

# The TAVI Times

Bringing Local Journalism Back to Our Community

*A Community Service of The Allentown Village Initiative*

July 1, 2025 - Volume V, Issue VII

*We hold these truths. . . .*

## Annual Proclamation of the Declaration of Independence on July 4<sup>th</sup>

How will you start your July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday? Join us in Sensi Park at 9 a.m. to hear again the words which gave birth to our nation. TAVI is proud to sponsor the 249<sup>th</sup> annual Proclamation of the Declaration of Independence as read by about two dozen residents ranging in age from 15 to 80.

The event is a reminder of the principles on which America was founded. It's also a community celebration of freedom and the perfect way to begin the quintessential American holiday.

This free program runs about 45 minutes, including refreshments at the end, so you'll have plenty of time to prepare your own barbeques and evening fireworks!



## TAVI Presents Newell Award to Madia Resch

TAVI was pleased to present the 2025 William Augustus Newell award to Ms. Madia Resch, a graduating senior at Allentown High School. Madia served as president of the English Honor Society and was also a member of the History Honor Society, where she became a tour guide at the Old Burying Ground for TAVI. Madia volunteered at the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen and, as a member of the Science Honor Society, helped



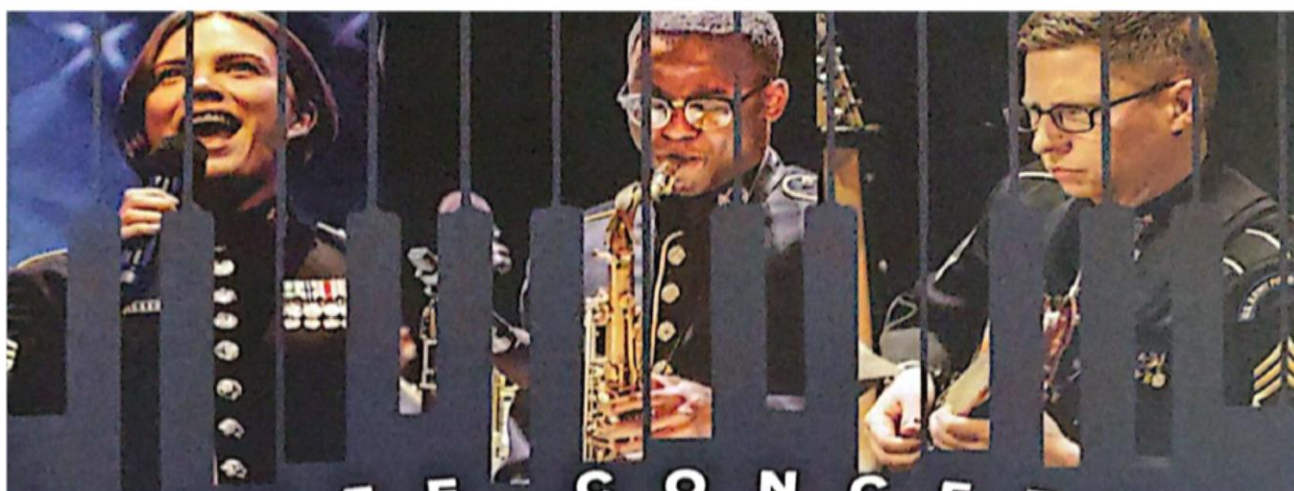
Madia Resch

make and serve homemade ice cream at Newell Elementary School's "Science Night."

TAVI's Newell Award includes a \$250 honorarium and bears the name of the Allentown resident who served as governor of both New Jersey and Washington Territory. Newell was also Abraham Lincoln's personal physician and, as a member of Congress, he sponsored legislation establishing the U.S. Coast Guard.



