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Courier News

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LOOKING AHEAD

NJ politicians to keep an eye on in 2020

(Clockwise from left to right: Governor Phil Murphy, Rep Jeff Van Drew, George Norcross and Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliverare among the politicians to watch in 2020.

USAY TODAY NETWORK-NEW JERSEY AND AP FILE PHOTOS.

How NJ's finances fared in 2010s after Great Recession

Ashley Balcerzak NorthJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Despite close to 10 years of national economic growth, New Jersey is still feeling the lingering effects of the Great Recession.

Governors of the past decade struggled to fill gaping budget holes when the money coming in to state coffers dropped dramatically, forcing leaders to put off investments in education and infrastructure, among other needs.

“In general, New Jersey has been a state that has lagged behind almost all other states in almost any of the major indices of state fiscal health that we look at,” said Barb Rosewicz with the Pew Charitable Trusts. “Among them, New Jersey is one of the last to finally have gotten revenue back to the purchasing power before the recession.”

Meanwhile, Govs. Chris Christie and Phil Murphy had to grapple with growing debt and pension and health-care liabilities for public workers. Because leaders of the past few decades didn’t make their payments to the pension fund on time, the amount the state owed grew exponentially, and

See FINANCES, Page 8A

These 12 people will influence state in the next decade

Political Stile
Charles Stile
North Jersey Record
USA TODAY NETWORK – N.J.

The political forecast in New Jersey for the New Year and the next decade suggests that the internal fighting between the two tribes that define the Democratic Party is unlikely to abate anytime soon.

But portents of change abound.

An ascendant, Trump-angered activism has set the Democratic Party’s grassroots aflame.

These scattered, defiant voices are beginning to mobilize and prod the sclerotic Democratic Party establishment from the left. Expect the insurgents to morph into a permanent opposition to the party elders in the coming years. And expect them to be a loud, influential chorus when both parties sit down to redraw the state’s 40 legislative districts in 2021.

Meanwhile, the beleaguered state Republican Party showed signs of re-birth in recent months, snagging two seats in the Assembly races while fending off a spirited challenge to the Assembly minority leader, Jon Bramnick.

They pulled it off despite the widespread hostility to President Donald Trump and a rapid rise in Democratic party registration. The idea of a comeback in the 2020s now seems plausible.

See STILE, Page 9A

Texas gunman who killed two at church served time in NJ after Linden arrest

ck Muscavage
Central Jersey Home News Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

LINDEN – The Texas man who was fatally shot after opening fire at a church Sunday and killing two people was previously arrested near the Phillips 66 refinery in the city.

Keith Thomas Kinnunen was arrested in September 2016 after Linden police found him in possession of a .12 gauge shotgun and ammunition in the area of the Phillips 66 refinery, known as the Bayway Refinery. He was 39 years old at the time.

Kinnunen, of River Oaks, Texas, was fatally shot at the age of 43 by an armed security officer after he shot and killed two congregants who were volunteers of the church’s security team during a Sunday service at West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, a town of about 17,000 people near Fort Worth.

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LOOKING BACK

The decade’s most important people in NJ dining

Esther Davidowitz NorthJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

It’s not easy to come up with a list of New Jersey’s most influential food people of the decade. It’s especially not easy when you consider how much innovation and how many changes took place over the past 10 years.

As the New York Times restaurant critic Pete Wells recently noted, this decade has seen the rise of Instagram and consequently how chefs cook (make it Insta-worthy, chef!); the proliferation of small-plates (tapas, anyone?) and the increase of vegetarian and vegan diners (how do you like your Impossible burger, ma’am?). Let’s not overlook the explosion of the farm-to-

Burke

table, tail-to-snout movement; the mushrooming of the fast-casual restaurant, and the rapid growth of craft breweries and artisanal food.

But we, food reporters and editors of USA Today Network in New Jersey — read our bios at the end of this story — love a good challenge. To help us with this formidable task, also enlisted we turned to two trusted food lovers and avid restaurant-goers: Michael Sinatra, a Hoboken and Asbury Park resident who is vice president of communications for restaurants-discovery platforms The Infatuation and Zagat, and formerly with Whole Foods

Market; and Vincent Barcelona, a River Vale resident and former restaurant chef-owner who today runs Vincent Barcelona Hospitality, a restaurant consulting business.

