



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and information from the Atlantic County Office

June is PTSD Awareness Month, Pride month, and Men's Health Month

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Spotlight on LGBTQIA+ Group Props for the people and their passion

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist

Among the core concepts of Pride Month are to lift up LGBTQIA+ voices and celebrate that community's culture. Four special people who promote that year-round at MHA are Britt Huff, Thom Mason, Amy Yennella, and Ashleigh Zappala who facilitate a weekly group called Show Your True Colours, SYTC.



Pictured: two of the four co-facilitators of Show Your True Colours, Britt Huff and Thom Mason.

During Pride month, we recognize the dedicated individuals who provide a safe, non-judgmental space for those in the LGBTQIA+ community, their family members, friends, and allies. They designed SYTC with an engaging, rotating format that provides opportunities for speakers, as well as the ability to discuss, share, and pose questions.

Amy Yennella, one of the group's facilitators, said SYTC is all-inclusive, and rolled out the proverbial red AND rainbow-colored carpet.

"We welcome you if you struggle with mental health or substance use disorder. And we welcome you if you don't struggle with either," she said. "You're welcome if you identify as LGBTQIA+ and you're welcome

if you're questioning. All are welcome."

In addition to the many members of the LGBTQ+ community, family members and friends have attended SYTC from time to time to learn the lingo, philosophy, and more about the community in general.

SYTC is especially endeared to Britt's heart because her original group, Speak of the Spectrum, was the first LGBTQ group that dates back to December 2017. When the pandemic prompted staff to transition all groups to online platforms, her group evolved and expanded with the help of Thom and Amy of the Ocean County office and Jill Schlossberg from Union County. **continued on page 2**

The open forum discussion morphed into what Britt had envisioned - with a rotating format that included speakers and activities. The collaboration also enabled the meeting to be offered weekly, which was another advantage.

"It's like my baby is all grown up," Britt said.

The ability to provide this type of group is deeply meaningful for co-facilitator Thom Mason. At age 61, he is the "senior" among the four facilitators (and the most knowledgeable on current events, according to Britt). He reflected back and noted how helpful a group would have been for him as a young man growing up. He recalled skipping his prom because at that time, two boys attending together was considered taboo.

Thom pointed to several sobering statistics to drive home the importance of SYTC. For example, those in the LGBTQIA+ community are 2.5 times more likely to have a substance use or mental health disorder because of the stressors that society places on them. He also noted that LGBTQIA+ youth are three times more likely to die by suicide.

"I wish I had a safe place to pose questions and get answers as a young person," said Thom. "So, it's really rewarding and satisfying to me that I can be a part of this - to be that voice for someone."

In contrast to Thom, the youngest facilitator, Ashleigh, is age 21, which means there is a rich and great age range represented in SYTC. Ashleigh said that having so many generations participating in meetings is ideal because the perspectives and lived experiences allow for meaningful discussions and opportunities to learn from each other.

One aspect of the group that makes the facilitators especially proud is the third Tuesday of each month that features a guest speaker or panelists. Representatives from PFLAG Atlantic County, for example, have presented information on the topic of transgender individuals, which was especially enlightening and helpful to parents who attended and expressed some of their struggles. (See sidebar for details on each week's format.)

"That's one of the benefits of the group," said Ashleigh. "There's an opportunity to learn something new every week." ■



Pictured at left: Ashleigh Zappalla, who recently joined SYTC as a co-facilitator, and Amy Yennella.

SHOW YOUR TRUE COLOURS

- A GROUP BY AND FOR THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY EVERY TUESDAY @ 5P
- 1ST TUES - OPEN FORUM
- 2ND TUES - CURRENT EVENTS
- 3RD TUES - GUEST SPEAKER
- 4TH TUES - ACTIVITY

• THIS IS A GROUP FROM UNITED BY WELLNESS
 • MHANJ'S VIRTUAL WELLNESS CENTER
 • CONTACT: UNITEDBYWELLNESS@MAHNJ.ORG
 • [MHAAC.INFO/UBW](https://www.mhaac.info/ubw) TO SIGN UP OR COMPLETE THIS SURVEY : [SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/8VXP2K8](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8VXP2K8)

