

Going Green In Person

Chamber's St. Patrick's Day Breakfast Back In-Person After Last Year's Virtual Event

A funny thing happened last year at the diner. Elenie Loizou was preparing to record a "Jess Delicious" video segment with Ulster Chamber Membership Director Jess Davis when the camera suddenly turned on her live during the virtual Peter B. Mathews St. Patrick's Day Breakfast.

The co-owner of Dietz Stadium Diner at 127 North Front St. was legitimately shocked when Chamber President Ward Todd pronounced her the 2021 Honorary Irish Person of the Year. On the split-screen, Todd applauded and praised Loizou, while she gasped in disbelief.

"I didn't understand until Jess put the hat on me. I was overwhelmed with joy and happiness. I didn't know what to say or do. Jess had me totally fooled up until that moment."

Last year marked a first for the Chamber and Honorary Irish Person as the annual breakfast was live-streamed on YouTube and Facebook due to the pandemic. The previous year it was canceled altogether as COVID-19 cases began rising in Ulster County and statewide restrictions were put in place to prevent the spread.

I guess I really did make history, said Loizou. At the time, I wasn't even thinking of that, but I guess it's a special to be the first virtual honoree. It probably will never happen ever again, and I hope it never does.

The light-hearted and festive breakfast, sponsored each year by The Reis Group, returns this year with a live audience on March 17 from 7:30 to 9:00 am at The Venue Uptown at the Best Western Plus in Kingston.

Expect the usual merriment, including the Chamber's distinctive drink of the day, 'green' orange juice. The Ulster County Ancient Order of Hibernians will kick off the mirth with bagpipes and drums, and the T. McCann Band will perform some "jigs and reels," according to lead singer Terry McCann.

"We're going to play some of the standards, but it depends on how the spirit moves us, he



Eleni Loizou, the Chamber's 2021 Honorary Irish Person of the Year.

said.

"We're so looking forward to seeing a live audience this year because we feed off the energy of the crowd. Irish music is all about the party. It's about having a good time and interacting with the crowd."

The breakfast annually recognizes an outstanding business and community leader with the Royal Order of the Blarney Stone proclamation, which states, in part, "Whereas, it has been decreed that there should be admitted annually to membership in this Royal Order those kindly souls imbued with the spirit of St. Patrick, blessed with the art of blarney, but, unblessed with Irish name, who, by use of quick and facile tongue, have nonetheless endeared themselves to the Irish race."

In Loizou's case, there isn't a wee bit of Irish blood in her veins.

"I am first-generation Greek-American," she said. "My parents are from Cyprus. My father came over on the Queen Elizabeth and first got settled before he brought my mom here."

Still, Loizou has all the selfless and benevolent attributes Todd looks for before

selecting the honoree on the morning of the breakfast. She is the President of the People's Place Board of Directors and the St. George Church Women's Club and past President of Junior League of Kingston and the Kingston Uptown Business Association.

She has run the award-winning Uptown diner with her husband, Xenaki, and their partner, Andreas Zambas, since 2007. It has been in her family for three generations. Her grandfather opened the original trolley-styled diner in 1962 and replaced it with the current building in 1978. At that time, he ran it with his two brothers and Loizou's father, George. In the years that followed, George operated it with his wife, Myofora. After her parents retired, Elenie and her partners assumed ownership.

As far as last year's honor is concerned, Loizou still gets clammy palms when she thinks of her moment in the Chamber spotlight.

"I was totally baffled. Jess did it in a smart way. As we were doing the 'Jess Delicious' interview, she kept telling me the diner was going to be advertised live during the St. Paddy's Day Breakfast and to stand by. She did it in her own little sneaky way and had me

totally fooled," Loizou said.

"Then, they scooped me right up and took me to the Best Western Plus, where Ward announced it again and gave me my plaque in person. Everyone who came to the diner that day told me I was the first Greek-Irish person they ever met. It was a lot of fun."

By the way, that "Jess Delicious" video on the Dietz Stadium Diner did post on the Ulster Chamber Eateries United Facebook page on March 21, so Loizou got double the exposure the week of St. Patrick's Day.

"I will never forget this great honor," she said. "I do what I do for the community and don't expect anybody to give me an award for it. If you're picked this year, cherish that moment. It's a blessing to be recognized in this way."

Chamber breakfast programs are a great way to network with other local business leaders and stay on top of current events. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged. For more information or to register, call the Chamber at (845) 338-5100 or go online at www.ulsterchamber.org.

