

# Sister Cities: Flanders, N.J. Meet the 1

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**MOUNT OLIVE** - Located on the South Fork of Long Island, Flanders, New York is a hamlet of Southampton. In describing the area, Janice Jay Young, Secretary of the Flanders Village Historical Society noted that the hamlet has "lots of green open space and park land, a golf course along the Peconic River... [Also.] Flanders contains two beach communities developed around the fifties/sixties with hundreds of smaller homes: Bay View Pines and Water's Edge." Originally a summer getaway, a good portion of these small homes are still owned by part-time residents from Western Long Island and Manhattan. Young noted that the hamlet had a population of 4,000 people in 2014; now, that's probably more. Mostly residential, the hamlet has no grocery store, no restaurants, and no zip code. However, Flanders, N.Y. does have The Big Duck. "The 10-ton wood, wire and cement icon is physically and spiritually the heart of Flanders," Young said. The Big Duck welcomes about 10,000 visitors a year.

Young shared that, "NYS Route 24 ( or Flanders Road) runs through the center of the hamlet, which starts at Route 105, a crossroads to the North Fork, and ends at Sears Bellows Road, where Hampton Bays begins.... historically, Flanders was a place where New York City people came in the summer to get away from the heat and enjoy the breezes from the Peconic Bay. There are several large historic homes along Flanders Road that were boarding houses around the turn of the 19th century. Full-time residents worked as duck farmers, fisherman or in the lumber industry."

Duck farming gave birth

to the hamlet's unique claim to fame: The Big Duck. Tim Ganetis, president of the Flanders Valley Historical Society, shared some information from a hamlet report which gives the history of that. In 1884, duck farming was introduced to the area and became quite profitable. The success led to other farms being started. The Big Duck, a building literally in the shape of a duck, was constructed on a farm in 1931, the idea of duck farmer Martin Maurer. During its life, the Big Duck "migrated" to few places in the hamlet, only to end up back on its original site. "Called 'The Big Duck Ranch', its property and buildings are listed on the State and National Registries of Historic Places and locally designated as a town landmark", the 2014 Flanders Hamlet heritage report noted. Today the area is a Suffolk County Park, with the Big Duck being a museum, tourist information center, and gift shop.

Besides the tourists who visit it, the duck has a number of friends. "Friends of The Big Duck is a 501c3 that was formed in 2009 after the duck was moved back home. The community wanted to let the town and county governments know that they were watching and that they were also going to be active participants in promoting and preserving 'their duck' or as many call it, 'the Flanders Duck', " shared Neil Young, Friends of the Big Duck president.

Janice Young shared that a couple of examples of the visible ways the Friends of the Big Duck have helped the duck to be a welcoming roadside attraction are by planting and tending to its native garden (which draws a number of butterflies which young visitors

love) and providing picnic tables for visitors to use.

Reflecting on the Big Duck, Neil Young shared how it has inspired him. "Our hamlet of Flanders is a quiet, beautiful area that loves The Big Duck. People from around the world visit here. I've been inspired to create art because of it. I created the 'Friends' logo of three little ducks looking up at The Big Duck in awe. I make glass ducks as well as miniature Big Ducks (sans door) from Plaster of Paris, and duck ornaments, too. I also do voice-overs, an art in its own right, which started with promoting Friends of The Big Duck events on our local radio station," he said.

As for the Big Duck itself, Janice Jay Young shared that "[The inside] has an old-fashioned look, like a general store. It is the first stop or last stop [that people make while passing through the area]," she said.

