

THE 2022 INNOVATION IN GOVERNANCE AWARDS PROGRAM

Municipality:	Township of Old Bridge		
Population:	68,000	County:	Middlesex County
Address:	1 Old Bridge Plaza		
City:	Old Bridge	Zip:	08857
Contact Name:	Anahita Feltz, Senior Center Manager / Mayor Owen Henry		
Telephone:	732-721-5600, ext. 6625	Fax:	732-588-1724
Email:	afeltz@oldbridge.com / mayor@oldbridge.com		

Initiative Title:	Silver Linings Virtual Community
Description:	In the face of mounting social isolation due the COVID-19 Pandemic, Old Bridge Township's senior center "Silver Linings at Old Bridge" established a virtual senior center via Facebook that brought vital services and information to the older adult population in Old Bridge. Our award-winning "Silver Linings Virtual Community" also provided a place for seniors to stay in contact with friends and senior center staff. It also provided resources for their health and wellness, virtual exercise and art classes, presentations and more. This program was innovative and distinctive in that the concept of a virtual senior center – or a "Senior Center Without Walls" had not been heard of in the field of aging. Furthermore, this concept enabled senior center staff and Township administration to meet the needs of older adults in the Old Bridge community during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort. Innovations must have been initiated or completed during the time period June 1, 2021 - September 30, 2022

Project Specific Details:

- How is your innovation original and distinctive?
- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

Please attach a supplemental sheet(s) noting the details of your initiative.

(Supplemental attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)

Application Deadline: Applications must be received no later than Friday, October 7, 2022.

***Mail applications to: NJLM Innovation in Governance, 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608,
Attention: Ciara Bradley or send by email to CBradley@njlm.org***

*If you have any questions, please contact Ciara Bradley at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext. 128 or CBradley@njlm.org*



“Social distancing refers to creating a physical space between one another and avoiding large gatherings. It does not mean to socially disconnect from one another. Instead, we encourage you to strengthen your social ties while maintaining physical distancing.”

Daniel Aldrich, Professor at Northeastern University - March 2020 Washington Post article

- Silver Linings at Old Bridge is a nationally accredited senior center for adults over the age of 60 in Old Bridge. It is overseen by the Township of Old Bridge through their Department of Parks & Recreation and Social Services.
- Unfortunately, senior center doors closed in March of 2020 when the COVID-19 Pandemic began. While center doors were closed, delivery of services remained, albeit in a limited capacity.
 - Social services continued via phone.
 - Transportation services remained in place for dialysis patients and critical medical appointments.
 - Assistance was provided to Meals on Wheels program for the delivery of meals to congregate meal clients who became homebound due to COVID-19.
- While the initial hope was to reopen on March 30th, 2020, NJ went into a lockdown and the center remained closed until July 2021, when we reopened in a limited capacity.
- Once it became apparent that the center would not be able to reopen on March 30th, the staff’s focus shifted to virtual programming to address the growing issue of social isolation that our members were all of a sudden facing.
- With the support of Mayor Owen Henry, Township Council and Administration, over the course of a weekend, “Silver Linings Virtual Community” via Facebook was created. And so began Old Bridge’s “Senior Center Without Walls”. This was a new and innovative way to deliver senior services and programs that hadn’t been done before. This virtual community is still very much active today, even after our doors reopened fully in March of 2022.
- “Silver Linings Virtual Community” included the following types of content:
 - The very first post was a video of Mayor Henry, senior center staff and the Director of Parks & Recreation and Social Services welcoming members to the Virtual Community.
 - Exercise videos (which were at first pre-recorded and then held via Zoom, starting in May of 2020)
 - Sketch classes & paint classes (via Zoom with all supplies provided and delivered to their homes)
 - Mindful Mondays - Mental Health posts and live presentations with mental health counselors via Zoom
 - Trivia Tuesdays
 - “Summer School” Sessions - History “lessons” throughout the summer of 2020 and 2021.
 - Arts & Crafts projects - plastic canvas, knitting, and crocheting, with supplies/kits are delivered to their homes.
 - Themed Months/Weeks
 - Technology Thursdays
 - All our Zoom presentations and programs were available via phone for members without access to technology.
- 3-4 posts per day kept the page active and members engaged.

