

## THE JAY AND LINDA GRUNIN FOUNDATION

*Making the Jersey Shore a Better Place*

by Jill Ocone

Academy Award winning actor Denzel Washington once said, “At the end of the day, it’s not about what you have, or even what you’ve accomplished. It’s about what you’ve done with those accomplishments. It’s about who you’ve lifted up, who you’ve made better. It’s about what you’ve given back.”

Two of the pillars of philanthropy at the Jersey Shore who embody Washington’s words are Jay and Linda Grunin. The pair met as classmates at New York University School of Law and has called Toms River home for almost fifty years. In the late 1990s, the Grunins phased out their day-to-day law practice in order to concentrate on their two greatest passions, business investments and philanthropy. Their efforts, through the Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation, have positively impacted thousands of lives at the Jersey Shore.

### **The Mission**

The Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation puts citizens first. Their philanthropy provides activity and economic development opportunities through the arts, healthcare, and education, with the values of integrity, tenacity, and leadership always at the forefront. Under those pillars, four different programs impact, engage, and elevate Toms River as well as the Jersey Shore region.

With the help of Foundation staff and the Grunin’s son, Jeremy, who came on board in 2013 and is the Foundation’s president, the Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation continually

exceeds its goal of improving quality of life and economic health by investing in projects that transform the Jersey Shore community.

### **The Engage Toms River Program**

This program was designed for residents to engage and participate in the arts. With the goal of having every Toms River resident awaken their creativity, individuality, and artistic/technical abilities, programs have included the **Giving Tuesday Theater Group Challenge and the Engage Toms River Community Mural Project.**

The driving force behind Engage

Toms River’s success is the coming together of different entities with the Foundation. These include the Community Art Project, the Toms River Artists Community, the Business Improvement District, the Toms River branch of the Ocean County Library, Congressman MacArthur, and Toms River township officials. Thousands of people, by working together, helped bring both the 2014 and 2015 Community Mural Projects to life, adding color and life along Water and Main Streets. The Foundation is currently working on expanding this program to include communities outside of the Toms River area as well.

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Mark R. Sullivan/markrsullivan.com

*Jeremy, Jay, Laura, and Linda Grunin.*

### The Elevate Toms River Program

Don't let the name fool you—everyone at the Jersey Shore benefits from the “Elevate Toms River” program. One example is their sponsorship of the Toms River Artists Community’s **Art in the Park** festival held at Toms River’s Huddy Park over the past three summers. The festival features displays and performances from more than forty Jersey Shore artists. Musical and poetry performances compliment showcases of glass, pottery, photography, jewelry, oil, acrylic, charcoal, mixed media, digital, and print works.

Elevate Toms River also proudly unveiled the **Protectors of Freedom Monument** at Toms River’s Bey Lea Park in June 2017. Jay Grunin said, the “Protectors of Freedom was a project that had been in my mind for a number of years. Being a part of a community that’s home to one of the largest veteran populations in the country, it was obvious that we had to do something to pay them proper tribute. Together with Brian Hanlon, master sculptor and founder of Hanlon Sculpture Studio, we were able to bring to life something that we believe will help educate and com-

memorate simultaneously,” The monument created by Hanlon reflects every conflict from 1917 to present. His figures represent and honor those who served in World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Middle East conflict. The five larger than life sculptures are surrounded by beautiful flowers and landscaping with the American Flag and the flags of each branch of the United States Armed Forces standing tall and proud behind the figures. The walkway leading up to the monument has signs explaining the story of each figure, creating an atmosphere of reverence. Grunin continued, “We hope that visitors feel a sense of pride and patriotism when they visit the monument. Whether it’s a class of elementary school kids, or one of our great veterans organizations around the area, or a visiting family here for the weekend to enjoy our beaches, we know that the story of how we’ve been protected and will continue to be protected by our brave military will resonate.”

