – a unique program designed to empower young men of color by teaching them coding skills and tapping into their entrepreneurial spirit and leadership abilities.

All Star Code taught the precocious teenager the fundamental of building websites. The summer he spent there was “very vital to my career path,” said Awoyomi, who is now a sophomore at Cornell University, majoring in information science. “All Star Code has done so much for me and my life, especially with the opportunities I have come across. I will always be grateful for the people that I connected with.”

Like many of his classmates, Awoyomi wanted to “pay it forward” and decided All Star Code could help him accomplish it. Since completing

the initial course in 2020, he has worked as a teaching fellow, teaching assistant and this year as a lead instructor for All Star Code. The dedication and commitment of the faculty was something he wanted to emulate. “It was the thought and care that the instructors put into teaching – the amount of preparation behind the scenes, and making sure they’re making every single student feel welcome.”

The three pillars All Star Code instills in its student are to dare greatly, celebrate failure and tell your story. The non-profit organization was founded in 2013 by Christina Lewis Halpern, a former Wall Street Journal reporter, who found men of color were under-represented in the technology industry. She was determined to open doors for interested young men, giving them

“We’re excited to collaborate with All Star Code and their commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive tech industry enabling students to immerse themselves in the learning process, explore their passion for coding and unleash their creativity.”

opportunities for social and economic mobility. Lewis is the daughter of the late Reginald F. Lewis, who was one of the richest black men in America in the 1980s. He was the first African-American to build a billion-dollar company, TLC Beatrice International Holdings. His story is an inspiration for the young men enrolled in All Star Code.

Some 1,300 scholars have completed the tuition-free program since its inception, reported Tony Stewart, the director of marketing and communication. He said 200 of them are now workforce ready. All the students are highly-motivated to apply their talents in the tech industry. Most are recommended by a network of schools and academies which All Star has developed over time.

The organization is headquartered in New York and its focus has been in the New York

metropolitan area, Chicago, Houston and Dallas. While All Star Code recruits heavily from those areas, the instruction is provided remotely, making it open to anyone who has access to a computer.

AnythingIT, a leading Information Technology Asset Disposition (ITAD) & e-waste solutions provider for over 30 years, based in North Bergen, partnered with All Star Code this year and donated 100 laptops. As a demonstration of its commitment to fostering diversity and equal opportunities in the tech industry, AnythingIT donated the laptops in hopes of laying a foundation for transformative experiences that will pave the way for lifelong learning and professional development for up to 300 students.

“We’re excited to collaborate with All Star Code and their commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive tech industry enabling students to immerse themselves in the learning process, explore their passion for coding and

Continued On Page 20



ASC Director of Teaching and Learning Khye Borg Liew at CSTA_s 2022 Annual Conference in Chicago.



ASC Executive Director Danny Rojas and Senior Director of Programs Nadine Friedman-Roberts Pose in Front of the Capitol Building During the Congressional App Challenge 2023.

Technology

Continued From Page 19

unleash their creativity,” said Dave Bernstein, managing director of AnythingIT.”

“All Star Code is excited and grateful to collaborate with AnythingIT. This partnership will significantly bolster our capacity to empower young men of color with the skills, networks, and mindsets they need to succeed in the innovation economy and jumpstart careers in tech. Without committed partners like AnythingIT and their overwhelming generosity, our mission would not be possible,” said All Star Code Executive Director Danny Rojas.

The mission of All Star Code is to close the tech entrepreneurship and racial wealth gaps by developing a pipeline of diverse talent. Featuring its flagship six-week Summer Intensive program, All Star Code introduces students to the technology industry through a culturally responsive computer science curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes entrepreneurial skills, industry networking, and fosters a growth mindset.

Founded in 1992, AnythingIT is an e-Stewards, ISO14001, & NAID AAA Certified global organization, employing experts in e-Waste, IT reuse, secure DoD data destruction, & IT asset management/logistics support. With more than 30 years of experience in proprietary product valuations, its project managers implement IT asset disposal best practices for global Fortune 1000 companies and enterprise US Government IT organizations.

Stewart said AnythingIT has been “a phenomenal partner and very committed to helping us increase our capacity to achieve our mission and that’s the type of partner we love.”



ASC Executive Director Danny Rojas Poses with All Star Code Students and Instructors.

