

Madison Eagle

newjerseyhills.com

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2022

\$2.50

Family-Owned Businesses
• Special Section Inside



'Add to the world's good:'
Drew graduates Class of 2022 • 8

☒ Sign up for daily email
alerts at madisoneagle.com



From left, Jerry, Lynne and Bret Harmen of Madison Photo Plus on Main Street pose for a photo inside the shop.

'MEMORY MERCHANTS'

Photo shop celebrates 75 years on Main Street

By ALEX PARKER-MAGYAR
MANAGING EDITOR

MADISON - The way Jerry Harmen sees it, he and his family are in the memory business.

All manner of cameras and related equipment fill the walls and display cases of their longtime Main Street shop, Madison Photo Plus, but at the end of the day, those are just tools, he says. The ultimate product that the camera and print shop has been selling for decades is what those tools convey.

"Photography is a way of taking memories and stowing them away for others, so that they can be communicated somewhere else, to someone else," Harmen says. "We are memory merchants, when you get down to it. We sell memories; we sell how to keep those memories to make them look as good for as long as possible."

That knowledge, he says, combined with the shop's relationship with its customers, is what has kept the business going for three-quarters of a century.

Madison Photo Plus celebrated its 75th anniversary with a weekend of giveaways and special promotions from Friday to Sunday, May 6 to 8. Town officials stopped by to present the Harmens with a proclamation recognizing the camera and print shop's longevity and service to the community.

Harmen runs the store with his wife Lynne, son Bret and a staff that includes many longtime employees. He said the shop

saw many familiar faces over the anniversary weekend, which makes sense when one considers the fact that Madison Photo Plus is now serving fifth-generation customers.

As a camera store, the shop at 40 Main St. attracts people with a passion for photography from across the area, but also many more people looking to custom print, frame, preserve, restore and enlarge their photos, among other film and digital services.

"The business has been built on the belief that the people who walk through the door are more important than any of the things we sell or do," he said in a Friday, May 13 interview at the shop.

"The greatest achievement that we can have is that for anything that we can do, anything that we can sell, a customer would not consider going anywhere else."

From Film To Digital And Back Again

Jerry Harmen came to the business in 1969 as an undergraduate studying psychology at Drew University.

He said he worked at the store "for as many hours as I could" over the next several years, learning to treat customers with respect from former shop owner Jim Abramson and his wife, Ermine, who had helped to convert the store into a photo shop in 1947.

Harmen fell in love with the business, and though he was now pursuing a

PLEASE SEE PHOTO, PAGE 6



Photo by Judi Whiting

GREEN THUMBS

Scarlett Hamilton, left, and Vivian Mazzacano, both 8, of Madison, tend to the garden in front of Central Avenue School during the May Day in Madison town-wide cleanup on Saturday morning, May 14. The two are wearing their 2022 May Day in Madison T-shirts, its design crafted by another local 8-year-old, Central Avenue School third grader Lucia Reilly. Please see a photo gallery from the event on Page 12.

Long road ahead for Route 24 ramp plan

By ALEX PARKER-MAGYAR
MANAGING EDITOR

A proposed Route 24 ramp on Park Avenue would seek to reduce accidents and slowdowns at the Columbia Turnpike-Park Avenue intersection, but neighboring residents worry the plan would worsen congestion on Park and its side streets.

More than 50 people attended a public information session on the tentative proposal Tuesday evening, which was hosted by Morris County officials over a videoconferencing app. The vast majority of those who spoke were Morris Township residents

who live in the neighborhoods bordering Park Avenue between Punch Bowl Road and Columbia Road.

The county project, which would be years and several rounds of approval away from coming to fruition, would add a new two-way ramp for Route 24 East between the Park Place office complex and Hyatt House Morristown Hotel. The ramp would create a new T intersection on Park Avenue almost across the street from Prescott Road, though it may be moved closer to the hotel.

The goal of the project is to eliminate a dangerous traffic movement from the existing Route 24 East off-

ramp on Columbia Turnpike, in which drivers exiting the highway are made to cross two and three lanes of traffic if they want to turn left onto Park Avenue.

