







HOME NEWS

Home > Middlesex/Monmouth News

COMMUNITY ABOUT FREE E-NEWSLETTER ADVERTISE SUBSCRIBE CONTACT US

CLASSIFIEDS

Share | f y ⊠ ⊜

#### Video Jewish Newsreel Commentary Editorial

Op-Eds Letters to the Editor

NJJN Blogs

Kahntentions

Nu Online Our Tribe & Joy

News Statewide

World Greater MetroWest

Middlesex/Monmouth Princeton Mercer Bucks

Life and Times

Life and Times Sports

Touch of Torah Travel

Community

Events Calendar

LifeCycle Events

Obituaries Submit LifeCycle Events / Obituaries

FREE weekly e-newsletter Sign up now! NIN VIN VIV

# 'Journalist with a heart' gets personal

Just three weeks away from becoming the first female chief White House corresp for the Associated Press in early 2003 ondent Sandra Sobieraj Westfall left to take a job at People magazine.

Why? The impeachment of President Bill Clinton "had sucked the life out of me," said Westfall, on May 1 at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge for the Main Event of the Womer Philanthropy of the Jewish Federation in the Heart of N.J., where she was the keynote

Westfall, who has covered presidential campaigns and served as AP White House correspondent from 1997 until her departure in 2003, said the burden her position carried also influenced her decision. In the days before most Americans were connected to the internet, Westfall said, the AP was a heavily relied upon news source, and she worried something she reported would cause a financial crisis on Wall Street or, as the Bosnian War raged, destabilize the Balkans.



Journalist Sandra Sobieraj Westfall said that she learned that as an Associated Press reporter, "what I wrote and said had real consequences." Photo courtesy Jewish Federation in the Heart of N.J + more images

Sidebar

BA

Since 2007, Westfall has served as People's nation political correspondent, and her career has taken around the world with leading American political and entertainment figures. During her days with the AP, she flew on AIF Force One with the press corps, and rode camels with Chelsea and Hillary Clinton. She climbed the Great Wall of China with President George W. Bush, whom she also accompanied to Ground Zero four days after the 9(11) terrorist attack.

Zero four days after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. But, she said, although being in that position

may seem glamorous, it came with a tight schedule and rigorous rules that governed when reporters could eat and even when they could visit the bathroom.

When she decided to leave the AP and take the position at People, Westfall said, it was a decision to "lean out," a counter reference to Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In" website and book title touting the attitude toward career advancement that such a phrase implies. Instead, she said, "I learned to care."

In fact, the description of herself that she most likes is "journalist with a heart."



» Women leaders lauded at Main Event



Westfall said "the blessing" of her career has been "showing people the other side of what they think they know" about government leaders and other celebrities

While she was interviewing Laura Bush near the end of her eight years in the White House, the first Willies are was intervening dual oats inten uited in the right years in the winner house, the intended and lady confessed to Westfall that she regretted not giving interviews out of fear of disgracing her husband by accidentally saying something controversial. Bush lamented that the public saw her only as "the nice librarian," her profession before her husband entered politics; because of Bush's reticence, Westfall said, "no one knew who she really was."

Westfall spent two weekends with Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of disgraced former North Carolina senator and presidential candidate John Edwards, as she was suffering from cancer (she died in December 2010). By then Edwards was separated from her husband, who had fathered a child with

"I slept in the same bed as her son, Wade, was using when he died at age 16," said Westfall, who wrote of Elizabeth's heartbreak and strength.

One of Westfall's challenges has been trying to combine familial responsibilities and a dynamic career Sometimes they overlapped: A Secret Service agent set her up on a blind date with another agent, whom Westfall ended up marrying.

Other times they complicated matters: While covering a holiday party at the White House during the Obama administration, she decided to bring her then-six-year-old son, Jonathan, to Washington, D.C., as her date. But when an unplanned interview opportunity with Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor arose the following day, Westfall, far from her New Jersey home, she had no one to leave Ionathan with

She recalled something Michelle Obama had told her about being offered an interview for a plum job when the Obamas' daughter, Sasha, was an infant. Still on maternity leave and without any child options, the future first lady decided to bring Sasha along in her stroller, hoping the baby wouldn' and that her potential employer would understand the challenges of being a working mother.

that her son would sit outside the office and read during the interview. A short time later, Westfall was told that "The Justice work hear of it." Instead, a staff member told her, Sotomayor would be happy to meet not only with Westfall, but with Jonathan, too. Sotomayor even had hot chocolate and other goodies ready for him.

She later learned Sotomayor was especially sensitive to the plight of working mothers because, thanks to an understanding employer, her own mother was able to work to support her family after Sotomayor's father died when she was 9.