More than half of the All Star Code scholars over the age of 18 are first-generation college students. Stewart said his organization helps scholars with college placement through a collaboration with Upliftology, which gives seminars on how to graduate debt-free. All Star Code also focuses on getting internships for its students through corporate relationship.

During the pandemic the program operated entirely virtually. But now it is more of a hybrid with site visits to the offices of corporate

partners. One recent visit was at JP Morgan Chase offices in Jersey City, where the students got an opportunity to interact with executives and hear about their personal journeys. All Star Code has relationships with Spotify, Microsoft, Goldman Sachs, Carvana, Google and Netflix, to name a few.

“You have to be a special student to want to sign-up for a six-week coding intensive program when you’re supposed to be away from school on summer vacation.” Stewart said. 🦋



2019 All Star Code Scholar Sebesteon Allen



All Star Code Scholar Jon Freeman taking class instruction in-person during the 2018 summer cohort.

New NJMEP CEO Targets South Jersey Manufacturers

By Diane C. Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

When Peter Connolly became the new CEO of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP) his mantra was “don’t mess it up.”

Connolly, a former NJMEP board chairman with decades of industry experience, took over the reins in July. He succeeded John W. Kennedy, who is credited with dramatically expanding the organization’s reach and influence during his 11-year tenure. Connolly has called Kennedy an “NJMEP legend.”

The NJMEP is a unique industry organization. It is designed to partner with the Garden State’s more than 11,000 manufacturing companies to provide training/education courses and consultative services. Its mission is to help companies work smarter and become more competitive and efficient. While the private, not-for-profit organization receives federal and state support, the bulk of its revenue is derived from contracts with individual manufacturers that benefit from their services.

Under Kennedy’s leadership the organization also instituted regular conferences on the “State of Manufacturing” and developed the largest annual manufacturing networking event on the east coast, ‘MADE in NJ’ Manufacturing Day and collaborated with business groups, including the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey. The collaboration led to the creation of a bi-partisan manufacturing caucus that operates in both houses of the state legislature. It focuses on manufacturers’ challenges and tries to find ways to solve them.

The new CEO is proud of the relationships NJMEP has made across the state. “My playbook is to keep that going,” Connolly said. But don’t be mistaken, he has plans too.

While NJMEP is available to manufacturers across the state, Connolly believes companies in South Jersey have been underserved. He is directing his new team to target manufacturers in the southern reaches, especially Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland and Salem counties. “This is going to be a long-term effort,” the new CEO said.

Last month NJMEP hosted the South Jersey Manufacturing Revitalization Summit in collaboration with Rowan University of Southern New Jersey as one of the first strategic move to better serve the area. NJMEP will have a true presence in the south. Their Bellmawr office in Camden County –an historic manufacturing hub. It will be a foothold to support local

manufacturers who are excited to create an even larger presence. The organization’s headquarters will remain in Cedar Knolls but Connolly said they are expanding their space to accommodate new services they will be providing in-house.

The CEO said the food manufacturing industry has a large presence in South Jersey and with the emergence of wind energy along the coast it makes sense to locate a satellite office.

Connolly has an affinity for South Jersey, since he grew up outside of Trenton and earned his degree from Glassboro State College located in Glassboro. It’s the same school with which NJMEP is now partnering. But its name was changed to Rowan in 1992 in a tribute to industrialist Henry Rowan and his wife Betty, who became its biggest benefactors with a \$100 million donation.

