

Arts & Entertainment

On Mondays, Union County Seniors Show Learning is Forever

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ROSELLE – A group of Union County senior citizens is proving that learning is a lifelong process, not something that should be confined to a certain age group or a particular time in one's life.

Every Monday from September through May, the group, which usually numbers around 24, gets together at the Roselle Community Center.

There, under the direction of Union County College (UCC) Professor Tony Nicolai, they study the appreciation and history of art, as well as create their own masterpieces.

These illustrious seniors are part of Learning Is For Ever (LIFE) Center, a program started in Union County in 1984 to provide college-level classes to senior citizen students at an off-campus setting at no charge.

"LIFE Center is one of Union County's best-kept secrets," said Barbara Cook of Roselle, a spokesperson for the group.

In addition to art and art-appreciation classes, LIFE Center offers classes in Writing, Literature, Biology, Music, History and Drama.

"[The program offers] many of the things you wished you had gotten into when you were young, before time sped by you," said Ms. Cook.

She has been attending the LIFE Center program for three years.

The LIFE Center classes, held in Roselle, are funded in part by a grant provided by the Township of Roselle to UCC.

One recent Monday morning found



Marylou Morano for The Leader/Times
ONE LIFE TO LIVE...At the LIFE Center in Roselle, Union County College Professor Tony Nicolai assists Marylyn Rosenthal in adding definition to her oil painting, which she has tentatively titled "The Plant Shelf."

illustrious students working in groups or individually on their work.

"We learn from each other," said Ms. Cook, who is primarily a cartoonist, but still creates what she deems the "straight stuff."

Sylvia Weidemann of Roselle, president of the Roselle Art Association for over 13 years, said, "The LIFE Center program gives us an opportunity to express ourselves artistically."

The senior students cannot say enough about their instructor, Profes-

sor Nicolai.

"He has taken students with no experience and drawn talent from them that they didn't even know they had," said Carol Norman of Union.

Arnold Schaeffer, a multi-media artist from Rahway, who has studied art all his life under nationally recognized artists, agreed.

"Professor Nicolai is a superb teacher," he said. "He is down-to-earth and always available when you need him."

Ms. Norman concurred with the assessment, and said, "Professor Nicolai has something good to say about everyone's work. He is critical without hurting your feelings."

These compliments are not one-sided, as Professor Nicolai also holds his students in high esteem.

"This is a really special group of people," he said.

"There is diversity in terms of interest and abilities; however, almost every year, the work of one or more students is lauded on the local or state level," he said.

The instructor, who is also the coordinator of UCC's Fine Arts Program, believes his LIFE Center class has benefits that extend beyond art.

"The students have formed a nuclear group, which is wonderful to see," he said.

For Professor Nicolai, the success of the LIFE Center Program is intertwined with the mission of the county college, which is to provide a "positive educational and creative experience to people who might otherwise not have these opportunities," he said.

Professor Nicolai added, "LIFE Center also provides seniors a respite from the pressure and strain of the current [economic] situation."

UCC's LIFE Center program was the first such program in the United States.

To date, more than 3,000 Union County senior citizens have participated in the program.

For more information about LIFE Center, call (908) 497-4360 or log onto ucc.edu/go/lifecenter.

Erratum

In last week's article on the Itinerants, Mr. Seymour's name should be spelled Sean Seymour, not Shawn. In addition, the band with which certain members played prior to the Itinerants should have been referred to as Rogue's March, not Rosemarch.

We regret the errors.



IN THE EYES OF THE LAW...Westfield resident Julian Mazzola, 8, stars alongside Jeff Goldblum in "Law and Order" this Sunday. In the episode, Julian portrays the son of a single mother targeted by a con man.

Westfield Third Grader to Appear On TV's 'Law & Order' Sunday

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Like many 8-year-olds, Julian Mazzola can often be seen having fun with his friends at school, tossing the baseball around with his team at Tamaques Park or playing with his dog in the yard. But this weekend, Julian will additionally be seen on television in the role of "Kevin" on the USA network's "Law and Order: Criminal Intent."

In the episode, Julian portrays the son of a single mother targeted by a con man. He worked alongside actor Jeff Goldblum (*Independence Day, The Fly, Jurassic Park, Life Aquatic*), who stars as "good guy" Detective Zach Nichols.

Julian described his character as a "regular" kid just like him...well, almost.

