

MEDICARE GUIDE 2026

MEDICARE ADVANTAGE SHOPPING SEASON IS HERE, AND WITH IT A DOSE OF COMPLEXITY AS PLANS CHANGE OR DISAPPEAR ALTOGETHER. WE'RE HERE TO HELP. **A10**

Sunday

South Jersey TIMES



OCEAN COUNTY

Vigilante ‘superhero’ takes on a new mission



Chris Pollak, owner of Hybrid Combat Karate in Jackson Township, declared his intention to run for an open seat on the council he'd been attacking for months, bewildering its members as he barrels toward Tuesday's election while continuing to accuse them of corruption and incompetence. Photos by Neil H. Davis, for South Jersey Times

Chris Pollak — formerly known as “Dark Guardian” — is running for a seat on a town council he’s lambasted for months.

AJ McDougall For South Jersey Times

The superhero stalks down the darkened New York City street, bullhorn in hand. He wears red nylon pants, held up by a utility belt, and a matching bulletproof vest, inscribed with the letters “DG.” He goes unmasked, though most of the half-dozen men and women flanking him — fellow caped crusaders — have chosen to cover their faces. He turns into the park, barking through his weapon of choice: “We’re here because we’re not going to tolerate drugs in the park anymore. We’re not going to stand for it. It goes on and on and on and nobody does nothing or says anything. It’s time somebody stood up!” Dark Guardian, as he’s known, will spend the rest of the night on patrol, hoping to confront and scare off drug dealers, ruffians and other ne’er-do-wells. A video clip of him will be used for an HBO documentary about “real-life superheroes,” part of



In Jackson Township, a sign for Chris Pollak’s council campaign is displayed by the window at Hybrid Combat Karate.

the avalanche of goggling media coverage he was receiving at the time. But that was then, about 15 years ago. Dark Guardian’s bulletproof vest now hangs in a closet in Jackson. He has no intentions of ever donning it again. Instead, he’s taken to defending the everyman under his real name, Chris Pollak. Even in a business suit, standing tall at a June town council meeting, Pollak is an imposing figure. He looks like a cleaner-cut Roman Reigns, his tone no less brusque than the pro wrestler as he chastises the

council for what he sees as their failure to protect the community. “We’re watching our town change and it’s not for the better. This is not the future that any of our families want,” he says. “And this council sits up here pretending like your hands are tied, like you’re helpless. You ignore the problems until residents make enough noise to embarrass you into action. “You guys are liars,” he goes on. “You could have acted. You should have acted. You didn’t have the spine.” Pollak posted a video of his statement to social media and it went viral, pulling hundreds of thousands of strangers into a unique shade of suburban Jersey drama. Pollak is among many township residents frustrated by what they believe is overdevelopment spurred by intense population growth in neighboring Lakewood — New Jersey’s fastest-growing town, with a 45% increase in residents from 2010 to 2020, according to census data — which has spilled over in Jackson. A post-viral Pollak, 41, declared his intention to run for an open seat on the council he’d been attacking for months, bewildering its members as he barrels toward Tuesday’s election while continuing to accuse them of corruption and incompetence. “Even if he wins, he doesn’t get along with the current council,” said Mordechai **SEE CHRIS POLLAK, A3**

ELECTION 2025

Black, Latino vote seen as pivotal in gov. contest

As they court key voting blocs, both main contenders encounter challenges.

Brianna Kudisch and Brent Johnson For South Jersey Times

Michael Eric Dyson barreled into Metropolitan Baptist Church on a recent Friday night. The well-known Black academic, radio host and minister was slated to moderate a forum at the Newark church with the candidates vying to be New Jersey’s next governor. But he got caught in traffic, so the church’s pastor, Rev. David Jefferson Sr., took over and politely interviewed Republican nominee Jack Ciattarelli first. “I’m so mad I missed that opportunity,” Dyson began, after arriving. “Pastor would have to reprove me,” he continued to the delight of the audience, as people stood and cheered, his voice rising in a rhythmic cadence. “Cause I got issues with white supremacy, anti-DEI on one hand, and liberal spinelessness and the inability to stand up to which is true on the other side.” Before he went on to interview Democrat Mikie Sherrill, Dyson alluded to President Donald Trump as an “autocrat” and a “racist.”

But, he added, the Democratic Party is “in shambles as well.” And therein lies the quandary for both gubernatorial contenders, as they zigzag the state in hopes of courting undecided or ambivalent Black and Latino voters — key blocs in a race with national resonance. While neither group is a monolith, these voters may help decide who ultimately wins the combative contest. “I think that the Black and brown vote determines who the next governor of this state will be,” said Modia “Mo” Butler, the former chief of staff for Democratic U.S. Sen. Cory Booker. “I think it’s that critical.” The candidates both know it. If you closed your eyes and threw a dart at a map of New Jersey, you’d probably hit a campaign stop vying for Black and Latino voters.

There was Sherrill at Greater Mount Zion AME, a historic Black church in Trenton. Ciattarelli swung by New Hope Baptist Church, a Black church in Elizabeth. Sherrill, all smiles, at another Black church in Camden. Ciattarelli glad-handing at the annual Hispanic State Parade in Hudson County. Sherrill in Mercer County. Ciattarelli in Teaneck. Sherrill in Plainsboro. Ciattarelli in Newark. Sherrill in Newark. Ciattarelli in Paterson. Sherrill in Paterson. But for both candidates, it is opportunity mixed with big potential roadblocks. Sherrill, a congresswoman from Montclair, is fighting to turn out Black and Latino voters — once-reliable for **SEE ELECTION 2025, A6**

STATEWIDE

Food pantries brace for surge in demand

Steve Strunsky and Ande Richards For South Jersey Times

When Carlos Roldan started feeding individuals struggling with food insecurity, he says it was rough. But it wasn’t even close to what he and others are dealing with now. “More people need help who were usually donating to those struggling,” said Roldan, director of the Father English Food Pantry, operated by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Paterson. “There are more people in need than I’ve seen in a very long time.” Supplemental and emergency food providers up and down New Jersey say they’re on the cusp of a crisis the likes of which they haven’t seen since the coronavirus pandemic.

With demand for food already rising, the situation grew more dire Saturday as recipients of SNAP benefits were expected to see delays in payouts. Though plans by the Trump administration to freeze payments to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program were halted by federal judges on Friday, millions of people will likely be short on their grocery bills. It can take days to restart the multistep system that sends money to recipients. This could affect the 813,000 New Jersey residents who rely on the program. Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy has declared a state of emergency to respond to the issue. He also released \$42.5 million Friday to the state’s six largest food banks to purchase more food and supplies.

On Friday, a Rhode Island federal judge said the Agriculture Department must distribute the contingency funds “as soon as possible.” Another federal judge in Massachusetts also directed the government to decide by Monday whether it would use its reserves for food aid. Hours after the rulings were issued, President Donald Trump added to the confusion, saying he had asked government attorneys to clarify with the courts how to get SNAP funds out as quickly as possible. “We’re having nightmares already,” Vesta Godwin Clark, executive director of the St. James Social Service Corporation Food Pantry in Newark, said earlier in the week. “We are afraid that it’s going to be **SEE FOOD INSECURITY, A4**

DAYLIGHT SAVING

Whew, it’s early ...

It’s time to fall back! Daylight saving ended at 2 a.m., so don’t forget to set your clocks back one hour.



Advance Local