Be sure to "Save the Date" for the next event in  
TAVI's "Allentown Arts" Concert Series --



FREE CONCERT

AMERICA'S BIG BAND  
**JAZZ**  
AMBASSADORS

**August 17 • 3 PM**

**Allentown United Methodist Church  
ALLENTOWN, NEW JERSEY**

Inclement Weather Location  
Same time: 8/17 at 3 pm  
Allentown High School  
27 High Street

[ARMYFIELDBAND.COM/EVENTS](http://ARMYFIELDBAND.COM/EVENTS)

301-677-6586

★ U.S. ARMY



## BEHIND THE BOOKS:

### The Allentown Library's Unique Public-Private Partnership

By Brandon Metrick

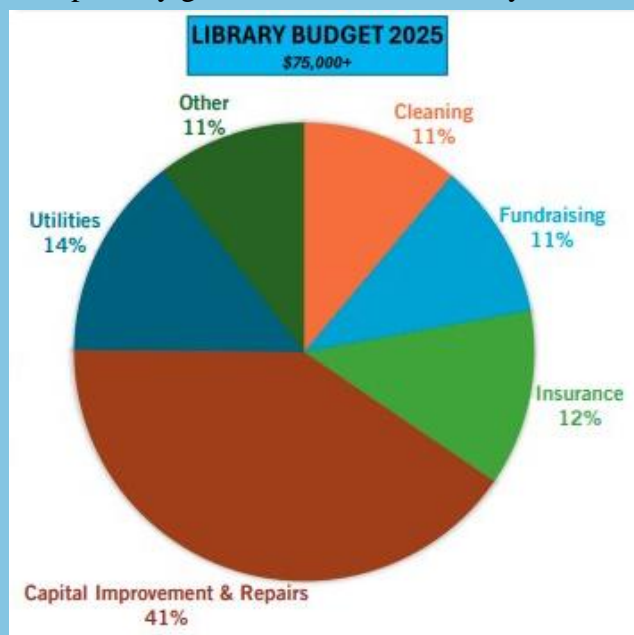
Tucked along Main Street inside a repurposed 19th-century church, the Allentown Public Library offers the community far more than books. But few patrons realize that behind the scenes, a dedicated nonprofit, the Allentown Public Library Association (APLA), keeps the building standing and the doors open.

"It's a public-private partnership," said Joan Ruddiman, the Association's longtime president. "The Allentown Public Library Association owns and operates the physical building, the physical plant... Everything that has to do with library services is then as a Monmouth County branch."

Unlike most branches in the Monmouth County Library System, Allentown's facility is not municipally owned. That distinction puts the responsibility on the APLA to fund all building maintenance, repairs, and preservation efforts. Costs that rise steadily with age and time.

"There's one other library in Monmouth County that owns their own facility. But in the state of New Jersey, it's very rare," Ruddiman explained.

The Association raises funds primarily through a fall mailing campaign sent to residents in Allentown, Upper Freehold, and parts of Millstone. "The annual letter is very successful... kind of our annual state of the library... we tell people what they're getting before we ask for money," she said. It's transparency grounded in accountability.



a grant towards preserving the steeple... steeples are very expensive," she said. "These are not ordinary renovations. The building itself is a piece of living history."



With an approximate annual operating budget of \$70,000, the Association handles everything from plumbing and electrical needs to weather-related damage and furniture repairs. "The money that comes in every year gets spent," Ruddiman said. "Any homeowner would understand this... we just have to take care of unexpected emergencies."

Despite the challenges, the Association has preserved a strong relationship with the county's system. "We have always had a really good relationship with the county, very purposely managed," Ruddiman said. "For example, the county will replace the book drop... That was good news."

Still, major capital projects loom. "We're waiting to hear from the state of New Jersey if we've received

Continued on next page

## ***Behind the Books***

(continued from previous page)

The church was purchased by the Association in the early 1970s, burned out but salvageable, and gradually transformed into a functioning public library. "We were serving multiple masters when we were attempting to renovate this burned-out Baptist church," Ruddiman said. "That's tough to do, but we did it."

Inside, the library retains much of its original character. "You have to picture that you're standing in the sanctuary of a church... real high ceilings, real high windows, big windows," she said. "It's just a beautiful, open, airy, light space."

Original pews, restored woodwork, and hand-selected furnishings give the library its distinct charm. "We didn't cut corners. And I'm really proud of that... that it was done well, not only aesthetically, but it met code," Ruddiman added.

All four walls of the library, its core included, tell a story of community commitment, where residents choose to care for the physical space themselves rather than hand it off to larger municipal authorities.

The building's transformation has been recognized with multiple grants and awards, including a prestigious New Jersey Historic Preservation Award. "It was... really wonderful confirmation that we had done a good job, that it was well done, that it was appreciated," she said.