March Breakfast
March 17
7:30-9:00 am
The Venue Uptown at the Best Western Plus
503 Washington Ave.
Kingston, NY
Sponsor:
THE REIS GROUP
INSURANCE WORTH HAVING.

The Reis Group Is The March Breakfast Sponsor

The Reis Group is, once again, proud to sponsor the Peter B. Mathews Honorary Irishman of the Year Breakfast.

We are thrilled to be all together, in person for the first St. Patrick's Day breakfast since 2019. Let's raise a glass in celebration.

Now let's observe a few moments of silence for all those who have suffered and for those who have lost lives over these two years, remembering the families that carry that pain of loss every day.

Think about it. 2021 was like a mini 2020. Omicron came, roared, and left just as quickly. We opened and closed our businesses doors more than once. The toll on all the business owners and entrepreneurs in this room, struggling to keep their doors open and our economy healthy, all the while being pummeled on all sides by crippling, confusing, and onerous oversight and compliance has been more than a challenge. It's been fatal to both businesses and individuals. To all hardworking survivors in this room, The Reis Group raises a toast of admiration and respect.

As an essential business, The Reis Group continued to keep its doors open from the start of the pandemic. With increasingly severe weather events, the needs of our clientele for assistance after a loss have never been greater. The February ice storm saw over 42,000 outages in Ulster County due to falling trees. We suffered multiple car accidents in the ice and structural damage due to the stress of extra weight on buildings. Through all these incidents disrupting normal life, The Reis Group is continuing to improve its on-site and remote communication chains



with roots in our business community going back over 100 years. Since we are a local company, our employees are your neighbors, the patrons of your businesses, and the diners in your restaurants.

Our commitment to our area is evidenced in the support we show for local charities, organizations, and fellow businesses. The Reis Group is a proud supporter of the areas we serve and has given over one-half million dollars to charities over the past 10 years.

Our personal lines department works diligently at matching our clientele to one of our many carriers, customizing coverages to meet the exact needs for auto, home, umbrella, liability, and other personal insurance. Our commercial insurance departments are skilled in providing business insurance needs for all

types of ventures; from the sole contractor to restaurants, retail, large manufacturers, municipalities, and all other businesses. The Reis Group brings together our combined experience to support each policyholder. We also offer competitive group health insurance, specialized Workers' Compensation solutions, and custom-structured risk management plans to reduce the chance of catastrophic loss.

The Reis Group has been providing insurance to the residents of The Hudson Valley and beyond since its incorporation in 1967

to be as available as possible for the time we all need insurance; after a loss occurs and your life is disrupted.

The Casciaro Brothers were beyond humbled and thrilled to have been chosen Honorary Irishmen of the Year in 2019. We, along with our (Irish/Italian) partner Owen McKane wish the next honoree an uneventful and prosperous term of service. Use that blarney to your advantage! Happy St. Patrick's Day from The Reis Group...Insurance Worth Having. Sláinte!

Ulster County
Black Business Achievement Awards
& Community Connect
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Present: TIA ASHE Love Hair	TAY FISHER FUNDAMENTAL BASKETBALL CAMP
Future: KAMIR HYLTON-JACKSON Benny's Tropical Ice	YMCA YOUTH CREW
BLACK BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AWARD MARTIN & TAMIKA DUNKLEY Seasoned Gives	
BLACK BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARD KEVIN BRYANT NYS Supreme Court Justice	

Wednesday Jun 15, 2022 | 5 - 6 pm Awards | 6 - 8 pm Community Connect
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Jewish Federation Branches Out

A Beacon For All People In Ulster

The new Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Ulster County comes with an impressive resume and has some big goals for the organization he took over just eight months ago.

David Drimer, who was born and raised in New York City, is the former associate publisher of The Forward, the most national Jewish newspaper. He also is the former national executive director of the Zionist Organization of America.

Drimer and his wife, along with former Forward executive editor Dan Friedman, most recently co-founded the non-profit National Holocaust Awareness Initiative (NHAOnline.org).

"I'm happy to help the federation become ever more mission-driven for the benefit of the Jewish community and the Ulster community as a whole," Drimer said. "We're really involved in preserving cultural identity, safety and security and being a voice and proponent for social justice for all peoples in the County. We are not a religious organization. We are a secular Jewish organization."

The Jewish Federation of Ulster County, now in its 41st year, is the local affiliate of the Jewish Federation of North America. For a full list of programming, go to www.ucjf.org.

"Our mandate is to promote Jewish culture and the safety and security of the Jewish residents of Ulster County," Drimer said. "We want to be a voice for social justice, humanitarian efforts, and educational advancement for all Ulster residents of any race or religion."

