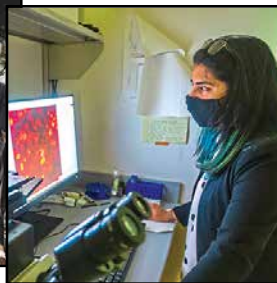


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Pennsylvania newspapers are a powerful force. Our mission today is no different than that of our predecessors: Deliver reliable news and information essential to taxpayers and residents so that they can make informed decisions about their lives, their families, and their communities. What has changed are the methods of news delivery, still firmly rooted in print newspapers and expanded through news websites and social media to make the industry's multipronged statewide reach unprecedented.

Our industry contributed \$1.3 billion to the state economy in 2020, according to a newly released report commissioned by the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association, our trade organization representing more than 350 print, digital and news media-related members statewide. The economic analysis reveals that our industry's state and local tax impact was \$51.8 million. The numbers demonstrate that Pennsylvania newspapers work diligently to support commerce and industry in our individual communities through news coverage and myriad advertising opportunities.

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Local news delivered by our local papers is in-depth

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# Are we getting our money's worth?

Some judges enjoyed light workloads as taxpayers ponied up millions for salaries, pensions, health care.

By **Christine Vendel**  
cvendel@pennlive.com

and

**Daniel Simmons-Ritchie**  
Spotlight PA

Greg Johnson has a pretty good job — and even better benefits.

The Dauphin County magisterial district judge and his colleagues across the state earn \$93,338 a year, with the possibility of a pension and lifetime health care, funded largely by taxpayers.

So, it might come as a surprise that 2019 court data revealed Johnson sometimes had proceedings just two days a week. That also allowed him to tend to his family business — a nursery and landscaping company north of Harrisburg.

In Delaware County, Judge Robert Radano had a nice setup, too.

Setting aside weekends, holidays, and a week of training, Radano had the equivalent of five months without court appearances. He also worked as an attorney.

And in Allegheny County, Judge Anthony Saveikis had 96 days without any proceedings. He listed three other jobs on his financial disclosure form: lawyer, energy company owner and real estate partner.

Across Pennsylvania, 512 elected district judges are the gatekeepers of the court system and the most likely to interact with residents. They preside over traffic cases, set bail amounts in criminal cases, and rule on civil disputes, such as home evictions.

But a yearlong investigation and data analysis by PennLive and Spotlight PA



## SPECIAL REPORT: PA.'S DISTRICT JUDGES

found huge variations in how many days each had court proceedings.

We analyzed the calendars of 466 district judges for 2019, after eliminating judges in Luzerne County and Pittsburgh, for whom we could not obtain reliable data, and 23 offices that were vacant some portion of the year.

Ten percent of the judges had at least 60 days without court appearances, above and beyond holidays, weekends, and training days.

By comparison, the average full-time American worker had 19 days of paid

vacation and sick time, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Even when the judges had proceedings, they weren't always logging eight hours in the courtroom. Some, particularly in rural areas, only heard a handful of matters, while others stacked their schedules in the morning, and their courtrooms sometimes went dark after 1 p.m.

PennLive and Spotlight PA also applied the state's workload methodology — which weighs the varying complexities of proceedings. We found workloads were wildly unequal, even though each judge

receives equal pay and, after serving at least 10 years, benefits for life.

Some district judges pushed back and said their workloads consist of more than proceedings. Others shot down the notion, saying they have little work outside the courtroom.

Nearly 40 district judges, attorneys, county clerks, academics, and other sources were interviewed for this story, but many declined to speak on the record.

They said problems with judicial

*Continued on next page*



scheduling and workloads at the magisterial district level have been an open secret for years, but that it was taboo to criticize judges or file complaints, citing fear of retaliation.

“It’s not like poking the bear with a stick,” an official said. “It’s like punching the bear in the nose.”

The result, court observers said, was a bloated, \$237 million annual bureaucracy that wasted taxpayer money and spurred a domino effect of inefficiencies across the judicial system.

One district judge said he remembered the advice a colleague gave him shortly after being sworn in: “Remember, this is a part-time job. Don’t ruin it for the rest of us.”

### Huge variations

Like other elected offices, state law doesn’t spell out any requirement that district judges, who serve six-year terms, work full time. They are simply directed to devote the time needed “for the prompt and proper disposition of the business of their office.”

Many judges had packed schedules in 2019 and heard far more matters than their colleagues.

But they’re also allowed to have other employment, as long as they make their judicial duties a priority. That provides them with wide latitude, court observers said, when setting schedules and putting in whatever time they decide the job requires.