So, who are the women and men who made the greatest mark this decade on the ever-evolving, ever-expanding, ever-luscious dining landscape in New Jersey? Let’s dig right in.

The Wizard | David Burke

Ventanas, Fort Lee; David Burke at Orange Lawn, South Orange; Drifthouse by David Burke, Sea Bright; and Nauti Bar in Sea Bright

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USA TODAY

After 20 years in power, Vladimir Putin coy about his future. **3A**

Pay raise

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Dining

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He may be one of America's most creative and innovative chefs — he has restaurants in New York, Washington, Sarasota Springs and Garden City, Long Island. But David Burke, a Fort Lee resident who began his admirable career in New Jersey (washing dishes at the Sheraton Hotel in his hometown of Hazlet), heads five restaurants in New Jersey with plans to add more Jersey spots to his portfolio in the years to come.

He made food Insta-friendly before Instagram even existed (seen his bacon hanging on a miniature clothesline?); he has won a handful of James Beard awards (including Best Chef New York — twice) and received the coveted Meilleurs Ouvriers de France Diplôme d'Honneur (the only American chef to do so). And now he is slowly growing an empire in his home state. "At my age, I don't need to fly all over the world," Burke told The Record earlier this year. "I can save three hours by staying in New Jersey." Besides, he said, "I'm a Jersey guy." A Jersey culinary wizard, we'd say.

The Mentor | Anthony Bucco

Chef/Owner, Felina, Ridgewood
Matawan resident Anthony Bucco has wowed critics and diners alike with his cooking prowess in a slew of top-notch restaurants. He garnered a four-star review in 2012 in New Jersey Monthly for his cooking at the legendary Ryland Inn in Whitehouse Station. Bucco also received a guessn "Excellent," New York Times's highest rating, and AAA's coveted Four Diamond Award. Plus he got four stars from The Star-Ledger for his work at Stage Left Steakhouse in New Brunswick, Uproot in Warren and the Ryland Inn. And this year his modern Italian restaurant Felina was named by New Jersey Monthly one of the Best Restaurants in New Jersey.

Impressive? Yes. But perhaps even more impressive is how many chefs under his tutelage today are heading first-rate kitchens themselves. The list includes: J.R. Belt, executive chef at Stage Left Steakhouse and restaurant Catherine Lombardi, both in New Brunswick; Jason Ramos, executive chef of the Pluckemin Inn in Bedminster; Martyna Krowicka, chef de cuisine, Felina; AJ Capella, executive chef, Jockey Hollow

Bar & Kitchen, Morristown; David Viana, executive chef-partner, Heirloom Kitchen, Old Bridge (see below); Aishling Stevens and Matt Laurich, executive chef and chef de cuisine respectively, Crystal Springs Resort and Restaurant Latour, Hamburg; and Randy Forrester, who until recently was chef and owner of award-winning Osteria Radici in Allentown.

Says Bucco about his many prominent proteges: "These talented individuals did more to ensure their own success than I or anyone could have ever done for them. I am humbled to have had so many talented people share time in the kitchens I have had the luxury of overseeing. They own the success, not I." Talented *and* humble: a winning combination in life and the kitchen.

The Restaurateur | Chris Cannon

Owner, Jockey Hollow Bar & Kitchen, Morristown

Once arguably the predominant restaurateur in New York City (his portfolio included Marea, Alto and Convivio), nearly six years ago Chris Cannon showed New York hotshots and New Jersey diffident food lovers what can be done on this side of the Hudson. Jockey Hollow Bar & Kitchen, his magnificent, 15,000-square-foot, four-restaurant compound in Morristown, was the first Garden State restaurant in 2015 to make Esquire's Best New Restaurant list in more than a decade. It also received a 3-and-a-half star review in New Jersey Monthly and was named by NJ.com as one of the "49 restaurants you need to eat at before you die."

