

THE SPIRIT OF

Essex

Winter 2025

**Essex County's parks
offer something
for everyone!**

**Explore, relax,
and rediscover
nature in 2026 —
*right here in your
own backyard.***



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.
Essex County Executive
and the Board of
County Commissioners



Daniel K. Salvante
Director of Parks, Recreation
and Cultural Affairs

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A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Dear Friends,

As the holiday season begins, we invite you to enjoy the festive traditions throughout Essex County. Join us at our Holiday Lights Spectacular at Essex County Turtle Back Zoo for a magical display of over one million lights around our zoo complex featuring 50 illuminated holiday and animal figures. Don't forget to join us for Winter Story Time, a family-friendly activity for children ages 8 and younger. In the spirit of giving, remember to drop off non-perishable food, gently use winter coats, and bring new toys to benefit the less fortunate.

Get in the holiday spirit with our Essex County Historic Holiday Tour! During December, historic homes and properties bring the past to life with beautiful décor from earlier periods. This festive holiday activity is a great way to explore Essex County and learn about our local history.

The holiday season is also a great time to give the gift of arts and culture and visit local museums, galleries, and theaters with your friends and family.

In the Spirit of Essex, we wish you a happy holiday season!

Together we will continue *Putting Essex County First!*

Joseph DiVincenzo, Jr.

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.
Essex County Executive



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Essex County Executive
and the Board of County Commissioners



Daniel K. Salvante
Director of Parks, Recreation and
Cultural Affairs

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This program is made possible in part by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Essex County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs received an operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.

Indicates the facility is handicap accessible. Please contact the facility directly for specific accommodations.



Ring in the New Year with the Essex County Parks System

Discover the natural beauty, culture and community spirit of Essex County in 2026.

The Essex County Parks System—America's first county park system—offers countless opportunities to explore, learn and celebrate through its scenic landscapes, historical landmarks and vibrant annual events. Here are ten of the best things to do throughout the year.

1. Branch Brook Park, Newark — 2026 marks the 50th anniversary of the famous Essex County Cherry Blossom Festival. Save the dates of April 4 to 19 and check the park's social media pages for bloom timing updates.

2. Essex County Turtle Back Zoo, West Orange — Open year-round, you can enjoy the zoo's winter programming such as the Family Nature Club hiking series, "Winter Wildlife" (January 25, 2026) and "Rock On! Geology Hike" (February 8, 2026). (turtlebackzoo.com)

3. Riker Hill Art Park, Livingston — Attend the annual Artists' Open House event for art amid nature, held semi-annually on the first weekends of June and November. (essexcountynj.org)

4. West Essex Park & Essex County Environmental Center, Roseland — Participate in environmental workshops, kids' clubs and outdoor seasonal programs. (essexcountyparks.org)

5. Eagle Rock Reservation — Hike for panoramic NYC skyline views and enjoy sections of the Lenape Trail.

6. Verona Park — Enjoy a peaceful paddleboat ride, picnic, or lakeside walk in this 54-acre gem.

7. Grover Cleveland Park, Caldwell/Essex Fells — Explore wooded paths and a charming children's playground in this historic 41-acre park.

8. Essex County Summer Concert Series & "Celebrate America" — Enjoy free concerts and entertainment across the Parks System. 2026 will

include a special celebration of 250 years of American during the annual July 4th celebration in Brookdale Park.

9. Return to Eagle Rock Reservation — The Essex County Eagle Rock September 11th Memorial pays tribute to the 3,000 men and women, including the 57 residents of Essex County, who lost their lives in the terrorist attack.

10. South Mountain Recreation Complex — There is so much to do, it's hard to find where to start. Stroll around the picturesque 1.7-mile walkway around the waterway, picnic at the Clipper Pavilion, enjoy the Regatta playground, grab a bite to eat at McLoone's Restaurant or putt your way through our Safari Minigolf course.

Whether you're chasing cherry blossoms, hiking forest trails, or listening to live music under the summer stars, Essex County's parks offer something for everyone. Explore, relax, and rediscover nature in 2026 — right here in your own backyard. ■

ESSEX COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

Seasonal events sponsored by the Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

ESSEX COUNTY CODEY ARENA
560 Northfield Avenue, West Orange
973.731.3828 ~ www.essexcountyparks.org/calendar 

Learn to Skate Group Lessons
Winter Classes 6-8 weeks

- Winter A – November 1 to December 21 (6 weeks)
- Winter B – January 9 to March 1, 2026 (8 weeks)

Ages: 3½ to adult
Classes offered on Friday, Saturday or Sunday

- Snow Plow (Ages 3½ to 6)
- Basic 1-6
- Freestyle
- Therapeutic Skating/Special Olympics

Public Skate Sessions
Ages: 3½ to adult
Sessions on Friday, Saturday & Sunday

- Adults - \$12 / Children 16 & under - \$10 / Seniors - \$10 / Skate Rentals - \$5
- Discount cards offered

Freestyle Sessions

- Offered daily – Monday to Friday
- 6:30am to 3pm
- \$19 session / discount cards offered


Adult Weekday Skate Sessions
Ages: 35 and older
Sessions on Tuesdays & Thursdays

- Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10:45am to 12:15pm
- \$17 session

Birthday Parties
Reserve a party room to celebrate your child's birthday on the ice

- \$125 - 3-hour party room

- Parties held during the public session skates or private ice time
- Group admission discount rates for 15+ skaters on public session times

ESSEX COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
621-B Eagle Rock Avenue, Roseland
973.228.8776 ~ www.essexcountyparks.org/calendar 

Pre-registration and payment are required either in person, by mail or online for all programs at www.essexcountyparks.org/calendar.

PLEASE NOTE: ECEC will be operating on a Tuesday through Saturday schedule and will be CLOSED MONDAYS from October 20, 2025 through March 9, 2026. A Monday through Friday schedule will resume on March 16, 2026.