Daniel Baranoski, a district judge in Bucks County and president of the Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania, reviewed the PennLive/Spotlight PA analysis.

In a statement, Baranoski said if judges weren’t hearing proceedings, that didn’t mean they were not working. They could be doing other activities, he said, such as participating in community events, researching cases, working on task forces, or filling out paperwork.

Baranoski said most district judges are hard workers, and the state’s system is efficient for taxpayers. “Judges do not punch a time clock,” he said. “Hearings run long, and we work late many days.”

Three district judges, however, told PennLive and Spotlight PA our analysis was fair and their activities outside the courtroom rarely require an extensive amount of time. One veteran district judge



PHOTOS: DAN GLEITER  
DGLEITER@PENNLIVE.COM

**ABOVE: PennLive found Magisterial District Judge Robert J. Radano at his law office in Delaware County during business hours in August, meeting a client. His shared district judge office was closed due to COVID-19. He declined to comment on the record.**

**RIGHT: Magisterial District Judge Greg Johnson didn’t dispute he had a lighter caseload than his peers in 2019. He estimated he spent 30 to 32 hours a week in his office, but said he is always available as needed.**



said, in an average year, he spends about 15 percent of his time on paperwork and other duties outside the courtroom.

District judges aren’t required to be lawyers and don’t write legal opinions. But if they don’t have a law degree, Baranoski said, they must take a four-week training course, pass a four-hour exam, and attend annual legal classes.

Baranoski also said a recent survey, by his organization, found about 35 percent of district judges were lawyers.

Several district judges — including Delaware County’s Radano — who had high numbers of days without court appearances declined interview requests.

A Delaware County defense attorney said she didn’t know about the workloads of district judges outside of court, but she was surprised Radano’s name topped the list for fewest days with proceedings.

She said he is a high-quality, “hands-on”

judge, who takes phone conference calls and reviews documents before hearings, instead of just showing up cold.

Johnson, the Dauphin County judge, didn’t dispute he had relatively few days in court and a lighter caseload than many of his peers. He said he spent about 30 to 32 hours a week in his office, which is housed in the same building as his courtroom.

But he also said police officers visited him, on occasion, at his nursery to get documents signed. Johnson declined to say how much time he spent at the nursery.

“Looking strictly at caseload isn’t the only way to look at this,” he said. “I look at those statistics and say to myself I’ve been very successful.

“I don’t have to work every single day because the people in my district ... are very well behaved, and then when they appear before me, I make it clear, we don’t

allow those types of misbehaviors in this area.”

John Cherry, Dauphin County’s president judge, and David Judy, president of the Dauphin County Magisterial District Judge Association, said they’ve always considered being a district judge a full-time job.

Judy said he is committed to being in his offices from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

“It is my responsibility, as an elected public official,” he said. “I realize that some of my colleagues may disagree with this philosophy. I respect that. But this has been my practice since I took the bench in January 1988.”

In 2001, an intergovernmental task force studying Pennsylvania’s district judge system found some district judges were “only performing their judicial duties on a ‘part-time’ basis while they pursue other employment during the week.”

The task force recommended barring district judges from outside employment, similar to higher court judges, so they could concentrate full time on judicial duties. The committee also noted that, under that scenario, pay raises would be appropriate. The recommendations did not result in either change.

State Sen. Lisa Baker, who was chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee during the most recent legislative session, said she plans to widen the scope of a planned examination of the court system in 2021, using data and information from the PennLive/Spotlight PA analysis.

“I do think it’s appropriate to do these deep dives,” she said. “Just because something’s been done a certain way so long, doesn’t mean it’s the right way.”

Presented with our findings, Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Saylor applauded the work of district judges and noted president judges can petition to eliminate a court at any time.

“The men and women who serve as magisterial district judges are the front line of Pennsylvania’s judiciary,” Saylor wrote. “They administer justice, often in highly charged circumstances, and are due the appreciation of the public for their service.”

### Too many judges

Lawyers and court officials pointed to multiple reasons for what, they said, were inefficiencies in the system.

*Continued on next page*

They said there are too many district judges, and not all of them have enough work to fill a week. They also said low caseloads are common in rural areas. Johnson, whose district covers a rural portion of Dauphin County, had less than half the average proceedings of all the other judges in the county.

Kim Berkeley Clark, Allegheny County's president judge, agreed some of her district judges had low caseloads. But eliminating positions and merging districts, she said, would create problems.

"Allegheny County is a large county," she wrote. "It could be a great hardship to require someone in one part of the county to travel to a location that may not be easily accessible to them."

The state Supreme Court looks at more than just workload when determining the number and boundaries of judicial districts, Johnson said, because they want offices to be in close proximity for all residents.