One of the first things Drimer was able to do was organize the Ulster County Anti-Semitism Hotline, which can be reached at (845) 859-9858.

"People can report any antisemitism they've witnessed or if they've been a victim," Drimer said. "We have resources available in helping them to follow up."

"We encourage anybody who has ever been a victim of or witnessed acts of antisemitism to contact law enforcement first but then to contact us. We have strategic partners that help back us up in pursuing appropriate remedies, depending on what the original problem was."

Meanwhile, the Ulster County Holocaust Awareness Initiative is designed to supplement the state-mandated teaching of the Holocaust to high school students.

"Statistics show New York has a poor level of Holocaust awareness despite the fact it's the state with the most Jews and has mandated Holocaust education in the schools, one of only 17 states that do," Drimer said.

Drimer said the Jewish Federation wants to be "recognized as a reliable and concerned neighbor and we want people to rely on the fact that we're there for the community, Jewish or not." One of those ways Drimer chose to do that was to get involved in the Chamber.

"I told [Chamber President] Ward Todd if anyone gets more value out of being a Chamber member than we do, I would like to see it," Drimer said. "Every time we need to know who to talk to, he has instantly provided us with useful information. As a newcomer to Ulster County, I cannot tell you enough how valuable I have found the Chamber's local savvy."

The Jewish Federation not only took part in last year's Buy Local Expo but won the award for the "friendliest booth."



Sukkot is a Jewish holiday celebrating the gathering of the harvest. Jews traditionally celebrate by eating and praying in a foliage-covered booth called a Sukkah. Last Fall, the Jewish Federation of Ulster County (UCJF.org) built the first-ever Sukkah in a Kingston public space, in the Rondout. Pictured visiting the Sukkah are (L-R) Jewish Federation Board members Barbara Cohen, Barbara Blas, President Rondavid Gold, Executive Director David Drimer, and Kingston Mayor Steve Noble.

"We get tremendous value out of the exposure that the Chamber and its events provide," Drimer said. "We were pleased to get that award because we want the community to understand that we're not an insular community. We're here for the benefit of everybody."

Drimer said that's why the Jewish Federation is partnering with the Chamber and other organizations this Spring to put on a free webinar for small commercial kitchens, farm stores, and cottage industry food manufacturers regarding Kosher certification. He believes it will benefit Jewish and non-Jewish businesses alike.

"The kosher market is growing 15 percent year over year, which means it doubles every five years," Drimer said. "It's being driven not so much by the Jewish market alone, but by other interest groups, such as food purity and nutrition." Last year, Kosher was the most added food labeling item, ahead of non-GMO and all-natural," Drimer said.

Drimer has several other goals for the Jewish Federation, including "As a sentinel for the safety and security of the Jewish community in Ulster County because of the growth of antisemitism both nationally and internationally."

"It's important to keep our eyes open and our ears up," he said.

Drimer has applied to join the Ulster County Interfaith Council and the Ulster County Human Rights Commission.

Drimer speaks enthusiastically about his job and the future of the organization.

"Of all of the organizations I've ever worked with, this is the most committed, hands-on Board of Directors I've ever known," he said. "These are people with deep roots. The board here, the

active members, are the people with the deepest roots in the community I've encountered in my not-for-profit career. They really care about their community and Ulster County."

The Jewish Federation of Ulster County, located at 390 Aaron Court in Kingston, can be reached at (845) 338-8131 or www.ucjf.org.

UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS

Thursday March 17 | 7:30 - 9:00 am

St. Patrick's Day Breakfast

The Venue Uptown at the Best Western Plus
 503 Washington Avenue | Kingston, NY
 \$25 Members • \$35 Non-Members
 Featuring the T. McCann Band
 Sponsor: The Reis Group

Thursday April 28 | 5:00 - 7:00 pm

Networking Mixer @ MAC Fitness

Kingston Plaza 338 Plaza Road | Kingston, NY
 There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members.
 Reservations are required.
 Sponsor: Bank of Greene County

SAVE THE DATES!

Wednesday April 20 | 7:30 - 9:00 am

Chamber Breakfast Meeting

Diamond Mills Hotel & Conference Center
 25 S. Partition Street | Saugerties, NY

Wednesday September 14 | 12 noon - 5:00 pm

Buy Local Expo

Diamond Mills Hotel & Conference Center
 25 S. Partition Street | Saugerties, NY
 Presenting Sponsor: Naccarato Insurance

Thursday October 27 | 5:30 pm Cocktails 6:30 pm Dinner

Business Awards Recognition Dinner

Interested in Sponsorship Opportunities?
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More Info and Registration UlsterChamber.org
 Questions (845) 338-5100

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DAILY FREEMAN

No Simple Answer To Labor Shortage

Head Of Normann Staffing Says Pandemic Likely Changed Workforce For Good

Tony Marmo hears the constant and desperate cries of local employers who can't find enough workers to fill jobs, and he wishes he had some tangible solutions to ease their stress.