ORGANIZED GROUP BOOKINGS (Institutions, Scouts, Municipal Recreation Programs, Homeschoolers, etc.) All ages.
Maximum of 20 participants including group leaders/chaperones. Program length is 1.5 hours. Choose from a variety of topics offered by the Essex County Environmental Center. Inquire by calling the Center. Minimum of 10 person booking requirement (if less booked, minimum booking fee applied). **Fee: \$12 per participant (including leaders/chaperones)**

SMALL GROUPS/PODS & FAMILIES All ages. Winter topic selections include: Seasonal Nature Adventure, Lenape Village Tours, Backyard Birding, *Fire Making and Hot Chocolate, *Camping 101. One group at a time with a limit of 10 people. Schedule your 45-minute time slot by calling the Center at 973.228.8776. **Fee: \$12 child, \$15 adult. *Where noted, additional fees apply.**

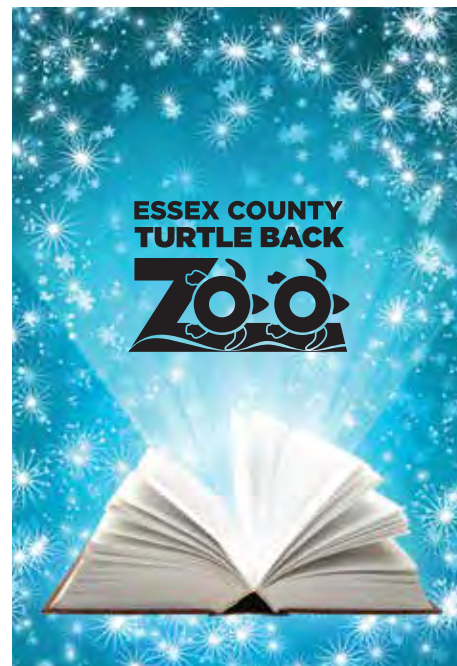
LITTLE EXPLORERS
Fridays–January 9, 23; February 13, 27; March 13, 27
For Ages 2 to 5; 3:30-4:30pm
Join us for explorations of nature as we study plants and animals and observe the colors, shapes, textures, and sounds in the Environmental Center's forest habitat. Please come dressed for the weather; all

classes include an outdoor adventure. All children must be walking and accompanied by an adult. Paths cannot accommodate strollers. Maximum of two children per adult. All sessions are limited to 10 children. **Fee: \$120 per session series**

FOREST FRIENDS CLUB
Thursdays—January 15; February 19; March 19, 4-5pm
For children ages 5 through 10.
We'll explore the forest using nets, binoculars, magnifiers, and microscopes to investigate nature in our wooded wetland habitat. Together we hope to foster an ethic of stewardship and offer an opportunity to take part in hands-on conservation projects. **Fee: \$45 per session series**

FOREST FRIENDS FEEDER CONTEST
Registration Deadline: Wednesday, December 10; Project Drop-off: Friday, December 19 by 5pm
For all ages. Create an edible, festive and unique wetland wildlife feeder for our outdoor exhibit. The purpose of this contest is to provide participants with a fun and educational experience, evoking creativity, to make natural edible treats for the Center's backyard forest friends. Add to a winter's bounty by registering for this contest and submitting a forest feeder for our forest friends to enjoy! All contest entries will be displayed for one week (or for as long as the wildlife will allow) during the winter holiday and will be voted on by a panel of eco-experts! Grand prizes are awarded to entries that place 1st in all categories; 2nd and 3rd place entries will be recognized with a plaque, certificate and a small gift from the Environmental Center. For contest rules and to register, please contact the Essex County Environmental Center at 973.228.8776 or email tbutler@parks.essexcountynj.org. **FREE**

ART IN NATURE
Saturday, December 13; 10-11:30am
For families. Allowing ourselves to be inspired by nature, we will begin the session with a walk outdoors to observe the different colors, shapes, textures and sounds that the season has to offer. We will collect materials from nature and bring them back indoors to create expressive



and unique works of art that can range from collage, sculpture, plant prints or mixed media. Led by Roxana Marroquin, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Program Associate, Agriculture & Natural Resources. **Fee: \$15 per person**

OWL PELLET DISSECTION
Saturday, December 20; 2:30-4pm
For families. Learn about these beautiful and mysterious silent hunters of the night. Discover what they are eating by carefully reconstructing the bones found inside owl pellets, while discussing predators and prey and food chain dynamics. **Fee: \$12 per child, \$15 per adult**

S'MORES n' MORE HIKE
Saturday, December 27; 11am to 12:30pm
For all ages. Join an ECEC naturalist-guided short walk on the trails and experience forest life in wintertime. Practice fundamental fire skills and build a campfire in a safe and controlled environment. Once we get our fire burning, we'll roast marshmallows and make s'mores. **Fee: \$12 per child and \$15 per adult**

WINTER WILDLIFE EXPLORERS CAMP
Tuesday, December 30 and Wednesday, December 31; 9:30am to 3:30pm
For children ages 6-10. Campers enjoy stories, crafts, campfires, and

Winter Storytime

At Turtle Back Zoo

Thursday, December 18 & Friday, December 19
6pm
Saturday, December 20 & Sunday, December 21
2:30pm & 3:30pm

Wear your favorite winter seasonal attire, enjoy an animal-themed story, and meet a favorite animal friend. This is a family-friendly event recommended for families with children ages 8 and younger.

\$10/participant; zoo admission not included.
For more information,
visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/storytime-programs-at-turtle-back-zoo/>.

forest adventures exploring our wooded wetland forests in wintertime. **Fee: \$120 per camper per day**

MILKWEED AND MONARCHS: SEED STARTING
Saturday, January 10; 3-4:30pm
For all ages. You'll learn how the right plants can offer a banquet for bees and butterflies, creatures that enrich our lives with color, beauty and grace and support biodiversity around our homes. Together we'll plant native swamp milkweed seeds in milk jugs that act as a miniature greenhouse, providing a protected place in which the seeds can cold-stratify outside and then germinate and grow outdoors until late April and May when they are transplanted into container pots or directly into your garden. **Fee: \$12 per child and \$15 per adult**

DIY FIRE CIDER FOR WINTER WELLNESS
Saturday, January 17; 10-11:30am
For adults. Fire Cider is a traditional herbal folk remedy that uses easily accessible kitchen ingredients to create a powerful winter tonic. This vinegar and honey-based infusion has been used throughout the ages to keep the immune system strong all winter long. We will discuss the history and tradition of Fire Cider, the medicinal properties and benefits of the ingredients that go into it, as well as recommended guidelines for how to use it. Everyone will create their own Fire Cider to take home. Led by