- Websites used for content (with credit given to sites when using articles/content):
 - NCOA.org
 - SeniorPlanet.org
 - AARP.org
 - idontmind.com
 - history.com
 - YouTube.com
- As the pandemic grew and months went by, virtual programming was expanded, and new programs/classes were introduced. They included nutrition presentations, a Virtual Read Across American Zoom event that was shared with local elementary schools, vaccine education, arts and crafts projects, the debut of Silver Leaf Plant & Garden Club (which grew vegetables that were donated to the Township's Food Bank), the start of Silver Reads Book Club, the release of a baking cookbook, and more.
- Silver Linings at Old Bridge has become a locally, statewide, and nationally recognized center for its virtual programming. The concept of a "Senior Center Without Walls" has been duplicated by other centers throughout the country.
- To offset costs of this unexpected program, we applied and received grant funding for Public Awareness, Information & Assistance, and Assistive Technology through Older Americans Act and CARES Funding.
- We were able to purchase OWLs (which are conferencing cameras/microphones/speakers), iPads and Hotspots with our Assistive Technology grant for members with no access to technology so that they can connect with senior center staff and their friends and participate in the center's virtual programming.

Project Specific Details:

- How is your innovation original and distinctive?
 - *The concept of a virtual senior center – or a "Senior Center Without Walls" as the concept came to be known – was unheard of before the COVID-19 pandemic. It became a concept that many centers across the state and the country replicated. Our virtual senior center model has served as an example that the National Council on Aging and the National Institute of Senior Centers promoted during the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
 - *At the time that the pandemic began, the older adult community was the most vulnerable. Senior centers across the state and the country shut down. Senior centers are not only a place for recreation and socialization but also a nexus hub for vital services for older adults to age well in their communities. In Old Bridge, the senior center not only offers recreational programs and classes but perhaps most importantly, it serves as a hub for vital social services in Old Bridge. Old Bridge Township took a swift and active role in making sure that the needs of the older adult population were still being met, but in a safe manner.*
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
 - *This initiative kept members connected, informed, and active – both physically and mentally. They were also able to still have uninterrupted access to social services. This initiative was very well received by constituents. "Silver Linings Virtual Community" has over 300 active members on its page. Furthermore, we have members who are not on Facebook that have also taken advantage of this virtual community by joining our Zoom programs and classes via computer/tablets and by phone.*
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
 - *None.*

- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent.
 - *While the center has fully reopened, our “Silver Linings Virtual Community” has remained active. This innovative concept has enabled us to continue keeping in touch with all our members – those that have come back to the center when we reopened and those who have chosen to remain at home. We have continued to offer all our exercise classes and presentations in a hybrid format by having them in person at the center and livestreamed via Zoom simultaneously. We still use our virtual community to disseminate vital information, to interact with members and to keep them active and engaged!*
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?
 - *The model of a virtual senior center – or a “Senior Center Without Walls” – can easily be replicated and has been duplicated by senior centers across the state and country. The cost of running a virtual senior center can be very low. Because of grant funding, for our center, the only cost has been the monthly cost for the use of Zoom. Grant funding is still available through Older Americans Act that centers looking to duplicate this program can apply for. If anything, the pandemic has taught us is that we are resilient but also that social isolation can have a deep and lasting effect on the physical and mental health of an individual. For older adults, social isolation is unfortunately an all-too-common reality that comes with aging, pandemic or not. Many seniors were homebound even before the pandemic and will continue to be homebound post-pandemic. This virtual senior center opened our eyes and minds to what our communities CAN DO to reach those socially isolated in a way that we didn’t think of before. While center doors have been reopened across the state and country, a hybrid program can easily be established using this virtual senior center model and is actually encouraged to continue addressing the issue of social isolation amongst older adults.*