The owner of Normann Staffing, a Kingston-based private employment service that provides temporary and permanent staffing to organizations in health care, administrative, manufacturing, customer service, and other sectors, said the ongoing labor shortage is not only a national crisis but a local one that is affecting how businesses operate.

"There's been a tremendous decline in workers since the pandemic started," he said. "In 2021, things started coming back, and then, when the Omicron variant hit, things reversed again, so it's been cyclical for us, and that has to do with the demand for jobs. Right before Omicron exploded, we were actually seeing an uptick in people wanting to come back to work, but that has again changed."

To understand the factors behind the ongoing labor shortage, Marmo said it's necessary to look back for comparison's sake.

"Prior to the pandemic, we were pretty much at full employment. Unemployment rates were at 3 or 3.5 percent, and those were historic numbers. You would have to go back to the '60s for figures like that. Things were really robust in the marketplace, and even though it was full employment, the opportunities in Ulster County were pretty significant," he said.

"In the five years before the pandemic, our business probably tripled in revenue, so things were going really well, and then, the pandemic hit. We lost 60 percent of our business during this time, so that was a struggle. We took advantage of the Paycheck Protection Program, and that helped significantly."

As COVID-19 spread throughout the nation, spurring lockdowns and job losses, the federal government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act in March 2020, providing an extra \$600 a week in unemployment benefits.

Marmo said the continuation of the enhanced benefits through September 2020, may have contributed, at least initially, to the tight labor market.

"There's no question that the need was great, but the

government could have turned that faucet off a little bit sooner," he said. "The subsidies have to stop because people rely on that. It's a demotivation for folks to go back to work."

Marmo, who has been at the helm of Normann Staffing since 2014, said a number of other pandemic-related factors are responsible for the ongoing labor market shortage. They include more Baby Boomers retiring; a child-care shortage that led to many parents leaving the workforce; fear of catching COVID; the rise in gig jobs like DoorDash and Amazon Flex; U.S. visa delays; and the increasing shift to remote work, which gave workers greater flexibility.

"Folks started saying, 'This is a time for me to really reassess what I'm doing and make things better for myself,'" Marmo said, adding that new views of work and personal happiness largely led to the so-called Great Resignation, or 4.5 million Americans quitting their jobs late last year.

While Marmo doesn't have any clear-cut solutions, he suggested ways to improve the tight labor market. Among them are immigration reform, government subsidies similar to FDR's Works Progress Administration, and more training and development programs to "move people who are on the sidelines back into the game."

Marmo said he expects things to get better in 2022, but he's not so sure the labor force will ever look the same as it did pre-pandemic.

"I think this year is going to be very telling. Our workforce



Normann Staffing Crew at Diamond Mills

has changed permanently in certain areas, but this has to crack at some point in terms of folks coming back. There are some jobs that are going to remain remote because they can, but there are some jobs that can't, and these employers may need to find a better way to compensate them.

"We deal with this every day. It's a roller coaster. There's a lot of burnout for the people remaining. Those folks say they just can't do it anymore. I'm hopeful that as Omicron declines, people are going to have one less concern. There's certainly the demand out there, but we need the fuel to make this happen, and the employees are the fuel," he said.

Normann Staffing, located at 231 Clinton Ave., Kingston, can be reached at (845) 338-9111 or Info@NormannStaffing.com.

Connecting With Her Subjects

Juliet Lofaro Portrait Photographer

Juliet Lofaro was a 9th grader at Onteora High School when she needed candid photos for the yearbook. The class advisor put a camera in her hand and told her to "go get 'em." She didn't know it at the time, but that day her career was born.

"It was fun and quite satisfying," she said. "I loved the combination of making art and documenting my friends. I've been a photographer ever since. It was always part of what I did and part of my identity as well."

Lofaro began using the darkroom at the Center for Photography at Woodstock and later completed the photography program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Soon, she was assisting and working production for other photographers in New York and making a living as a freelancer, all while maintaining her thriving photography studio in Chelsea.

After decades away, the Woodstock native returned to her hometown in 2015 to raise her children. She had a studio space in Rhinebeck's Starr building but last September moved her business to her current location in Woodstock.