Another program sponsored by Elevate Toms River is the annual **Salute to Ocean County**, a celebration of arts and heritage. The **2018 Salute to Ocean County**

**Documentary** provides an opportunity for three Ocean County high school student videographers to work with three professional media consultants, funded by the Foundation, to create a video documentary of one of the three Salute to Ocean County award winners. (The awards include the John C. Bartlett, Jr. Government Service Award; the Lifetime Achievement Award in the Arts in Ocean County; and the Pauline S. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for Ocean County History.) The awards evening also includes performances by students who were Critiqued for Excellence at the Ocean County Teen Arts Festival. The Foundation awards up to \$10,000. for the top performances as judged by the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

Elevate Toms River also sponsors the annual **Jersey Shore Makersfest** and gave a grant of more than \$180,000. to the Toms River Regional Schools through the **Principals’ Innovation Challenge**.

### The Impact Toms River Program

“Impact Toms River Partners” (organizations the Foundation has



A mural at 207 Main Street in Toms River, created through the Engage Toms River Community Mural Project program.



**The Protectors of Freedom Monument at Toms River's Bay Lea Park. Unveiled in June 2017, sculptor Brian Hanlon created the monument to reflect every conflict from 1917 to present.**

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identified) work in conjunction with the Foundation to find solutions to shortcomings in healthcare, the arts, and education, resulting in the greatest outcome for all members of the community.

**The Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts** at Ocean County College not only hosts entertainers from around the world but also serves as a home for young performers at the Jersey Shore. The Grunin Foundation's \$5.75 million endowment established the Center, which has grown local talent while bringing world-class visual and performing artists to the Jersey Shore. The Center also serves as the home for the Garden State Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ocean County Teen Arts Festival, and the New Jersey State Teen Arts Festival. The Grunin Center enriches the culture of all

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*The Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts at Ocean County College not only hosts entertainers from around the world but also serves as a home for young performers at the Jersey Shore.*

Jersey Shore residents while providing students and local talent with a place to perfect their skills. The Center's seasonal schedule includes lectures and talks, plays and musicals, and concerts, many of which are geared for families and children. A number of famous entertainers will take the stage at The Center this season including Arlo Guthrie, The Everly Brothers, Tony Danza, and Herman's Hermits.

On the healthcare front, a severe head injury suffered by Linda Grunin in 2010 was the catalyst for change at the Jersey Shore. At the time, Jay had no other choice but to bring his wife to a facility in north Jersey. After Linda's recovery, a conversation between the two led to the idea to end that "race up north." Thus, the **Jay and Linda Grunin Neuroscience Institute at RWJBarnabas Community Medical Center** was established with a \$3.5 million endowment from the Foundation. The Neuroscience Institute provides the highest quality advanced care to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases of the brain, spinal cord, and nervous system with a highly skilled team of specialists right here in Ocean County.

Also on the healthcare front, The **Inspiration Boutique** at the

J. Phillip Citta Regional Cancer Center at RWJBarnabas Community Medical Center opened in 2013 after the American Cancer Society reached out to the Grunin Foundation. There was a need for a place where cancer patients could go to receive cosmetic items, and The Boutique fulfilled that need. Patients undergoing cancer treatments are provided with free wigs and accessories. The Inspiration Boutique has since expanded their offerings to include appearance consultation, therapies such as Reiki, other types of hair loss replacement alternatives such as brows and lashes, a comprehensive breast care program, mastectomy products, and more.

One of the non-profit partners of Impact Toms River is **Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Ocean County** (BBBSOC). By partnering with the Grunin Foundation, BBBSOC was able to rekindle its relationship with the Toms River Regional Schools, which had to end similar programs due to budget cuts. As a result, 185 children who were waiting to be matched with a big brother or sister found their mentor, and the BBBSOC was ranked number one in the northeast region for match retention in 2015.

**The Ocean County YMCA, the United Way of Monmouth and**

**Ocean Counties, and the Caregiver Volunteers of Central Jersey** are also partners with the Foundation through Impact Toms River. With health and wellness campaigns and senior services at the forefront, the lives of countless Jersey Shore residents have changed for the better as a result of these partnerships.

### The Impact2 Program

This mission of the "Impact2" program is to support proven leaders, their solutions to challenge the status quo, and to create positive and sustainable system change.