As the Association looks to its next chapter, the story of the Allentown Public Library remains one of uncommon stewardship, where history, literature, and community converge under one tall steeple.

## ***"Just a Servant of the Library"***

### **Joan Ruddiman Reflects on Decades of Dedication in Allentown**

By Brandon Metrick

If you've ever stepped inside the Allentown Public Library, you've already walked through part of Joan Ruddiman's life's work. The shelves, the windows, and even the ramp in the back, all carry her touch. But ask her about it, and she'll tell you the same thing she's said for decades.

"I just... I've always appreciated the fact that I'm just a servant of the library," she said. "I'm just this chief servant. We're just all there to serve."



Joan with one of the books she has authored

After more than 30 years of guiding the Allentown Public Library Association (APLA), the nonprofit that owns and maintains the building, Joan Ruddiman will step down as board president at the end of the year. And while her title

may be changing, her connection to the library isn't.

"I've been involved with the library since I was a child," she said. "It was always a really important place for me." She remembers walking through the original library space in the 1960s, where "the first librarian we had was Mrs. Tindall," and where neighbors and volunteers like Bernice Van Kirk and Mrs. Tindall became part of her earliest memories of reading and community. Even then, the library was more than a place. It was a part of Allentown's identity.

In 1980, Ruddiman returned to Allentown with her husband John and joined the library board at a pivotal time. "It was right at kind of a crucial point when they

*Continued on next page*



## ★ **Library Servant** *(continued)*

★ had this building that needed renovation,” she said. “And we made a decision to go about it with an architect and engineers and professional contractors and kind of quote, do it the right way.”

★ There were challenges, from structural work to long-term planning, but they were met with collective problem-solving. “We always have had an incredible library board of people, volunteers, that bring their own expertise and knowledge to bear, and we work through them,” she said.



She recalled how even a seemingly small detail like the choir loft had to be carefully negotiated with local inspectors. “The stairway, the circular stairway that had been in the foyer that would get up to that had been, of course, taken out and we built a new staircase that would go up to it,” she said. “And [the inspector] said, ‘Well, you can't let the public use that, so you have to put a gate across the stairs.’ Okay, we can do that.”

Professionalism, patience, and precision guided each step. “There were no roadblocks. We were able to work through any challenges,” she said.

Professionally, Ruddiman is a retired teacher with a doctorate in education. “I’m a reading specialist,” she said. “It’s all about books and reading and research and learning... It’s just been part of my life, my whole life.”

That lifelong connection is what makes her upcoming departure from the presidency so bittersweet.

“It is true,” she said when asked if she plans to step down. “My husband and I are moving to North Carolina... It just

★ seems like the right time to do this.”

★ She will stay on the board until she and her husband move. In the meantime, the Association is already preparing for its next chapter. “We have an incredible group of people,” she said. “Men, women, people that are old to Allentown, people that are new to Allentown... It’s a real diverse group that bring an incredible number of skills and talents.”

★ Asked what she hopes for in her successor, Ruddiman answered simply: “A passion for the library, which they all have, everybody that serves on the board has that.”

★ Her final advice? Stay humble. Stay cooperative. Stay focused. “What advice I would give... to be very willing to maintain the positive relationships that we have built with the town and the township and the county,” she said. “Politics can never enter into the library’s realm. We serve everyone in an unbiased way.”

★ When asked how she would like the community to remember her service, Ruddiman didn’t hesitate. “That I was a good servant. That my love of the library just was because I love the library, and I love the town,” she said. “If you care about something deeply, then you serve it. You try to take care of it.”



## UFT/Allentown Residents Meet with Conaway

On May 27, 2025, Upper Freehold and Allentown residents met with Congressman Herb Conaway, Jr., M.D. (D-NJ) to urge his opposition to the further dismantling of the Older Americans Act. The Older Americans Act (OAA) of 1965 was the first federal level initiative aimed at providing comprehensive services for older Americans. Conaway's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District includes both Allentown and Upper Freehold.