Roxana Marroquin, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Program Associate, Agriculture & Natural Resources. **Fee: \$30 per person**

S'MORES n' MORE HIKE
Saturday, January 17; 2:30-4pm
For all ages. Join an ECEC naturalist-guided short walk on the trails and experience forest life in wintertime. Practice fundamental fire skills and build a campfire in a safe and controlled environment. Once we get our fire burning, we'll roast marshmallows and make s'mores. **Fee: \$12 per child and \$15 per adult**

GROW AND GLOW: HERBS FOR SELF-CARE
Saturday, February 7; 10-11:30am
For families. Learn about the different herbs that can be used for self-care to reduce stress, boost confidence and promote radiant skin and hair. We will discuss the importance of taking care of our mental and emotional wellbeing and how herbs and plants can become supportive allies in our personal growth and care. Participants will create their own herbal product such as oil infusion, bath salts and/or sugar scrub to take home, as well as write a personal affirmation to help them remain committed to their wellness and self-care. Led by Roxana Marroquin, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Program Associate, Agriculture & Natural Resources. **Fee: \$30 per person**



Winter Wildlife Explorers Camp at the Essex County Environmental Center

VALENTINE’S FAMILY WALK & CAMPFIRE
Saturday, February 14; 2:30-4pm
For all ages. Experience forest life in wintertime and make birch bark hearts and necklaces that double as fire-starters. We’ll build a campfire, make s’mores, and enjoy fire-popped popcorn and mint tea or hot chocolate. Dress warmly for the weather. Advanced registration and minimum number of participants required. **Fee: \$15 per child and \$20 per adult**



Essex County Beekeepers Society at the Essex County Environmental Center

ESSEX COUNTY BEEKEEPERS’ SOCIETY: BASIC BEEKEEPING: 3-DAY SHORT COURSE; Saturdays, February 21 & 28 8:30am to 4pm; Snow day March 7; Field Day in April TBA
For adults and children ages 12 and older. This short course is appropriate for new beekeepers, as well as those who need a refresher. It is offered by the Essex County Beekeepers Society <http://ecbs.njbeekeepers.org/index.htm>, a branch of the New Jersey Beekeepers

Association, and overseen by EAS Certified Master Beekeeper Landi Simone. Successful completion of this class fulfills the education requirement necessary to legally keep bees in NJ. Classroom topics covered include: Honey Bee Biology, Beekeeping Equipment, Getting Started with Bees, Keeping Bees in Populated Areas, Bee Plants, Seasonal Management, Honey Bee Pests and Diseases, Harvesting Your Honey Crop, Queens, Queen Problems and Re-Queening. Day 3, Field Day, takes place in apiaries in Montville Twp. and provides students with an introduction to working with the bees. Students will have the experience of opening and inspecting a beehive themselves and obtain hands-on lessons in recognizing the various components of a hive and colony as well as inspection basics such as smoker lighting, protective gear, and correct use of the hive tool. For more information, contact registrar Justin Luna at Justin@GalacticGold.org. Online registration available at <https://njbeekeepers.org/Education.htm>. Meet in Garibaldi Hall. **Fee: \$130, which includes all class materials, continental breakfast, and afternoon snack.**

PLANNING YOUR SPRING AND SUMMER GARDEN
Saturday, February 21; 10-11:30am
For adults. Join Claudia Urdanivia, Urban Agriculture Agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Essex and Hudson Counties, to learn about planning your spring and summer gardens. We will review the basics, best practices, and a calendar of activities to prepare for gardening season. For beginner and all garden levels. **Fee: \$15 per person**

BUILD-A-BIRD HOUSE
Saturday, February 28; 3-4:30pm
For all ages. Join us to build a home that encourages breeding birds and other wildlife to take residence. Putting out bird houses now improves the chances of having a nesting pair of songbirds in gardens by spring. Advanced registration and minimum number of participants required. **Fee: \$25 per birdhouse (2 people max per birdhouse).**

ESSEX COUNTY TURTLE BACK ZOO
560 Northfield Avenue, West Orange
973.731.5800 ~ www.essexcountyparks.org/calendar.

Berson Family Center at Essex County Turtle Back Zoo
973-731-5800 x236
<https://www.turtlebackzoo.com/learn/>

WINTER WORKSHOP
Sunday, November 30 from 11am to 2pm
Wear your favorite winter-inspired outfit and join us to make holiday-themed enrichment items for all our animals! This is a family-friendly event recommended for all ages. **Free with zoo admission.** Stop by the Mount Building Classroom to participate. For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com>

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS FOR TEACHERS
Genetics and Zoo Conservation (for grades 6-12): December 4 from 9am to 3pm
Heredity, Variation, and the Environment (for grades K-5): December 11 from 9am to 3pm
Join experienced TBZ Educators for NGSS-aligned professional development programs leveraging the resources of Turtle Back Zoo. Each session will cover the relevant scientific background, provide advice and materials for classroom implementation, and include a special animal encounter and time in the zoo. **\$200/participant.** For more information, please email mhunt@parks.essexcountynj.org.

BEHIND THE SCENES TOURS & ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS
Behind the Scenes – Giraffes
December 6, 13, 27 at 2pm
January 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 at 2pm
February 14, 21, 28 at 2pm
Animal Encounters – Sloth Socials
December 6, January 10, February 22 at 10am
Join us for a deeper exploration into the care and conservation of our animals! For 6 years old and over only, under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. All members of the party must have a ticket. Group sizes are strictly limited. No photographs are permitted behind the



Build-A-Bird House at the Essex County Environmental Center

scenes; all attendees will sign a photo waiver prior to the tour. Attendees may be asked to wear face coverings at some locations. Tour and program guests do not enter exhibits or touch animals. Animal Encounters include bagels and coffee and an educational presentation. **\$50/participant; will not include zoo admission starting in 2026.** For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/behind-the-scenes-tours/>

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS
Hatchlings: December 7, January 4, February 1 at 10am
Tots: December 7, January 4 & February 1 at 11:30am
Explorers: December 14, January 11 & February 8 at 10am
TBZ’s Early Childhood programs encourage family learning and foster early environmental awareness. We invite young children to discover the natural world through gently structured play, art, stories, animal visits, and more. Age restrictions apply; pre-registration required; zoo admission not included. **Hatchlings (12-24 months), Tots (ages 2&3) and Explorers (ages 4&5) are \$25-\$30/participant per session (increasing to \$30-\$40 in 2026).** For more information, please visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/early-childhood-programs/>