That off-ramp would remain in place, but a curbed island would prevent drivers from crossing over into the left lanes. Drivers bound for Park Avenue southbound would instead be encouraged to take the new ramp a few hundred feet down the highway onto Park.

The existing on-ramp from the eastbound side of Columbia Turnpike to Route 24 East, meanwhile, would be removed, as those drivers would be directed

to enter the highway from the new ramp off Park Avenue. A second right-turn lane would also be added to the Columbia Turnpike-Park Avenue intersection, encouraging drivers coming from the Morristown area to turn right onto Park Avenue toward the ramp.

Morris County Engineer Christopher Vitz said drivers who exit Route 24 East at Columbia Turnpike today have 650 feet from the end of the ramp to the left turn on Park Avenue.

"You'd need about double that distance for it to be a safe area to make that

PLEASE SEE RAMP, PAGE 6

FAMILY, FRIENDS, 5K



Madison friends Alice Corley, left, and Nora Fountaine, both 7, hold hands as they set out on the Madison Area YMCA's "The Mind Matters" one-mile fun run Sunday, May 15 on Keep Street. Please read more about the family-friendly event on Page 11.



NEW JERSEY HILLS
MEDIA GROUP ©2022

One-year subscription
in Morris County: \$110.
Out-of-area subscription
rates available upon request.

INSIDE

Calendar	16	Opinion	4
Crossword	2	Public Notices	17
Obituaries	7	Sports	9-10

VOL. 141 NO. 17

CALL US

News: (908) 766-3900 ext. 226
Classifieds: (800) 624-3684
Advertising: (908) 766-3900
To subscribe: (908) 766-6960

Publication USPS 325-040

Never Priced
Over MSRP

Flemington
Audi

213 Route 202 South, Flemington, NJ • 888-539-3569 • FlemingtonAudi.com

Audi

Audi
Magna Society Elite

SUBSCRIBE
908-766-6960

PHOTO: Industry changes, but Madison Photo Plus remains

FROM PAGE 1

master's degree, he became disenchanted with the idea of being a school psychologist. He became the Abramsons' person of choice to take over when Mr. Abramson fell ill. He and Lynne purchased the shop in 1975, about a month before Mr. Abramson would pass away.

"I had never had a business course, never had any financial training. I was going by the seat of my pants," he said. "But, with the help of my wife and other family, we made it what it is today."

The store would move to its current, larger location in 1993, and absorbed the services, merchandise and customers of a former sister store in Summit in 2020.

Operating in the photography industry for so many years, Madison Photo Plus has had to adapt many times over, particularly in the past two decades.

Harmen, who lives with Lynne in Whippany, said the biggest revolution came in the early 2000s, when the longtime business of film processing and printing "went away over the course of basically a year" with the rise of digital cameras.

"When it was film-based photography, you could count on the customer coming in three times: the first time to buy the film, the second time to drop the film off and the third time to pick it up. That changed to zero," he said.

What was once a steady stream of hundreds of rolls of film coming through the store daily tapered off into two or three a day, he said. The store began selling products and offering services it never had before to survive. "There were many innovations and a very confused public at the time of the transformation," said Harmen, "but we looked at that

as an opportunity because we had to continue the memories of our customers."

The next revolution came about 10 or 15 years ago when the spread of smartphones put a camera in everybody's pocket. Harmen said the business ultimately adapted by growing and emphasizing its photo storage services and hardware, something people began to appreciate after they realized the cloud wasn't always the safest place to store their photos.

The shop offers customers the security of having their photos stored on CDs, DVDs, flash drives and hard drives – "whatever a customer would like, because we want to continue to stress that permanence. Nobody that I know takes a picture for the satisfaction of pushing the shutter button. They all do it as a way to communicate and save a memory."

Madison Photo Plus has thrived by expanding the right services at the right time. The shop has also persevered long enough to effectively wait out changes in the industry. Harmen said it took a generation-and-a-half for people to start printing photos again, a service that today is a major part of Madison Photo Plus' business. He said advances in technology made printing easy and affordable to do in-house, and the shop now makes prints as large as 44-by-90 inches.

