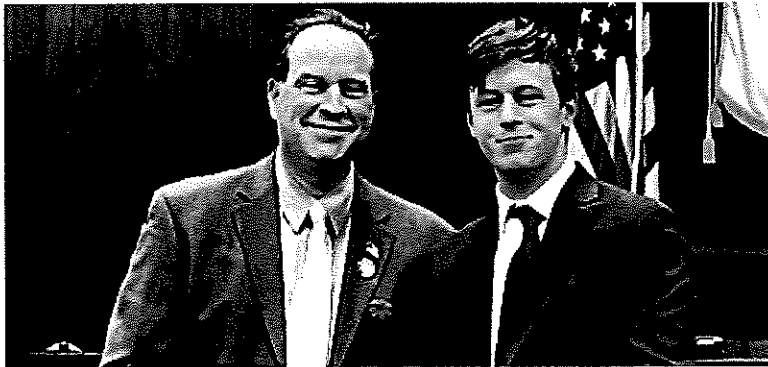


2023 Awards Presented

League Names winners of 29th Annual Louis Bay 2nd Future Municipal Leaders Scholarship Competition

What My Municipal Government Does Best

Tyler Zepp, *Randolph*



Mayor Lou Nisivoccia and Tyler Zepp (r)

Eighteen years living in one New Jersey town—for some young people that might not sound exciting, but for me, it has been exactly that! Randolph is the town that both of my parents grew up in. They felt so strongly about how special the town is that they stayed here to raise my sister and me. Randolph and its town government truly focus on creating a very diversified approach to their services.

My first experience with the town was participating in many great recreational programs and clinics, such as youth soccer and little league baseball. Here I was encouraged to try different sports until I decided to be more committed to just soccer. These programs are offered at a low cost to families. Over the summers Randolph offers several Artworks Studio camps and library programs which helped me explore more creative options.

For the outdoorsy type, Randolph offers an extensive trail

Winners

Tyler Zepp, Randolph Township
Akash Deepak Nayak, West Windsor Township
Lauren Markarian, Wyckoff Township

Finalists

Umehani Rehmanji, East Brunswick Township
Olivia Piserchia, Emerson Borough
Gavin Joseph Wyllie, Glassboro Borough
Katie Harrell, Livingston Township
Juliana Bucciero, Manville Borough
Eliana Zlotnick, Marlboro Township
Alexandra Leadley, Middle Township
Priyal Kumar, Mount Olive Township
Tyler (TJ) Sepe, North Caldwell Borough
James Kane, North Wildwood City
Jonathan Calabrese, Oakland Borough
Brett Bachenheimer, Roseland Borough
Leah Whittaker, Sayreville Borough
Bridget Lacerda, Somerville Borough
Kathryn Marra, Toms River Township

Semi-Finalists

Devin B. Davis, Aberdeen Township
Amanda Cleary, Andover Township
Joseph Gaspari, Audubon Borough
Kayla Lavecchia, Bayonne City
Melat Haile, Bergenfield Borough
Benjamin Demuren, Branchburg Township
Caroline Felser, Brick Township
Caitlin Reynolds, Deptford Township
Samantha DellaTerza, Fairfield Township (Essex)
Karina Borysiak, Fanwood Borough
Makayla Chiariello, Frankford Township
Alexia Koulikourdis, Franklin Lakes Borough
Luca Pappalardo, Glen Rock Borough
Kaylee Tenezaca, Hackensack City
Joseph Rass, Manalapan Township
Sean Burns, Middletown Township
Ava Hellerich, Milltown Borough
Armaan Pandey, Plainsboro Township
Anna Bergen, Point Pleasant Borough
Ayush Kumar Singh, Robbinsville Township
Eleanor Leigh Kutschera, Sea Isle City
Olivia M. Bucs, Springfield Township (Burlington)
Aniella Casper, Stillwater, Township
Isabelle Embden, Summit City
Andrew Karayiannis, Upper Township
Jackson Barrie, Ventnor City
Brooke Stallard, Waldwick Borough
Brianna Moran, Weehawken Township
Kaydence Oakley, Wildwood City
Carly Marie Murphy, Wildwood Crest Borough
Uchechukwu Ajaegbulemh, Winslow Township
De'Shon Cooper, Woolwich Township