A Gathering for Womyn Of Color

Wise
Open-minded
Melanated
Yes
Necessary

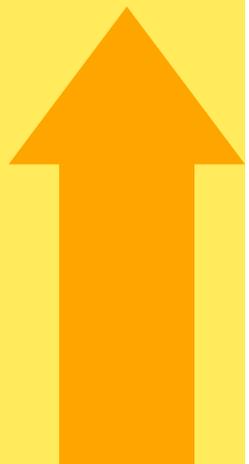
First Thursdays @ 6-7 PM

Please Register in Advance:
<https://bit.ly/35jX1yf>

Mental Health Association in New Jersey, Inc.

MHANJ offers a *second* LGBTQIA+ Group called Womyn of Color See flier for and details

Next month's newsletter will feature that group!





SPOTLIGHT ON MENTAL WELLNESS

5 Major Mental Health Problems Affecting Men



DEPRESSION

Over 6 million men suffer from depression per year. Male depression often goes undiagnosed. Men are more likely to report fatigue, irritability, loss of interest in work or hobbies, rather than feelings of sadness or worthlessness.

ANXIETY

Approximately 19.1 million American adults ages 18 to 54 have an anxiety disorder. 3,020,000 men have a panic disorder, agoraphobia, or any other phobia.



BIPOLAR DISORDER

2.3 million Americans are affected by bipolar disorder. An equal amount of men and women develop the illness. The age of onset for men is between 16 to 25 years old.

PSYCHOSIS AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

Approximately 3.5 million people in the U.S. are diagnosed with schizophrenia and it is one of the leading causes of disability. Ninety percent of people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia by age 30 are men.



EATING DISORDERS

Males account for an estimated 10% of patients with anorexia or bulimia and an estimated 35% of those with binge-eating disorder. Men with eating disorders are less likely to seek professional help than women.



SUBSTANCE ABUSE



ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY

Approximately 1 in 5 men develop alcohol dependency during their lives.



GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

Homosexual men are more likely to have higher rates of substance abuse than heterosexual men.



MILITARY VETERANS

Male veterans, regardless of their form of service, experience nearly twice the rate of alcohol and drug use as women.

Signs and symptoms of depression in men

Different men have different symptoms, but some common depression symptoms include:

- Anger, irritability, or aggressiveness
- Feeling anxious, restless, or "on the edge"
- Loss of interest in work, family, or once-pleasurable activities
- Problems with sexual desire and performance
- Feeling sad, "empty," flat, or hopeless
- Not being able to concentrate or remember details
- Feeling very tired, not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Overeating or not wanting to eat at all
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Physical aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems
- Inability to meet the responsibilities of work, caring for family, or other important activities
- Engaging in high-risk activities
- A need for alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing from family and friends or becoming isolated

Not every man who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some men experience only a few symptoms while others may experience many.

Source: NIH



Spotlight on ODD

OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER

Angry and irritable mood:

- Often and easily loses temper
- Is frequently touchy and easily annoyed by others
- Is often angry and resentful

Argumentative and defiant behavior:

- Often argues with adults or people in authority
- Often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests or rules
- Often deliberately annoys or upsets people
- Often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior

Vindictiveness:

- Is often spiteful or vindictive
- Has shown spiteful or vindictive behavior at least twice in the past six months

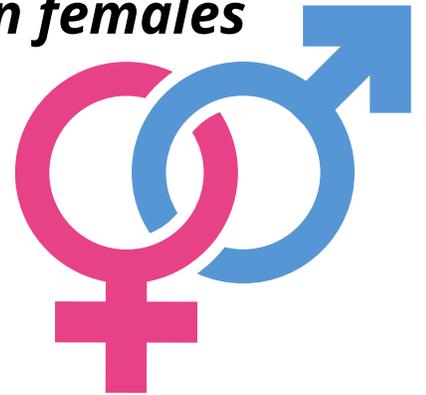
Many children and teens with ODD also have other mental health disorders, such as:

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Conduct disorder
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Learning and communication disorders

Source: Mayo Clinic



***Affects more
males
than females***



***Read more
Guest column
on ODD
page 6***



Unexpected Gifts

Her son's diagnosis helped her father understand more about his own troubled past. What the author's father and son have in common helped promote healing and understanding across generations.