In addition, for the first time in some 20 years, people are discovering film again. Young people who never knew the medium are experiencing it for the first time, Harmen said. Disposable and polaroid cameras are now hits with teenagers.

Harmen says the shop during the past two years has sold more used 35-millimeter cameras than

it has digital cameras. Film manufacturers the world over are scrambling to keep up with the soaring demand, a demand that has people of all ages discovering camera shops like Madison Photo Plus.

"The cameras and the film are tools," Harmen reminded. "Yes, they follow fads and trends, but they're still tools. The memories are what's important."

Madison Photo Plus was also ready when the 2020 COVID-19 shutdown gave people more free time for household and personal projects. The shop digitized many customers' photo prints and slides in those months.

Harmen said one customer brought in three full SUV loads of photo prints for digitization. Others brought in more than 10,000 images for the store to transfer; in some cases trusting the shop to care for images that were more than a century old.

The pandemic also allowed Madison Photo Plus to move in the merchandise from the Summit store, which it had previously decided to close in the spring of 2020. Harmen said the Madison shop was busier then, and is busier now, than the two stores combined before the pandemic.

The Future

Harmen says the shop is now the only full-service camera store left in Morris County, meaning walk-in customers are coming from as far away as Bergen, Passaic and Middlesex counties. People who have moved out of state and fourth- and fifth-generation customers send Madison Photo Plus their digital files for printing.

Harmen said the shop no lon-

ger has any direct competitors in the area.

"We have other stores that compete in certain areas, but not as far as doing it all and doing it the way our customers want it done. Seventy-five years is a good testament to doing it that way."

Harmen says he and his wife are getting ready to retire, but the business is in good hands with their son, Bret, who was instrumental in running the Summit store for years after a decade at Fujifilm.

The younger Harmen shares his parents' philosophy, which they in turn learned from the Abramsons. He said the company is excited for the future.

"It's not easy to keep a family-run small business open this long, but you can do it as long as you take care of your customers and take care of your staff," he said.

His father noted that with all the changes in the industry, the core of what Madison Photo Plus provides hasn't changed. "The people who walk through the doors are the most important thing," he said. "If you don't look at your business as selling merchandise, but working with people's memories, you get to know the people and their families and you form relationships that last for years."

Madison Photo Plus will continue to host special drawings throughout its 75th year. The shop will also host a "photo field trip" in the Drew Forest at 12:30 p.m. Sunday, June 12. To register for the event, visit <https://tinyurl.com/4bs6er3j>. To learn more about Madison Photo Plus, visit www.madisonphoto.com.

Florham Park Little League official stole \$30K, police say

FLORHAM PARK - A borough man faces theft and fraud charges after allegedly stealing more than \$30,000 from the Florham Park Little League.

The man, Daniel Raczynski, 40, allegedly committed the crimes while serving as the league's treasurer.

The league filed a complaint with the Florham Park Police Department on Feb. 22, after observing numerous suspicious transactions and significant missing funds uncovered while preparing its upcoming tax return documents, according to a press release Tuesday from the police department.

Detective Frank Pietropinto conducted an investigation and, while working with Florham Park Little League Board members, discovered more than \$30,000 was stolen from the league's checking and savings accounts between about October 2019 and January 2022 by Raczynski, their treasurer; police said.

After a thorough analysis of the official records by Pietropinto, as well as attempts between the Florham Park Little League and the suspect to mediate the situation amongst themselves being unsuccessful, the investigation concluded with the arrest and charging of Raczynski.

Police said Raczynski surrendered himself at Florham Park Police headquarters for processing on Wednesday, April 25. He was charged on a criminal complaint summons with third-degree theft by unlawful taking and third-degree fraudulent use of a credit or debit card.

He was released on his own recognizance pending a Superior Court appearance in Morristown.

RAMP: Morris Township neighbors not on board with proposal

FROM PAGE 1

maneuver," he said. "... It was just a problem with the design from the start."

A state Department of Transportation (DOT) study found that there were 34 crashes at that turn between 2011 and 2013, or more than 10 each year, largely due to the weaving movement from the off-ramp. Vitz said just five crashes in a given year is usually enough to merit improvements to an intersection.

