



2024 New Milford Hall of Fame Nominees

The following people have been nominated for induction into the Hall of Fame.

Arts and Letters

Mary Joyce Doyle: Ms. Doyle, a longtime New Milford resident, is best known as the creator of the Bergen County Cooperative Library System (BCCLS), which revolutionized book lending in the county – and beyond. She worked for the Fair Lawn Library before being named director of the Bergenfield Library in 1974. After becoming president of the New Jersey Library Association, she helped launch BCCLS, to facilitate sharing of books and other resources among libraries. Ms. Doyle lived for many years on Holland Avenue with her sister, June, and was a parishioner of Ascension Church. Following her retirement after 25 years as Bergenfield Library Director, she became a supporter the Friends of New Milford Public Library. Ms. Doyle died in 2016.

Natalie Frier: Ms. Frier has been a stone sculpture instructor at the Art Center of Northern New Jersey since 2000 and has served on its Board of Trustees. Two of her sculptures are featured in the Sculpture Garden at the New Milford Public Library. Additionally, her work can be found in private collections throughout the United States and internationally. She has also created works for Sheering Plough, Englewood Hospital and Medical Center, and Temple Beth El (in Closter). A resident of Harrington Park, Ms. Frier is a graduate of Simmons College in Boston, MA, and Columbia University in New York. She studied for 15 years with the acclaimed Japanese abstract sculptor Minoru Nizzuma. Under her guidance, the Art Center has made professional instruction in the arts accessible to residents of New Milford and surrounding areas, while also sponsoring programs that promote cultural awareness.

Jean Shepherd: Shepherd is the author of the holiday classic “A Christmas Story,” which is based on his childhood in Indiana. He began his broadcast career in 1945 after serving in the U.S. Army Signal Corps. After several stints working in radio and television in the Midwest, Shepherd was hired in 1955 by WOR Radio in New York and moved to the Brookchester Apartments. His program became wildly popular, propelling him into the national spotlight. He lived at 283-B Reichelt Road until the fall of 1960. Shepherd wrote several short story collections and his narrative style inspired many writers, including Spaulding Grey and Garrison Keillor. Marshall McLuhan, philosopher and pioneer of media theory, wrote that Shepherd “regards radio as a new medium for a new kind of novel that he writes nightly.”

Philip Smallwood: Smallwood is an award-winning artist best known for his signature watercolors. He refers to his body of work as “Lifescapes,” which portray subjects within their natural environment. He has participated in major art exhibitions such as the Harlem Fine Arts Show in Martha’s Vineyard, Watercolor USA—50th Exhibition in Springfield, Mo., and the 14C Art Fair in Jersey City. His works have been featured in artistic journals including “American Art Collector,” “Watercolor Artist,” and “People in the Arts.” He has also been commissioned for private works by business leaders, entertainers and sports personalities. A longtime resident, he is active with the Art Center of Northern New Jersey and was the 2022-2023 Artist-in-Residence at Fairleigh Dickinson University, where he also funds a scholarship. In 2023, he received the Artist of Impact Award from the Bergen County Commission for the Arts.

Business and Enterprise

Sol Abrams: Abrams was the longtime promotor for Palisades Amusement Park. Among his most memorable stunts: a water-skiing elephant on the Hudson River. Born in Paterson, NJ, and raised in the Bronx, Abrams and his wife, Zelda, moved to New Milford in 1959. They had three children. He served in WWII. He began his career with a public relations firm that handled the Palisades Amusement Park account. When the park parted with the firm in 1963, it hired Abrams as vice president in charge of publicity and public relations. He held that title until the park closed in 1971. He then did public relations for a real estate company. Abrams was also active in the New Milford Jewish Community Center and the Jewish War Veterans. He died at the age of 89 in 2015.

Herman Hirschfeld: Born in Germany in 1866, Hirschfeld immigrated to New York City in 1891. In 1902, he moved to Palisades Township (predecessor to New Milford) and established his factory, which became one of the largest button and pearl novelty manufacturers in the county. His estate included nearly 60 acres, including an old, remodeled farm house. He was a member of St. Matthew's Church and also served as fire commissioner (1907-1913) and school trustee (1914-1917) for Palisades Township. Hirschfeld sold the factory to John Jacob Kneirim, and returned to Germany, where he died in 1938.

Klinger Family: The Klinger family started farming in New Milford in 1913, after moving to New Jersey from Queens. In 1963, son Bill and his wife Shaaron took over the farm from his parents. They primarily grew flowers, although Shaaron also kept a ceramics studio on the farm. Bill also served as Municipal Court bailiff (the courtroom is named in his honor) and an auxiliary police officer, and was a member of the Historic Preservation Commission. In 2008, Bill and his neighbor, Mike Perrone, signed a conservation easement to ensure that the borough's last remaining farms would be preserved as open space. Bill never stopped farming until the day he died in March 2010. Shaaron died in 2017. The property is now Fresh & Fancy Farms.