Sometime after, Jonathan received a message from the justice telling him how much she enjoyed meeting him; she signed the note "Sonia."  $^{\prime\prime}$ 

"To this day, I have no idea what they talked about," said Westfall.

#### Women leaders lauded at Main Event

THE MAIN FOCUS of the Main Event were six leaders who have earned accolades for their contributions to the local and worldwide Jewish communities and were honored for furthering the ideals of the Women's Philanthropy of Jewish Federation in the Heart of N.J.

Brenda Belsky Tanzman and Sheryl Grutman were the major honorees at the May 1 event. "The Brenda Belsky Tanzman and Sheryl Grutman were the major honorees at the May 1 event. "They lead by example and inspire people to give to Israel," said federation board member Linda Block of Grutman and Tanzman. Block described the women as generous to the Jewish community and valuing Jewish learning. Tanzman of Kendall Park serves on federation's board and leaders' council and has long been active in Jewish and community causes, including the Highland Park Conservative Temple-Congregation Anshe Emeth, Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Auxiliary, and South Brunswick for Women's Leadership. She has served as chair of many federation missions to Israel, has earned Lion of Judah status after more than 20 years of significant financial contributions to federation, and in 2006 she received the Ruth Jacobson Woman of the Year award from what was then the Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County.



Search NJJN

Follow NJJN



NEWSLETTER STGNUD









Grutman of Manalapan has held many federation leadership roles over 24 years, including Women's Philanthropy campaign chair, campaign vice president, overseas allocation committee chair, and president of what was then the Jewish Federation of Monmouth County. For the last 10 years, she has been active in Jewish Federations of North America National Women's Philanthropy, serving as its social action committee cochair and receiving its Kipnis-Wilson/Friedland award in 2014. Grutman is also active in Special Strides Therapeutic Riding Center, Embrace the Kids Foundation, and Four Seasons Women's Club.

Besides the honors bestowed on Grutman and Tanzman, four women received Outstanding Community Leadership Awards recognizing their record of achievements.

Tova Chazanow has served as codirector, with her husband, Rabbi Boruch Chazanow, of the Chabad Lubavitch of Western Monmouth County in Manalapan for more than 30 years. She has created merous engagement and learning opportunities for the community, particularly for its women. They include the Ari Kraut Friendship Circle in support of youth with special needs and their families; the Bikur Cholim program, whose participants visit Jewish patients at CentraState Medical Center in Freehold; and Smile on Seniors, which provides the homebound elderly with connections to the community.

Rabbi Lisa Malik has been religious leader of Temple Beth Ahm in Aberdeen since 2011. She holds a doctorate in Jewish education from Stanford University and had a career in marketing before entering the Conservative rabbinate. Her adult education series, Wild Women of Biblical Proportions, focuses on exemplary women from the Torah to inspire, instruct, and amuse congregants.

Rabbi Esther Reed, senior associate director of Rutgers Hillel, a Conservative rabbi, has been at Rutgers Hillel since 2001. She serves on the Interfaith Alliance and Bias Prevention Education Committee at Rutgers, the executive committee of the Rabbinic Association in the Heart of New Jersey, and the executive council of the New Jersey Rabbinical Assembly. She wrote the chapter on Conservative Judaism for the second edition of "Jewish U: A Contemporary Guide for the Jewish Collego Student," and a chapter in the book "Kaddish: Women's Voices." She was part of the first cohort of the Hartman Fellowship for Campus Professionals and the inaugural Wexner Foundation's predeficien program. mentoring program.

Rivky Ross, head of school of Yeshivat Netivot Montessori in East Brunswick, is considered a leading authority on Jewish Monteson education. The school is also the site of a Jewish Monteson training center. Ross has worked in Jewish alternative education for 25 years through such institutions as Melitz: Center for Jewish Ioinst Education, the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, and the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus, She became Netivot's director in 2006 and head of school in 2009.

- DEBRA RUBIN

f Recommend 2	Share	f	7	₩ 🗢

You might also like:

Covering DC often frustrating for journalist Journalist to recall the century she chronicled Journalist: Israel getting cozy with Russia 'A journalist shored by his Jewish values'

Back to top

### Reader Discussion

Leave a Comment

Your Name Your Email (never published) Comment

## Post Comment

New Jersey Jewish News welcomes your comments. New Jersey Jewish News reserves the right to edit or remove any comment that is deemed inappropriate, off-topic or otherwise violating the Terms of Service of the New Jersey Jewish News website.

Home | News | Community | About | Free E-Newsletter | Advertise | Subscribe | Classifieds | Contact Us