system that connects the many sections of town. These trails allowed me to bike ride with friends, without being on the busy roads (or to ride my bike to school if I missed the bus!). Some days I would take my dog on the trails. I loved the hilly, wooded adventure as it reminded me of camping. I can now appreciate that these trails require regular maintenance to stay so clean.

At age nine, I learned about the Randolph Regional Animal Shelter and quickly became a regular volunteer there. The township runs this shelter and provides a low-cost option for people to adopt their next best friend. The staff at the shelter truly care for the animals they rescue and always makes me (and everyone else) feel welcome. The animal control officers also encourage community groups and clubs like the Boys and Girl Scouts to tour the facilities and in some cases help with special projects. My involvement with the shelter has been one of the most meaningful experiences in my life. It introduced me to volunteerism and fostered my love of animals.

In eighth grade as part of my capstone project, I developed a proposal to install electric vehicle charging stations at town hall. The project aligned with the United Nations' sustainable development goals of sustainable communities/cities and affordable, clean energy. The objective was to have the township consider reducing gas consumption and reliance on fossil fuels as they replaced older vehicles.

The township's Environmental and Landmark Committee listened to my presentation and provided practical feedback. I am not sure every municipal committee would have made the time to listen to an inexperienced eighth grader.

Randolph also offers impressive emergency response services. I am presently a volunteer firefighter with Engine Company #5 in town. Doing this truly helps me better understand some of the most vital services offered. The fire department also organizes community events and mutual aid to neighboring towns whenever possible. In addition, as part of my senior year Option II program at my high school, I spend part of my day working in the IT department of our town's Police Department. Here I witness firsthand the dedication of our town's law enforcement and assist them with installing and repairing technology.

I am grateful for the many ways that I have been able to become involved in my township, from youth sports to emergency services. This is all due to the many quality government programs offered, some of which I have yet to explore.

My experiences with Randolph's government have led me to pursue a major in Public Administration/ Policy in college, with the goal of continuing to give back to a community in the future.

What My Municipal Government Does Best

Lauren Markarian,
Wyckoff Township

Smart, compassionate, innovative, loyal, and hardworking. These are the adjectives I use to describe the members of the municipal government

I have come to know. They are astute at juggling a wide range of responsibilities, from the maintenance of our local roads to balancing the needs of citizens with the resources available to them. I am impressed with how they go above and beyond the call to protect and serve our town. However, the efforts that stand out the most to me are their ability to foster civic engagement among young citizens and their commitment to improving the environment.

Living in Wyckoff for the past 18 years, I have witnessed the commendable job the municipality does to provide students with opportunities to become engaged in town. They forge meaningful relationships with them to help build a vibrant community together, valuing contributions from all residents. Allowing young residents to see firsthand what government service is all about will hopefully spark some interest in the next generation.

For the past three years, I have had the pleasure of serving as a junior commissioner/green team member on the Wyckoff Environmental Commission. The volunteers on this committee and the projects they put forward make Wyckoff a “greener” community. I was fortunate to spearhead one of their many initiatives. The project was to increase the percentage of recycled waste and show how plastic waste can find a second life in the form of composite decking. Thanks to our enthusiastic residents, we earned two Trex benches for Wyckoff! The mentors I had along the way, notably Mrs. Beth Fischer, helped me develop the knowledge and skills to make a difference in my community.

