

WOODBURY'S HOMETOWN HISTORY MAKERS AND TRENDSETTERS

Our article will focus on both an organization and an individual:

Special Events for Special Kids- *SE4SK*



On January 15, 2022 both city and county officials had the pleasure of participating in the Ribbon Cutting event for Special Events for Special Kids (**SE4SK**) now located at 22 Dickerson Street, Woodbury NJ. (Director Frank J. DiMarco, Commissioner Jim

Jefferson, Mayor Peg Sickel, Councilwoman Danielle Carter, Councilwoman Donna Miller, Councilwoman Karlene O'Connor and Miss Coastal Shore Gabrielle Allen). This amazing non-profit hosts events for special children between the ages of 3 and 17. Its scope of influence spans far beyond Woodbury. Dedicated clients traveled from various parts of New Jersey and even Delaware in order to celebrate this momentous day.



COUNCILWOMAN O'CONNOR'S HISTORY CORNER

What started as an effort to fill a need for a family friend, has blossomed into a successful organization bringing joy and encouragement to many families near and far. Its founder, Jami Saraullo, explained that she attended elementary school in Woodbury. Therefore, this location has more significance. *Jami said, "I was very excited about making our [organization's] home here. We have felt so welcomed in our short time here. They say it takes a village. So, we work really hard to support our families and our community."* After meeting Jami and her clientele, I had to share the history of SE4SK with everyone.

Let's start at the beginning. Jami actually lived in Woodbury from age 3 through 6th grade. She was raised by a single mother who encouraged her to walk in kindness and charity toward others. A principal which she has diligently worked to instill in both of her own children Jarriid and Alyssia. Many years of volunteering for her children's youth sports teams helped her to develop a love for photography which she still uses today. She is the volunteer sports photographer for her children's alma mater, Gateway Regional High School.

This commitment to our local youth is the driving factor which ignited her interest in creating SE4SK. Jami explained that her daughter, Alyssa's friend had a younger brother with Down syndrome named Logan. "At the time, I was a volunteer at a Lodge which was looking for someone to take over their Special Needs program. Because Logan loved to dance, Alyssia had been asking if we could have a dance for him. When I asked the lodge to donate the hall for a dance for children with special needs, they agreed!"

Alyssa and Jami immediately reached out through social media for both donations and volunteers. They swiftly received all they needed to host their first event called Winter Festival for Children with Special Needs on February 12, 2016. It was very successful and the children loved it.



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In fact, their parents persistently asked for ANOTHER event. Jami quickly learned just how committed they are to meeting their children's needs. Once again, she used social media for donations and asked her employer for assistance. She was able to obtain a school gym and library in Haddonfield which allowed her to host the second Winter Festival.

As event requests increased, so did the need to broaden their scope. The organization's name change was another group effort. They used their Facebook page to ensure that the title accurately reflected its new focus. Special Events for Special Kids (SE4SK) was born. Their Winter Festival became an annual event along with Fall Funday, parties and even remote events during COVID-19.



Because they rely heavily on donations from friends, family and community; SE4SK became a 501c3 in order to offset the costs of their growing events schedule. In addition, they have collaborated with businesses which have faithfully help with fundraising events: The Village Pub, Dot's Homemade Ice Cream (Woodbury Heights) and the Cinder Bar just to name a few.



The SE4SK board members include: Jami Saraullo- President; Tammy Merinuk (West Deptford)- Secretary; Angelica Ortiz (Woodbury)- Treasurer and Danielle Mitchell (Franklinville)- Family Representative. They had three main goals. The Ribbon-cutting fulfilled their need for an office/educational space. Next, they will focus on their long-term goals of purchasing a van followed by hiring a paid staff member. SE4SK is directed by an unwavering group of people.

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COUNCILWOMAN O'CONNOR'S HISTORY CORNER

On February 05, 2022 they hosted the 7th annual Winter Festival event by taking additional safety precautions for their volunteers and clients due to COVID. This determination to overcome challenges extends beyond the administrative responsibilities necessary to grow and maintain a successful organization. It also inspired a milestone for two long-standing clients.

Jami sees firsthand the impact on her clients' families. "We get to watch our kids as they experience new things, and as they get older [we] find ways to help them give back to the community." Tommy and Mason are an example of that transformation. Tommy attended the first SE4SK event in 2016. Mason started attending in 2018.

When they started, both were very shy and had a hard time socializing. However, this year they transitioned from Winter Festival participants into volunteer staff members. "It was heartwarming to see the growth in both these young men. They spent the day helping others have an enjoyable time. Watching them interact with the new families was such an amazing experience," Jami stated.



Jami's commitment to helping others has grown beyond her expectations: "Never did I ever, think that one event would escalate into starting a nonprofit, but I am so glad it has. I am so proud of SE4SK and how we are able to make a difference for so many deserving families."

SE4SK CONTACT INFORMATION:

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/SE4SK>

Call: (856) 264-9386

Email: specialevents4specialkids@gmail.com



Woodbury's Alumni are also setting trends in sports!

In February, my research for local trendsetters brought me to a post on Twitter. Sincere Kato is a graduate who signed a contract with the Lions semi-professional soccer team. CONGRATULATIONS!

<https://twitter.com/KatoSincere/status/1492576753021243395>



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Mr. Kato showed his amazing talents by setting goal scoring records for Woodbury Junior-Senior High School on his way to earning multiple honors within the Tri-state area.

He also became a history maker as the first person to be officially signed to this new team according to the original post:

“...oaklynunitedfc DONE DEAL! We’re kicking off a huge signing season with the capture of forward Sincere Kato, a standout goal scorer who boasts experience in top-notch programs on both sides of the Delaware.

Sin becomes the club’s first official signing for our new @epslsoccer squad and is bound to deliver plenty of attacking threat thanks to his pace, guile, and superb first touch. With stints at FC DELCO and NJ ODP State and Regional teams on his resume – plus DII experience at Goldey-Beacom college – Sincere has established himself as one of South Jersey’s top emerging talents. The Lions are set to benefit from his prolific goal scoring record, which saw him bag 53 times for Woodbury HS on his way to earning First Team All-Conference and 3x Conference Leading Scorer Honors.”

These stories of success are examples of family and community inspiring excellence in our youth. Even during uncertain times, I hope they encourage the trailblazer in all of us!

**For 2022 we will be creating quarterly articles which will include your help. I’d like to have more information about our amazing innovators and history makers of all ages. We have wonderful residents that I would love to hear more about. Please forward your pictures and stories about family and neighbors that are making a difference every day to (History Corner at koconnor@woodbury.nj.us).

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