Cannon, a proud Mountain Lakes resident and passionate wine lover, wants those across the river to know that dining (and boozing) on this side is pretty darn amazing. "New Jersey is so misunderstood, so maligned," Cannon told Esquire. "Three quarters of the stuff from the Union Square green market is coming from New Jersey. My staff, all the key guys, moved from the city out here." Feeling slightly cowed, NYC?

The Chef | Robbie Felice

Chef/Owner, Viaggio, Wayne, and Osteria Crescendo, Westwood

Not yet 30 — he celebrated his 29th birthday two months ago — Robbie Felice, a Sussex native and a Culinary Institute of America graduate, has already shown North Jersey diners how awesome authentic Italian food tastes at his two award-winning restaurants: Viag-

gio in Wayne and Osteria Crescendo in Westwood.

Nowhere on his menu are such Italian-American dishes as chicken cacciatore, penne alla vodka, spaghetti and meatballs or garlic bread. Arancini, di Stefano Stracciarella, salmon oreganato, tagliatelle Bolognese, and tiramisu panna cotta are.

Felice cures his meats, hand rolls his pasta, makes most everything from scratch. In less than four years, he's shown New Jersey how darn good real Italian food can taste. Buon appetito!

The Pizzaiolo | Dan Richer

Owner, Razza Pizza Artiginale, Jersey City

Seven years ago, Dan Richer, a Rutgers University grad, opened a BYOB pizza joint in Jersey City — and redefined the art of pizza making.

Says Michael Sinatra of The Infatuation: "Outside of sports gambling, Razza has maybe become the state's most successful new source of interstate commerce. Anyone who's been rants about the incredible bread, butter and pizza. But more importantly, Razza gives New Jersey the hammer that punches the final nail in the coffin of the debate of who does it better: NJ or NYC. Don't believe it? Just check out the people filing off the PATH train at Grove Street to get a taste of some of what's on a menu that pays tribute to purveyors in every corner of the state."

The Grill Master | Stephen Chrisomalis, Jr.

Chef/Owner, Steve's Burgers, two locations, both in Garfield

Stephen Chrisomalis, Jr. may have learned how to butcher animals, clean and debone fish and julienne vegetables at the Johnson & Wales culinary school, but the Hackensack resident is happy, thank you very much, flipping burgers at his roadside stand, and equally humble second, similarly eponymous burger joint, in Garfield.

Not just any burgers, mind you. But, well, the best. Yelpers recently named Steve's Burgers one of 50 Best Burgers in America. Travel Channel's "Food Paradise" voted it the best in the tri-state area. And in 2018, it was named "Best Burger" at the Famous Food Festival in Jersey City. We second all those accolades, having named his patty Bergen's Best Burger this year.

The Mixologist | Jamie Dodge

Reyna's, Barrio Costero and Laylow, Asbury Park

For too long, cocktail culture huddled in a few corners of the Garden State (Cheers, Jersey City! Cheers, Princeton!). But over the past 10 years, it has spilled over widely into just about every Jersey region.

Mixologist Jaime Dodge can take a chunk of credit for New Jersey's new-found cocktail zeal. The 35-year-old Long Valley native started his career seven years ago at Circa in High Bridge and went on to floor the press and cocktail lovers alike with his wildly creative potent potions at Elements, Princeton's revered fine-dine restaurant, and Mistral, its more casual sister restaurant.

Today he heads the drinks programs at three Asbury Park spots: Mexican restaurants Reyna's and Barrio Costero and newly opened cocktail lounge Laylow.

The press — and public — have taken notice. In a review of Barrio, New Jersey Monthly wrote: "(Executive chef) Anthony Bustamante is not Barrio's only star. Jamie Dodge ... has crafted Mexican-influenced cocktails that make Barrio's busy bar worth a visit on its own."

Recently, Dodge began concocting "off-the-wall" drinks in underground "killer lounge" Laylow that serves as his lab for experimentation. "I'm playing with more science," he says; his toys include foams, infusions, citrus acids — as well as homemade tonics, gins, colas and syrups. We can't wait to drink what he comes up with next.

The Sommelier | Susanne Wagner

Wine Director, Restaurant Latour, Hamburg

German-born Susanne Wagner, wine director at Restaurant Latour, is arguably the most knowledgeable sommelier in the Garden State. She oversees one of the world's most exceptional wine collections, boasting more than 100,000 bottles.