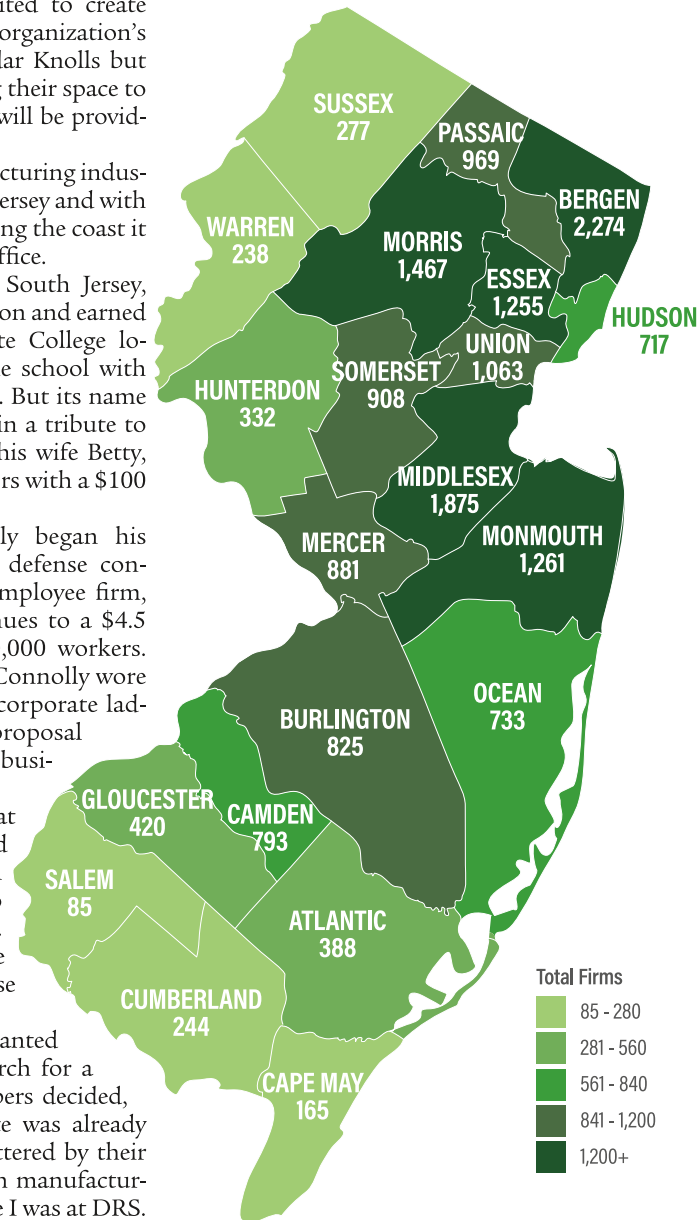
Fresh from college, Connolly began his career at DRS Technologies, a defense contractor, that grew from a 100-employee firm, generating \$16 million in revenues to a \$4.5 billion operation employing 10,000 workers. During his three decades there, Connolly wore many hats as he moved up the corporate ladder from operations analyst, proposal manager, program manager to business development.

Later in his career he worked at Telephonics in Farmingdale and Alion Science and Technology in Mount Arlington and went onto be president of ShockTech Inc. in Mahwah. Connolly joined the board of NJMEP in 2010 and rose to chairman four years later.

When Kennedy revealed he wanted to retire, the board began a search for a new CEO. Ultimately, the members decided, however, that the best candidate was already in their midst. Connolly was flattered by their trust. “I was deeply involved with manufacturing. It had been in my blood since I was at DRS. I decided it was the right thing,” he said.

He is enjoying his role tremendously. One of his new projects stemmed from a federal contract NJMEP was awarded to train veterans for jobs in manufacturing as they leave the military. NJMEP also received federal funding to create a supplier data base. The information will be connected to a nationwide network of data to ease supply chain issues.

Training will continue to be priority also. While NJMEP operates training facilities in the north and south, Connolly said it is now outfitting an RV with 3D printers, CNC machines and



Manufacturers' size and location as provided by NJMEP reports.

other equipment to make it a mobile training unit. Connolly has plans to bring the RV to high schools and county colleges to spark students’ appreciation and interest in manufacturing.

As he settles into his new role, Connolly said he has driven from Atlantic City to Sussex and back again, meeting with manufacturers. “The best part is talking to manufacturers and seeing how we can help.”

Data Destruction: Final Barrier to Protect Your Trade Secrets

For many businesses and IT staff, data security and privacy protection (and budgets) are focused primarily on cybersecurity. For good reason; a digital fence is essential for keeping nefarious actors out of your network. Less glamorous and often forgotten or mishandled is end-of-life (EOL) data security. Often called the undertakers of the IT world, data destruction providers are the final barrier to protecting trade secrets and confidentiality.

Why is data destruction important for aging, unused, broken or unneeded computers and IT equipment?

Even when the computer reaches the end of its useful life, vital information on hard drives tucked inside servers, company laptops, tablets, POS devices, scanners, external hard drives, kiosks, and even copiers, is waiting if someone is looking.