There are currently five selected Impact2 partners: **Ocean Academy** in Bayville, the **Count Basie Collective Impact, Fulfill NJ**, the **New Jersey State Teen Arts Festival**, and the **Grunin Center for Law and Social Entrepreneurship** at NYU School of Law.

Through the Grunin Foundations' partnership with **Ocean Academy**, which is affiliated with Ocean Mental Health, students were offered yoga classes for the first time as an alternative to negative behavior. With support from every member of the Academy's staff, students are graduating with more job placements and better grades than ever before.

The **Count Basie Collective Impact** was developed in cooperation with foundation president Jeremy Grunin and several of the foundation's art partners, including Adam Philipson, Executive Director of the Count Basie Theater, the New Jersey Department of Art and Culture, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and the New Jersey Department of Education. Jeremy Grunin explained, "The Count Basie Collective Impact project, mindALIGNED, is a modern approach to teaching that challenges the notion that deemphasizing the arts in schools is necessary to leave time for Common Core education. Rather, mindALIGNED operates under the premise that incorporating more of the arts into a creative teaching model improves outcomes for students and teachers alike." According to Grunin, the program is being piloted in six elementary

schools across Monmouth and Ocean counties. He added, “It is widely believed that kids become more confident, more creative, and more likely to succeed in other facets of their lives when there is a larger emphasis on the arts in their school lives.” The anticipated results, from the joint investment in exposing culture and the arts to youth through improving education, are expected to be exciting. This program, as well as many future programs, will be housed at the new Jay and Linda Grunin Arts and Education Building at the Count Basie Theatre, which was announced at the official groundbreaking on September 20, 2017.

**Fulfill NJ**, formerly known as the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, fights and plans to defeat hunger in New Jersey. With help from its Impact2 partnership with the Grunin Foundation, Fulfill provided over twelve million meals in 2016. Today, over 50,000 children in Monmouth and Ocean Counties do not have enough to eat every day. Fulfill is committed not only to

providing food to neighbors but also many life-changing programs such as culinary training, SNAP enrollment assistance, affordable healthcare, tax refund assistance, mobile pantries, and more. With the Grunin Foundation’s support, Fulfill wants to eliminate hunger while making the Jersey Shore community stronger and more self-sufficient.

What started out as a very small festival to celebrate teen arts in New Jersey has turned into one of the biggest teen arts festivals in the nation thanks to the Grunin Foundation’s partnership with the **New Jersey State Teen Arts Festival**. Jay Grunin said, “This is the premier event for arts students across the state to come together to showcase their talents in the arts including theater, dance, visual arts, creative writing, music, and filmmaking with a chance to win an arts scholarship. Professional adjudicators at the festival provide in-depth critical reviews and analysis of the students’ works and performances.” Young artists from around the state are provided the opportunity

to receive feedback from professionals, attend workshops, learn about colleges with art programs and scholarships in the field, and participate in open mic sessions with professional writers over the three-day spring festival. Grunin added, “The arts are a vital part of our community and economy, and we are proud to partner with so many incredible organizations, including Ocean County College, to bring these esteemed students, teachers, and professional artists under the same roof year after year.”

In 2016, Jay and Linda Grunin knew it was time to give back to the place that started it all and molded their lives. Working together with New York University School of Law and Ashoka, a pioneer in the field of social entrepreneurship, the **Grunin Center for Law and Social Entrepreneurship** was established last year. Jay Grunin explained, “Linda and I celebrated our fiftieth reunion at NYU School of Law with the dedication of the Grunin Center

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Another mural, created through the Engage Toms River Community Mural Project program, at Simply Skin on Water Street in Toms River.

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for Law and Social Entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship, which is loosely defined as sustainable business solutions to many of society's seemingly intractable problems, wasn't a thing back then, or, to be

one needs right here at home.

Jeremy Grunin also holds his work here at the Jersey Shore close to his heart. "As successful as I was in my career, it was my volunteer time that was always most fulfilling. To now be able to do that with a larger percentage of my time is an amazing and rare opportunity. To be able to that and still be able to work on a myriad of business ventures with my parents is a dream come true." Jeremy considers his position his dream job and is living his dream alongside his parents, his wife, Laura, and his children in his hometown of Toms River.

