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ONE DOLLAR



PATRICK OLIVERO

Middletown Mayor Tony Perry swore in Bernard F. Chenoweth III as fire chief at the town's reorganization meeting at the new municipal building Jan. 2. For a 2022 mayoral outlook from across the Two River area, see story on page 1.

## Two River Mayors Set Goals For the New Year

By Allison Perrine

MONMOUTH COUNTY – While many people spent the end of December enjoying the holidays and making New Year's Eve plans, mayors in the Two River area were thinking about the 2022 goals for their towns.

The Two River Times reached out to local municipal leaders and asked them to reflect on the past year and discuss some objectives for the year ahead. Some responses have been lightly edited for space and clarity. Here's what they had to say.

*What's one of your goals to accomplish for the town in 2022?*

**Sea Bright Mayor  
Brian Kelly**

Our team will be working on a school regionalization project with Highlands and Atlantic Highlands. We are in the process of looking at the feasibility of forming a new pre-K through 12 district while going through the process

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## Lunch Break and Family Promise Announce Merger

By Allison Perrine

RED BANK – Two local nonprofits with complementary missions are partnering to address "the systemic problem" of homelessness in Monmouth County, officials announced this week.

As of Jan. 3, Family Promise of Monmouth County (FPMC) – an Oceanport-based nonprofit that provides family services and temporary housing for those experiencing financial insecurity – officially merged with Lunch Break – a Red Bank-based nonprofit that freely provides food, clothing and social services to those in need. Together, they will help the hundreds who, on average on any given day in Monmouth County, experience homelessness.

"Getting a family stable and back on their feet is not easy. It involves networking of several agencies to pull services together. With Family Promise merging with Lunch Break, it will allow us to have more access to meals, clothing, financial literacy programs, food and many



KENNETH SWAIN

As Lunch Break launches a \$12 million capital campaign to expand programs and facilities, it announced a merger with Family Promise of Oceanport to provide even more services for Monmouth County residents in need.

other programs," said FPMC program director Lenore Gibson. "It's like a one-stop-shop."

Having access to resources and funding is critical but can be difficult, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, according to Gibson, in FPMC's previous model its operations ran on donations. Now, some of its funders "are not all still intact" due to the pandemic and, with people's circumstances changing because of COVID-19, FPMC is spending \$40,000 each month on housing alone for those in need.

"With the shortage of our access to our funds and our donors, (we) will now have Lunch Break which is a secure nonprofit. This will help us a lot to make sure we stay afloat for the community," said Gibson.

The timing of the merger is perfect as Lunch Break, now in its 39th year, is looking to launch an expansion project at its facility, 121 Drs.

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## Struggling Renters Find Relief

By Gloria Stravelli

MONMOUTH COUNTY – The COVID-19 pandemic has caused financial hardship for many vulnerable residents. Now Monmouth County has announced that, with the support of local community-based nonprofits, millions in federal funding has been leveraged to help those struggling remain in their homes.

Last year the county distributed a little over \$13.3 million to 1,362 households impacted by COVID-19 from the \$18.4 million in federal emergency rental assistance (ERA1) received from the U.S. Treasury Department's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). This first round of funding covers the period between May 13 and Nov. 30, 2021.

The county announced Dec. 30 that additional ERA2 and ERA2-High Need funding allocations would be distributed in 2022.

"On behalf of the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners, we are proud of the work our Emergency Rental Assis-

tance Program (ERAP) has done and will continue to do in the new year," said Director Thomas A. Arnone in a press release.

"The success of the Monmouth County ERAP is truly a team effort and the board is thankful for all of our community partners and staff who have assisted in the planning, development and implementation of this program over the last year," he said.

The support of nearly a dozen community-based organizations, including the Community Affairs Resource Center (CARC) in Asbury Park, and Project PAUL in Keansburg, is instrumental in the program's success. Those groups help identify and assist potential applicants who meet the federal eligibility requirement for the program.

At CARC offices in Freehold Borough and Keyport, county residents can get that help applying for rental assistance funding. The organization also sends staff

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## RED BANK LIBRARY SHARES THE MEANING OF KWANZAA

By Allison Perrine

RED BANK – The holiday season means many things to different people, but one common theme is tradition.

That stands for most of the well-known religious holidays, but also for Kwanzaa, observed each year Dec. 26 through Jan. 1 when individuals of African descent celebrate their heritage. Members of the Red Bank Public Library (RBPL) discussed the hol-

iday Dec. 29 as part of the final Let's Talk About Race program of 2021.

"When we take the time to learn about other people and their lives, their cultures and their histories... we discover a common humanity," said Sira Williams, head of children's services at the RBPL. "My hope is that by the end of this program... you will have a new appreciation for Kwanzaa and what a

beautiful holiday it is."

Williams, who celebrates Kwanzaa and Christmas each year, kicked off the conversation by explaining the holiday. The week-long tradition is not "steeped in history" like the other holidays observed at the end of the year; it is merely a few decades old. Established in 1966 by professor Maulana Karenga, the idea arose during a "tumultuous time" in the U.S. amid the Civil

Rights Movement, Vietnam War and rising Black Power movement.

"People were beginning to get frustrated with the slow pace of change of the nonviolent movement of Dr. Martin Luther King, and so there was a push for a cultural revolution for Black Americans to return to Africa culturally and spiritually because they

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