Sue Kozel wrote the Congressman in response to the proposed dismantling of the Older Americans Act and the proposed cuts to programs including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicare, and Medicaid. She asked if Representative Conaway would meet with members of the Monmouth County Senior Advisory Council, who were attending as individuals and not representing Monmouth County. The Congressman agreed to the meeting. This letter writing campaign to protect the Older Americans Act was initiated by Pat Bohse, Chairwoman of the Monmouth County Senior Advisory Council.

The four area residents in the photo (*right*) with Congressman Herb Conaway, M.D. from Upper Freehold and Allentown were: Betty Elder (Allentown), Reverend Crystal James, Union A.M.E. Church (representing her Allentown Church), Sue Kozel (Upper Freehold), and Steve Satran (Upper Freehold).



## CCGNJ Undertakes Gambling Attitudes in NJ Survey

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) is conducting a survey of gambling attitudes in New Jersey. The legalization of online gambling in 2013 followed by sports betting being legalized in 2018 have given rise to a gambling culture and a surge in problem gambling. The Council has begun to frame the spike in problem gambling, evidenced by a dramatic increase in calls to the 800-GAMBLER Helpline, as an emerging public health issue.

The Council's survey will gauge the public's views on gambling's proliferation and assess whether regulators have responded sufficiently to this trend. One issue of concern is the tremendous volume of gambling advertising, some of which is misleading and targets youth and young adults.



To take CCGNJ's survey, please go to [Gambling Attitudes in NJ Survey](#)



## *The Patriots Amongst Us*

**SWITLIK**  
SURVIVAL PRODUCTS



# **Switlik Family Legacy One of National Service**

By Olivia Suh

*Editor's Note: This is the first of an occasional series sharing the stories of individuals and families in Allentown and Upper Freehold whose service has impacted lives far beyond our borders.*

Generations of Switliks have made their home on the High Street, Allentown property they lovingly refer to as "Hardaground" for its perch above Conine's Pond. Few families can say that they helped save a president's life, worked with Amelia Earhart, or aided in the success of America's victory in World War II. But the Switlik family can and has been only adding to their list of successes.

From producing life-saving parachutes to donating land to open schools in central New Jersey, the Switlik's legacy is one of modern innovation, service, and community impact.



**Walther & Stanley Switlik**

founded in Trenton, New Jersey, started as a manufacturer during the rising popularity of modern aviation, but the story begins with Stanley Switlik. A Polish immigrant who arrived in the U.S. in 1907 at the age of 16 with nothing but ambition. In 1920, Switlik founded the Canvas-Leather Specialty Company in Trenton, which first produced mailbags and other products for the U.S. Postal Service, but as the popularity of aviation rose, Switlik steered his focus towards

pilot belts, flight suits, and eventually, parachutes.

By the 1930s, his company had become a success, changing its title to Switlik Parachute & Equipment Company. In just a short span of time, it had become the nation's largest parachute supplier. Switlik has outfitted some of the most iconic aviators in history, such as Wiley Post, Admiral Richard Byrd, and even Amelia Earhart.

In 1934, Switlik partnered with George Putnam, Earhart's husband, creating the first parachute training tower constructed on Switlik's Prospertown Farm in Ocean County, New Jersey. Amelia Earhart was the first to jump from the tower where she shared her experience as "loads of fun!" This parachute training tower was replicated and is now used for military training across the nation.

During World War II, Switlik became the key supplier to the U.S. military, producing 2,500 parachutes a week. Due to their excellent performance, Switlik was recognized and awarded the Army-Navy "E" Award for outstanding war production not just once, but five times.

One of these parachutes played a vital role in saving the life of Navy Lieutenant George H.W. Bush when his plane was shot down in 1944. Without Switlik's parachute, America's

*Continued on next page*



**A Switlik parachute in action**

## Switlik Legacy *(continued)*

presidential history could have been very different.

World War II was not the only war Switlik has provided for. During both the Korean War and the Vietnam War, the company provided parachutes and equipment for its military operations.

Although parachutes are what created a name for Switlik, the company did not stop there; they altered their products to meet the needs of the world. They have developed safety products for civilians such as life vests, inflatable rafts, and G-force survival suits for astronauts, all of which are FAA and U.S. Coast Guard approved.



The Switlik's contributions do not relate solely to their survival products but have expanded into public education as well.