Virtual Community Highlights

Monday, February 22nd
10:30am
Meeting ID:
854-5375-9368

Beating the Quarantine Blues: Enhancing social connectedness during times of isolation

Feelings of loneliness and isolation can have profound and lasting effect on our well-being. It can be especially hard when we are forced to stay home, like in the current pandemic. Being restricted and limited can make one feel very disconnected and burdened with care needs of others. Staying connected can help lessen serious health risks and help keep your immune system healthy. This presentation will examine ways to strengthen social connections, review tips to prevent and combat isolation, and explore resources to provide additional support.

Silver Strength: Mind & Body

We are excited to announce our new weekly TV show called "Silver Strength: Mind & Body". Each week, our show will feature one of our exercise programs:

Chair Yoga, Gentle Strength Training and
Move 2 the Groove.

The show will air four times a week so you will have plenty of opportunities to catch it. Our show times are:

Sundays at 10:00am
Mondays at 6:00pm
Tuesdays at 8:00am
Thursdays at 8:00am

Join us this Sunday as we premiere
"Silver Strength: Mind & Body" featuring
Chair Yoga with Allen!

Optimum Channel 15 / Fios Channel 22

Breast Cancer Awareness Presentation & Tea

Thursday, October 22nd
1:00pm

Did you know that 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer?

Education and early detection is invaluable for women and men. Our guest speaker, Carol Schoenberger, RN, BSN from Hackensack Meridian Health, will be leading our presentation.

So grab a cup of tea, WEAR PINK and join us for an informative session on breast cancer awareness.

Zoom Meeting ID:
890-3024-9441

Fall Prevention, Home Safety, and Balance Training

Thursday, March 4th
11:00am

Meeting ID: 830-2356-3775

According to the CDC, falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults.

In this presentation, you will learn:

- Basic exercises to improve your balance reactions
- Safety strategies to avoid falls in your home and out in the community
- Compensatory strategies for activities of daily living to decrease your fall risk.

Presented by Janice Woerner, MS, OTR/L
Janice Woerner is an Occupational Therapist and Group Fitness Instructor specializing in working with active older adults.

Believe

Join Silver Linings in
this letter-writing
campaign to help more
children experience the
"power of a wish"!

★ macy's

Crochet Project

Help us make Pocket
Scarves for our
friends at Reformed
Church Home!

Sign up in the comments
section below.

Virtual Community Highlights (cont.)



Intergenerational Pen Pals
Piecing Generations Together
Come & Meet your Pen Pal!
Thursday, August 20th*
at 1:00pm
Geick Park Pavilion

RSVP by August 17th to Anna & Brianne
afeltz@oldbridge.com
bmcmanus@oldbridge.com

Student pen pals must be accompanied by a guardian.

Masks are required to be worn.

*Rain Date: Friday, August 21st.



Be Kind to Your Mind

1. **PAUSE.** Breathe. Notice how you feel.
2. **TAKE BREAKS** from COVID-19 content.
3. **MAKE TIME** to sleep and exercise.
4. **REACH OUT** and stay connected.
5. **SEEK HELP** if overwhelmed or unsafe.

