



Manhasset Times

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NORTH SHORE**

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ARRESTED IN F.P.**

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Fight against heroin comes to Flower Hill

Village hosts event to prevent drug abuse, raise awareness

BY SARAH
MINKEWICZ

Thomas Ventura was a star athlete at Kings Park High School and dreamed of playing lacrosse in college, but a drug addiction cut his life short.

"We all talk about where addiction ends and mine ended terribly," Thomas's mother, Linda Ventura, told a packed Flower Hill Village Hall last Wednesday.

"We need to talk about where it begins," she said. "And we need to as communities, we need to start putting prevention into place. We need to start empowering our kids at a young age with coping skills with the ability to communicate these types of feelings."

Ventura was joined by Patchogue resident Nora Milligan, Nassau County Detective Pamela Stark, and Anthony Rizutto from Seaford Addiction Facility at a discussion on the rise of heroin and substance abuse on Long Island at an event hosted by the Village of

Flower Hill, the Women's Club of Flower Hill and Manhasset Casa.

Officials said the event was to encourage conversation, promote awareness and find solutions to a growing problem facing Long Island.

Ventura said on March 14, 2012, while on her way to work in New York City, she received the call that her 21-year-old son had died from a heroin overdose.

"My phone rang and it was my youngest son and I can still hear his voice in my head because it was chilling," she said. "He was 18 years old and he found his brother in the bathroom dead from a heroin overdose and he is screaming 'my brother is dead, my brother is dead, Thomas is dead,' and I'm on the Long Island Rail Road."

Ventura said that before her son became addicted to drugs he had bright future, played sports and enjoyed joking around with the family.

"He loved to tease his sister

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John Benvenuto, Supervisor Judi Bosworth and Don Benvenuto with the petition that was circulated to Villa Milano's customers.

Villa Milano serves up support for Sixth Precinct

BY CHRIS ADAMS

Near North Hempstead Town Hall, the Villa Milano Italian restaurant in Manhasset is in the "center of the action," said Donald Benvenuto, the co-owner.

And he was part of the action when he recently collected 350 signatures on a petition opposing the merger of the third

and sixth police precincts.

Since the decision was made in 2012 to merge eight Long Island precincts into four, residents have protested the action, which according to Benvenuto has resulted in underpatrolled neighborhoods.

"This is a neighborhood where everyone is concerned, and being here 31 years I feel a part of committing myself to the

community. We need the police forces," Benvenuto said.

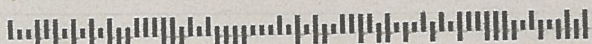
Benvenuto was against consolidating police forces from the start, he said. Since he began the petition, he said, the response from residents has been positive.

"Most of them didn't even know that they had closed the sixth precinct, and they were shocked. [Residents] were very

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Orlando shooter born in New Hyde Park

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reason to believe Mateen coordinated the attack with the Islamic State.

While Seddique Mir Mateen reportedly said "only God can punish homosexuality" in a since-deleted Facebook video, he told NBC News his son's attack "has nothing to do with religion."

"Bigotry, hate, terrorism — they don't have any religion," said Isma Chaudhry, president of the Westbury-based Islamic Center of Long Island. "They do not belong to any ethnicity. It's a disease of the mind and disease of

the heart."

The Mateen family lived in Westbury in the Islamic Center's early years — it was incorporated as a religious organization in 1982 and is now Long Island's largest mosque.

But the family was not active there and no members knew them, Chaudhry said.

"They were not involved in any of the center's activities or community programs, nor were they members, according to our records," said Chaudhry, a Roslyn resident.

As more Muslims moved to Long Island suburbs to raise their children, the mosque that at first had 100 households as members now draws 500 people to each of its two Friday prayer services, Chaudhry said.

Islamic Center leaders and religious figures from other faiths will pray for the victims of Mateen's attack and their families at an interfaith iftar, the meal that breaks Muslims' daytime fast during the holy month of Ramadan, Chaudhry said.

The mosque expects a crowd of about 200 for the 13th annual event, she said.

Villa Milano serves up support for 6th Precinct

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happy to start a petition for the reopening," Benvenuto said.

Benvenuto also received a response from an official involved, when Town of North Hempstead Supervisor Judi Bosworth visited the restaurant to sign and collect the list of signatures, later presenting the petition to the Nassau County Legislature.

