

LOVED AND LOST

These profiles are part of a continuing series called "Loved and Lost" about New Jersey family, friends and neighbors taken by coronavirus.

Jean Thomas, soul front man who was became a star in England

He was a dresser. He'd sashay down the street in matching suit, shoes, pocket handkerchief and fedora — white or red or any shade in between. But what people in Ridgewood remember most about Jean Thomas was his voice.

He died April 10, a month after his family and friends gathered to celebrate what, it can now be said, was his 78th birthday.

Jean Thomas was stingy with his exact age, and not much else. Friends described his generosity: with home-baked pound cake, with daily inspirational Facebook messages, and with music.



Thomas

Especially music. Although he made his living working at a dry cleaner, Jean Thomas enjoyed a professional performer's rarest, sweetest pleasure. He was rediscovered. He came back.

In the 1960s he was lead singer in the New Jersey-based soul group, Epitome of Sound. Their single You Don't Love Me became a hit — and then a classic.

Other hits did not follow, and so after decades of playing local and regional gigs, Thomas focused on singing in a church gospel choir and entertaining

friends in Ridgewood.

Meanwhile, in England, his music never really went away. There, it became part of a genre called "Northern Soul" (for the North of England). That region's famously discriminating music lovers valued soul that was either not as slick or not as popular as the products of Motown or Stax. They liked authenticity. And Jean Thomas was nothing if not authentic.

Then, in this century, his records won new fans. Suddenly, there were gigs in the British Midlands, including one at the famous Blackpool Tower venue, and a new record.

"It shocked him more than anyone — decades had passed," says Mack Brandon, pastor of AME Mount Zion Church and a music professor at Ramapo College. "He'd just sort of forgotten about it. But he'd planted a seed."

The new record didn't sell, and that was disappointing. But he was always a hero in Ridgewood, where he'd long performed at summer concerts in Van Neste Park, outside Ben and Jerry's, at the Fourth of July celebration and at fundraisers and the odd birthday party.

"When he smiled, we would smile," recalled his friend, the soprano Kristen Plumley. "When he sang, we danced."

Memorial

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We also recognize this task is herculean and we will not likely be able to profile so many. But that is just an indicator of the terrible toll this virus has taken on our communities. Indeed, even gathering the names of all the victims may not be possible given the scope of the tragedy. But we will try.

We are asking relatives and friends of those who have been lost to reach out to us to help us memorialize them in print and online. These are not obituaries, but rather celebrations of those we have lost.

If you'd like us to profile your loved one, submit their name at LovedAndLostNJ.com or contact us at chantee@lovedandlostnj.com.

About the Loved and Lost collaboration

The project was conceived out of several conversations between Daniel Sforza, Executive Editor of The Record, and Stefanie Murray, Director of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University.

Its aim is simple, yet daunting in scope: profile as many people as possi-



Loved and Lost CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE MEDIA

ble who have been lost to the coronavirus.

We are actively seeking help from media organizations throughout New Jersey to help in this effort. Media large and small, independent and corporate owned, are welcome to join. We are especially interested in working with diverse media organizations who write for under-served populations and in languages other than English.

If you are interested in working with us, please contact Chanteé Lans, our project director, at chantee@lovedandlostnj.com.

About the project leaders:

Chanteé Lans

Chanteé Lans is an Edward R. Mur-



Lans

row award-winning journalist.

Before "Loved and Lost," Chanteé was a general assignment reporter at KYW-TV CBS 3 Philadelphia. She joined CBS 3 from WBZ-TV, the CBS owned and operated sister station in Boston, where she was also a general assignment reporter.

Chanteé has covered the Boston marathon bombings, arrest and murder trial of New England Patriot Aaron Hernandez, the imprisonment and release of rapper Meek Mill, the Philadelphia Eagles' first Super Bowl win and the Blizzard of 2013.

The Brooklyn and Long Island, New York native started her career behind

the scenes at CBS News as a national desk assistant in New York City.

Chanteé earned her bachelor of arts degree in broadcast journalism from Temple University. She later earned her masters degree in global development and social justice from St. John's University.

Stefanie Murray

Stefanie Murray is the Director of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University.

A Michigan native, Stefanie previously worked in Michigan and Tennessee as a reporter, editor, digital media manager and news executive.

Before joining Montclair State, she worked for Gannett Co. as vice president and executive editor of The Tennessean in Nashville, and was with the Detroit Free Press before that.

Her professional passions are collaborative journalism, local journalism and community engagement. She has a master's degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and a bachelor's degree in broadcasting and journalism from Central Michigan University.



Murray

SAFE AND STRONG TOGETHER

Creating a safe environment for all your healthcare needs. That was our mission before the pandemic. That was our mission during the pandemic. That remains our mission...today and every day.



What You Need to Know About Returning to Healthcare Services

We want to assure you that our hospitals, doctors' offices and services are safe, open and available to you. For your continued good health and ongoing protection, we have made several modifications and enhancements at all of our facilities:

Separate COVID-19 Units: patients testing positive for COVID-19 are separated from other patients in designated units.



Screening: all patients' temperature screened upon entry; every employee screened at start of work day



Social Distancing: redesigned public entrances to ensure a protective flow and distancing in all areas



Hygiene Stations: at all entrances offering complimentary masks, hand sanitizer and precaution information



Clean Environment: all facilities cleaned and disinfected continuously, following strict procedures and guidelines



St. Joseph's Health

If you have questions about an upcoming visit or procedure, please call and speak with a patient navigator anytime between the hours of 8:00 am – 6:30 pm at (833) 913-2758.

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