WONDERS OF THE WILD
Animal Enrichment: December 13 from 1-3pm
Radical Reptiles: January 17 from 1-3pm
Winter at the Zoo: February 14 from 1-3pm
Turtle Back Zoo is an amazing classroom! Our Wonders of the Wild program is an opportunity to participate in supplementary science and nature-themed programs and projects that facilitate scientific literacy and life-long environmental stewardship. Available to students ages 6-12. The programs include a visit to Essex County South Mountain Reservation, reservoir, or zoo as weather permits; does not include zoo admission for after the program. **\$30/ participant per session (increasing to \$40 in 2026).** For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/wonders-of-the-wild/>

FAMILY NATURE CLUB: NATURE GUARDIANS
Christmas Bird Count: December 14 from 9-11am
Great Backyard Bird Count: February 15 from 9-11am
Nature Guardians is an FNC program focused on community engagement that connects families with local conservation actions and citizen science research, shaping our understanding of the natural world. This season’s programs will focus on building your birding skills and a salamander research project at Turtle Back Zoo. **\$5-\$15/participant.** For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/family-nature-club/>

HOMESCHOOL DAYS
Enriching Animal’s Lives: December 17 from 11am to 1pm
Extreme Environments: January 21 from 11am to 1pm
Animal Architects: February 18 from 11am to 1pm
Welcome to the wildest classroom in NJ! Our homeschool classes offer students an opportunity to boost scientific literacy and knowledge of the natural world while learning the importance of life-long environmental stewardship. Available to students ages 6-12, this drop-off program

includes a visit to Essex County South Mountain Reservation, reservoir, or zoo as weather permits; be prepared to go outside. **\$30/participant per session (increasing to \$40 in 2026); zoo admission not included.** Guardians will need a valid photo ID for pickup. For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/homeschool/>

UPCOMING MINI-CAMPS

Monday, December 29 through Wednesday, December 31 from 9am to 4pm
Monday, January 19 from 9am to 4pm
Monday, February 16 & Tuesday, February 17 from 9am to 4pm

Join us at Turtle Back Zoo for some wild fun! To further our mission of conservation, education, and stewardship, campers will be introduced to the extraordinary world of animals, nature, and science. Children will enjoy age-appropriate camp activities that include games, teacher-led lessons, behind-the-scenes tours, up-close animal encounters, hands-on science demonstrations, and fun crafts. Each session is a unique curriculum. **\$100/participant per session.** Tickets for January and February sessions will go on sale January 1, 2026. For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/zoo-camps/>

**FAMILY NATURE CLUB:
NATURE ADVENTURERS' HIKES**

Footprint Finders: January 11 from 1-3pm
Winter Wildlife: January 25 from 1-3pm
Rock On! Geology Hike: February 8 from 1-3pm

Nature Play is playing WITH nature, not just IN nature and is a great way to interact with nature no matter your experience level or play style. Run, climb, build, dig, or even just sit and experience the sounds, smells, and sights of the outdoors. Nature Adventurers visits different locations near Essex County Turtle Back Zoo; hikes are lightly themed. Zoo admission not included. **\$15/participant.** For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/family-nature-club-nature-adventurers/>

HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Spectacular

**AT ESSEX COUNTY
TURTLE BACK ZOO**

5pm to 9pm

**Daily Monday, December 1
to Saturday, January 3**
**(Closed December 24,
December 25 & January 1)**

Take a winter stroll through Essex County Turtle Back Zoo this holiday season under the sparkling lights of holiday-themed and animal characters. Celebrate the season of giving by bringing donations of non-perishable food items, new toys, and gently used coats.

For more information,
visit turtlebackzoo.com/attractions

Sponsored by




SUMMER CAMP OPEN HOUSE
Saturday, February 7; hour-long informational sessions at 11am, 12pm, and 1pm
It's never too early to think of summer! Join us for Essex County Turtle Back Zoo's Annual Summer Camp Open House to check out what's new and fun at camp for Summer 2026. You can meet camp counselors, learn about our science-based curriculum, try a camp activity, and say hello to a few of our camp Animal Ambassadors. **Free event;** register in advance, day-of walk ups will be welcome. This is not a drop-off program for children; all attendees should register. For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/events-calendar/>

**OTHER PROGRAMS AT
THE ZOO OR CLOSER TO YOU**
In-person and Virtual Programs, Outreaches, and more
Dates and times scheduled at need
Join us for a dynamic and fun educational program that focuses on animals, conservation, and stewardship. We offer a variety of programs that satisfy many scientific benchmarks while also being engaging and informative. Programs can be adapted to age and ability; many can be adapted for outreaches to your school, senior center, etc. **Fees and restrictions vary per location.** For more information, visit <https://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/education-center-programs/> ■

ESSEX COUNTY

HISTORIC HOLIDAY

House Tour



Saturday, December 6 & Sunday, December 7, 2025
Times vary by location

Visit essexcountyparks.org for participating locations



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.
*Essex County Executive
and the Board of
County Commissioners*



**COUNTY OF ESSEX DEPARTMENT OF PARKS,
RECREATION & CULTURAL AFFAIRS**
155 Prospect Avenue, Suite 100
West Orange, NJ 07052
973.268.3500 / www.essexcountynj.org
PUTTING **ESSEX COUNTY** FIRST

ANNUAL ESSEX COUNTY PARKS PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST WINNERS

The Essex County Environmental Center and the Essex County Parks Department would like to thank you for your participation in our annual Parks Photography Contest. All contest entries portrayed beautiful images highlighting the wide range of opportunity and natural splendor found throughout the Essex County Park System. As you could imagine, it was very challenging for the Essex Photography Club judges to select winners; however, the ballots are in and we would like to announce the winners:

ADULTS



Janet Markman - First Place Adult
Kip's Castle



Joan Tabor - Second Place Adult
Eagle Rock Reservation 9/11 Memorial



Jo Olivio - Third Place Adult
Branch Brook Park

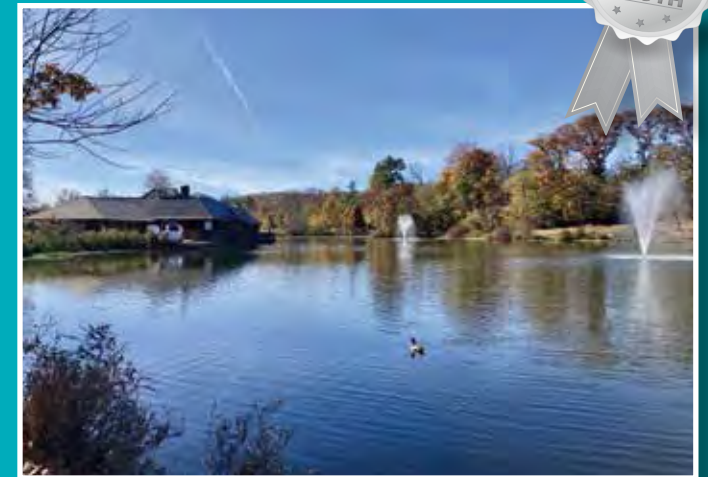


Andrew Decotiis-Mauro - Honorable Mention Adult
Brookdale Park

YOUTH



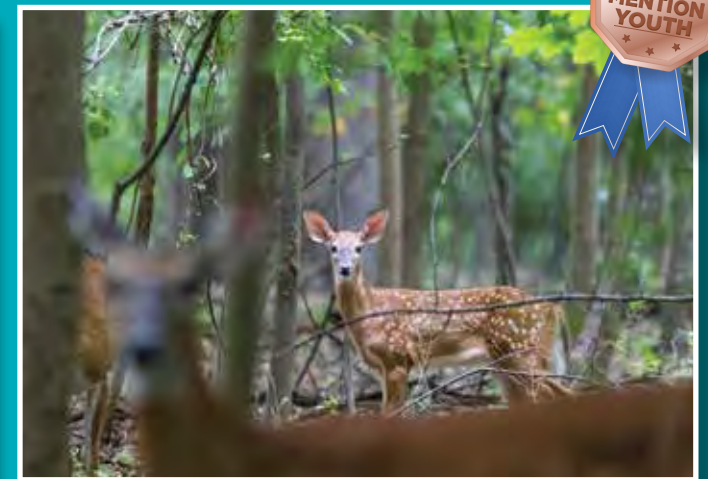
Domenica Balladares - First Place Youth
Branch Brook Park



Thomas Carey - Second Place Youth
Verona Park




Connor Carey - Third Place Youth
Grove Cleveland Park



Lucas Hubbard - Honorable Mention Adult
Brookdale Park

ESSEX COUNTY CULTURAL EXHIBITIONS

GAELLEN GALLERY
JCC OF GREATER METROWEST
760 Northfield Avenue, West Orange
973.530.3412
www.jccmetrowest.org 

Judy Levy and Roberta Reynolds
Through December 28
Mixed media and painting

**Ellen Hark, Eric Estrada,
Michelle Kurlan**
January 11 to February 26
Sculpture, photography and mixed media

HEIDI GALLERY at JSDD
310 Eisenhower Parkway, Livingston
973.272.7148 / HeidiGallery@JSDD.org
Call for ADA accommodations

The WAE Open – 2025
Through December 7
The annual juried exhibition, The WAE Open – 2025, showcases the highest quality visual art created by established, emerging and underrepresented artists. Established in 2021 as a key component of the state-of-the-art facility of JSDD, Heidi Gallery is focused on bringing artists and the public together to experience art and arts education while fostering a fully inclusive community.

Synesthesia
Through December 7
Synesthesia is a neurological phenomenon where the stimulation of one sense triggers an involuntary experience in another sense. Musicians Porl Gordon and Jen Rondeau perform original and improvised soundscapes on keyboard and theremin while artist Helena Chywski paints in response.

Montclair History Center
Crane House & Historic YWCA
110 Orange Road, Montclair
973.744.1796 / mail@montclairhistory.org

**Discover Highlights From
The Collection**
December 6
Explore Montclair's varied past with these special collections highlights


**The following events are offered for the public's enjoyment
by Essex County-based arts and history organizations.**

The Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs takes no responsibility for the content, accuracy, dates or times and whether or not non-County sponsored events listed in this magazine are held as scheduled.



Judy Ley's-Pathways Through a Garden at Gallen Gallery

sessions. Featuring recent acquisitions, interesting artifacts, and hidden gems, these pieces bring local history to life in a fun, interesting, and hands-on way. \$8. Programs eligible for free admission include Families First, military personnel, NARM members, MHC members, Montclair students, and the Montclair Public Library Museum Pass.

STUDIO MONTCLAIR
LEACH GALLERY
641 Bloomfield Avenue, Montclair
862.500.1447
<https://www.studiomontclair.org> 

Not Just Set In Stone

November 14 to December 12

For so many, the picture in one's mind when asked what a sculpture looks like is a monumental slab of carved stone – a figure, a geometric form, an object. But sculpture can be created from so many other materials and combinations of materials. "Not Just Set in Stone" explores the myriad materials beyond stone. Opening reception is Friday, November 14 from 6-8pm at SMI's Leach Gallery. Independent curator Mary Birmingham juried the exhibit. ■



"While we celebrate and spread cheer this holiday season, let's all do our part to promote conservation and protect our environment. Our Give Green Holiday Pop-Up Shop is an opportunity to learn about and purchase eco-friendly gifts, decorations and other holiday items."

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.



**Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., Essex County Executive
and the Board of County Commissioners**

Invite you to

GIVE GREEN

Holiday Pop-up Shop

**Eco-Friendly
Fair Trade
Local Artisans
Recycled Materials
Alternative Gift-Giving**

**ECO
HOLIDAY
SHOPPING
FUNDRAISER**

**Wreath Making
Workshop**
11am to 1pm
*Call ahead to register

**SELF-GUIDED KIDS
CRAFT CORNER

FESTIVE MUSIC
REFRESHMENTS**

**25% OF
EACH SALE TO BENEFIT THE
ESSEX COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER**

Shop Thru January 2026

Essex County Environmental Center

Essex County Environmental Center
621 B Eagle Rock Avenue, Roseland, NJ 07068
Phone: 973.228.8776 Fax: 973.228.3793
www.essexcountynj.org



~ Putting Essex County First ~

ESSEX COUNTY WINTER EVENTS

December 3: Rutgers-Newark Chorus Winter Concert. The Rutgers-Newark Chorus presents its annual winter concert featuring music for the holiday season from many cultures and traditions. Dr. Brian Harlow directs the 50-voice ensemble made up of students, faculty, and alumni. Atrium, The Center for Law and Justice, 123 Washington Street, Newark. 2pm. Suggested donation \$25 preferred seating, \$10 general admission, \$5 students. 973.353.5194

December 6: Elf in Concert. Buddy was accidentally transported to the North Pole as a toddler and raised to adulthood among Santa's elves. Unable to shake the feeling that he doesn't fit in, the adult Buddy travels to New York, in full elf uniform, in search of his real father. This holiday season, relive this heartwarming holiday classic on a giant screen as every note of John Debney's wonderful score is played live by the New Jersey Symphony to picture in Elf in Concert! New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center Street, Newark. 2-4pm. \$46 to \$126. 800.255.3476. <https://www.njsymphony.org/>

December 6: Dirty Deeds – The AC/DC Experience. Get ready for an explosive performance with the ultimate AC/DC tribute band. This electrifying experience channels the iconic guitar riffs and stage moves of Angus and Malcolm Young, creating an immersive and authentic show. Join them for a sonic and visual adventure that will transport you back to the glory days of rock 'n' roll and leave you screaming for more. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$35 to \$50. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/dirty-deeds/>

December 6 and 7: Essex County History Holiday House Tour at Kingsland Manor. Come explore the rich history of the Kingsland Manor,



Campfire cooking at the Greater Newark Conservancy

which is on the National and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places and beautifully decorated for the 2025 holiday season. Kingsland Manor, 3 Kingsland Street, Nutley. 1-4pm. Free admission. 973.661.3410. www.kingslandmanornutley.org/

December 6 and 7: Essex County Holiday House Tour at the Montclair History Center. Explore the beautifully decorated 229-year-old home at your own pace, with festive period décor designed by the Garden Club of Montclair. Cozy up by the hearth and discover the flavors and traditions of holidays past. Don't forget to stop by the Nathaniel Crane House for one-of-a-kind holiday gifts! Ranked #4 nationwide by USA Today. Montclair History Center, Crane House & Historic YWCA, 110 Orange Road, Montclair. 12-3pm. \$5 per person, children under 12 free. 973.744.1796. montclairhistory.org

December 7: Rutgers-Newark Chorus Winter Concert. The Rutgers-Newark Chorus presents its annual winter concert featuring music for the holiday season from many cultures and traditions. Dr. Brian Harlow directs the 50-voice ensemble made up of students, faculty, and alumni. St. Mary's Church, 520 Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard., Newark. Suggested donation \$25 preferred seating, \$10 general admission, \$5 students. 973.353.5194

December 12: Holiday Candlelight Tour. Experience the holidays by candlelight! Enjoy a festive evening that begins with period-inspired libations served in the historic hearth kitchen, followed by a special candlelight tour of the Crane House & Historic YWCA. Montclair History Center, Crane House & Historic YWCA, 110 Orange Road, Montclair. 6-7:30pm. \$25, \$20 for members. 973.744.1796. montclairhistory.org

December 12: Beatles vs. Stones: A Musical Showdown. The British Invasion brought us the two most popular rock groups of all time, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, as well as the liveliest debate in rock history – which band is the greatest? These two legendary bands will engage in an on-stage, mash-up duel featuring internationally renowned tribute bands, Abbey Road and Satisfaction - The International Rolling Stones Show. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$45 to \$75. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/beatles-vs-stones-2025/>

December 13: "Winter Wonderland" Open House. Stroll through this beautifully preserved 229-year-old home, adorned with festive period decorations created by the Garden Club of Montclair. Enjoy a self-guided tour at your own pace, cozy up by the hearth, and discover the rich history of holiday food traditions. Montclair History Center, Crane House

& Historic YWCA, 110 Orange Road, Montclair. 12-3pm. \$5 per person, children under 12 free. 973.744.1796. montclairhistory.org

December 13: Hearth Cooking Demonstration. Step back in time on the hearth at the Crane House & Historic YWCA Museum! Experience a live Hearth Cooking Demonstration to see how meals were prepared in the past. Taste historic recipes, smell delicious aromas, and discover the art of cooking over an open fire. Included with admission! Montclair History Center, Crane House & Historic YWCA, 110 Orange Road, Montclair. 12-3pm. \$5 per person, children under 12 Free. 973.744.1796. montclairhistory.org

December 13: Second Saturday Family Adventures: Mammals. Join us as we dive into the fascinating world of mammals. From learning how mammals survive the winter, to examining real fur pelts, to crafting a mini habitat; this program is perfect for families who love nature and wildlife. Don't miss this educational and fun-filled morning! Greater Newark Conservancy, 32 Prince Street, Newark. 10:30am to 12pm. Free. Registration required; opens mid-November. citybloom.org/events

December 14: SO Jewish Comedy Night. SO Jewish Comedy Night is an irreverent, hilarious holiday celebration showcasing top Jewish comedians Liz Glazer, Myq Kaplan, Elon Altman, and Stone & Stone. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$32 to \$48. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/so-jewish-comedy-night-2025/>

December 18: History at Home: Early History of Montclair State University. Opened in 1908, the Normal School was founded to educate elementary school teachers. It grew to become Montclair State University. Learn about the early history of the campus with Paul Martinez, archivist at the Harry A. Sprague Library. We will explore the original buildings, campus grounds, and student life in the first part of the 20th century. Montclair History Center, virtual on Zoom. 7-8pm. Free. 973.744.1796. Visit montclairhistory.org for registration.



