

NEIGHBORS

Helping parents in their darkest days

Name: Laura Crandall**Age:** 39**Hometown:** Upper Montclair

Achievement: Crandall was nominated for Glamour magazine's Woman of the Year award for 2007. She also was selected for the next phase of the competition and was one of 10 finalists, chosen by a team of editors. The recognition comes for her work with SUDC (Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood). The admission came from her teenage baby sitter and Chelsea Hilbert, co-founder and co-director of the CJ Foundation for SUDC.

The cause: On July 30, 1997, Crandall's 1-year-old daughter, Maria, took a nap and never woke up. The medical examiner was unable to determine the cause of death, and couldn't provide any answers. There were resources for SIDS — Sudden Infant Death Syndrome — but nothing for toddlers because it is such a rare occurrence. SUDC is a condition that occurs in children more than 12 months old. It is so uncommon that one in every 100,000 toddlers die from it.

In 1999, Crandall met with state Senate President Richard Codey to discuss toddler deaths. That meeting resulted in two pieces of legislation. She later met with Henry Krous, a pediatric pathologist and researcher at Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego. He works on numerous research projects that are geared toward helping infants and toddlers. Crandall, along with a team of researchers, continues to try to solve the problem.

Crandall then approached the CJ Foundation for SIDS. She became the co-founder and co-di-



rector at the CJ Foundation for the SUDC. The program is affiliated with the CJ Foundation for SIDS at Hackensack University Medical Center. It provides families and professionals with resources, information, support and advocacy. She says she is "touched by the support" of her family, friends and community.

Helping others overcome hardship: Crandall has been involved with helping "over 275 families that have lost a child." The SUDC research project has published several research papers and medical literature since 2001. She says there is still no evidence that suggests why this can happen to a toddler.

"Over 90 children have been studied to date," said Crandall. Her goal is to help families so they won't be alone in their time of need. It is important to her to help supply more information and find an answer to why her child died.

Other involvement: Crandall also works part time as a physical therapist at the Kessler Institute

for Rehabilitation in West Orange.

Long-term interests: She wants to see her "other three daughters grow up to be happy and healthy." Crandall also would like to help find a cure for SUDC.

She is happiest when ... She enjoys spending quality time with her family. Crandall especially likes when she is with her "husband and kids outdoors."

Proudest accomplishments: Crandall is proud of the "SUDC program and seeing that it has helped people in their darkest times." She also likes the fact that she is successfully balancing her life with charitable endeavors.

Interests: Crandall "loves sports." Her favorite activities are soccer, running, swimming and participating in triathlons. She wants to travel to different parts of the world that she has never seen before.

Family: Husband, Josh, 42; daughters, Maria, 11; Lily, 9; Abigail, 7; and Grace, 5.

— Kimberly Williams

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MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS

Livingston teen honored for work at Y

MARGARET MAKAC
16, Livingston

Educational background

Margaret is a junior at Livingston High School.

Achievement

She recently received the Russell Colgate Youth of the Year Award from the Metropolitan YMCA of the Oranges. Margaret was presented with the award during a luau-themed gala at Mayfair Farms in West Orange. "It was a nice feeling when I heard how children love the YMCA," Margaret said.

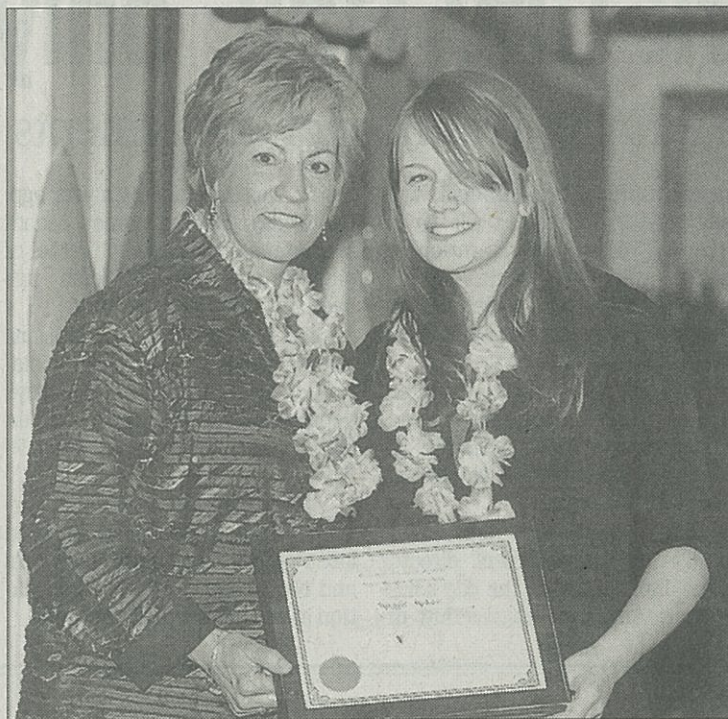
This award is given to one member of each of the five metro YMCA branches. At the West Essex chapter in Livingston, Margaret is a certified lifeguard and member of the aquatics department. She contributes to this organization by providing group and private lessons as lead swim instructor. Margaret also thrives in academia and provides outstanding service to the community.

