

# SCENE

THE TWO RIVER TIMES

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# SEN. JOSEPH M. KYRILLOS JR.

## *A Portfolio Life*

Joe Kyrillos, 57, was calm, cool and collected for his so-called exit interview with The Two River Times the day after he walked out of the New Jersey Senate on Jan. 9 after 30 years of public service.

"Why am I leaving? I just felt it had been enough time. It was more than half my life," he said during an interview in his Middletown office suite on the second floor of the "gold building" (its windows reflect a golden color) on the south side of Route 35 just before crossing into Red Bank, where he plans to relocate soon.

At 27, Kyrillos, a Republican, was elected to the State Assembly, making him among the youngest ever to hold that office. After serving two terms he ran for the Senate in 1992 and was re-elected eight times.

"Some kids catch the bug for football or sports or the theater or whatever," he said. "Public service was instilled in me at an early age."

became New Jersey's 56th governor on Tuesday.

"I like him a lot as a person, a friend, but our politics are very different," he said. "We have the same goals – a strong economy, opportunities for our kids, for New Jersey to be successful. But our strategies and tactics on how to get there are very different."

During his time in office he focused on job creation, economic growth and protecting the Jersey shore.

"You don't do this as long as I've done it and completely vanish," he said. "Some people say to me, 'Oh, Joe, you're not moving to Florida, are you?' They think I'm *really* retiring. I'm leaving my Senate seat, not public life."

He noted he's got to make a living and put two kids through college.

Son Max, 18, has been accepted to New York University next fall and has a strong interest in music and entrepreneurship. Daughter Georgia is 15. Kyrillos met

his wife Susan, the daughter of a Missouri legislator, in 1992, his first year in the state Senate. She was working on the presidential campaign for George H. W. Bush and was assigned to work in New Jersey. They married three years later.

Kyrillos has founded his own company, SK Partners, which will consult on public affairs and business development. He will continue working with Newport Capital Group, a financial services firm in Red Bank, as he has for the past 10 years, and Newmark, a global commercial real estate advisory firm.

He is joining the board of directors of Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey and other paid boards he said he cannot reveal at this time.

He's calling this next stage his portfolio life.

"A little of this, a little of that," he said with a smile. "It's going to be exciting. I'm not running away."

By Gretchen C. Van Benthuyzen

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It's an oft-told story: it was a fourth grade civics class taught by Dorothy Morgan that sparked his interest in government. She called it contemporary history, he said.

"My parents were good citizens. They followed current events, but they weren't involved in politics," said Kyrillos about his father, Joseph, a longtime pediatrician in Middletown, and his mother, Margo. "They might have been Republicans, but I don't know. My mother, for sure, was raised in a Democratic house. It was just a normal house."

Kyrillos' father is an immigrant from Lebanon with a Greek last name.

"He came here and met my mother," he explained. "They went back there. My mother hated it. She said, 'It's either this place or me. Take your pick.' So they came back here and started a family."

The oldest of four children, Kyrillos has a brother who is a business executive in San Diego, a sister who is a doctor in Philadelphia, and another brother who left publishing to be an entrepreneur with Farmshelf, an indoor hydroponic growing system for produce based in Brooklyn.

"My mother checks in with us all, if not daily, regularly," he said about his close-knit family. "They're proud of all their kids."

Kyrillos said it seemed like the right time to walk away from public life and he feels good about it.

"I made my decision early. I just didn't tell people. I didn't want any pressure to reverse the decision," he explained. "I announced it Oct. 25, 2016, a whole year before the November (presidential) election."

"One, I wanted people to be able to prepare to run in their own right to replace me and, two, I didn't want the other side taking political shots at me. Then I would have felt compelled to run. I wouldn't want to retreat in that case."