Others said Clark's and Johnson's concerns might be true in certain areas, but they are also long-standing excuses to justify offices that should be eliminated.

Wider use of video conferencing and centralized courts, court observers said, would make it easier to consolidate workloads between rural and urban areas.

And, while a reduction in court offices might increase travel times for some residents, they said, a balance needs to be struck between cost and public access.

Between the salary of each judge, staff, security, and building upkeep, each district office costs taxpayers an average of \$460,000 annually. The state pays the judges' salaries and benefits, while the counties pay for office operations.

The PennLive/Spotlight PA investigation found it wasn't just rural judges who had high numbers of days without proceedings.

In 2019, five of the 10 judges with the highest number of days without court appearances were based in Delaware County, a bedroom community of Philadelphia, with about 500,000 residents and 29 district judges.

We reached out to those five, and a sixth, Vincent Gallagher, who had relatively few days with proceedings in part because of time off to deal with a health issue, he said.

Gallagher, who also works as a website design consultant, was the only one who spoke on the record.

He said he has hearings scheduled



Mondays and Tuesdays that don't normally take eight hours, and nothing regularly scheduled Wednesday through Friday. He also said he works "on-call" every nine weeks, covering evenings and weekends.

Gallagher said he can only hear the cases that come before him.

"Is it a 40-hour work week?" he said. "It may not be. But what job do you have to work every night and weekend during rotations? Nothing about this is the normal, everyday job."

Delaware County employs 10 more district judges than Lancaster County, which has a similar population, and 11 more than Bucks County, which has about 62,000 more residents.

Kevin Kelly, Delaware County's president judge, didn't return multiple messages.

"Everyone knows it's hard being a (district) judge," said Andrew Edelberg, a Delaware County defense attorney. "But it's not a 9-to-5, five day-a-week job. It's not a full-time job. Could it be with fewer judges? It's possible. But that's not the way it has happened."

### Case stacking

How do some district judges manage workloads when they have so many days without proceedings?

Some use a strategy called "case stacking."

It's a simple technique: Instead of scheduling one hearing every 30 minutes, judges schedule up to 10 every 15 minutes.

A judge can't handle different cases at the same time. But by scheduling them simultaneously, police, attorneys, and their clients all show up at the same time. A judge can go immediately from hearing to hearing with no downtime. If a police officer or defendant doesn't show, the judge can jump straight to the next case.

From a district judge's perspective, it's a time saver: You can pack a day's worth of cases into a morning.

But for others, it means long, crowded waits, said Gary Asteak, past president of the Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

"There is nothing more aggravating than to show up in court to find 25 cases scheduled at the same time," said Asteak, who works as a defense attorney in Northampton County. "Then, if you want to exercise your right to a hearing, you have to wait until the end."

A Dauphin County attorney said: "If you have been to central court, you will see half-a-dozen attorneys waiting, half-a-dozen police waiting. It's a phenomenal waste of resources."

Case stacking appeared to be in full swing in May 2019 in Dauphin County.

Judge David O'Leary had 51 scheduled cases between 9 and 11 a.m. — or, on average, a case less than every three minutes.

For two hours, the court's waiting room was packed with attorneys, their clients, witnesses and relatives. Guards said the situation was common, and sometimes led to arguments and fights.

Several Harrisburg police officers, who declined to be identified, said it wasn't unusual for officers to not show up because they didn't want to wait hours to testify. When officers didn't show, the cases typically were rescheduled, requiring everyone to report back another day.

PennLive and Spotlight PA reached out to three Dauphin County judges, all based in Harrisburg, who appeared to stack their cases. Only one responded.

O'Leary defended case stacking as efficient and necessary because so many cases are disposed of without hearings but admitted "some of that efficiency was done at the expense of people sitting around."

That has changed amid COVID-19 rules that require social distancing and remote video hearings for prisoners, he said.

The changes require more discussion between prosecutors and defense attorneys before hearings, and more administrative work, O'Leary said, and it has reduced the amount of time people are sitting around.

Cherry, who became Dauphin County's president judge in January, expressed concern about the PennLive/Spotlight PA findings.

He was disturbed by one case, where a defendant wanted his day in court.

The man appeared three times, waiting two hours on each occasion, before the charges were dismissed, after the arresting officer failed to show.

"For that person who had to come three times, that's frankly inexcusable," Cherry said. "There will be those angry over that comment made, but it is inexcusable for three times. And that comes down to scheduling."

Cherry said he planned to sit down with all of the county's district judges. "We're going to look into these matters and try to resolve what we can," he said.