BY S. Brown Guest Columnist

Though they are separated by one generation, my dad and my son are bound by one merciless strand of DNA. It probably looks like a lightning bolt instead of neatly twisted ladder. But, that's what they were dealt.

Growing up in my family, we all appreciate the genes we got for blue eyes and height. Honestly, though, we got short-changed with the ones related to mental health, especially among males. My dad is one of them.

My younger self did not understand that my dad's behavior was a mental health, behavioral health issue. He just seemed angrier, more volatile than my friends' dads. During my late teen years, he did share stories about growing up and having trouble with authority, dislike of school, and months spent in a juvenile detention center.

Still, I did not correlate mental health with my dad until I had a son of my own. His behavior was like my dad's – and that was terrifying. Ultimately, a psychiatrist ticked off a list of diagnosis, one being oppositional defiant disorder. When my father heard the words, he shared his truth. Those same words were spoken to him many years ago.

That truth, though painful, was a gift both *from* my dad and *for* my dad.



Dad, I know my son's challenges and family's suffering brought up memories of very difficult days. My son's behavior and your experience converged so hard in that moment. I suspect your reaction was for me, my family, and for you and your family. Bad memories, bad genes passed. A curse that you trace to your flawed DNA.

In some ways, though, your grandson's diagnosis is like a gift. You see yourself in him.



Now you know you didn't choose to be "bad," you were "predisposed." You also see your grandson doesn't choose it either. Life is harder for both of you. Impulsive behavior and defiance are powerful. Risk-taking. It's an overwhelming combination.

You have lived long enough to see that the mental health services and support for my son has improved since you grew up. Specialists can work with family members to help them understand, support, and respond to a child with these struggles.

But there's still no medication that treats oppositional defiant disorder. Maybe I'll see that in my lifetime.

Around the kitchen table we have talked about how some men are on the wrong side of things – and don't know they have an illness, a DNA "lightning bolt."

Then there's the other group of people who also may not know. Daughters. It's good to know...to finally understand.

Some men have trauma heaped on top of it because of life experience, a hard childhood, and so many other factors in a child's environment. I imagine many parents don't know how to help or cope with a child who lives with the disorder. (And it's so, so very hard to be a parent or the child of one.) *continued on p. 7*

continued from Unexpected Gifts

You know it was especially hard for your parents to raise you. It has been hard for me and my husband. But the experience is tempered and softened – even lightened – by the learning, understanding, and knowing.

And therein lies these merciful, merciful gifts, yours, his, and mine.

To protect the identity of the minor and respect his right to privacy, the author wrote this column under a pen name.

The author's son lives with both bipolar mood disorder and ADHD, which can commonly co-occur with oppositional defiant disorder.



HAPPY
Father's
DAY
Sunday, June 19

***With thoughts of all
the fathers who
struggle with mental
health and the
fathers of children
who live with a
mental health
condition***

SEEKING TREATMENT

 **MEN ARE LESS LIKELY THAN WOMEN
TO SEEK HELP FOR DEPRESSION,
SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND STRESSFUL
LIFE EVENTS DUE TO:**

Social norms



Reluctance to talk

Downplaying symptoms

FOR MORE INFO, VISIT:
www.mentalhealthamerica.net



*Thanks to all the male staff of
United By Wellness who provide
support, encouragement, and inspiration*



**Thom Mason
Garrett Fitzgerald
Mike Butterworth
Alan Esquite-Hernandez
Seth Edwards
Brendan Deal
Randy Elfenbein
Mike Lefanto
John "Bud" Buckley
*not pictured:
Mike L.
Scott W.
Joseph M.
William F.
John P.
Ryan G.
Daniel M.**

**During Men's Health Month, we recognize
the contributions of these dedicated staff members.**

**They facilitate or co-facilitate more than 30 groups offered by
MHANJ's statewide wellness center, United By Wellness.**

We can't count the number of lives they touch.