In 1948, Stanley Switlik donated 160 acres of land in Jackson Township, helping create Jackson Memorial High School and

Switlik Elementary School. These institutions provide education to over 2,000 students. In addition, Michelle Alter, Richard Switlik's daughter, established a \$1.2 million trust fund for Jackson schools.

The Switlik name is remembered beyond Jackson Township. There is Stanley Switlik Elementary School in Marathon, Florida, where the family resided seasonally. As they also once resided in Lawrenceville, Rider University honors their legacy by naming a residence after them.



Richard Switlik, Jr.

Richard Switlik, named Grand Marshall of the Allentown Lions' Memorial Day parade in 2016, noted, "We live

our lives in phases. I literally grew up on the pond, here in this town. I went out and sailed and had many adventures. But things come full circle, and I returned and raised my family here, served, and continue to serve, the community here. Honestly, there is no place I would rather have as my home base than Allentown, the place where it all began."

## TAVI250 Adds Gilbert Wooby Program to Calendar

Upper Freehold historian Sue Kozel will present "Say Our Names: Free Black Families Emerging Out of Slavery to Freedom in Upper Freehold and Allentown, 1780s-1830s" on June 20, 2026 as part of TAVI's year-long celebration of America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday, and in commemoration of Juneteenth.

Built around some historical records of Gilbert Wooby, a free African American man in Upper Freehold in the late 1790s, Sue Kozel will discuss parts of the emerging Free Black Community in Allentown and Upper Freehold using Manumission records, tax records, census, and other documents.

TAVI250 events are made possible by the generous support of First Commerce Bank and a grant from Monmouth Arts, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the Monmouth County Board of Commissioners.





# State Legislators Salute TAVI

**Editor's Note:** In the wake of New Jersey's first "Six Triple Eight Day" honoring Allentown native Marion VanOrkey, the New Jersey Legislature has thanked TAVI for its efforts to recognize the 27 African American women from New Jersey who served in the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Battalion during World War II. Six Triple Eight Day will now be celebrated annually throughout New Jersey on May 18<sup>th</sup>, Ms. VanOrkey's birthday. We're grateful for the support shown TAVI by Senator Shirley Turner and the members of the legislature who made "Six Triple Eight Day" possible.

**Here's the full text of the Legislature's Resolution:**

## THE SENATE AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE, TRENTON, N.J.

### JOINT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION

By Senator TURNER, Assemblywoman REYNOLDS-JACKSON, and Assemblyman VERRELLI

**WHEREAS,** The Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey are pleased to recognize and commend The Allentown Village Initiative, highly esteemed in the Garden State, in appreciation of its tireless advocacy in behalf of the passage of the bill designating May 18<sup>th</sup> as Six Triple Eight Day in the State of New Jersey; and,

**WHEREAS,** Founded in 2013 by a group of public-spirited volunteers, The Allentown Village Initiative is an exemplary organization dedicated to revitalizing the local economy, improving the visual appeal of the Borough, and preserving and protecting the region's natural and historical resources, and, to that end, TAVI sought to honor Marion VanOrkey, an Allentown native who was a member of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Battalion of the Women's Army Corps; and,

**WHEREAS,** As part of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Battalion of the Women's Army Corps, Marion VanOrkey and her comrades were tasked with sorting through a backlog of some 14 million pieces of mail—an extraordinarily daunting mission that required the women to work around the clock in shifts to guarantee that letters and parcels would finally reach soldiers on the front and their families at home, thus boosting morale and significantly contributing to the Allied victory in Europe; and,

**WHEREAS,** The Allentown Village Initiative helped ensure that Marion VanOrkey and the other members of the 6888<sup>th</sup>, a battalion of eight hundred fifty-five African American women, twenty-seven of whom were New Jersey residents, are commemorated each year on the anniversary of Marion VanOrkey's birth—a meritorious accomplishment worthy of praise and admiration; and,

**WHEREAS,** Within all spheres, The Allentown Village Initiative has established a model worthy of emulation and set a standard of excellence toward which others might strive; and,

**WHEREAS,** It is altogether fitting and proper for this Legislature to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge The Allentown Village Initiative and affirm its importance to the people of the State; now, therefore,

*Be It Resolved by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

That this Legislature hereby salutes The Allentown Village Initiative, pays tribute to its sterling record of service and commitment, and extends sincere best wishes for its continued success and vigor in all the years to come; and,

*Be It Further Resolved,* That a duly authenticated copy of this resolution, signed by the Senate President and the Assembly Speaker and attested by the Senate Secretary and the Assembly Clerk, be transmitted to The Allentown Village Initiative.



