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**Nancy Sabino and Mike Sodano
outside The Showroom during
construction back in 2012**



THE IMPORTANCE OF NANCY SABINO AND MIKE SODANO TO ASBURY PARK A CASE STUDY IN HOW SMALL ARTS-BASED BUSINESS BROUGHT A CITY BACK

ASBURY PARK — This newspaper has been front row center for the remarkable ascent of our beloved little city of Asbury Park during the past two decades.

It pretty much started around the time the first issue of the triCityNews rolled off the presses in January of 1999 — because there was finally a loud, focused voice in our region determined to restore Asbury Park to its rightful place as one of the best small cities in the nation, if not the world.

So triCity has watched everyone come through who sacrificed, took risks and did the real work of rebuilding a city, versus this newspaper that just sat back and wrote about it Big deal.

With that introduction, it's time to take a look back at the story of Nancy Sabino and Mike Sodano, who played a key role in making sure Asbury's rise stressed culture and the arts.

The two opened the remarkable ShowRoom Cinemas in 2009 on a starting-to-come-back Cookman Avenue. They loved independent and art house film, and their dream was to have a theater featuring such movies — just like you find in the most vibrant large or even small cities in this country.

Those of us there at the ShowRoom's early days remember the magic of their first place: One large room with one screen. The best part: The seats were comfortable outdoor lawn furniture! Talk about DIY. But it was a success, which makes it all that more memorable and remarkable.

The big move came in 2012, when Sabino and Sodano bought a building across the street and built an actual three screen movie house. And it worked — until an historic pandemic hit. People loved the new ShowRoom. The two even took over the old Beach Cinema in Bradley Beach when it was about to close. It was reopened as the ShowRoom Bradley Beach in 2018. And plague killed that one too.

Nancy Sabino and Mike Sodano had gone through enough with the lockdown that shut down their business. Both ShowRooms were put up for sale.

Most of us thought that's the end of that. What a great run for Asbury Park in particular. What a great loss now that they'll be gone.

But miracles do happen in Asbury Park!

The triCity-affiliated Asburyparksun.com broke the news last week that Daria Parr of Manasquan has purchased the ShowRoom in Asbury and intends to reopen it in 4-6 weeks, with a continuation of the same independent and art house programming. (The Bradley Beach ShowRoom remains listed for sale and was not part of the deal.) Parr plans to add other events to boost attendance.

"Mike and I started the cinema as a natural expression of our love of movies and a desire to contribute to the new Asbury Park downtown. We were fortunate to have grown it into a successful arts business spanning two locations. We're now looking forward to what's next in our creative endeavors," Sabino said.

Their desire to "contribute to the new Asbury Park downtown" is an understatement. Both Sodano and Sabino are Asbury residents who are a force in our city through their service on various boards and committees, as well as the influence of the ShowRoom. They're leaders who are uniformly liked and respected by all for their intelligence, experience and wisdom.

Among all the people, businesses and organizations critical to our city's comeback as an arts-focused small city, the ShowRoom has been at the top. It's been that important. For Asbury Park to have an art house movie theater — and a new and state-of-the-art one since 2013 — was a remarkable signal to the outside world that our city is about the creative and the broad-minded.

The triCityNews was founded to help businesses and people in Asbury Park like Sodano and Sabino, as well as others throughout the triCity region of eastern Monmouth, to get the word out about their efforts to raise the profile of the arts, culture and creativity. People such as Sabino and Sodano are who transformed our region into a suburban area like no other. It's been

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get involved, she said, so that these critical community organizations can continue on. And if charging into a burning building isn't your thing, there's all different ways to volunteer and help out.

Although the fire academy training is rigorous, Triggiano said getting through it is one of the most rewarding things she's ever done. And the camaraderie and satisfaction of service as a first responder is like nothing else, she said.

Ok, now that we've gotten Kate's public service announcement out of the way, we'll return to our regularly scheduled programming.

This whole firefighting thing with Triggiano is cracking us up. She comes from a big Irish family in New York City, and there are firefighters all over the generations.

But she's the first female.

"My grandma is really proud," Triggiano said.

"My uncle on my Dad's side is a firefighter. He's really excited," she said. "On my mom's side, my grandfather was a firefighter. A cousin is FDNY. My great uncle was a firefighter. It's like everyone in my family."

"Every man on my mom's side was a member of that volunteer house in Staten Island. I was always there," said Triggiano. "The crab boils. All the family parties in the firehouse. It was really nice."

Triggiano said there are some cultural shifts happening in volunteer firefighting because there were four women in her class and that's unusual. But it's a welcome sign that more women are getting involved. (Twenty eight people started the class, and twenty finished to become certified firefighters.)

Volunteer firefighters in their fifties and older went through two weekends of training and that was it. Everything has changed radically since they became firefighters, Triggiano said.

Now there are four state exams — two on hazardous materials, a traffic incident exam and a final exam. There's also lectures and texts.

But Triggiano really got into the physical training.

