

Westchester County Board of Legislators celebrates

ALBANIAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Monday, November 18, 2024 | 7PM

Live streamed from the Board Chamber
westchesterlegislators.com/calendar

PROGRAM

Welcoming Remarks and Acknowledgements

Board Chair Vedat Gashi

Presentation of Proclamations to



HON. JOSEPH J. DIOGUARDI

Presented by Legislator Emiljana Ulaj



ANGJELINA NIKA

Presented by Minority Leader Margaret A. Cunzio

[see back for more]

Vedat Gashi

Board Chair

Legislator, 4th District

Colin D. Smith

Legislator, 1st District

Erika L. Pierce

Legislator, 2nd District

Margaret A. Cunzio

Minority Leader

Legislator, 3rd District

Benjamin Boykin II

Legislator, 5th District

Nancy E. Barr

Legislator, 6th District

Catherine F. Parker

Legislator, 7th District

Jewel Williams Johnson

Legislator, 8th District

Emiljana Ulaj

Legislator, 9th District

Judah Holstein

Legislator, 10th District

Terry Clements

Majority Whip

Legislator, 11th District

David Imamura

Legislator, 12th District

Tyrae Woodson-Samuels

Majority Leader

Legislator, 13th District

David J. Tubiolo

Legislator, 14th District

James Nolan

Minority Whip

Legislator, 15th District

Shanae V. Williams

Legislator, 16th District

José I. Alvarado

Vice Chair

Legislator, 17th District





HON. JOSEPH J. DIOGUARDI

Joseph DioGuardi was the first U.S. Congressman to address Albanian rights in the Balkans, sponsoring a Congressional Resolution in 1986 and initiating the first Congressional hearing on Kosova in 1987. Since leaving Congress in 1989, he has made over 40 trips to the region as the volunteer president of the Albanian American Civic League, working across political lines to promote peace and stability in Southeast Europe.

In 1990, DioGuardi and Congressman Tom Lantos visited Kosova to challenge Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic's oppressive regime. They then made the first official U.S. trip to Albania in 50 years, where they obtained archives documenting Albanians' rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, later authenticated by Yad Vashem. DioGuardi returned to Albania in 1996 with Shirley Cloyes and Congressman Benjamin Gilman to discuss Albanian national security and, in 1998, assessed the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Kosova at Congressman Dana Rohrabacher's request. After NATO's 1999 bombing campaign, he and Cloyes evaluated post-conflict conditions and continued fact-finding missions throughout the region.

In 2003, DioGuardi and Cloyes introduced a Congressional Resolution advocating for Kosova's independence and organized the first hearing on Albanian issues in Montenegro. They played key roles in countering Serbian propaganda and fostering U.S. support for Kosova's independence, culminating in a 2005 House International Relations Committee hearing. That same year, they hosted a dinner honoring Albanians' Holocaust heroism, tied to the 60th anniversary of the Nazi death camps' liberation.

More recently, DioGuardi has focused on advocating for Albanians in the Presheva Valley. His work remains instrumental in raising awareness of human rights and political issues affecting Albanians across the Balkans.

Before Congress, DioGuardi spent 22 years with Arthur Andersen & Co., becoming the first practicing CPA elected to Congress in 1984. He championed federal financial reform and founded the Truth in Government foundation after leaving office. He authored *Unaccountable Congress: It Doesn't Add Up* and served as a director and trustee for several corporations.

Born in the Bronx, DioGuardi graduated from Fordham University in 1962. His father, an ethnic Albanian from Greci, Italy, and his Italian-American mother instilled in him a deep connection to his heritage. He married Shirley Cloyes in 1998.



ANGJELINA NIKA

Angjelina Nika's lifelong commitment to preserving Albanian folk dance is a testament to the power of culture and community. Born in Tropojë, Albania, in 1966, Nika began dancing at the age of six and has never stopped. In 1997, she immigrated to the United States with her husband, Gezim, and their three children—Eliverta, Danjela, and Jason—hoping to pursue a career in music. That's exactly what she did.

For the past 20 years, Nika has served as the choreographer for the Rozafati Dance Ensemble, based at the Our Lady of Shkodra Catholic Church in New York, as well as at schools across the tri-state area, including Albanian Roots and the Albanian Youth Center. She has taught Albanian folk dance to over 500 young Albanian Americans, some as young as four years old.

Nika's work goes beyond teaching dance steps; she instills values of strength, dignity, and national pride that are central to these dances. Under her direction, the Rozafati Ensemble has performed throughout the United States and even in Albania, bringing the rich traditions of Albanian folk dance to new audiences. Each performance tells a story of freedom, resilience, and national identity—values that Nika hopes to pass on to future generations.

For Nika, the most rewarding part of her work is seeing her students embrace and carry forward the culture she cherishes. Her efforts have sparked a growing interest in Albanian folk dance in communities across New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Detroit, Boston, and beyond.

Nika's mission is simple: to ensure that Albanian culture continues to thrive in the United States through the dance traditions she holds dear, keeping those cultural roots alive for generations to come.