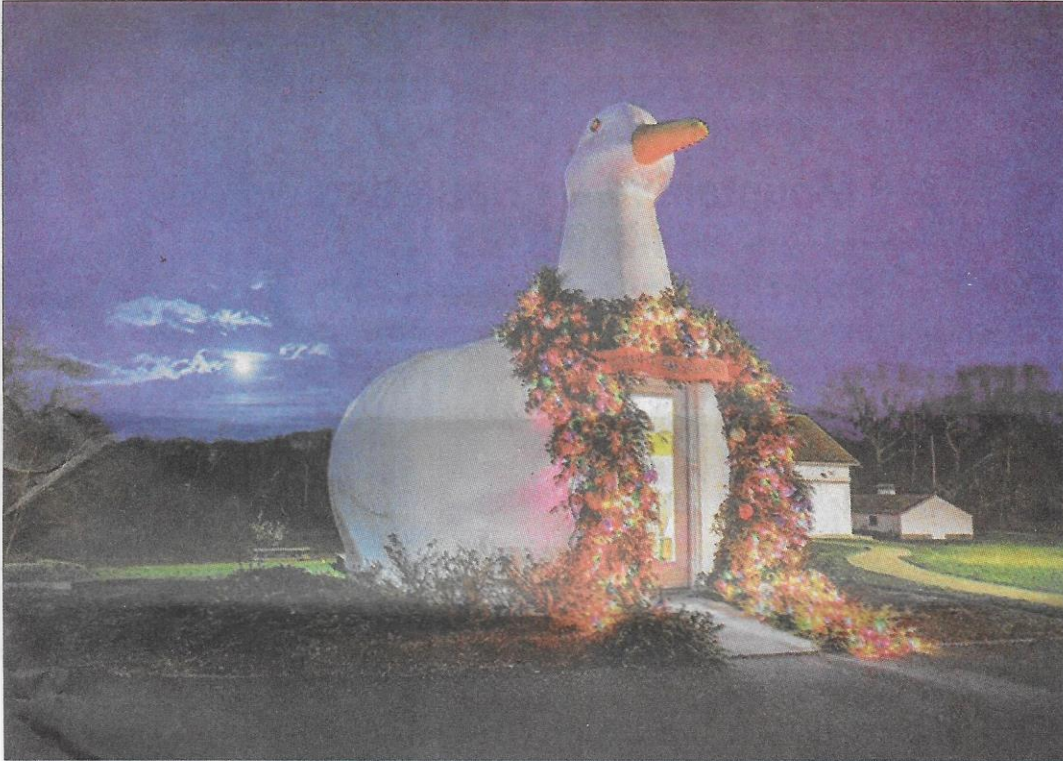
Though no official tours are given, Young noted that when she is there, she shares some of the history with almost everyone who visits. There is quite a bit of memorabilia on the wall plus exhibits, and information on duck farming.

The Big Duck sells gift items with the most popular being magnets and t-shirts. Young shared that they also sell postcards, holiday ornaments, stuffed animals, rubber ducks, and more. Everything has the familiar Big Duck symbol on it.

Besides the Big Duck, the hamlet has another place on the national registry of historic places. Young shared that the James Benjamin Homestead (circa. 1782), the oldest surviving house in Flanders, is on the registry. The hamlet has a Flanders Heritage Area heading west on Flanders Road.

Though Flanders, New Jer-

## Hamlet of Flanders, N.Y.



*The picture of the Big Duck at Christmas (by itself) needs the credit of "Jim Lennon Photographer Inc."*

sey has nothing like the Big Duck, it does have a couple of things in common with Flanders, New York. Both have a Flanders United Methodist Church. The one in Flanders, New York is circa 1840, and Young shared that it is "located along the historic corridor of Flanders Road. The church is right across the street from a

recently restored historic barn and a planned catwalk over the grasses to the edge of the bay." The Flanders United Methodist Church in New Jersey is located at 2 Park place. It was founded in 1789. The current building is not the original one but was built in 1857. Also, both Flanders have fire departments which have met ...in a

way. New Jersey's Flanders Fire & Rescue Co. #1 participated in the 2018 parade held by the Flanders, New York Fire Department.

For more information on Flanders, New York, visit the Flanders Village Historical Society website at <https://www.flandersvillagehistoricalsociety.org/>