Last year, The Wine Enthusiast Restaurant named Restaurant Latour to its Restaurant Hall of Fame, the only New Jersey restaurant to be given the honor. It is in stellar company; also inducted were such industry luminaries as Blue Hill at Stone Barns (Pocantico Hills, N.Y.) Eleven Madison Park (New York City) and The French Laundry (Yountville, Calif.).

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Dining

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And while New Jersey oenophiles rave about her — "She's amazing; hands down the best," declares Anthony Bucco, chef and owner of Felina in Ridgewood — her influence stretches beyond the borders of New Jersey. Among those she has trained are Samantha Shaw, today wine director of highly regarded seafood restaurant The Pearl in Nantucket, Mass.; Brent Jones, cellar sommelier at The French Laundry in Napa, Calif.; and Kenneth Belgard, who recently started working at The Modern in NYC.

The Partners in All Things Food | Neilly Robinson and David Viana

Owner and Chef/Partner Respectively, Heirloom Kitchen, Old Bridge

Three years ago, chef David Viana became a partner of six-year-old Heirloom Kitchen, a restaurant, retail boutique and cooking school founded by Neilly Robinson and housed in one gorgeous space in Old Bridge. And while the wonderfully talented chef has gotten lots of kudos — he was nominated for a James Beard award; was inducted into the Hall of Fame at his culinary alma mater, the Institute of Culinary Education; became one of 15 chefs to compete on Top Chef's 16th season — Robinson is no industry slouch.

Says Sinatra of The Infatuation: "While David Viana's food is what has brought a level of notoriety to Heirloom Kitchen as a restaurant, Neilly Robinson's tireless work in developing a dedicated following for her best-in-class cooking school and connecting the state's most influential food suppliers together. From butchers in North Bergen to bakers in Asbury Park, oyster harvesters on the Barnegat Bay, local chefs, wine retailers, farmers and more, Neilly is an undeniable lynchpin that connects all things related to food in not only Monmouth County but throughout the state."

The Brewer | Michael Kane

Founder, Kane Brewing Company, Ocean Township

Kane Brewing churns out lots of different beer, make that, lots of amazing artisanal, small-batch beers. Kane specializes in hoppy and barrel-aged beers that wisely take advantage of the Gar-

den State's bounty. Founder and owner Michael Kane mixes such local ingredients as New Jersey honey and apple cider into his brews.

"We work with local farms to make culinary-inspired beers," says the 43-year-old Little Silver resident. The brewery's flagship beer Head High today is poured in at least 500 restaurants and bars in New Jersey.

Says Sinatra of The Infatuation: "Kane Brewing might not have been the first, but its success in the 2010s brought newfound levels of respect to the state's growing brewery community, as well as long lines to their brewery for one-of-a-kind and special beer releases."

The Sommelier | Francis P. Schott

Co-owner and Beverage Director, Stage Left Steakhouse and Catherine Lombardi, both in New Brunswick

In 1992, when Francis Schott and his business partner Mark Pascal opened Stage Left Steakhouse, hardly any restaurant in New Jersey was offering estate-bottled wines from small producers. Stage Left was. "Now everybody is doing it," said Schott, who is not only co-owner but beverage director of the restaurant. (He is beverage director for Catherine Lombardi, the duo's second restaurant, too.)

Thanks to Schott, Stage Left has won Wine Spectator's coveted Best of Award of Excellence every year since 2005. It has hosted some of the wine world's most luminary professionals, including Alexandra Cherniavsky, beverage director of The Love, an award-winning restaurant in Philadelphia, and Master Sommelier Johnathan Ross (ex-Eleven Madison Park guru; today a wine consultant in Australia). And it has introduced one of the first cocktail programs in the country. New York Times's drinks writer Robert Simonson features him in his book "A Proper Drink."

Says Schott, "We helped to change the way people drink wine and cocktails in New Jersey." A thank you is in order.