# MONMOUTH ACTS IN MY COMMUNITY

In person at Allentown Branch

**First and Third Tuesday  
from 10:00 am – 1:00 pm  
and the Fourth Friday  
from 1:00 – 4:00 pm**

Co-sponsored by the Monmouth County  
Division of Social Services

"Monmouth ACTS In My Community" is a new initiative that places representatives from the Monmouth County Department of Human Services (DHS) directly in the offices of local nonprofit organizations and agencies that are spread across the County – meaning help is always nearby.

Help provided for SNAP, NJ Family Care,  
Medicaid and more.

Services are provided on a first come, first serve basis.



**Monmouth County Library | ALLENTOWN BRANCH**

16 S. Main Street, Allentown, NJ 08501 • 609-259-7565 • [MonmouthCountyLib.org](http://MonmouthCountyLib.org) 2025



## DID YOU KNOW.....

Abraham Lincoln's great-great grandparents, Modacai and Hannah Salter Lincoln, lived in Upper Freehold? "Uncle Mord" (pictured at right) moved to Imlaystown from Massachusetts. Once in New Jersey, he married Hannah Salter and operated a mill with his father-in-law, Richard Salter. The mill still stands in Imlaystown (across from the Happy Apple Inn). While living in Imlaystown, the couple's

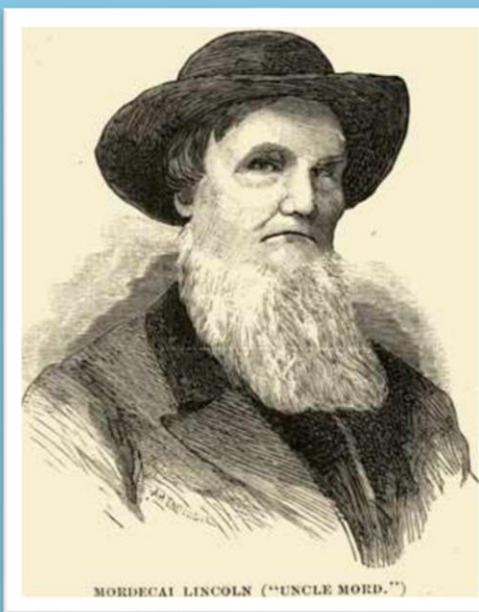
daughter,

Deborah, died at the age of three.

She is buried in the Robbins Burial Place off Route 524.

Mordacai moved his family to a 500

acre farm in Exeter, Pennsylvania, where he died in 1735 at the age of 49.



Salter's Mill in Imlaystown

*Are you marking a birthday, anniversary, graduation, marriage or other milestone event in your family? Let TAVI celebrate with you – Send your announcements to [mccormicknj@aol.com](mailto:mccormicknj@aol.com) so we can include them in The TAVI Times.*

## The TAVI Times — The return of local journalism to our community

The TAVI Times exists to report local news you are not likely to see elsewhere. Please send us your local news as well as information about the events and activities which make Allentown and Upper Freehold a great place to live. News, events and activities are free -- TAVI is a small band of volunteers which happily serves our community free of charge. If you are a small business owner, please consider supporting TAVI's many community service projects by purchasing ad space in this monthly publication, now reaching over 2,400 households in the Allentown-Upper Freehold area. Contact Mike McCormick at [mccormicknj@aol.com](mailto:mccormicknj@aol.com) for more information.

[www.allentownvinj.org](http://www.allentownvinj.org)

### The Allentown Village Initiative (TAVI)

President – Martha Ploshay

Vice President – Annette DeFalco

Treasurer – Alan DeFalco

Secretary – Jacqueline Bossart

Trustee & TAVI Times Editor – Mike McCormick

Trustees – Alice Wikoff, Jeff Ploshay, Debbi McCormick, David Bossart

**Donations are always gratefully accepted at**

**<https://www.allentownvinj.org/donate.html>**

Copyright 2025