Perrone Family: Carmine and Rose Perrone moved to New Milford in 1922 and purchased about 10 acres of land on River Road, adjacent to the Klingers. Anthony, the youngest of their eight children, eventually took over the family farm. Tony's son, Michael, became a third-generation farmer. Mike Perrone and Bill Klinger were inseparable friends, so it's not surprising that together they signed the conservation easement to protect New Milford's farming heritage. Following Bill's death, Mike took his seat on the Historic Preservation Commission. He was later named honorary borough historian. Mike died in 2023. The property is now the New Bridge Garden Center.

Local Hero:

Marlene Casey: Marlene, along with her husband, Tim, was dedicated to the preservation of historic sites in New Milford and surrounding areas. Born in 1942 in Jersey City, Marlene attended Weehawken High School and the University of Virginia. She served for many years as borough historian and was instrumental in the creation of New Milford's Historic Preservation Ordinance and Commission. Marlene lovingly cared for the historic Jacobus Demarest on River Road, the oldest, continuously occupied home in Bergen County. The house had been purchased and restored by her husband's grandfather, noted artist and architect John Abram Gurd, a member of the NM Hall of Fame Class of 2022.

Teresa M. Martin: Mrs. Martin served as principal of New Milford Junior High School (now New Milford High School) for 30 years. During WWII, she shared the news about the military service of more than 560 former students (men and women) through a monthly newsletter distributed to local residents. Following the war, she compiled a book, “New Milford in World War II,” which contained biographies of those who served, including photographs of the 16 residents who made the ultimate sacrifice. A native of Massachusetts, Mrs. Martin lived in Bogota, where she was active in the Women’s Club.

Rev. Daniel Reichelt: Rev. Reichelt became the first permanent pastor of St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in 1925. The church was established in 1895 to serve residents of the Peetzburgh development. He was born in Maryland in 1884. Following ordination from the Concordia College and Seminary in Illinois, he served at churches in Harrison, Lyndhurst and Maywood before coming to New Milford. At St. Matthew’s, he oversaw the expansion of the church and its Sunday school. He and his wife, Dorothy, had five children, including a son, Henri Neil, who was killed during WWII. Following his retirement after 33 years as pastor, he continued to minister to the community. He died in 1969 at the age of 84.

Ray Woods Jr.: Patrolman Woods is the first member of the New Milford Police Department to die in the line of duty. In November 1972, Woods, 26, rushed into a burning home on Rheim Court and saved the lives of Patrolmen Michael Burns and Milton Barrett. A resident of the house, Marie Cordey died, and Barrett and Firefighter Joseph Costello were critically injured. After pushing Barrett out of the house, Woods reentered the flaming structure. He was found unconscious after his air supply ran out. Initially, it seemed as if Woods would survive; however, his lungs were severely damaged and he succumbed to the injuries. Woods, who was married, coached a Babe Ruth team and was an avid collector of railroad memorabilia. The address of the borough’s Police Headquarters, 112 Patrolman Ray Woods Drive, honors his name and badge number.

Performing Arts

Jack Antonoff: Antonoff was born in 1984 and spent his early years in New Milford, attending the Solomon Schechter Day School. The family later moved to Woodcliff Lake, and he and his sister, Rachel, attended the Professional Children’s School. Another sister, Sarah, died of brain cancer, an event that profoundly impacted his life and inspired his work. A singer, songwriter and musician, Antonoff may be best known for his success as a producer. In 2024 he won his third consecutive Grammy as Producer of the Year, Non Classical. In total, he has earned 24 nominations and 10 Grammy Awards. He has worked with artists such as Taylor Swift, Lana Del Rey, Lorde and Bruce Springsteen.

Ruth Beiner: Ms. Beiner has served as producer for New Milford High School’s spring musical for two decades. Her commitment to this event has become a cherished tradition in the school and wider community. By bringing the community together through the arts, she has strengthened bonds and fostered a sense of unity and pride. Through memorable performances and engaging productions, she has inspired audiences, both young and old, to appreciate the arts and recognize their importance in society.

Beth Fowler: A native of Bergen County, Ms. Fowler has lived in New Milford for more than 20 years. She is a two-time Tony nominee for her work on Broadway in “The Boy From Oz,” with Hugh Jackman, and “Sweeney Todd.” She has also performed in numerous films, including “Sister

Act” and “Mulan.” She won a Screen Actors Guild Award for outstanding performance by an ensemble for “Orange is the New Black.” Her television credits include “Law & Order,” “Ed” and “Gossip Girl.”

Joe Regalbuto: An actor and director, Regalbuto is best known for his portrayal of Frank Fontana on the popular sitcom “Murphy Brown,” which earned him a Primetime Emmy Award nomination in 1989. Born in Brooklyn in 1949, he graduated from St. Joseph’s School and New Milford High School. He studied acting at New York University. He made his film debut with a minor role in the Neil Simon comedy “Goodbye Girl.” Other acting credits include “Criminal Minds,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” “Castle” and “Ghost Whisperer.” He has also directed episodes of “Murphy Brown,” “Friends,” “Wizards of Waverly Place” and “George Lopez.” He and his wife, Rosemary, have three children and live in California.

