

WINNERS

HILARY JM TOPPER
President, CEO

Hilary JM Topper, of Merrick, has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Public Relations Professionals of Long Island. Topper is president and CEO of Long Beach-based HJMT Public Relations, a public relations and social media marketing firm that she started out of her one-bedroom apartment in 1992. Today the firm has nearly 25 staffers and client revenues that exceed \$1.5 million. Her other achievements include founding the Social Media Association and authoring books and articles for public relations trade journals. She also runs a lifestyle blog on her personal website, as well as a podcast called "Hilary Topper on Air."



HILARY JM TOPPER

AGUSTIN BEAS ROMERO
Student

Agustin Beas Romero, of Brentwood, has received a 2024 State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence. Romero will graduate this month with a Bachelor of Arts in Biological Sciences from SUNY Old Westbury, where he has been on the Dean's List and is a member of Tau Sigma, a national honor society recognizing academic excellence among transfer students. He is also a member of the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program and volunteers at the Smithtown Gospel Tabernacle, where he is part of the Medical Emergency Response Team.



VALERIE CAVINESS

COLETTE VAUGHAN
Student

Colette Vaughan, of Franklin Square, has received a 2024 State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence. Vaughan is a psychology major at SUNY Old Westbury who will graduate this month. She is a member of the Omicron Delta Kappa National Honor Society and Tau Sigma, a national honor society recognizing academic excellence among transfer students. She was also the keynote speaker at the university's The Dream.US Scholarship award ceremony, and has had her work published in the English department's scholarly journal, *Discordia*.



VALERIE CAVINESS

— MICHAEL EBERT

NOMINATE A WINNER Email information about the accomplishment or honor to winners@newsday.com. Include photo in JPEG format; color is preferred.

MAKING THE GRADE

72 LI districts honored for music education

BY MICHAEL R. EBERT
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Seventy-two Long Island school districts have been recognized for their commitment and access to music education.

The districts are among 975 nationwide named Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation, which strives to advance music participation by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs. The award celebrates efforts to make music part of a well-rounded education.

The selected districts are Amityville; Bay Shore; Bayport-Blue Point; Bellmore; Bellmore-Merrick; Bethpage; Carle Place; Central Islip; Cold Spring Harbor; Commack; Comsewogue; Connetquot; Deer Park; East Hampton; East Islip; East Meadow; East Moriches; East Rockaway; Elwood; Farmingdale; Franklin Square; Freeport; Garden City; Glen Cove; Great Neck; Half Hollow Hills; Hampton Bays; Harborfields; Hempstead; Herricks; Hewlett-Woodmere; Hicksville; Island Trees; Jericho; Lawrence; Levittown; Lindenhurst; Locust Valley; Long Beach; Longwood; Lynbrook; Malverne; Manhasset; Massapequa; Merrick; Miller Place; Mineola; New Hyde

Park-Garden City Park; North Babylon; North Shore; Northport-East Northport; Ocean-side; Oyster Bay-East Norwich; Plainedge; Plainview-Old Bethpage; Port Jefferson; Port Washington; Riverhead; Rockville Centre; Rocky Point; Sayville; Seaford; Shoreham-Wading River; Southampton; South Country; South Huntington; Syosset; Valley Stream 13; Valley Stream Central; Wantagh; West Islip and William Floyd.

"This recognition is a testament of our community's commitment to music education and our dedicated music educators who have continued to inspire our talented students," said Chad Wyman, supervisor of fine arts for the Hicksville school district, which earned the designation for the ninth consecutive year.

BETHPAGE/SYOSSET JAPAN ESSAY WINNERS

Two Long Island students — Anderson Maziero of Bethpage High School and Marisa Yamamoto of Syosset High School — were among the winners of the Japan Center at Stony Brook's 19th Annual Japan Center Essay Competition, which received 233 entries and required the discussion of one or more aspects of Japanese culture based on personal experiences.

Maziero placed second and



PORT JEFFERSON SCHOOL DISTRICT

In Port Jefferson, children at Edna Louise Spear Elementary School interact with high school musicians. The district was one of those recognized for its music education.

won \$1,500 for his essay, "The Sound of Drums Behind a Stage," while Yamamoto won the \$1,000 Uchida Memorial Award, dedicated to former Canon U.S.A. CEO Kinya Uchida, for her essay, "Sparks of Identity." Winners also received products from Canon U.S.A., whose Canon Americas headquarters is in Melville. In his essay, Maziero wrote of playing Japanese percussion instruments: "Being a relatively soft-spoken and shy person, I never had an interest in the stage, but the push

that taiko gave me helped me take the chance and explore what once felt impossible to me."

GREAT NECK JEWISH KNOWLEDGE CHAMP

Naomi Cohen, a fourth-grader at Elizabeth M. Baker Elementary School in Great Neck, won the top trophy in April at the International Jewish Knowledge Championship, a spelling bee-style competition that covered topics related to Jewish tradition and culture. It was coordinated by CKids:

Chabad Children's Network.

To win, Naomi first competed in regional semifinals before advancing to the championship in Connecticut. In total, she outlasted more than 4,000 students from 25 countries.

"Naomi's mastery of the material . . . is not just a personal milestone but a source of immense pride for our entire community," said Rabbi Zalman Baumgarten of Chabad of Great Neck Hebrew School, which Naomi also attends.

WESTHAMPTON BEACH TOP BUSINESS PLAN

A Westhampton Beach High School team placed fifth nationwide and was the top-placing team statewide at Virtual Enterprise International's National Business Plan Competition, which challenged teams to present proposed business plans. Westhampton Beach's team had presented plans for a cybersecurity training business, Soteria.

The competition, held in April, featured 40 teams at the Javits Center in Manhattan. To reach the national level, the team was among 133 groups to showcase their businesses in January during Virtual Enterprise International's Long Island Regional Conference and Exhibition. Semifinals were held in February.