Spotlight on success

Margaret says upon arriving at work one day, her supervisor called her into his office. At that point, he sat her down and told her that she would be receiving the Youth of the Year award. With working seven days a week, she explained the YMCA is her second home and everyone is like family to her.

Proudest endeavor

She is elated that she won the



Helen Flores, left, executive director of the West Essex YMCA, gives the Russell Colgate Youth of the Year Award from the Metropolitan YMCA of the Oranges to Margaret Makac, a junior at Livingston High School.

award. She says this event was important to her because she received the award during her first year of service. It is also meaningful because her older brother also received it. "I felt like I really made a place there. Everyone showed their appreciation," Margaret said.

Seeking to serve

Margaret is a member of a youth group at St. Philomena par-

ish in Livingston, where she works on projects with her group. She volunteers in a soup kitchen in Newark every month and also helps to raise funds for charities by chipping in with a twice yearly car wash. Part of the proceeds go to organizations such as Make-A-Wish and Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundations. Funds are also allocated for a group ski trip, where she learns valuable drills that are applied towards future

projects. "The trip always turns into a life lesson and helps me see things in a different way," Margaret added.

Beyond tomorrow

After high school, Margaret plans to attend Montclair State University, where she will major in early childhood education. Her focal point of study will be grades K-5. Her passion for teaching came into play while working at the YMCA. "I fell in love with kids," she said. "I really want to go into teaching."

Most memorable quote

Margaret's favorite quote is by Albert Schweitzer: "Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."

A good read

Margaret enjoys reading "The Giving Tree," by Shel Silverstein. "I like this book because it's about making someone happy," she said, noting that although it is a book for children, it teaches wonderful lessons about selflessness. While growing up, various people in her life devoted themselves to making sure she was happy. Now, her goal is to extend the favor by bringing happiness to the lives of others.

Family

Mother, Barbara, 56; brother, Thomas, 22.

— Kimberly Williams

MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS

Short Hills woman helps give the gift of sight — for 40 years

ANN HUMPHREY

73, Short Hills

Achievement

She has volunteered at New Eyes for the Needy in Millburn for more than 40 years. Humphrey moved up the ranks and has held numerous positions with the charity, including becoming vice president in 1973 and president in 1975. She has been an assistant treasurer for the past 30 years.

"I take great satisfaction in knowing I am doing something for other people," Humphrey said.

Finding new eyes

While living in New York City, she listened to the radio and heard an advertisement for New Eyes for the Needy. Determined to help the less fortunate, she sent glasses to the organization. In 1966, she moved from New York to Short Hills, and to her surprise she did not live far from New Eyes for the Needy. Her children were just starting school and Humphrey had free time on her hands. She decided to volunteer at New Eyes for the Needy, which dates to 1967.

"I love what the organization does and what they stand for," she said.

Giving the gift of sight

New Eyes for the Needy, which began in 1932, purchases eyeglasses for less fortunate men, women and children in the United States. The organization also recycles glasses that are donated and has distributed them to other nations. It only takes \$60 for New Eyes for the Needy to give the gift of sight, by purchasing a pair of glasses for someone.

Love thy neighbor

Her charitable efforts don't end with New Eyes for the Needy. She



"I have been a steady volunteer my whole adult life," says Ann Humphrey of Short Hills. "It is very important for people to give back to the communities they live in."

also volunteers at Community Congregational Church in Short Hills. Her posts include being involved with the buildings and grounds committee, rummage sales, antique shows and being on the board of trustees. She is also a volunteer for the TWIG program at Overlook Hospital. This program enables Humphrey to help raise money for the hospital through fundraisers.

"I have been a steady volunteer my whole adult life," she said. "It is very important for people to give back to the communities they live in."

Connection is key

Staying in touch with family and friends is very important to her. "I have five children and 11 grandchildren, ranging from ages 3 to 18," Humphrey said. "I try very hard to stay in touch with loved ones."

Humphrey maintains connection with her loved ones by visiting, sending e-mails, and calling

them on the phone.

Proudest milestones

Her most memorable moments have been raising a family and seeing everyone grow up and become gainfully employed. All of her children are married with families of their own. "I believe if you can get to that point in life, it certainly is an accomplishment," she said.

Enjoying everyday life

Humphrey's spare time activities and interests include golfing, reading and traveling. She says her main hobby is golfing. "My father was a golf pro. I grew up around golf courses in North Carolina," she said.

Family

Husband, Hank, 70; son, Jim, 47; daughter, Elizabeth, 46; son, Andy, 45; son, Chip, 43; daughter, Missy, 40.

— Kimberly Williams

NEIGHBORS

High-achieving ECC graduate is on a fast track

Name: Bertheleau Ngakam

Age: 30

Hometown: Born in Cameroon, he lives in Newark.

Education: On June 3, Ngakam graduated with a 4.0 grade-point average from Essex County College. He was also valedictorian at the commencement. He earned an associate in science degree with a concentration in biology pre-medicine.