Public Service

Sam Cosney: A lifelong resident, Cosney was an eyewitness to the creation of the Borough of New Milford. Born in 1885, when the area was known as Palisades Township, Cosney served his hometown in many capacities: founding member of Fire Co. 1, borough council member, police and fire commissioner. As a general contractor, he built many homes in the community. He was also involved in the New Milford Independent Baseball League. In 1964, Cosney was honored as the grand marshal of the borough’s 50th anniversary parade. He and his wife, the former Julia Riegert, were the parents of seven children. He died in 1973 at the age of 87.

Joseph Costello: Costello was seriously injured in the 1972 Rhein Court fire that killed Patrolman Ray Woods and resident Marie Cordey and injured Office Milton Barrett. He joined Fire Co. 1 in the 1960s and served as its president. After recovering from his devastating and life-altering injuries, Costello became an advocate for fire victims. He received the Fire Industry Act of Heroism Award by the Fire Chiefs Convention and the Fireman of the Year Award from the New York/New Jersey Volunteer Firemen’s Association. He and his wife, Betty, had four children, including former New Milford Police Chief Richard Costello. He died in 2004 at the age of 82.

Harry Jordan: Jordan was New Milford’s first and longest-serving Chief of Police. He began his career in 1917 as chief marshal for Palisades Township. He was appointed chief when the police department was formally organized in 1928. At the time, the borough’s population was less than 3,000. For 44 years, Jordan guided the department as it grew to meet the needs of an ever-changing and expanding community. When he retired in 1961, the force included more than 20 officers serving a community of more than 18,000 residents. He died in 1964 at the age of 70.

Florence “Peggy” Saslow: Mrs. Saslow became an icon in many ways to many people. Loving wife and mother. Inspiring teacher. Dedicated member of the New Milford Board of Education, which she served for 19 years. She represented the school district at the National School Boards and Bergen County School boards associations. In 1991, she was named “NJ School Board Member of the Year” by the state association. An avid tennis player, the courts at New Milford High School were named in her honor in 2022. She died in 2023 at the age of 100.

Sports:

John Connolly: Known as “Mr. Little League,” Connolly grew up in an orphanage in Staten Island following the death of his parents. He played sandlot baseball on a team considered to be one of the

area's best. He worked as an AC engineer at the Waldorf-Astoria. In 1955, he suffered a devastating injury at work when he broke both legs in a fall. After the family's moved to New Milford the following year, neighbors invited him to help promote baseball among the youth of the growing community. He became field superintendent. His constant care and attention to the field made it one of the best in the county. In 1966, the field behind borough hall was named in his honor. On April 30, 1967, Little League Opening Day, the Mayor and Council declared "John Connelly Day." Connelly was so beloved that every year on his birthday, July 4, the Ladies Auxiliary baked him a cake, which was present to him at home plate.

Sheldon "Shelly" Freschi: Freschi lived in New Milford his entire 98 years of life (1920-2018). He attended Washington School, New Milford Junior High School, and Hackensack High School, where excelled academically and on the soccer and baseball fields. He studied Horticulture at the University of Massachusetts and served in WWII as Army Medic in England. Horticulture became his lifelong career. He was the longest tenured member of New Milford Athletic Club (since the age of 18). His father had been a 1904 charter member of the Club. Freschi initiated the "Dedication Award" and presented the plaque at the NMHS Football Dinner to a player on the team who exhibited commitment and perseverance similar to his. In his will, he designated funds for annual scholarships for two graduating scholar/athletes who demonstrate his work ethic and productivity.

Bill Hartney: William "Bill" Hartney has been a head and assistant coach at New Milford for more than 40 years. Dedicated to the Knights programs, he has coached more than 100 seasons compiling championships in various sports and aiding many athletes reach the college level. Hartney also serves as a permanent substitute teacher at the high school and is the athletic department's site supervisor at football, soccer, basketball and wrestling. He is a staple of the community and specifically New Milford Athletics. While also being inducted into the New Milford HS Hall of Fame as well as the NJSIAA Hall of Fame, Hartney was recently honored by the YMCA as their Thomas Della Torre Special Achievement honoree for dedication to the values of spirit, mind and body.

Debbie Yager: Ms. Yager has been involved in recreation sports in New Milford for almost 30 years. She began as a coach when her two daughters were in elementary school. She coached teams in soccer, travel soccer, softball, volleyball, and travel softball. She went on to be a coordinator for soccer, indoor soccer, softball, and travel softball. She stayed as a coach, long after her two daughters outgrew the program, and she still serves as a coordinator for softball and travel softball. She has mentored countless coaches and ensured the program continued to develop under four different recreation directors.