

## Influential Women of the Year presented to Lou Ann Benson

On behalf of the Influential Women of North Brunswick Commission it is a privilege to present the 2024 Influential Women of the Year Award to Lou Ann Benson.

Born and raised in North Brunswick, Lou Ann has dedicated herself to humbly serving others and improving the lives of all of our residents. Lou Ann grew up at 377 Franklin Road Colonial Gardens. As a teenage Lou Ann was a life guard and taught swimming lessons at the town pool. Lou Ann went off to University of Tampa for her college years. There she joined their inaugural Women's Crew team. She was named Outstanding Oarsman of the Year and featured in Sports Illustrated for the sport of crew as the team placed 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation.

After college, she came back to her home town with a drive to start new programs and see them through to excellence. Lou Ann was committed to create opportunities for all to enjoy an active healthy lifestyle. In the 80's, Lou Ann was Head Gymnastics Coach Head for North Brunswick Township High school, and Head Basketball Coach for Linwood Middle School's first undefeated team. When the township built the Highschool and had its own indoor pool, she was there from the beginning promoting water safety and has taught countless children and adults how to swim.

Lou Ann, as Director of Parks and Recreation, has dedicated her career to improving the quality of life for the residents of the Township of North Brunswick. For over 45 years, Lou Ann's tireless commitment to excellence and can-do attitude has resulted in thoughtful topnotch programs and events that bring us together to honor and celebrate one another. North Brunswick, a diverse community, is recognized as one of the most cohesive townships in Middlesex Country. This accolade, in no small measure, is a result of Lou Ann's labors.

Under Lou Ann's direction the township of North Brunswick has expanded the park system redefining the use and purpose of our parks. During Lou Ann's tenure she oversaw the development of North Brunswick Community Park, the improvement of the pocket park system and the redevelopment of Veteran's Park and the Veteran's Street Dedication Program.

The Community Garden, located at Pulda Farm, provides space for young and old to tend their own garden space. Pulda Farm was a working farm for over 275 years. The community garden continues this tradition by providing parcels of land for residents to seasonally grow produce, herbs and flowers. It was Lou Ann's vision and dedication that made the Community Garden possible.

Lou Ann has served as the Coordinator for the North Brunswick Municipal Alliance since it was established in the Township over 25 years ago. The Municipal Alliance is a statewide initiative comprised of volunteers to prevent drug and substance abuse among school age children through programming and peer support. Our township has one of the strongest programs in the state thanks to Lou Ann's efforts. The programs, which engage hundreds of students every year,

shape the future of many of our young adults by encouraging them to adopt good habits and practice healthy decision making.

Lou Ann spear-heads Township special events that bring the community together in unique ways. She has instituted the Memorial Day 5k Run, Music in the Park, MLK, Jr. Celebration, Halloween Happenings, Winterfest Tree and Menorah Lighting.

North Brunswick Township's 911 Memorial Service is consistently recognized as one of the best in the state. So much so that the Governor and other State dignitaries have chosen to attend North Brunswick Township 911 Memorial over alternative ceremonies. For 22 years, Lou Ann has coordinated students, school administrators, governing officials, first responders and volunteers to provide a tribute that lives up to the pledge, "We will never Forget".

As a leader In Recreation, Lou Ann has consistently encouraged her team to seek out and participate in educational programs, seminars, conferences that encourage their skill set and advance them as Recreation professionals. Under her direction staff members have received credentials in CPRP, CPR/ First Aid/ AED, Water Safety Instructors Life Guard Certification, Life Guard Instructor Waterfront Safety, Unique You Curriculum, Certified Playground Safety Inspector, Pesticide Applicators License, Certified Life Guard, Management Wilderness & Remote, First Aid Instructor, Bloodborne Pathogens Training, Instructor Aquatic Attraction, Lifeguard Instructor, American Red Cross and Shelter Training.

Lou Ann is a 2-time breast cancer survivor committed to fitness, health and safety, A true athlete, she has competed in 10 full marathons, 10 half marathons, 10 triathlons. She was nominated by the township and chosen to carry the US Olympic Torch for the Men's trails. Lou Ann has volunteered for Purple for Pappas 5k, Special Olympics at North Brunswick Township High School and the Ronald McDonald House. She has delivered Meals on Wheel to our seniors and completed the 3 Day Susan G. Komen Walk for Breast Cancer Awareness. She is a 19-year volunteer for Care to Walk /Run to benefit Breast and Ovarian Cancer.

Lou Ann is a shining example of a woman who brings added value and improvement to the lives of others. She tackles initiatives, embraces change and humbly serves others. She is indeed a North Brunswick Woman of tremendous influence.