Achievement: After enrolling in ECC in the spring of 2005, Ngakam was named to the All-USA Community College Academic First Team, which is sponsored by USA Today and Phi Theta Kappa, the two-year college honor society. It was through Phi Theta Kappa that Ngakam learned he was eligible for this life-altering program.

About the team: Every academic school year, community colleges across the nation nominate two students with the highest achievements. There are several deciding factors in choosing a nominee, including GPA, extracurricular activities and community service. The nominations go to Phi Theta Kappa headquarters and are entered in a pool of about 1,600 people. One hundred students are selected from the pool, then broken into first, second and third teams.

Ngakam was named to the first team



SARAH RICE/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

in March and was accompanied by ECC President Zachary A. Yamba to an awards ceremony sponsored by the American Association of Community Colleges in Tampa, Fla., on April 16. There he won a medal, trophy and a check for \$2,500 from USA Today. He was also featured in the newspaper.

Long-term goals: Ngakam sees himself studying biological research and hopes

to earn a doctorate in that field. He also wants to make a difference in his native country and around the world. His ideal career would be working for the United Nations on public health in developing countries.

Ngakam is motivated to set goals for himself and meet them. He describes himself as a person who handles adversity well.

Working with youth: Last summer Ngakam worked with ECC's Summer Youth Program as a Project Grad mentor. The program is held in two, three-week installments and sponsored by the Office of On-Campus Continuing Education. It offers enrichment classes to children about to enter first through sixth grades. This year, Ngakam will work with the Bridge program, which starts Monday. He will assist high school students with math and English to prepare them for college-level courses.

Why help others?: He helps others because a lot of people need it. "People can do more if they have a little support," Ngakam said.

Other honors: While in college, he was president of the Student Government Association, executive officer of the African Student Association and Governor's Appointee to the New Jersey Student Advisory Committee. He also tutored students in biology, chemistry and math at the Learning Center.

Proudest moments: "Everything that was accomplished from 2005-2007," Ngakam said, noting that he is also proud that he graduated from college.

Leisure time: Ngakam enjoys playing tennis and soccer when he gets the chance.

Family: His mother, Christine Youmbi, 54, lives in Africa.

— Kimberly Williams

NEIGHBORS

Scouting's her lifelong adventure

Name: A. Virginia Dietz

Age: 84

Hometown: Maplewood

Education: She graduated from Berkeley Secretarial School, now Berkeley College.

Achievement: Dietz's volunteer efforts earned her a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Girl Scout Council of Greater Essex and Hudson Counties. She has volunteered 55 years of community service to the council and was formally recognized at the 15th annual Women of Distinction gala on April 11.

"I like to stay busy with people doing things that are worthwhile," said Dietz, who comes from five generations of Girl Scouts.

Service that spans decades: She became involved with Girl Scouting for a short period while in the seventh grade. But she continuously volunteered with the council following her daughter's participation as a Brownie in Troop 43, which dates back to 1953.

Her roles included being the secretary and first vice president of the board of directors, council nominating committee member, troop leader, assistant troop leader, service unit manager, service team member and long-range planning committee member. Dietz was also the chairwoman of the 25th anniversary celebration of the council's consolidation in 1984, Maplewood Mariner leader and skipper for Senior Troop 514.



Rewarding experiences: Dietz previously received the Thanks Badge and Thanks Badge II. "It's the highest award you can get as a volunteer," she said. Her service unit also honored her with the Statuette Award. Plus Dietz was the recipient of the District Service Award and the Girl Scout Pewter Plate.

Her accolades don't end with Girl Scouting; she also won the Maple Leaf Award from the Maplewood Civic Association and the Phoebe and Benjamin Shackelford Outstanding Volunteer Award, which was presented by the Community Service Council of the Oranges.

The gift that keeps on giving: Her charitable contributions extend beyond Girl Scouting. She, along with her husband, was involved with the Boy Scouts. Her

role involved being a den mother for her son's Cub pack as well as a troop committee member for Troop 24.

Happiness is . . . : Dietz enjoys spending time with her family at her beach house in Sea Bright. There she occupies her time with her 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

"I always want to do things with my children," she said.

The joys of life: "I am happy to have married my husband and have children," said Dietz, noting that she delights in her families' accomplishments. "They graduated from college and are successful business people."

But Dietz says she is mostly proud of her children for being the individuals they are.

Living a colorful life: Her interests include playing bridge, mah-jong, writing music, playing the piano, reading biographical novels, completing crossword puzzles, swimming and watching the popular game show "Jeopardy!" Although she has many pastimes, Dietz says playing music and swimming are her favorites.

She is also a member of the Prospect Presbyterian Church Choir in Maplewood and been a member of the Woman's Club of Maplewood for more than 10 years.

Family: Husband, the late William A. Dietz; daughters, Virginia A. Stoehr, 62, and the late Linda P. King; sons Alvin W. Dietz and Andrew E. Dietz, both 56.

— Kimberly Williams