Healing From Trauma, Men's Wellness, Dealing with Depression, Topics In Mental Health, Got Stress?
12 Stepping for Wellness, Spirituality, You Have the Floor, Rising Minds, Sunday Meditation, Quote Me Happy,
Keeping Our Commitments, Not Fearing Fear, Doing All Things with Heart, Just Hanging Out, MARA,
Relationships in Recovery, Music to My Ears, Anxiety and Depression, Coping with Chaos, Monday Night Music,
Strong Mind Sunday, Healing Connections, Saturday Morning Employment Wellness, Humanist Recovery,
Show Your True Colours, Employment Wellness, Staying Active in Isolation, Money Talks, and Bipolar Support

Please Join Us
as we focus on
Men's Health & Wellness
2ND & 4TH FRIDAYS OF EVERY MONTH @ 1:00PM



PEWS
Promoting Emotional Wellness
and Spirituality Programs

ZOOM MEETING ID: 893 8115 9546

PASSCODE: 387490

LINK: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89381159546?pwd=Y3IMM0pBdzRQRWpqQnRHVktwZUF6Zz09>

MHANJ COVID-19: SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF COLOR PROGRAM

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
FAMILIESOFCOLOR@MHANJ.ORG**

MTHFR

Find out why a variant of this gene matters to mental health and to men of specific ethnicities

Well, it certainly is an eye-catching acronym! Aside from its uncanny closeness to common profanity, there seem to be good reasons to read more about this 5-letter curiosity.

The MTHFR gene – and at least one mutation associated with it – plays a part in some common mental health and behavioral health disorders, including bipolar disorder, ADHD, depression, and schizophrenia. About 40-50 of Caucasian men are believed to have the variant, followed by Asian men, 20 percent. BIPOC community is much lower, with just 4 percent.

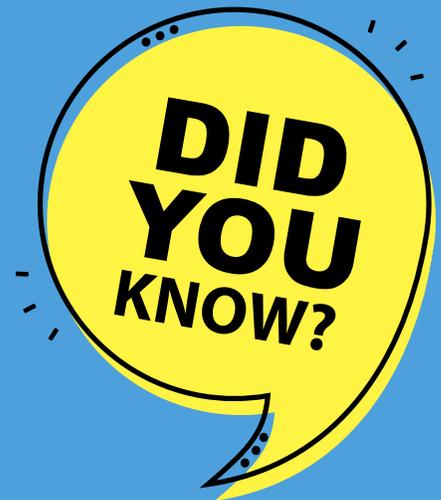
Here's how it works (or doesn't work, depending how you look at it).

MTHFR instructs the body to make a particular protein that helps the body process folate. The body needs folate for a couple of reasons including managing anxiety and anger. It is also useful to make DNA and modify proteins.

Most people are unaware they live with a variant. Doctors usually don't test for it unless a person is experiencing significant health effects.

One way doctors can test for a mutation is to order a DNA test. In most cases, a physician or psychiatrist can order it. A simple mouth swab is sent to a specialized lab. (One lab is located nearby in King of Prussia, PA.)

To help make up for the body's lack of folic acid, a prescription for a particular form of this vitamin can help. The amount each person needs is based on body weight; and the type a doctor orders is a variety that is absorbed by the body in a particular way. That means OTC folic acid is effective for other conditions, but not for MTHFR mutation.



Research suggests that several mental health disorders are linked to lower folate levels and defective folate metabolism. (A side note: other variants are associated with cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disease, colitis, Autism, and other illnesses.)

Learn about it during Men's Health Month and beyond. Read more online about MTHFR or talk to your doctor.

-Beth Wade

Acute Care Family Program serves

**7 days per week
Available 8 am to 8 pm
609 517-8614**

Support and assistance for families with a loved one in crisis and in need of linkage to treatment and other services.

Our team engages families who are often navigating the mental health system for the first time. Staff educate families about mental illness and offer resources and referrals that can help their loved one

Help is a phone call away



Community Outreach



MHA Atlantic and the Atlantic Center for Independent Living, ACIL, partnered to provide mental health information and resources to about 25 seniors at St. Peter's Village in Pleasantville on May 24. Special thanks to Ana Then who presented in Spanish.

Pictured: Vicki Phillips, Executive Director of MHA Atlantic, and Ana Then, Transition Specialist of the Atlantic CIL.