"There's this one scene where my mom on the show told me not to pick up the phone, but I did it anyway," Julian said. "That part didn't feel like me because I wouldn't do it if my mom said not to."

His young character also found himself in some dangerous situations, but Julian took it all in stride.

"I remembered the whole time it was fake because the guy who played the bad guy is actually really nice," he said.

This was not the first time Julian has been in front of the camera. His parents, Jeff, a property master, producer, director and actor, and Lorraine, an actress, have both worked in the industry for many years. They even initially met on the movie set of *Men Lie*, which was the first film Mr. Mazzola produced.

Mr. Mazzola has also worked on such popular movies as *Sleepless in Seattle* and *Big*, as well as TV shows "Third Watch" and currently, "Law and Order."

When Julian was 2 years old, he shared camera time with his mom for a TV pilot called "Last Laugh."

"He played my son and was supposed to be in the background," Mrs. Mazzola said. "But he started crying, so I ended up carrying him while on the treadmill and talking on the phone in the scene."

Julian's first speaking role was in the 2008 movie *Harold*, which was co-produced by his dad and starred Cuba Gooding, Jr., Ally Sheedy and Spencer Breslin. His mom also had a role in the film as did his then-3-year-old little sister, Olivia, who made her debut waving in the background of one of his scenes.

And while Mr. Mazzola is currently the property master (respon-

sible for purchasing and manufacturing any props needed) on "Law and Order," Julian still had to audition on his own with all the other actors interested in the role.

"He's been around many films I've produced and directed, so he's experienced being on a set," Mr. Mazzola said. "I think he felt pretty comfortable."

"I was really hoping I would get it," Julian said. "But I knew it's very competitive."

Julian's scenes were shot in New York City last fall, with some re-shoots taking place as recently as May 13.

He said his favorite parts of the experience were the photo shoots around the city and a trip to the Staten Island Zoo.

"We needed pictures of me and my fake mom so they could hang them for the scene in my room," Julian said. "So, we were just running around having fun, and I got to see all these big sculptures that are really cool."

Julian said the retakes were the most challenging.

"It took a really long time to keep doing it over and over," he said. "And half the scene I wasn't even in, so I had to keep going in and out of the building."

At one point in the script where his character was at the zoo, he receives a stuffed cheetah. Julian got to keep the stuffed animal afterwards as a memento, along with some of the clothes his character wore.

The role required Julian to have a work permit and tutor for the approximate eight days he spent on the set.

Town Book Store Runs Last Meet/Greet of Season

WESTFIELD — The Town Book Store in Westfield will host a meet and greet for Joani Ascher, author of "Vengeance Runs Cold: An Avalon Mystery" on Saturday, May 30, from 2 to 4 p.m.

Wally Morris helps her young friend, Paige Griffin, pack up her son and their lives in Manhattan to move to an old mansion on the shores of Lake Champlain.

When Wally boards the train to return to New Jersey, she pushes aside her worries about how they will adjust and wishes her friends well. She has no way of knowing that their new home on the edge of the Adirondacks, owned by Paige's traveling uncle,

"We were lucky he has a great teacher at Franklin," Mr. Mazzola said. "The tutor would speak with her and use the work she gave."

That Franklin teacher, Louise Loffredo, said the class is delighted to have its own "resident actor" in the room. She has also employed Julian's talents to enhance lessons.

"He is a master of accents," Mrs. Loffredo said. "He jumped in wholeheartedly when asked to act out characters from 'Charlotte's Web' or as Ares, God of War, from the 'Trojan Horse.'"

Julian said he's excited to have his teacher and classmates see him on television.

When not acting, Julian enjoys sports like baseball and soccer along with playing the drums.

He hopes to act again in the near future and said when he grows up, he would like to be an actor.

"I would love to be on a kids' TV show that I watch on the Disney Channel or Nickelodeon, like 'The Suite Life of Zack and Cody On Deck,'" he said.

But for now, Julian's content to get ready for his next role at Franklin School. He will be a pirate along with the rest of his third grade classmates as they wrap up a unit of study in June.

"Once again, he's presenting his lines with spark and enthusiasm," Mrs. Loffredo said. "He remains wonderfully humble about his natural talents...and we fully expect to see him at the Academy Awards one day!"

Julian's episode of "Law and Order: Criminal Intent" airs this Sunday, May 31, at 9 p.m. on the USA network.



Westfield's Julian Mazzola on set of "Law & Order" - Article at right

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