Meshell Ndegeocello at the South Orange Performing Arts Center

December 18: Irish Christmas in America. Irish Christmas in America is a joyful holiday tradition, produced by renowned Sligo fiddler Oisín Mac Diarmada, that brings together some of Ireland's finest musicians and dancers for an engaging, family-friendly celebration. Praised for its humor, energy, and integrity, Irish Christmas in America is a must-see event that captures the magic of the season and the warmth of Irish culture. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$32 to \$46. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/irish-christmas-2025/>



The world of mammals at the Greater Newark Conservancy

December 19: Storm Large – Holiday Ordeal. Storm Large is a genre-bending vocalist, writer, and performer whose electrifying stage presence and fearless storytelling have wowed audiences from Rock Star: Supernova to Carnegie Hall. With a voice that soars from rock to cabaret to symphony halls, Storm's live show is a wild, unforgettable ride through the heart of the American Songbook and beyond. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$39 to \$55. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/an-evening-with-storm-large/>

December 20: Kid's Craft Day! Get creative at Kids' Craft Day, where young historians can make history-inspired crafts and take home their own little piece of the past. Included with museum admission! Montclair History Center, Crane House & Historic YWCA, 110 Orange Road, Montclair. 12-3pm. \$5, children under 12 Free. 973.744.1796. montclairhistory.org

December 20: Sixpence None The Richer. Sixpence None the Richer returns with their first tour in nearly two decades, featuring beloved hits like the triple-platinum "Kiss Me" alongside fresh material. With Leigh Nash's iconic vocals and Matt Slocum's masterful guitar work, this Grammy-nominated band delivers both nostalgia and innovation in every performance. South Orange Performing



The Science of Balance at the Greater Newark Conservancy

Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$45 to \$65. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/sntr-2025/>

December 20: “Winter Wonderland” Open House. Stroll through this beautifully preserved 229-year-old home, adorned with festive period decorations created by the Garden Club of Montclair. Enjoy a self-guided tour at your own pace, cozy up by the hearth, and discover the rich history of holiday food traditions. Montclair History Center, Crane House & Historic YWCA, 110 Orange Road, Montclair. 12-3pm. \$5 per person,

children under 12 Free. 973.744.1796. montclairhistory.org

December 20: Family Fun in the Kitchen. Join Chef Afi to learn knife skills, cooking tips and tricks, and how to make recipes like Portabella Mushroom Fajitas, Tofu Stir Fry, Sweet Potato Fritters, Mango Slaw, and more! Chef Afi will walk families through every step and, at the end, you get to enjoy the dish you made! Greater Newark Conservancy, 32 Prince Street, Newark. 11am to 12:30pm. \$5. Registration required; opens mid-November. citybloom.org/events



Irish Christmas in America at the South Orange Performing Arts Center

December 21: Handel's Messiah. Handel's Messiah performed by the New Jersey Symphony embraces every emotion, from the first voice singing “Comfort ye,” inviting you to step aside from the season's frenzy, to the riveting Amen Chorus at the end. In between are moments of transcendence, loss, and deeply-felt awe—what makes a classic a classic. Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, 89 Ridge Street, Newark. 7-9pm. \$32 to \$117. 800.255.3476. <https://www.njsymphony.org/>

December 21: John Pizzarelli Swinging into the Holidays and More. John Pizzarelli is the Grammy-winning guitarist and vocalist renowned for his fresh, swinging takes on jazz standards, Broadway hits, and pop classics. With a dynamic trio and a repertoire spanning Sinatra to the Beatles, Pizzarelli's live show is pure musical delight for fans of all ages. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$45 to \$60. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/john-pizzarelli-2025/>

January 3 to February 1: NARNIA, The Musical. The Strollers proudly present its mid-winter children's show, NARNIA, The Musical! Come follow the adventures of four siblings as they stumble upon (and through) a wardrobe into the magical kingdom of Narnia. Based on the magical book, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis. The Maplewood Strollers, 10 Durand Road, Maplewood. \$30 general admission; seniors (65+) and students 18 and younger \$25, ID is required. For group sales of 10 or more, please contact the box office at 973.761.8453. www.themaplewoodstrollers.org

January 10: Second Saturday Family Adventures: Campfire Cooking. Gather your family for a sizzling adventure as we dive into the ancient skill of making fire safely! Learn the fascinating science behind fire, build your own, and experience the joy of campfire cooking. Don't miss this chance to bond over the warmth of a campfire and tasty treats made with your own hands! Greater Newark Conservancy, 32 Prince Street, Newark. 10:30am to 12pm. Free. Registration required; opens mid-December. citybloom.org/events

January 10: Randall Goosby Returns. After his 2023 concerts with the New Jersey Symphony, you asked and the wunderkind-violinist Randall Goosby returns. Two Romantic European classics flank American composer Samuel Barber's hauntingly beautiful concerto – a perfect vehicle for Goosby who The New York Times praised for his ability to create “a catharsis of joy.” New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center Street, Newark. 7:30-9:30pm. \$36 to \$122. 800.255.3476. <https://www.njsymphony.org/>

January 15: Tired Souls: King and the Montgomery School Bus Boycott. Tired Souls opens in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955 – the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus to a white man. Her determination was the catalyst that inspired Montgomery's black citizens to abandon all travel on city buses until they were no longer forced to sit in the back or stand when a white person boarded. It will be followed by a thought-provoking panel discussion featuring Award winning playwright and author Mike Wiley and special guests. The discussion will explore the legacy of civil disobedience, youth activism, and more. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7pm. \$25. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/tired-souls-2026/>

January 18: Historic House Tour. Come explore the rich history of the Kingsland Manor, which is on the National and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places. In celebration of our nation's 250th anniversary, the Manor will be featuring demonstrations, crafts and food of the colonial period. Kingsland Manor, 3 Kingsland Street, Nutley. 1-4pm. Free. 973.661.3410. www.kingslandmanornutley.org

January 23: Pedrito Martinez & Alfredo Rodriguez. Pedrito Martinez and Alfredo Rodriguez, two Grammy-nominated Cuban virtuosos, join forces for an electrifying night of Afro-Cuban jazz, soulful storytelling, and genre-defying collaboration. Their performances blend rhythmic fire, improvisational brilliance, and pure musical joy you won't want to miss. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC



Beatles vs Stones at the South Orange Performing Arts Center

Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/martinez-rodriguez-2026/>

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January 29, 30 & February 1: Romeo & Juliet. Shakespeare's story of two star-crossed lovers, their warring families, and a sleeping potion that causes calamity has inspired our greatest composers. With the dramatic music of two Russian masters, Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev, the artists of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey will join the New Jersey Symphony to share a timeless tale of romance, violence, and passion. New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center Street, Newark. January 29 from 1:30-3:30pm, January 30 from 7:30-9:30pm February 1 from 2-4pm. \$36 to \$122. 800.255.3476. <https://www.njsymphony.org/>