JUNE is *National* **PTSD AWARENESS** MONTH



Guest columnist Seth Edwards shares his story, which isn't set on a battlefield

The author is a past president of Active Minds at Stockton University where he studied psychology.



Often when we think of somebody living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, images of war heroes and veterans scarred by traumatizing experiences faced in the line of duty come to mind. This is a very true reality of somebody living with PTSD, but it is just a piece of the bigger picture of the many shared experiences that can cause an individual to develop the disorder. I am someone who falls into that category, though it took me years to come to that realization.

During college, I had the opportunity to sit in on an educational talk about the symptomology and causal factors of PTSD sponsored by Active Minds. This talk was the focal point of my recovery journey. What the presenter shared resonated with me. Dots connected for the first time, and I realized I'd spent years running from my past. At that moment it felt like somebody had held up a giant mirror and placed it directly in front of me saying, "This is you!"

During that time, I was depressed, burnt-out, hypervigilant, anxiety-ridden, scared of my past, afraid for my future, and absolutely too terrified to live in the present. I was haunted by terrible flashbacks of traumatic experiences I faced in my childhood and adolescence such as active addiction in my household, neglect, and both my

parents passing away by the time I was sixteen. I wasn't sleeping either and somehow I still felt like the sixteen-year-old version of myself who so desperately longed for structure, safety, and serenity.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), PTSD can develop from a variety of events including exposure to an actual threat of death or injury either directly or by witnessing it through somebody we care about. This can look like abuse, neglect, or violence as well. PTSD is an often-overlooked mental health condition that affects an estimated 3.6% of adults and 5% of adolescents a year..

“

In the average adult's lifetime, 70 percent will experience a traumatic event, and 20 percent of those folk will go on to develop PTSD...

”

What is even more crucial to understanding individuals living with PTSD is that it presents like so many other disorders. What may look like anxiety, depression, or even deficits in attention may actually be something bigger.

While working towards my own wellness, I have employed a unique set of coping strategies that have helped combat many of the intrusive symptoms that come from living with trauma. These provided me with a piece of serenity – a stark contrast to a chaotic upbringing. Practicing gratitude, mindfulness, meditating, and seeing a supportive therapist has
(continued on p. 12)

continued from PTSD

helped me feel connected to the world again and keeps me grounded in the safety of the present moment. These mechanisms serve as reminders and tools that I can carry onward with me for the rest of my life. (Though this works for me, others who live with the disorder may respond to other strategies or treatments.)

There are many ways to support someone who lives with trauma. First, recognize that they are living with something extremely difficult and disruptive to everyday life. Be patient with your loved one, a situation that might not feel “big” to you might impact them differently. Have compassion and show support. Recognize the role you can play as a loved one and encourage the individual to seek professional help -- if they feel comfortable doing so.

A strong support system is vital to recovery and by being a helping hand to somebody, you can truly make a difference in that person’s life. With the combination of my own experiences with mental health as well as studying psychology, I hope to one day be somebody who can help individuals work through formative traumatic experiences and help them realize as well that it can get better -- and it does get better! ■



Support for those who are healing from trauma

Group helps members overcome barriers

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist

When consumers were asked what kind of group they’d like added to the lineup offered by the virtual wellness center, one repeated answer was a group for individuals living with trauma.

To meet that need, a Stockton University intern at the Atlantic office, Brendan Deal, began facilitating a new group called Healing Trauma that started in March. He is joined by a co-facilitator, Seth Edwards, who lives with PTSD.



Pictured at left: Brendan Deal, who co-facilitates "Healing Trauma" on the first and third Thursdays of each month at 5 pm.

Attendance has been steady and growing, they said, with numbers expected to potentially increase amidst the recent series of mass shootings in the country. These events can be triggering for some.

“Seeing trauma on the news can bring back trauma reminders for certain survivors,” said Brendan. “When people go through something traumatic, sight, smell, words, sounds can bring back memories of their experience.”

Being together for group is helpful, he said, because participants can relate to others who have had similar experiences. Building community and teaching coping strategies has been rewarding for Brendan because he offers an outlet for people to talk and be heard. Supporting others who are working through trauma is meaningful work because he is a part and witness to the growth experienced by the group members who overcome barriers. *(continued on p. 15)*

continued from Trauma

Group members have been introduced to breathing exercises, mediation, and linked to other support groups through Healing Trauma. There are a variety of topics to cover, he pointed out, since trauma can affect so many aspects of wellness, such as occupational, social, environmental, and emotional.