"I think it is eye-opening to see how many local residents are unhappy with the sixth precinct merger, especially now that we are seeing the results are not what they expected. The residents of North Hempstead are making it clear that they want it reopened," Bosworth said.

Initially, the merger was proposed to save costs of approximately \$20 million, but four

years later officials including Bosworth are questioning whether it brought the promised savings.

The secretary of the Council of Greater Manhasset Civic Associations, Susan Auriemma, said the merger hasn't led to savings, citing a police shortage which has resulted in a large amount of overtime pay.

"I think it's a matter of time [the precincts are de-merged]. The county needs to admit it was a matter of saving money and they did not meet their objective," Auriemma said.

It is an issue of safety and quality of life for one of the highest tax-paying regions in the country, Auriemma said. In May, Auriemma's organization and the founder and facilitator of the Manhasset Neighborhood Watch Facebook group, Rosanna

Massaro, collected 1,620 verified signatures from residents opposing the merger, with an additional 350 gathered by Benvenuto. Considering the other areas among the eight precincts share unfavorable views about the decision, Auriemma said the response is significant.

"When you multiply that number by eight, that's a loud message that residents are not happy."

The number of resources available in terms of police coverage aren't just spread, but they are also not adequately shared, Auriemma said.

"The third and sixth precincts are unique areas," she said. "They cover a population of 250,000. That's the size of many cities, and you wouldn't see one precinct for an entire city."

The northern section of the third precinct, formerly the sixth, had three detectives, two teams of plain clothes officers, one dedicated vehicle and traffic officer, and four problem-oriented officers stationed locally in its building before the merge. Now there are none stationed in the north, except for two problem-oriented officers, Auriemma said.

However, not every official agrees that the precinct merger has resulted in less effective police coverage.

As reported earlier, Third Precinct Commander John Berry said that crime dropped 4 percent in 2015, and that the same number of patrol cars cover the northern section of the precinct as before the merger.

"We didn't redraw lines," Berry said in February. "The

posts stayed the same as they were before."

The reinstatement of problem-oriented police officers should also create a stronger police presence in the northern communities, Berry said.

Benvenuto said, "As a business owner in today's society, you never know what's going to happen. You never know what will strike at your door, and we have to be concerned as merchants as well for our safety."

Benvenuto said he doesn't consider himself a politician, nor does he often delve into politics, but it's a resident's duty to get involved.

"I just hope that legislators will come to some sort of terms and realize that Manhasset does need a local precinct active," he said.

Fight against heroin abuse comes to Flower Hill

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Jennifer and on one or more occasion tricked her into eating worms," she said.

Ventura said the problems started after her children lost three grandparents and watched their parents get divorced — all within three years.

"That's a lot of trauma for a kid going on the ages of 12 to 15," she said.

Ventura said that because of the stress, her son started to self-medicate with marijuana and eventually turned to heroin.

"You could see the difference in him, I knew immediately," she said.

Although her son attended several outpatient rehabilitation programs, several five-day detox programs and two 28-day inpatient programs, he was not able to beat his addiction, she said.

Ventura said that although she was monitoring her household, she was not able to control what her son was doing at other houses, which she feels happens

often to children that become addicted to substances.

"We all have to start to community parent again," she said. "We need to come back to caring about one another."

To help share her son's story, Ventura founded Thomas' Hope, a nonprofit organization in Kings Park which promotes drug awareness, prevention and advocacy.

At the event, Stark said she's noticed an increase in substance abuse cases around Long Island and that over the past few years the use of prescribed pain killers has gone up.

"I'm not going after all doctors, I'm just saying that I do know we have an epidemic here that is riveting our country," she said.

Stark discussed a Long Island couple David Laffer and Melinda Brady who became addicted to pain killers.

In 2011, Laffer shot four people at Haven pharmacy in Medford on Father's Day while robbing the pharmacy for prescription pills.



Residents attend a substance abuse and awareness event held last Wednesday at Flower Hill Village Hall.

"I have to tell you, most people don't get to that point but these people did, right here on Long Island," she said.

Stark said that after this incident, people on Long Island started to take notice and realize that something had to be done.

Stark said Nassau County has programs in place to help people who are suffering from substance abuse. These programs include a statewide system for tracking prescriptions of controlled substances to reduce their misuse and diversion and to cut overdoses.

Stark said in addition to the program, all Nassau County police officers have been trained to use Narcan, a brand of the opioid overdose antidote naloxone hydrochloride, in response to a call involving an overdose.