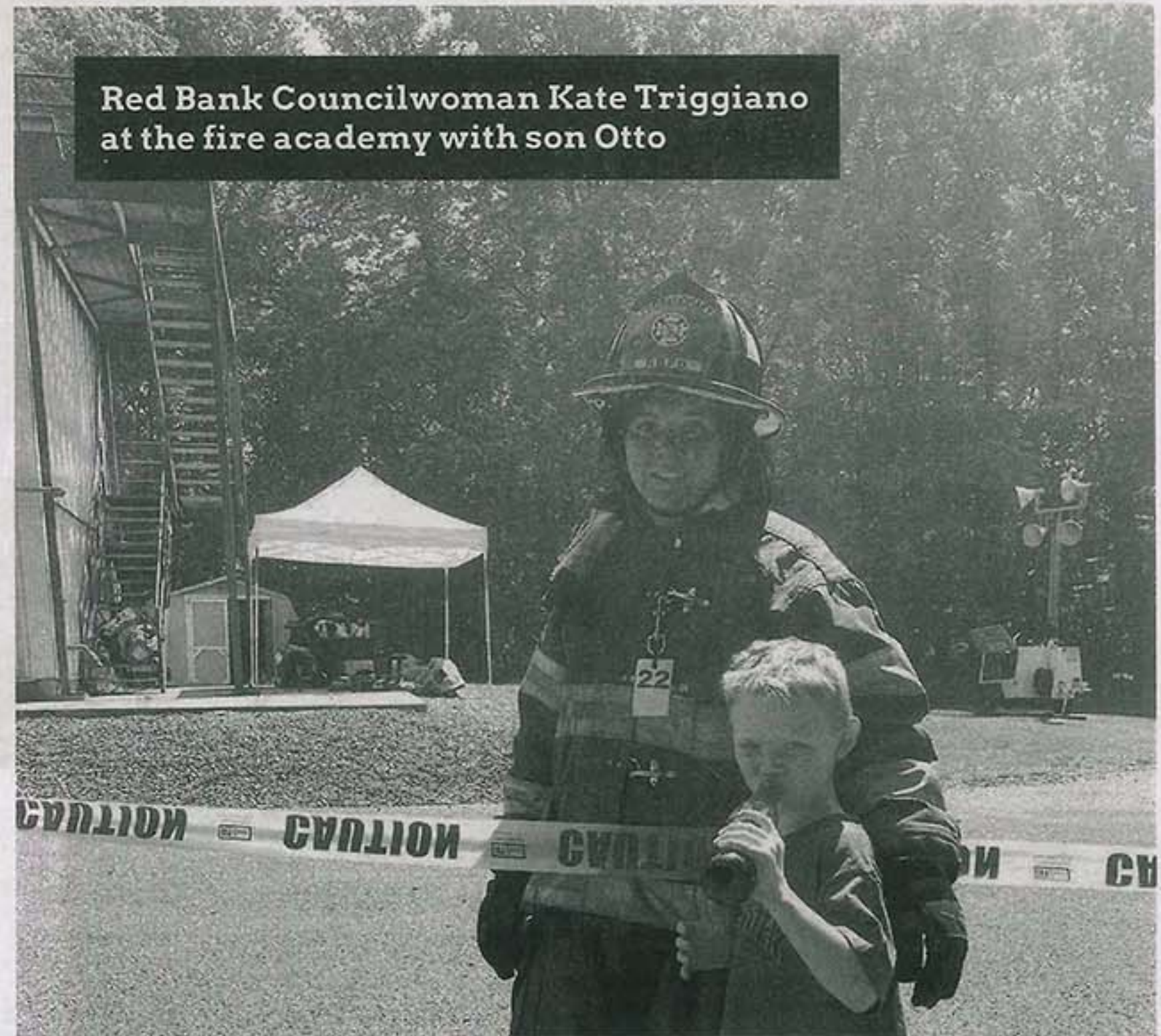
"You learn how to navigate car fires and there's search and rescue," she said. "One of the big days is ladder day. They bring out the major apparatus. You climb a 100 foot ladder while carrying a roof ladder. Then there's the burn house where there's a controlled fire you put out. That's where you learn search and rescue too. You

can't see anything. You have to navigate the room and try to find a victim. You learn to use power tools, roof venting and ventilation."

This Publisher has identified Triggiano as a future mayor because she's got that mayoral personality that focuses on big picture strategic thinking — while going bezerk if she sees a pothole that's still not fixed. Seeing her as a volunteer firefighter, on the scene fighting a fire in her town, is completely in line with that.

We'd love to see Triggiano get the many creative, artistic people she knows more involved in the volunteer world of first responders. That would be a great story for this newspaper — and an excellent development for Red Bank, and the other interesting towns in Monmouth County. (Asbury Park is unique in that it has a paid fire department.)

"Part of my goal here is inspiring more young people to get involved," Triggiano said. "Whenever possible when I'm asking someone to do something, I want to be able to have done it myself."



Red Bank Councilwoman Kate Triggiano at the fire academy with son Otto

a very grass-roots effort.