The Professor | Craig Shelton

Co-Founder, Princeton Center for Food Studies, Princeton University

Craig Shelton, who has trained in eight of the world's greatest restaurants, including El Bulli, Jamin; Ma Maison and Le Bernardin, is one of only two New Jersey chefs to have ever received a James Beard Award (the other is Maricel Presilla, chef and owner of Cucharama-

ma in Hoboken). The Bedminister resident also has received four New York Times four-star ratings, a five-star Forbes rating, the Relais & Châteaux Grand Chef title; and No 1. Top Restaurant in America in 2004 from GQ.

As many longtime Jersey food fans know, Shelton was the chef and owner of legendary haute-cuisine temple Ryland Inn until 2010. He was for a time the chef of a New Jersey diner (The Edison Diner), one that — surprise! — received a four-star review in The Star Ledger and the New York Times.

So what does an apparent awards magnet with more than 30 years of virtuoso cooking experience do at the pinnacle of his career? Teach — and think — about food, nutrition, agriculture, the environment ... and how they are related and can be made better.

In a statement, Shelton, who holds a degree in molecular biophysics and biochemistry from Yale, wrote that his mission is "to make great and healthy food available and affordable for all citizens of our great country." Shelton hopes to "help shift public opinion toward the demand for wholesome, nutritious and natural foods grown or raised holistically ... To bring fun and competency to the home cook and the professional culinarian ... To free culinary conventional wisdom from centuries of myth and false theory."

Recently, Shelton was awarded the New Jersey Restaurant Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. If only the Nobel Norwegian Committee gave a prize in food science.

The Teacher | Chris Mumford

Former Chef/Owner, Mumford's Cafe, Tinton Falls

Chris Mumford was doing farm-to-table before it was the thing to do. He could see his garden from his restaurant window, where he also held cooking classes, teaching people they could make a beautiful meal from the food they grew in their backyards (the backyard of his own home was full of vegetables, too, as were the side yards and anywhere he could fit a pot). He has a passion for cooking unlike anyone most of us have seen, and chefs up and down the Shore hold him in the highest regard. He made cooking seem like something people could, and would want to, do.

(P.S.: After three decades of cooking, Mumford closed shop in mid-2018. But he left his cafe in good hands with chef Casey Pesce, who renamed it Apple

Street Kitchen.)

The Chef | Bruce Lefebvre

Chef/Owner, The Frog & the Peach, New Brunswick

Bruce Lefebvre has been cooking at what again and again many consider to be one of the state's best restaurants for some three decades. He was named executive chef in 2001, became the restaurant's owner in 2012. But don't expect to hear him boast.

"He is a very quiet, unassuming chef," says Vincent Barcelona, New Jersey-based restaurant consultant. Since Lefebvre won't toot his own horn, we thought we'd boast for him.

Lefebvre, Barcelona says, "has been impacting not only central New Jersey for the past decade with ever-evolving food, top-notch service, and a great wine program, but he has trained successful cooks that have gone on to have solid careers as chefs all over."

The Beer Expert | Mike Proske

Owner, Project PUB and Tapastre, both in Somerville

For more than a decade, Mike Proske run Tapastre, a tapas-style restaurant that pairs dishes with its huge selection of craft beer. Project PUB is Proske's new venture, a brew pub that does a tap takeover every month at a brewery and offers a new menu designed to be paired with that brewery's beer. He also has hosted the town's Oktoberfest for the past few years, which has been called one of the best Oktoberfests in America, and has begun hosting a beer fest at Somerset Patriots Ballpark.

The Restaurateur | Steven Botta

Owner, Brando's Citi Cucina in Asbury Park; Osteria Cucina Rustica in Marlboro; Feast Italian Kitchen in Old Bridge; and Churrascaria Brazilian Steakhouse in Old Bridge

Monmouth County food enthusiasts have known for some time that Steven Botta, the executive chef and co-owner of the popular Brando's Citi Cucina in Asbury Park and Osteria Cucina Rustica in Marlboro, is a local authority on Italian cuisine. But earlier this year, Middlesex County residents learned it, too. Botta opened two restaurants in Old Bridge: Feast Italian Kitchen and Churrascaria Brazilian Steakhouse. He gets credit too for resurrecting Fromagerie in

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