When this became a successful program for Wyckoff, I thought, why not share this with other towns? Through my mentors, I learned most of the work that goes into civic action is ideation, planning, execution, and most importantly, lessons learned from a program. So, I took my plan to three neighboring towns, Mahwah, Allendale, and Ramsey. I met with town officials at their monthly meetings and shared my accomplishments and “civic recipe” with them. I am proud to report that two towns accepted my proposal and introduced the program to their communities. Given the fact that there are fewer resources nowadays, I am pleased when I see municipalities helping each other.



This collaborative effort makes our municipal government a recognized leader beyond Wyckoff's city limits.

Thinking back to my childhood, one of the hallmarks of Wyckoff has always been community engagement. Each year, I would participate in my town's “Team Up To Tidy Up” event, where children are encouraged to collect debris around town. Town officials also dedicate tremendous time to supporting the various scout troops. As you drive around Wyckoff, you will notice many projects completed by these groups, thanks to the encouragement and direction from our local leaders.

In addition to this unwavering support of our youth, their decision to purchase Russell Farms in 2012 to create a wildlife sanctuary and preserve the site for posterity was admirable. This green space has improved Wyckoff's quality of life and provides wildlife with a natural habitat and food needed to survive.

As I embark on the next chapter of my life at college, I look forward to returning to my beloved hometown someday. At some point, when the time is right, I hope to partner with town officials again to continue improving Wyckoff.

What My Municipal Government Does Best

Askash Deepak Nayak, West Windsor Township



Mayor Hemant Marathe, Ph.D. and Askash Deepak Nayak (r)

While national politics makes headlines, the daily life of citizens is guided at the local level—by the municipal government.

It is at the local level that citizens can easily engage with their governments, face-to-face. Located near the intersection of Clarksville and North Post Road, I have always been amazed by how close the municipal complex is to not just my home, but those of all residents. When I ride my bike, I am astonished by how easy it is for me to end up next to the complex, without even breaking a sweat. And though I have not always thought of it this way, the close proximity of the township's offices is a metaphor for the best attribute of my



local government: meaningfully engaging with the public.

As a wide-eyed Boy Scout, I first attended a city council (virtual) meeting when completing my citizenship in the community merit badge. The June business meeting discussed the budget of the township, and following the council's invitation for public comment, the "raised hand" icons fill my zoom screen.

As I sat on the call, I intently noted down the various arguments of those for and against issuing more bonds and differing perspectives on how to use the funds allocated for capital improvements. Once the public comments had ceased, the ensuing council discussion showed careful listening to constituent concerns and thoughtful consideration of differing interests. As the council members then voted on what to enact, it became clear that they did so listening to the views of those they represented. They changed sides, explained counterarguments, and held new debates. But action is not limited to council meetings.

The township provides ample opportunities and resources for residents to make change, something I noticed firsthand when I started work on my Eagle Scout project. As I searched for an opportunity, I reached out to Dan Dobromilsky, an employee of the township, who quickly responded to my request. Mr. Dobromilsky listened

to my goal of creating new hiking paths for locals to enjoy the serene nature in West Windsor, he helped me find spaces next to apartment complexes, and he helped me contact other employees of the township to help supply materials. Together, we were able to determine the logistics and complete a mile-long trail on a plot of land off Carnegie Center Drive, next to an apartment complex that is currently under construction. By having Mr. Dobromilsky's support, the project became more than I ever imagined, including covering the trail in mulch to make it more permanent and using fiber-glass trail markers that did not damage the surrounding trees. Even as a high schooler, the township was easily accessible and open to helping me achieve my goal of providing neighbors with opportunities to enjoy nature and the benefits of the outdoors.

Though seemingly intangible, the ability to consider the opinions of residents and help them enact action, is an integral part of what makes West Windsor such an outstanding place. Integral to democracy is individual participation in government, and by considering constituents' views and helping people make change the municipal government makes participation possible and meaningful.

In the future I hope to become a mayor, ready to listen and act on the ideas of my constituents. After all, if anyone ever needs to share thoughts on policies or get started on a community project they should only need to bike over to the town hall off Clarksville Road. ♣