Copiers? Reported in 2010 by a CBS investigative team, 6000 returned copiers in New Jersey were tested for document storage. Downloads of their hard drives revealed confidential police reports, medical records, pay stubs and more. Thirteen years after that news report aired, copiers are still turned in with hard drives full of personal identifiable information (PII) and confidential company data.

Work-from-home employees present an even greater higher risk. "There was a strong correlation between remote working and cost of a data breach, where more employees working remotely was associated with higher data breach costs." Source: IBM Security: Cost of a Data Breach Report 2022."

Data storage on retired data center equipment is another hot data opportunity for a data breach. NVMe drives can look like a matchbook or a stick of gum and blend right in with raw computer guts. "Two different sources at a Fortune 100 insurance company confirmed that all hard drives had been removed from all the servers they were getting rid of," related Andrew Hurteau, Project Manager. "Within hours, we found over 18 Terabytes of completely untracked added storage in firewalls and servers that had been completely missed." In data liability terms, 18TB is equivalent to three hundred and eleven BILLION combinations of usernames and passwords. Or, 1.24 TRILLION credit card numbers. Or social security numbers.

It's not just untracked data holding components, it's untracked assets. If you don't know what you have and where it is, it's an opportunity for data theft. From the Harvard Business Review, Four out of five corporate IT

asset disposal projects had at least one missing asset. More disturbing is the fact that 15% of these "untracked" assets are devices potentially bearing data such as laptops, computers, and servers."

The risk and penalties of data security negligence

Proper data disposition isn't nice to have, it's a must-have. With the average cost of a data breach falling between \$3-4.8M per the "IBM Cost of a Data Breach Full Report 2022", the losses can add up quickly:

Financial costs include fines, lawsuits and professional fees.

- Reputational damage to business and retail customers.
- Market share damage.
- Revenue loss due to customer flight.
- Cost increases are passed along to customers.
- High regulatory scrutiny.
- Loss of stockholder support.

Know the law for your business

While there is no single, universal data and protection law in the United States, there are multiple regulations (and some with real teeth) focused on consumer protection, commerce and specific industries. Healthcare and pharmaceutical, banking and financial, public and private educational institutions, manufacturing, credit cards, government agencies and more are governed by overlaps in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH), Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACTA), Identity Theft and Assumption Deterrence Act, Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 (SOX), Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA), Bank Secrecy Act, Patriot Act of 2002, US Safe Harbor Provisions, FDA Security Regulations (21 C.F.R. part 11), PCI Data Security Standard, National, State and Local regulations and, for anyone with a website, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

11 steps you can take to protect your data

1. Adopt industry and trade organization best practices.
2. Assume that customer data, proprietary company information and industry secrets are more important than the IT asset itself.
3. Work with your internal stakeholders like IT Asset Managers, CTOs and HR to determine data risk by department, job title, location and work assignment.

4. Understand the legal requirements and data destruction requirements for your industry (erasure, degauss, shredding)

5. Work with a knowledgeable ITAD (IT Asset Disposition company) to create a program that meets your stakeholder requests, legal requirements and provides complete serial number tracking ("chain of custody") for every IT asset you retire or release. Guardian recommends talking to these CIANJ members: AnythingIT, Baroan Technologies, Safari Solutions and XSolutions to find a good fit.

6. Always use a NAID AAA Certified data destruction provider for auditing, verification, data destruction, reporting and certification of all data-bearing equipment.

7. Properly budget for data destruction as a line item and designate a department responsible for execution, reporting and recordkeeping.

8. Insist on onsite data destruction to ensure that live data is not lost or stolen in transit.

9. Create an evolving education plan that trains your IT techs and IT Asset Managers about hard drive form factors and how servers, firewalls, Apple products and other office equipment use data storage.

10. Work with your purchasing and IT departments to record all data-holding devices and add-ons including SD cards, PCIE, M.2, SATA and NVMe. The more you have on your verification list, the fewer surprises you'll have.

11. Open up every device – front, back and below – at disposition to check for and remove embedded hard drives or expanded memory.