“It’s important to address trauma because it can be limiting,” he reminded. “Some people tend to avoid situations, for example. Some avoidance occurs without people even realizing, which can affect relationships and other areas of wellness. Learning to cope can be liberating.”

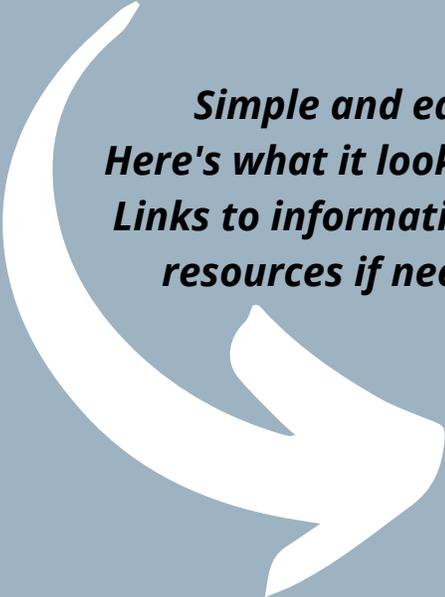
The group provides opportunities for both open and topic-driven discussions.

Healing Trauma is offered on the first and third Thursdays of each month from 5 pm to 6 pm. Interested participants who are not currently registered can receive a link to join the group by calling 609-652-3800 or unitedbywellness@mhanj.org. ■

Common types of trauma

- **Community violence**
- **Disasters**
- **Intimate partner violence**
- **Physical and emotional abuse**
- **Sexual abuse**
- **Terrorism and violence**
- **Generational trauma**
- **Death of a loved one**
- **Combat or war exposure**
- **Traffic accidents**
- **Neglect**
- **System-induced trauma**
- **Medical trauma**

PTSD Screening is available online - no cost, confidential mhaac.info/screening



***Simple and easy
Here's what it looks like.
Links to information and
resources if needed***

1. had nightmares about the event(s) or thought about the event(s) when you did not want to?

NO

YES

2. tried hard not to think about the event(s) or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of the event(s)?

NO

YES

3. been constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?

NO

YES

4. felt numb or detached from people, activities, or your surroundings?

NO

YES

5. felt guilty or unable to stop blaming yourself or others for the event(s) or any problems the event(s) may have caused?

NO

YES

Wellness Bulletin Board

Local Library Activities

One-on-one Computer Help



Ongoing year-round

Ventnor Branch

Registration required/one-hour appointments

609-823-4614

Pleasantville Branch

Thursdays 10 am to 2 pm

Registration Required/one-hour appointments

609-641-1778

*View the complete calendar at atlanticlibrary.org
Click on "Calendar of Events"*

Free Summer Concerts



Absecon Heritage Park
Sundays 7pm-8:30pm

- June 26, 2022 – Tom Allen Band
- July 3, 2022 – Lighthouse Band
- July 10, 2022 – Motts Creek Pickers
- July 17, 2022 – Hawkins Road
- July 24, 2022 – TK and the Howlers
- July 31, 2022 – Joey D's Rockin Oldies

*Other communities host free concerts including
Somers Point (Friday nights 7-9 pm William Morrow Beach) and
Ventnor (Sat. 6 pm Newport Beach & Wed. nights 6 pm at Ski Beach)*

Mindfulness for Balance and Peace
Tuesdays 12 pm

Wisdom Circle
Explore mindfulness practices and
meditations
Wednesdays 4:30 pm

Both offered by Linda Schwartz at
Med A Quest 6814 Tilton Road,
Suite K, EHT

Find a u-pick blueberry farm

Here are a few: Walking Bird Farm, EHC
and Lindsay's in Hammonton.
(MANY others in Hammonton)
Call for details



"Flowers" Art show and Exhibition

June 6 - 30

10 am to 5 pm M-SAT

10 am to 3 pm Sunday

Art on Asbury Gallery

711 Asbury Ave., OC

609-814-0308

