



CONGERS COMMUNITY CAFÉ OPENS AT CONGERS LAKE PARK

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter



Congers Lake Park has over 500,000 visitors/year now has a café that those visitors can go to for drinks and snacks. The ribbon was cut to officially open the Congers Community Café on June 5, 2026.

I'm here with Donna Ehrenberg, director of the café and who works with Rockland Community Services agency which works with all people with disabilities.

"We're always looking for more opportunities, especially for employment. So, we went to the town looking for what could happen. Could we have more volunteer, or employment? They said, 'Can you reopen the cafe?' So, it's a lot of support from people here, they helped to start that, and now it's run by people with disabilities, and hopefully other businesses will see that as our goal, and they will be able to then look at them and hire them. We want to use it as a training ground for that. We're very thankful."

They just opened. This is their second week. Right now they're open Monday through Friday from 9 to 12 and Saturday and Sunday from 8 to 3, but if we see more people coming, they're very willing to open up longer and see if we can try to raise some money to get a refrigerator or freezer for ice cream or warming, so they're trying to work on that.



"And just like here right now Josh and his foundation gave us money to start and Steve Cohen, who runs Cup O' Joe, donated all the coffee and everything for us to start. Coca-Cola donated everything, so we're very, very thankful for the people that have supported the start of this."

We have something that helps the community. A lot of people will come out to help. Well, it was very good to start because we didn't really have that money to start, so having that has been tremendous for us." She stated.

Clarkstown help out at all?

"Well, Clarkstown is giving us the space we're renting from them, and they've been very supportive on it, so yeah. We're very thankful they've helped us with the signs and paid for them, so we really appreciate everything. Just giving the opportunity. That's what we're always looking for."

Mike stepped in and stated, "Clarkstown has been very, very helpful. This wouldn't have happened without them, but it was their suggestion to take over the space, and they gave us a lot of help, some signs, some guidance. They've been very receptive to everything, tremendously."

What are you looking forward to accomplishing here?

"Yeah, I mean we're, we're, we're hoping to expand the hours and expand the menu so we can teach not only teach and employ more individuals but also give these individuals more skills they can take out into the workplace. The real goal is that people to come in here for a couple of months, learn some skills, show off what they can do, and get them a permanent, lifetime placement." Mike explained.

The skills they are focusing on teaching are learning to use a cash register, to make coffee, a big thing for really any young person, not just special needs, to stay on task, to put the phone down, put it aside.

"I'm working for 4 hours. I'm not going to touch it. I don't have to check for YouTube for 4 hours. I'm going to make the coffee."

I'm going to clean the counters. I'm going to help any customers that come in, and I'm going to ignore my phone. That's the biggest goal and the toughest part."

He continued stating "That's tough for any individual regardless of their background, regardless of age or anything else as my phone's vibrating and I'm fighting answering it."

Ehrenberg picked up, "We also have people that have their own businesses, individuals with disability, which we're highlighting there that people can buy products from them. It's really showing the community people have a lot of skills that we can't just say, oh well, they can't do that. There's so much that they can do and really. We want to show that. That's really important."

Mike pointed out that one of these people she was highlighting as a perfect example is John, who's wandering outside. "He's nonverbal and speaks with a communication device, but he will work 24/7. If you're doing something, he'll interrupt you so he can do it himself. He wants to keep himself busy and he wants to do everything perfectly. It's unbelievable, perfect employee for anybody."

Donna said, "We paired up with; Alicia who's here from YAI. We're going through agencies so they're able to pay for a paid internship to work here to start that. So really reaching out to other agencies also has been very helpful."

That's something we're doing that I think is a little unique. We're inviting other agencies to help. We know we can't do this on our own, so we're inviting, you know, other agencies to come in with their job coaches and their workers, you know, to give them shifts so we can keep them on." Mike explained.

"Councilman Mike Graziano here from Ward 2 with John Luca at, Congers Park here to open up the Congers Community Café. It's a great place. John Luca works behind the counter, and we wish everybody to come down when you're taking a walk around the lake."

Stop in and grab water or a cookie or something and, support the cause. So come on down and help us out and enjoy the park."

<https://youtu.be/9cBb-SECUMQ>

“With that, I'm going to ask, Councilor Graziano, followed by Councilman Axelrod, John Mulgrew before we hear from Donna.” Hoehmann said.

“Hello everybody, Mike Graziano here. Donna, thank you so much for taking the fortitude and the staff has been great. This is a great, great addition to the park. We provide great services to the half a million people that do come here. We're can't be more delighted in having you here. It's a great support system and everybody, the staff here behind me. Thank you so much, and I wish you much success and thank you.



Councilman Axelrod was next, “I can't say much more than, than Supervisor, Hoehmann and, Councilman Graziano has said. We're in a beautiful, beautiful place over here. I mean, you can't have a better park than we have. It's absolutely gorgeous. Now we have, in addition to that, this beautiful park, this cafe, and Donna, thank you, your staff, thank you for this beautiful area over here in this Congers Community cafe. So, if you're around, and I'm sure you're around, and we've talked about a half a million people going to pickleball, swimming, walking around the park, the lake, it's absolutely gorgeous. Come down and enjoy.

John Mulgrew representing Senator Bill Weber spoke next. “All right, thank you, Supervisor Hoehmann. It's an honor to be here on behalf of Senator Bill Weber. We've partnered with Donna Ehrenberg on a number of projects. Rockland Community Services always does great work. We're so happy to see this addition to the town of Clarkstown. I've personally lived in Clarkstown my whole life. I use this park all the time. I kayak out on the river, walk around the lake, so I'll be happy to take advantage of this new cafe, and the wonderful services they provide. Thank you.

Ehrenberg was the final speaker before the ribbon was cut.

https://youtu.be/x5_u9XpXOs



Certificates were handed out to all of the workers at the café by Mulgrew and Hoehmann.

After the fanfare Mulgrew and Hoehmann spoke to the press. First was Mulgrew.

“Well, it's an honor to be here on behalf of Senator Bill Weber at the ribbon cutting for the Congers Community Café. You know, it's a wonderful addition to Congers Lake. Senator Weber's partnered with Donna Ehrenberg and Rockland Community Services, quite a few times. They do great work teaching those vocational skills to people with all different ability levels, is such a valuable service and you know we're thankful for the Town of Clarkstown and Supervisor George Hoehmann for giving them the opportunity by opening up this café and repurposing the space from what had been storage at one point to now, a valuable addition to the park. It's an honor to be here and thank you for having me.”

“Hi Supervisor Hoehmann, we're at the ribbon cutting for the Rockland Community Services. This is a wonderful organization, parent run, that actually works with people with disabilities, mental disabilities, and other disabilities, and they assist them in all types of life services, job coaching, employment and employment services. We're delighted because this is our cafe building over at our Congers Lake Park. They started a couple of weeks ago. They've been hugely successful, so we encourage folks to come check it out. There's restrooms here. It's the Congers Community Café building, and they have an assortment of light refreshments, coffees and teas and waters as well as other snacks and accouterments. So we encourage you to check it out next time you're here in Congress Park and support this wonderful organization that is bringing good value to the community, training young people of all abilities to be able to work within the community.