

A Year Later, Montauk Playhouse Thrives



Taking advantage of the superb acoustics, Ani Kalayjian practiced before a solo cello performance in the Montauk Playhouse atrium.

By Christopher Walsh

August 20, 2026

One year after a ceremonial ribbon-cutting and three years after breaking ground, the aquatic and cultural centers at the nearly 100-year-old Montauk Playhouse have proven valuable additions, bolstering the building's status as a thriving, year-round hub for the hamlet and the wider community.

It was on Aug. 15, 2025, that Gov. Kathy Hochul visited the Playhouse for the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a jubilant affair to celebrate the completion of a \$13.9 million project that transformed the grand structure with the addition of the first-floor aquatic center, featuring a 25-yard, four-lane lap pool and a shallow, warm-water pool for instruction, recreation, and physical therapy; and the second-floor multipurpose cultural center to host uses for youth, families, senior citizens, businesses, and arts and cultural organizations.

Ms. Kalayjian performed Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G major. "It was really special," Ms. Iacono said. As it happened, a swim clinic was happening concurrently, led by Anthony Ervin, a three-time Olympic gold medalist and a friend of Lars Merseburg, co-founder of Imagine Swimming, which operates the aquatic center. "We literally had a master cellist and a master swimmer happening simultaneously," Ms. Iacono said. "We had no idea that was going on. It felt like a really good blessing."

Two days later, the second-floor cultural center hosted Hamptons JazzFest's concert by the Conrad Herwig Quintet,

which was attended by almost 200 people. The group, which includes Bill O'Connell of Montauk, celebrated Miles Davis and John Coltrane on the 100th anniversary of their births.

Now, two local musicians, Nancy Atlas and Inda Eaton, will perform together on Saturday at 7:30 p.m., which they are promoting in part with a social media post made at the aquatic center. Next Thursday at 5 p.m., the cultural center will host the Montauk Supreme Table Tennis Tournament, in which players of varying skill levels have been invited to compete.

On Monday, six professional table tennis tables were awaiting assembly. After the tournament, "we own it," Ms. Iacono said, "so now we can set up the community. If the kids want to come on Friday night, pizza, pool, and Ping-Pong?" she mused. "How can we leverage the programming ideas we do? How can we make each thing that we do be a pebble in a pond, and have an echo effect that helps the community, because that's our mission?"

Events will continue on Sept. 19 with Speedcubing at the Playhouse, a Rubik's Cube and other mechanical puzzle competition, and the Long Island Comedy Festival's first Montauk Comedy Festival on Oct. 10.

The cultural center features multiuse spaces including the main hall, a conference room and meeting rooms, an upper gallery and lobby, the lower lobby atrium, and a catering kitchen. Suffolk County awarded the Playhouse Foundation a grant for video conferencing equipment. Another, from New York State, will enable the completion of a sound system.

The center has hosted businesses and other organizations. "We started renting the entire floor in June," Ms. Iacono said. "We did private rentals first. They helped us test the space."

That was important, she said, as the Playhouse Foundation transitions from fund-raising and construction to operation. "We needed to test whether operationally we could pivot the entire mission of the foundation from building it to running it and then figure out the business model that would work," she said. "So we have developed a rental strategy. We've tested it with some real customers."

The Sarah and Maurice Iudicone Aquatic Center offers a range of programming for all ages and skill levels, including lap swimming, swimming lessons, aqua fitness, family swim, and a masters/technique class for advanced swimmers. Partnerships with the Montauk and Amagansett Schools, the Flow Surf Academy, Project Most, and the Pathfinder Day Camp were quickly established, Mr. Merseburg said. The center hosted East Hampton High School's boys swim team and the Y.M.C.A. East Hampton RECenter's Hurricanes swim team when their pool had operational issues last winter.

With summer's end and a new school year approaching, the center will soon become more active, said Mr. Merseburg, a former German national team member and N.C.A.A. national champion. He is pleased with "the really top-of-the-line UV filtration equipment," he said. "No chlorine smell." The Imagine Swimming staff is happy for the opportunity to "extend our love of the water," he said, while offering employment to locals during the winter months. "All kudos to my team."

"It's almost like our foundation has started again," Ms. Iacono said. "It's such a massive reset in mission and purpose. It's going to take rental, it's going to take tickets, it's going to take donors, it's going to take grants, it's going to take memberships — if we can get to memberships someday — to make this all hold together. It's going to take all five of those funding streams to stand this on its feet. We're feeling pretty confident."