### What's Next?

Earlier this year, the Jay and Linda Grunin Center announced that they have given \$8 million to build a new facility for the **Ocean County Vocational Technical School's Performing Arts Academy (PAA)** on the grounds of Ocean County College's main campus in Toms River. Jay Grunin said, "The PAA is a project that helps bring together two of our most valuable partners. Both Ocean County College (OCC) and the Ocean County Vocational and Technical Schools (OCVTS) do such a great job not only getting our kids ready for the conventional college route, but also the alternate routes that avail themselves to those kids through the trades and specialized certifications. Moreover, they already have a partnership built at OCC's Southern Campus, which also houses OCVTS's Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science (MATES)." Currently housed at Joint Base Lakehurst, PAA is a specialized, four-year high school open to all students in Ocean County with a focus on the performing arts, including dance, music, and theatre. "The current Performing Arts Academy is housed on the Joint Base at Lakehurst. While this was a great fit at one time, it has become clear that the PAA has outgrown this space and needed to be given the opportunity to further grow. As one of two Blue Ribbon High Schools in the County, the other being MATES, we were keenly interested in seeing

if we could do our part to help make this move a reality," said Jay Grunin. Once the new campus is finished, PAA students will have the opportunity to earn college credits alongside their high school courses and will graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree from Ocean County College.

With its impact at the Jersey Shore growing by the day, one can only speculate what the next big announcement will be from the Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation. No matter what it is, the Jersey Shore will undoubtedly become even better because of the vision and work of the Grunin family. ♦



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**Detail of the Mural Project at Simply Skin on Water Street in Toms River.**

honest, even a decade ago. Now, more and more students are thinking about making a positive social impact when choosing their career path. This is an emerging field, and we are only just beginning this journey of transforming the way law affects these social entrepreneurs." The Center is a trailblazer in social justice and education innovation and the very first center of its kind at a law school.

### Why The Jersey Shore?

Jersey Shore roots run deep in the Grunin family, with Linda graduating from Long Branch High School after growing up in Monmouth County. Jay Grunin said, "Our entire married and professional life has been spent in Toms River. We've watched the Jersey Shore area become a place not just for tourists, but for year-round residents. For us, it means a place where you can establish your career, build your life and family, and enjoy the fun and culture that surrounds you." With the beaches, shopping, restaurants, downtown cultures, and proximity to New York City and Philadelphia, Jay Grunin points out that the Jersey Shore has everything

For more information:

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### Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts

Ocean County College, College Drive,  
Toms River, (732) 255-0500  
[www.grunincenter.org](http://www.grunincenter.org)

**The Inspiration Boutique at the J. Phillip Citta Regional Care Center**  
RWJBarnabas Community Medical Center,  
99 Highway 37 West, Toms River,  
(732) 557-2317  
[www.barnabashealth.org/Community-Medical-Center/Our-Services/Cancer-Services/Social-Services/Inspiration-Boutique.aspx](http://www.barnabashealth.org/Community-Medical-Center/Our-Services/Cancer-Services/Social-Services/Inspiration-Boutique.aspx)

### Fulfill NJ

3300 Route 66, Neptune, (732) 918-2600  
Fulfill NJ - The B.E.A.T. Center,  
1769 Hooper Avenue, Toms River  
[www.fulfillnj.org](http://www.fulfillnj.org)

### Protectors of Freedom Monument

Bey Lea Park, at the corner of Bay and North Bay Avenues, Toms River

### Grunin Center for Law and Social Entrepreneurship

New York University School of Law,  
40 Washington Square South, New York,  
NY 10012; (212) 998-6100  
[www.law.nyu.edu/centers/grunin-social-entrepreneurship](http://www.law.nyu.edu/centers/grunin-social-entrepreneurship)

### New Jersey State Teen Arts Festival

[www.njteenarts.com](http://www.njteenarts.com)