#BreakTheStigma | Mental Health Awareness Month

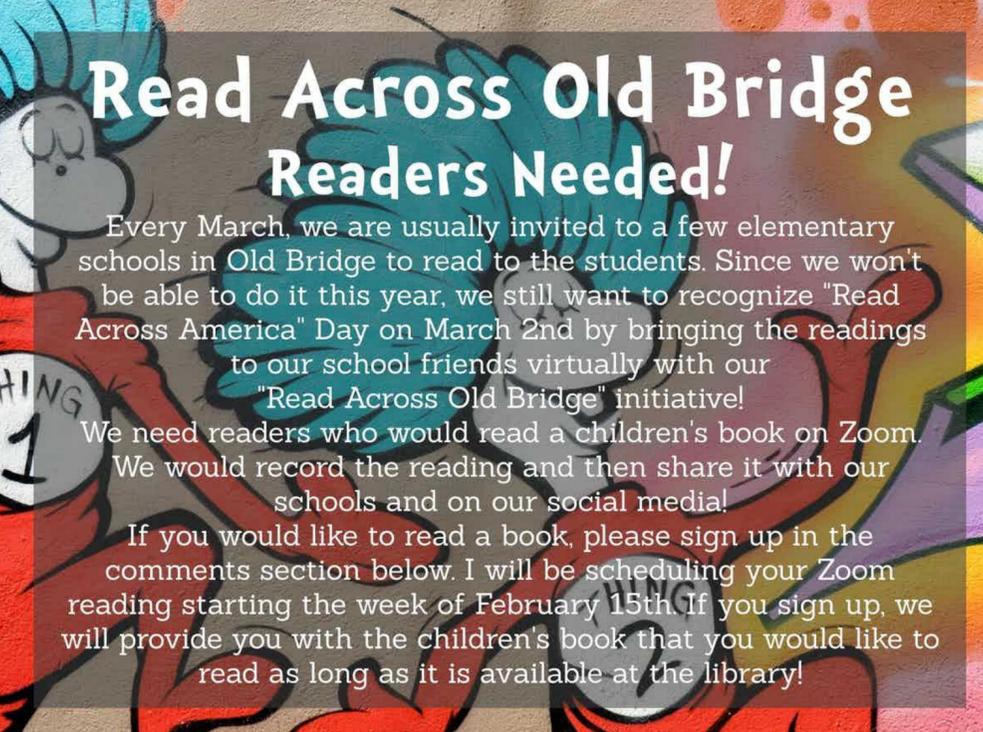


Calling all Bingo players!
Our Facebook Live Bingo was great!
Join us on Friday, May 15th as we try out Zoom Bingo. Please sign up below to receive your Bingo cards. Bingo cards will be messaged to you by Friday morning. The Zoom Meeting ID will be posted on Thursday afternoon! Please only sign up if you will be able to participate on Friday!
P.S.: There will be prizes this week!



New Dietary Guidelines & using MyPlate
A Nutrition Presentation
Thursday, March 10th at 11am
Meeting ID: 816-1513-7033

Join us for a great presentation with Kristen Slinger, County Nutritionist. Kristen will go over the new dietary guidelines that were recently released and she will also show us how to use the MyPlate webpage and app.



Read Across Old Bridge Readers Needed!

Every March, we are usually invited to a few elementary schools in Old Bridge to read to the students. Since we won't be able to do it this year, we still want to recognize "Read Across America" Day on March 2nd by bringing the readings to our school friends virtually with our "Read Across Old Bridge" initiative!

We need readers who would read a children's book on Zoom. We would record the reading and then share it with our schools and on our social media!

If you would like to read a book, please sign up in the comments section below. I will be scheduling your Zoom reading starting the week of February 15th. If you sign up, we will provide you with the children's book that you would like to read as long as it is available at the library!

Seniors Against Scams: Steps to avoiding scams
Thursday, October 15th
10:30am

Discussing vulnerability to scams can be uncomfortable and embarrassing for any generation. The goal of this presentation is to empower older adults to recognize when they are being targeted and how to protect themselves against financial fraud. We want to make sure our members take advantage of available resources and begin making incremental steps to ensure their economic security by being proactive in safeguarding their money.

Sign up is required to attend this presentation!

Zoom Meeting ID: 831-3297-9590

What Silver Linings Means to Me...

"I have just one word to define what Silver Linings means to me: FAMILY." - Malva P.

"I am so grateful to be part of the Silver Linings family. The dedication and hard work of all the staff, volunteers and instructions keeping us safe and connected with each other during this past difficult year is amazing. I enjoy the programs, education and all the wonderful friendships. THANK YOU!" - Dorothy R.