CIANJ Member Glenn Laga, Guardian Data Destruction's President and Founder notes, "Our onsite data destruction services include hard drive and SSD erasure and shredding to ensure that data on any device is completely destroyed. For remote workers, there's a cloud-based erasure system with full documentation that wipes drives before shipping. Our services, provided exclusively through ITADs, VARs, resellers and MSPs – never direct, are often the final data protection for a company and its customers. The only way to prevent a data breach or legal action is to destroy the data before IT assets are returned, shipped, warehoused, sold, donated or recycled." 📌

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Tracking Business Development: A Three-Step Process



By Joseph P. Truncale, Ph.D.
Contributing Editor

Ask any business leader about their primary concern, and you may find that business development is at or near the top of the list. It makes sense. It is difficult to

sustain business success without a robust process for finding and securing new customers. No client, no matter how satisfied or “loyal” is assured of staying around forever. Change happens as people and organizations are subject to change at a moment’s notice. New business development is not an option but a necessity.

So, it should naturally follow that this essential business process would be organized into a highly functioning, repeatable process. Not necessarily. Many organizations deploy business development in a haphazard, ad hoc, or fragmented way with the ultimate responsibility for bringing on new customers delegated solely to the sales team. There’s a better way.

Business development can best be thought of as a three-step process: Lead generation, careful review, analysis, and assignment of leads, and finally, customer contact, engagement, and procurement. These three steps, though fully integrated, stand alone as separate disciplines in how and where they are assigned.

The first step, lead generation is a *marketing* activity. Step two, rationalizing and assigning leads is a *sales leadership* function. The third and final step is securing the actual sale itself. Each of these are best done by separate team members, each highly functioning and focused on their individual part of the process. That is, a marketing specialist who understands the lead generation process, a sales leader who has intimate knowledge of the unique capabilities and interests of members of the sales team and the salesperson or salespeople who are best equipped to enjoy success with a particular prospect.

When there is a strategic focus on key account procurement and development, having a highly functioning marketing effort is not a luxury but a necessity. At any given time, the best performing organizations have a profile of the needs and requirements of their ideal clients and have established a target list of potential prospects. Irrespective of your chosen CRM



Business development is a three-step process: Lead generation, careful review, analysis, and assignment of leads, and, customer contact, engagement, and procurement.

system, doing the hard work of researching, understanding, and recording key data on your top prospects is an essential first step in building the foundation for client acquisition. Where to start? With your best *existing* relationships.

It’s not that difficult for most businesses to figure out what their best potential prospects look like, where they are and which issues they are facing or opportunities they are trying to exploit. Start by taking a close look at the clients/customers with whom you are currently enjoying success. Chances are they are loyal to you because they are getting the kind of support, service, products, advice and help they need and want to satisfy their requirements. Begin prospect profiling by trying to identify potential customers who may have similar needs and interests. Keep in mind that during this analysis, you will find it helpful to focus on the needs you are filling and not necessarily a particular industry, profession or demographic.

Sales leadership plays a critical part in the key account procurement process. Organizational leaders often refer to their sales team as though they are the same in terms of their capabilities and interests. They are not. Most likely, each member brings a unique set of skills, techniques, and experiences that have helped form their approach to sales. While this can frustrate attempts to standardize the selling process, it can also create a well differentiated sales team, with each member bringing a different set of skills and methods of selling. That’s why it is essential that sales leaders understand these differences and can allocate sales leads according to the unique capabilities of each team member.

This three-step process can revolutionize the business development process in most any business. For more information or aligning your organization for growth, contact me at joe@ajstrategy.com ;

Joseph P. Truncale, Ph.D., CAE, is the Founder & Principal of Alexander Joseph Associates, a privately held consultancy specializing in executive business advisory services.

He is the former CEO of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the world’s largest public relations organization. Prior to joining PRSA, Joe was President & CEO of NAPL, a business management association representing leading companies in the printing, graphic communications, mailing, fulfillment and marketing services industry.

Joe specializes in strategy, customer analysis and organizational effectiveness.

He is a graduate of Monmouth University and he holds a Masters’ Degree from Rutgers University. In 2011, he earned his Ph.D. in Media, Culture and Communications at New York University and was the recipient of the Prism Award for Academic Achievement. His dissertation was a ground-breaking study of the leadership styles of highly successful entrepreneurial business executives in the graphic communications industry.

Joe served as Co-Chair of the New York University Board of Advisors and is an adjunct faculty member at NYU teaching graduate courses in Executive Leadership, Financial Management and Analysis, Finance for Marketing Decisions, and Leadership: The C Suite Perspective. He resides in Colts Neck, NJ.



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