Lofaro does portraiture (individual and family), business headshots, and all the students at a few local schools, including Woodstock Day School. A growing segment for her is editorial-style sessions for high school seniors. "That's been a genre I've really enjoyed in the last few years," she said.

If you contact Lofaro for a photoshoot, you can rest assured that you'll get plenty of attention to detail.

"I walk people through every step of the process, from our first consultation to wardrobe and style direction. I have hair and makeup artists to call upon as needed," Lofaro said.

"The feedback I get when I photograph somebody is that I really manage to bring out their essence," she continued. "When someone comes to my studio for a portrait, I become completely immersed in the job and 100% present to connect with the subject. By the time they get there, we've already had a consultation and know what their needs are."

For example, is the photo for a business website? LinkedIn? An online dating profile? Or something else?

"I have a lot of people come in who have to get photographed for business," Lofaro said. "If somebody delays getting their headshot for five years, they walk away saying, 'Wow, that wasn't so hard. That was kind of fun.' They get what they needed, but also what they didn't even know they wanted. The



Juliet Lofaro

home.

"Socializing is the most natural form of networking for me," she said. "I like seeing what other people are doing with their lives. Getting to know them, hearing about their businesses, and just generally being in a community with all these wonderful people."

In fact, Lofaro loves being back home so much that she started a project called Woodstock Townspeople the first year she returned. The short features include a portrait by Lofaro and a little information about the business or person.

"I'm curious about the other people in town," she said. "Who are these people? Why do people live where they live and make this home? There are stores and restaurants opening constantly with new people coming and opening businesses and I'm curious about who's here."

Lofaro also knows she lives in one of the most beautiful parts of the world

process truly is fun."

"For businesses, I deliver mostly digital images after our session. With personal portraits and families, I offer prints and products along with their digital images. From small gift prints to albums, and large framed images, I take care of my clients from start to finish. I think it's important to have printed pictures of our loved ones in our environments, and it's a tradition we've held on to in my family."

In addition to her portraiture work, Lofaro is a fine artist with a number of gallery shows to her credit. In her new space, she also has numerous prints on view.

Lofaro said she enjoys being involved with the Chamber, as well as with Hudson Valley Women in Business since her return

here in Ulster County. She has photographed some of our more breathtaking landscapes and posted them on her Instagram account (@JulietLofaroPhoto). To see her work or schedule a portrait, visit her website at JulietLofaro.com.

Juliet Lofaro Portrait Photographer, located at 88 B Mill Hill Road in Woodstock, can be reached at (845) 684-0455 or julietlofaro.com.

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 www.gadaletos.com
Stacie Becker - Owner
 Category: Restaurants
 Description: *Fresh Fish Market & Eatery. Large selection of wild caught and sustainably farmed fresh and frozen seafood. Shop the fish case for at-home-cooking inspiration (10am to 7pm), or visit our cafe-style eatery and grab a bite to eat, for here or to-go (11am to 6:30pm). Closed Sundays.*

HRH DEVELOPMENT LLC

P.O. Box 914
Port Ewen, NY 12466
 www.hrhdevelopment.com
Zachary Gumpel - Principal
 Category: Real Estate Development/Investment
 Description: *Hudson River Homes is a boutique residential development company specializing in the construction of luxury single family homes in Ulster County. We take pride in providing unique, carbon savvy homes to each of our clients.*

UNISON LEARNING CENTER INC.

68 Mountain Rest Rd.
New Paltz, NY 12561
 www.unisonarts.org
Faheem Haider - Executive Director
 Category: Arts Organizations
 Description: *Unison Arts offers opportunities to grow our creative community through innovative environmental, social, and racial justice centered art practices. We are a not-for-profit community-based art center that invites eclectic audiences to our two locations bookending the historic village of New Paltz. We offer two gallery spaces, a woodland sculpture garden, performance space, and rental space for community members and makers. We have served communities across the Hudson Valley since our founding in 1976.*



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Greece - A Land of Gods & Heroes November 4 - 12, 2022

9 days, 7 nights including deluxe hotels, meals, luxury transport, tour guides, and airfare from New York JFK

\$3,249 including land & air!

**INFORMATIONAL MEETING
 Monday April 11, 2022 @ 5:30 pm**

Holiday Inn Express & Suites | 1835 Ulster Ave, Lake Katrine, NY
 No cost to attend this meeting but reservations are required.
 This trip is open to Chamber Members and the general public.

For more details, Itinerary or to Register for Informational Meeting visit
www.UlsterChamber.org

Questions? Contact Carol Ricken Carol@ulsterchamber.org | 845.417.7143