The project proposal, which was designed by the DOT, would decrease delays and enhance public safety at the intersection, Vitz said.

He said peak-hour delays of 274 seconds from the off-ramp to the left turn onto Park Avenue would be reduced to 82 seconds. With less congestion in the intersection due to traffic being pushed down to the new ramps, he said drivers turning left onto Columbia toward Morristown from Park Avenue would see delays re-

duced from 418 seconds to 75 seconds during peak hours.

He noted fewer drivers would turn right from Park Avenue onto Columbia Turnpike with the existing Route 24 East on-ramp removed.

"With the addition of this new ramp system, it takes that traffic out of the Columbia and Park intersection and diverts it sooner," he said. "So that really does help decrease the delays at the intersection."

Several residents would

weigh in later, saying that the project would only shift this congestion not far down the road on Park Avenue at the new intersection.

Morris County is seeking support for the proposal from the governing bodies of Florham Park, Hanover Township, Madison and Morris Township. County officials discussed the proposal on April 2 with the mayors of those towns, several of whom then asked the county to present it to residents in the public information session, according to Vitz.

On top of buy-in from the towns and the public, Vitz said the project is dependent on state funding and the county acquiring the land for the new ramps from the property owner of the Park Place complex, among other concerns. He said condemnation of privately owned land is typically a "last resort" for Morris County if negotiations are unsuccessful.

Vitz noted the DOT study did not vet the impact of the project on nearby private properties and neighborhoods, nor environmental concerns. He said these impacts would be investigated in the next phase of the project, the preliminary engineering phase. Should the process move forward, he said, there will be many public meetings to come.

Morris County Assistant Administrator Deena Leary, who co-hosted the presentation with Vitz, said the county is "confident that we will be able to access federal funds for the next phase of work if the municipalities support

the county further exploring the improvements through preliminary engineering."

Residents Call For Traffic Solutions

Many of the residents who spoke live in the Morris Township neighborhoods that are roughly across the street from the proposed ramp location, including Prescott Road, Delaware Road and Arrowhead Road.

The neighborhoods are already frequented by commuters using their streets as cut-through roads, they said, and the Park Avenue ramp would make the problem worse.


Stephen Huling said he lives two houses up from Park Avenue on Delaware Road.

"Every afternoon between 4 and 6, on many occasions, there are queues of five to 10 cars lined up in front of my house, waiting to turn left onto Park Avenue to get onto 24," he said. "I don't see that this proposal will make this any better"

"We already have a documented cut-through issue, as does Prescott Road," added Thomas Kelly of Arrowhead Road. "With 8,000 vehicles daily, it looks pretty attractive as a cut-through to utilize Delaware Road. I think that's unacceptable."

Several other residents said the change in the traffic pattern would lead to more drivers using their streets and driveways for U-turns.

Many of the residents who spoke offered alternatives to fix the area's traffic woes – additional interchanges along the highway, a relocation of the proposed ramp to the



You're Holding History In Your Hands

Did you know that the events of 100 years ago can still be found in New Jersey Hills Media Group's newspapers? Or that the lifespan of an average web page is, at best, 100 days? Newspapers like the one you're reading have a centuries-old tradition of preserving history for generations. They are a permanent record unmatched by any other medium.

It's the same with public notices. Records of what public officials did - as recorded by their own hand - can still be found in the pages of old newspapers. Bids, zoning, changes, ordinances - hundreds of notices that let us monitor what our government is doing with our resources.

Our history is too important to trust to anything temporary. Keep the records of your government in the most permanent medium available - newspapers.

It's your history. Keep it safe.

www.madisoneagle.com

EARLY DEADLINE NOTICE

For June 2nd Papers

In Honor of the Memorial Day Holiday, our display advertising deadline for June 2nd papers will be Thursday, May 26th at 2pm

The Real Estate display and classified real estate in-line deadline will be Thursday, May 26th at 5pm

The classified display deadline will be Tuesday, May 31st at 10am

The Public Notice deadline for all newspapers will be Friday, May 27th at Noon