"When Daria inquired if she could continue the business as ShowRoom Cinemas, we were flattered," said Sodano. "Ever since we closed due to the pandemic, members of the community would reach out to us about how much they missed coming to their local cinema. An entertainment destination like this deserves to evolve its place in the city."

Meanwhile, new owner Daria Parr sees the importance of the ShowRoom remaining in Asbury Park to continue to exert its influence.

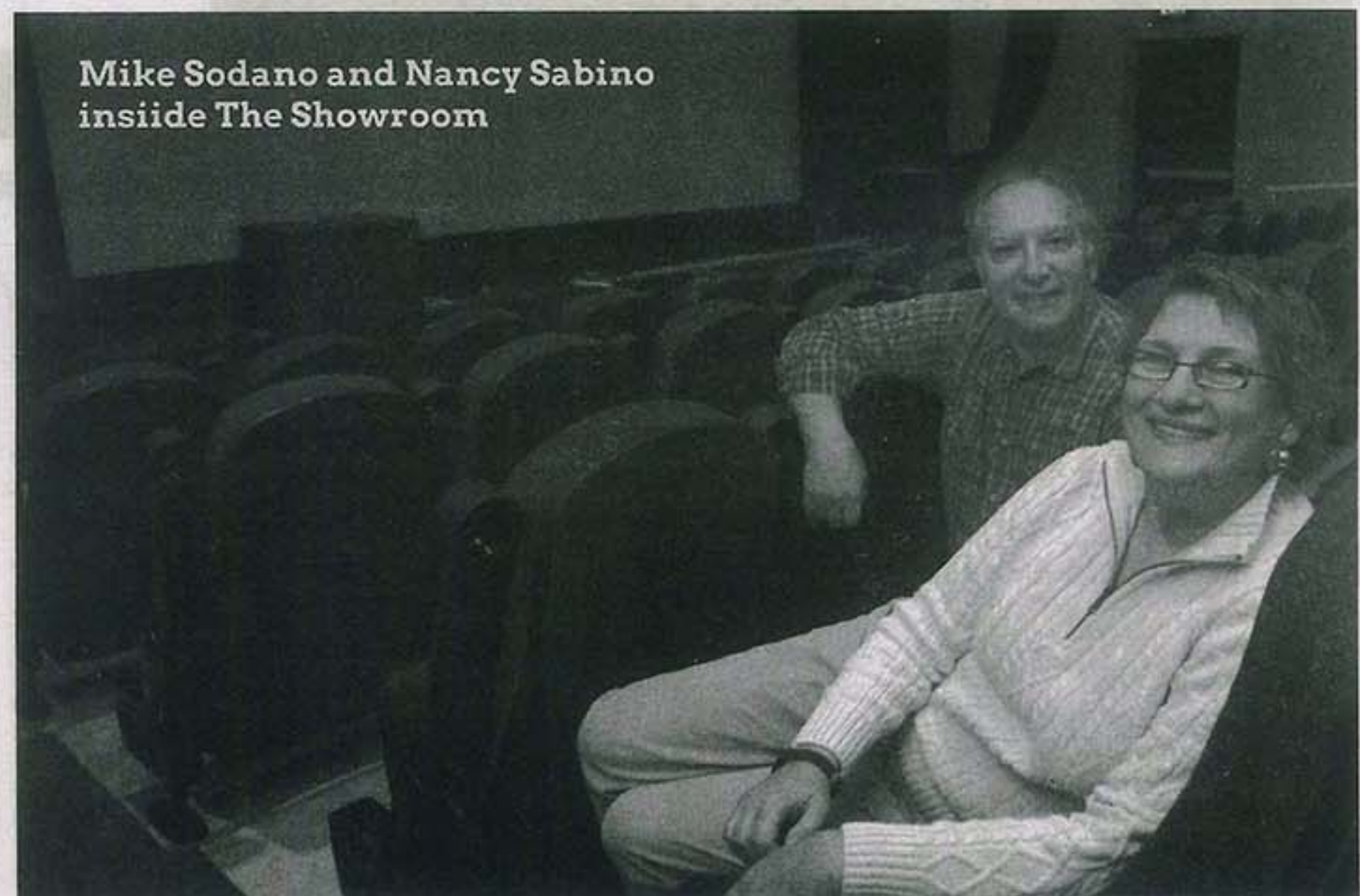
"We were looking to start a business for a few years and when the theater popped up it intrigued us. Asbury Park has a fun vibe with all of the music, art galleries, restaurants and bars that we felt the local theater showing independent films should remain," said Parr. "We are excited about maintaining and supporting the local arts by providing a welcoming atmosphere with featured artists, special movie nights and great film."

So the baton has been handed off, in the spirit of how Sabino and Sodano founded the place — to serve the community, and ultimately to make sure arts, culture and creativity reign in both Asbury Park and our region.

That can be a tricky thing to do in the midst of what is a real estate boom in our region, as the shore area has become more popular with the lifestyle changes caused by the pandemic. But the only way creativity remains ascendant is for small businesses like the ShowRoom to open

and make their mark.

You bet we'll be there to help everyone whenever we can. It's what we do.



Mike Sodano and Nancy Sabino inside The Showroom