February 5: Meshell Ndegeocello No More Water – The Gospel of James Baldwin. Meshell Ndegeocello is a Grammy-winning artist whose fearless blend of jazz, soul, and spoken word has redefined contemporary music. Her latest project, No More Water: The Gospel of James Baldwin, is a powerful, genre-defying tribute to Baldwin's legacy and a testament to Ndegeocello's status as one of music's most innovative and compelling voices. South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. 7:30pm. \$39 to \$55. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/meshell-ndegeocello/>

February 7: 2026 Lunar New Year Celebration. Enjoy an evening of community and cultural exchange that is wonderful for families and children, as we celebrate the Year of the Horse. Seattle Symphony Associate Conductor Sunny Xia and Van Cliburn International Piano Competition Winner Haochen Zhang make their New Jersey Symphony debuts in this festive concert that celebrates music from East and West. New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center Street, Newark. 7:30-9:30pm. \$36 to \$96. 800.255.3476. <https://www.njsymphony.org/>

February 13: Get Hypnotized! The Erick Känd Comedy Hypnosis Show. Laugh, participate, and experience an altered state of reality at Get Hypnotized! – The Erick Känd Comedy Hypnosis Show. Self-selecting audience volunteers will be hypnotized and become the stars



SO Jewish Comedy Night

Jewish Comedy Night at the South Orange Performing Arts Center

of the show! During this performance, the lucky volunteers will undergo a complete transformation. The pandemonium is all great fun and will have the audience laughing non-stop from start to finish! South Orange Performing Arts Center, 1 SOPAC Way, South Orange. Ages 12+. \$30 to \$45. <https://www.sopacnow.org/events/erick-kand-2026/>

February 14: Second Saturday Family Adventures: Balance. Join us for a thrilling exploration into the science of Balance! Perfect for families, this event offers hands-on activities and engaging children's books to help everyone think like scientists and understand these fundamental forces. This adventure is not just educational; it's a fantastic way to bond and have fun as a family! Greater Newark Conservancy, 32 Prince Street, Newark. 11am to 12:30pm. Free. Registration required; opens mid-January. Citybloom.org/events

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Tired Souls at the South Orange Performing Arts Center


February 27 & March 1: Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The internationally-acclaimed conductor Markus Stenz strives to make all of his concerts "as stirring, powerful, clear, and moving as possible." With Stenz on the New Jersey Symphony podium, here is music to inspire: from the joy of Kevin Puts' Contact featuring Time For Three, which won a 2023 Grammy with Xian Zhang conducting, to the drama and triumph of Beethoven's iconic Fifth Symphony. New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center Street, Newark. February 27 from 7:30-9:30pm and March 1 from 2-4pm. \$36-\$122. 800.255.3476. <https://www.njsymphony.org/>

February 27: Autism-Friendly "STONE SOUP" at Paper Mill Playhouse. Pushcart Players presents an Autism-friendly (relaxed) performance. "SOUP" is a well-seasoned musical blend of folk tales from India, Africa, Eastern Europe and the United States to discover the joy of reading, acceptance, and friendship. Autism-friendly performances provide a judgment-free space for individuals with developmental disabilities and those who support them. Paper Mill Playhouse, 22 Brookside Drive, Millburn. 11am to 12pm. \$20. Reservations required. 973.376.4343. <https://my.papermill.org/6388> ■

ESSEX COUNTY ONGOING PROGRAMS

BRANCH BROOK PARK ALLIANCE
973.969.1189
www.branchbrookpark.org/calendar
Please call for ADA accessibility details

December 1 to February 28: Volunteer Stewardship in Essex County Branch Brook Park. Join the Branch Brook Park Alliance team in ongoing stewardship efforts. Essex County Branch Brook Park, Prudential Concert Grove. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10am to 2pm. Free. Advanced registration is required. 973.969.1189. www.branchbrookpark.org

THE CATHEDRAL BASILICA OF THE SACRED HEART
89 Ridge Street, Newark
973.484.2400 / www.cathedralbasilica.org 

November 2: 'Requiem' by Michael John Trotta. The Cathedral Choir, soloists, and orchestra, conducted by John J. Miller at 3pm. Anita Foley will offer a short pre-concert lecture for the bereaved at 2:20pm in the Lady Chapel. Free-will offering. 973.484.2400. www.cathedralbasilica.org

December 11: NAVIDAD LATINA 2025. The Cathedral Spanish Choir, under the direction of Olfary Gutiérrez, joins forces with singers and instrumentalists from other Latin American communities of the Archdiocese of Newark. Program includes Villancicos Tradicionales of Latin America and Spain. 8pm. Doors open at 7pm. Free-will offering. www.cathedralbasilica.org

December 17 and 18: The 54th Candlelight Carol Sing. A Christmas tradition for 50+ years, the Carol Sing has become one of the most significant Christmas concerts in Northern New Jersey. The ambiance of candlelight and season décor, along with thousands of participants, combine to create an event that must be experienced featuring the Cathedral Choir, organ and Brass Ensemble. 8pm. Doors open at 7pm. Free-will offering. www.cathedralbasilica.org

December 21: "Messiah" with the New Jersey Symphony and Montclair State University Singers with Anthony Parnter, conductor. The Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, 89 Ridge Street, Newark. 7pm. Doors open at 6pm. For tickets, call 1.800.ALLEGRO. ■



NAVIDAD LATINA at The Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart



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Recreation & Cultural Affairs**
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www.essexcountynj.org

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THE SPIRIT OF ESSEX

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NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG
MUSIC DIRECTOR

CELEBRATING
MUSIC DIRECTOR

XIAN ZHANG'S
10TH SEASON!

10

25|26
SEASON

UPCOMING CONCERTS IN NEWARK

Elf in Concert

Dec 6 | NJPAC at 2 pm

Handel's Messiah

Dec 21 | Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart at 7 pm

Randall Goosby Returns

Jan 10 | NJPAC at 7:30 pm

Romeo & Juliet

Jan 29–30 & Feb 1 | NJPAC at 1:30 pm, 7:30 pm, 2 pm

2026 Lunar New Year Celebration

Feb 7 | NJPAC at 7:30 pm

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony

Feb 27 & Mar 1 | NJPAC at 7:30 pm, 2 pm

GET TICKETS!

1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) | njsymphony.org



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