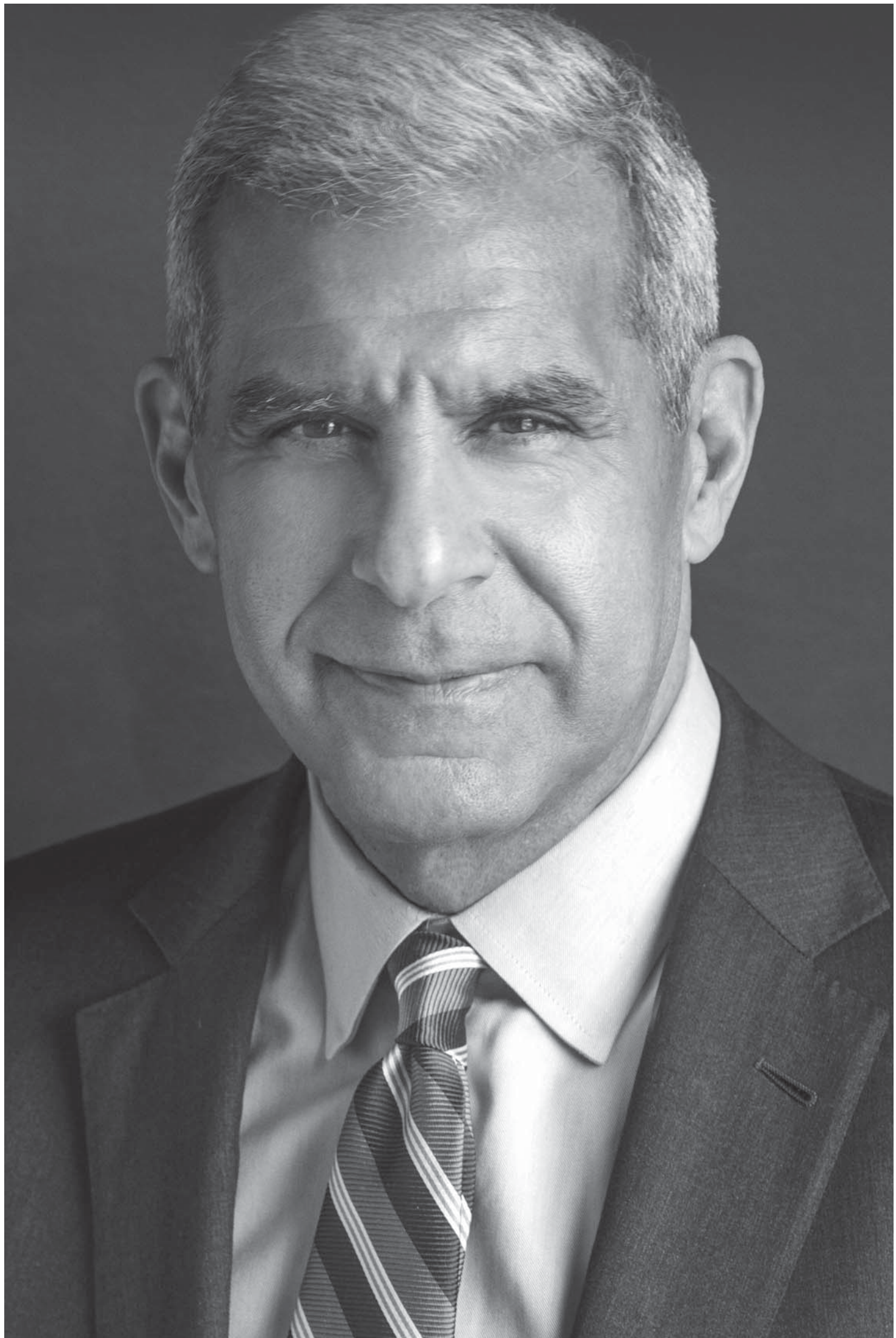
Kyrillos also said he has a dislike for political turbulence. It's not his style.

"I don't like serving in the minority party in the State House in Trenton because its job is to be critical of the opposition," he said. "It's much more natural for me to be productive and to help carry the ball, not criticize the guy carrying the ball."

His decision-making process also included the facts that New Jersey had become a Democratic state, that he'd served a long time and the current political climate.

But you haven't seen the last of Joe Kyrillos. "I'll stay involved in public life, help people I like, support people who deserve it, support good nonprofits, causes that I like here at home, around the state, and around the country," he said, adding that the night before he was in New York City with Jeb Bush. He served as a close advisor to the former Florida governor in the 2016 Republican presidential primary.

He's also close to Phil Murphy, a Democrat who



DANNY SANCHEZ