"Engaging in a variety of activities and programs keeps us mentally, physically and emotionally fit. We owe it all to the knowledgeable, creative, well-organized, responsible, kind, supportive and dedicated staff at Silver Linings. Togetherness is a happy feeling of affection and closeness to other people and that is what SL succeeds at." - Ellen L.

"SL is the glue that has bonded the seniors of Old Bridge through a patchwork of activities. The thoughtful and supportive staff is one of a kind. Together with its members, a unity was formed that has survived during COVID-19. It continues virtually at present and I am grateful to be a part of it." - Jackie D.

"SL is to me my life because of all the programs and staff that us informed on what is going on outside...Very happy to be connected virtually or I would be lost everyday." - Rose S

"So glad I had SL during this lockdown. Loved sharing the stories of our group. Everyone has a story. Kind of like one big happy family. I would it is very well run...Silver Linings gets an A+ from me." - Jennie A.

"A place to meet friends, have fun and stay healthy." - Debbi W.

"To me, it means a dedicated staff that keeps the seniors informed and alert of all that is happening during the pandemic...Silver Linings goes above and beyond in keeping us safe." - Ann S.

"SL is pure JOY. It is caring, friendships, educational, and in so many times our way of a new normal. We are also FAMILY, not by blood, but by being connected to one another. The staff that calls up and asks if I am okay because I have not posted for a few days, or know someone has been sick, and calls just to say hello. THAT'S FAMILY. SL may be something different to each of us. I am just thankful we have it in our lives." - John F.

"SL means to me friendship and togetherness. It has been a bad year but we are still together!" - Penny P.



What Silver Linings Means to Me... (cont.)

“When the center had to close last year, I felt like I lost my home. SL was my reason to get up in the morning and be with my friends. Thanks to Anna & staff for different projects, I feel like I’m at the center. I truly believe Anna doesn’t sleep at night always thinking of us...Nancy and the drivers are caring people and Nancy makes sure I am safe and taking care of myself. I love you all.” - Evelyn D.

“We are the most fortunate seniors here in Old Bridge. As always, especially throughout this difficult year, the entire staff of Silver Linings has been totally committed to enriching the lives of our members. We are all so grateful for the resources and programs: social, arts and crafts, education, health, exercise, etc. that we have been encourage to participate in. Many, many thanks and blessings to each and everyone for you.” - Cathy S.

“SL is the best senior center. We do so many activities that our days just fly by! I also made so many wonderful friends I’m so grateful for.” - Patricia W.

“I am truly grateful to be a member of Silver Linings. When I first joined, I was welcome with open arms by Anna and the wonderful staff, along with all the members. I love seeing the diversity and how everyone is treated with kindness and respect. We are also blessed to be offered enriching activities and to be a part of a loving community. Thank you for continuing to be a part of our lives.” - Betty C.

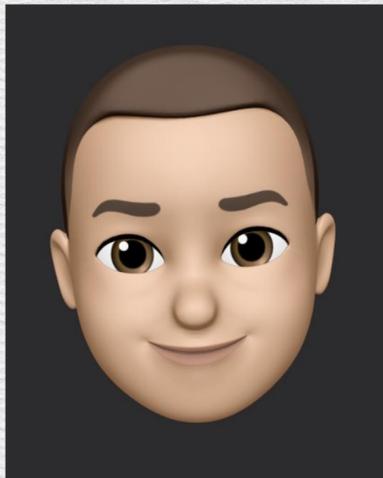
“SL has been a “silver lining” during this time of COVID and isolation. Anna, Brittany, Nancy and all the staff have done a fantastic job keeping us active, engaged and connected. We especially love the crafts, games, yoga and exercise classes! Being able to connect with each other by Zoom has been a blessing!” - Patricia R.



#SilverLiningsFamilyStrong



Silver Linings
at Old Bridge
An Activity Center for Adults 60+



Matt Mercurio, Director
Parks & Recreation and Social Services
732-721-5600, ext. 6625
mmercurio@oldbridge.com
www.oldbridge.com/Recreation



Anahita Feltz, Manager
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www.facebook.com/groups/SilverLiningsatOldBridge