Outside Dauphin County, one judge said he saw nothing wrong with case stacking.

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Saveikis, the judge from western Allegheny County, said it's easier for police and prosecutors if he schedules the bulk of his cases on Mondays and Tuesdays.

His district is on the county border, about 30 minutes west of Pittsburgh, and, he said, stacking cases minimizes the need for multiple trips to his remote courtroom.

For the rest of the week, Saveikis said, he is still available if police need him to sign warrants, or if residents need him to sign complaints.

If he wanted, Saveikis said, he could pad out his schedule. "Some people are probably better at making their schedule look busier," he said. "But that's never been my goal."

With too little work, and too little oversight, district judges may focus their attention on outside work, said Maybell Romero, an associate law professor at Northern Illinois University, who has written about rural court systems.

Of the 10 judges with the highest number of days with no proceedings in 2019, at least six worked as attorneys, several with their own firms, the PennLive/Spotlight PA analysis found.

For a judge who has a business to run, Romero said, a technique like case stacking would be difficult to resist.

"It's disincentivizing public work and incentivizing private work," she said.

### Weak oversight

In theory, Pennsylvania has a solution to ensure district judge workloads are balanced, and positions are treated as full-time commitments.

Every 10 years, the state Supreme Court evaluates the caseloads and boundaries of each district. Each county is required to study the workloads of their district judges and recommend whether positions should be kept, eliminated, or boundaries redrawn.

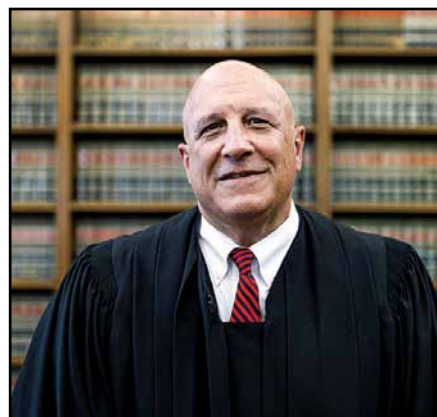


**ABOVE:** Five magisterial district judges from Harrisburg take turns handling criminal cases at a central courtroom located in the Dauphin County Prison building. Each judge presides over their cases one day per week.

PHOTO: VICKI VELLIOS BRINER | SPECIAL TO PENNLIVE

**RIGHT:** Dauphin County President Judge John Cherry pledged action after reviewing PennLive/Spotlight PA's findings.

PHOTO: DAN GLEITER | DGLEITER@PENNLIVE.COM



The next round is scheduled in 2021.

But some court observers said substantial improvements were unlikely without fresh attention.

During the last process in 2011, the Supreme Court set a goal of reducing district courts by 10 percent, or 55 offices, primarily through attrition, to save money. The process fell short but still resulted in 34 fewer districts, saving more than \$5 million a year, according to a court

administration newsletter.

At that time, the courts developed a formula to gauge the amount of work each judge performed. The formula took into consideration that judges heard different mixes of cases: some simple, others more complex. Handling a preliminary hearing for a criminal case, for example, is more time consuming than signing off on a traffic ticket.

The purpose of the formula was to

ensure districts could be drawn in an equitable manner.

PennLive and Spotlight PA applied the court's methodology to the 2019 caseloads of 466 district judges. Sixty-five percent had workloads that were significantly imbalanced, based on the court's own definition.

Doris Marie Provine, a lawyer and professor at Arizona State University, said it was encouraging that the Supreme Court had developed a system to gauge imbalances.

"Your state has got as far as having a reapportionment process," Provine said. "But why is the system so imbalanced?"

The system largely leaves decisions about redistricting to the president judges in each county. Some of those judges, court watchers said, may have little incentive to eliminate their colleagues' positions.

Provine said Pennsylvania has many government structures that are unique, or archaic. But judges who only have proceedings a few days a week, she said, is an issue that should transcend tradition.

"What you describe sounds quite unfair to taxpayers and to defendants," Provine said. "It seems to me more like a scandal than just plain archaic."

PennLive reporter Jan Murphy contributed to this story.

### About the Authors

**Christine Vendel** writes about public safety and oversees crime stories for PennLive after two years covering the city of Harrisburg. She previously spent 21 years writing about crime for the *Kansas City Star*.

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# SPOTLIGHT **PA**

## Failure by Pa. officials to clarify rules around medical marijuana, addiction treatment had serious consequences

Tyler Cordeiro was denied funding for treatment despite a state program offering help for anyone, even without insurance. The problem: his medical marijuana card.

**By Ed Mahon**  
Spotlight PA

BENSALEM — Tyler Cordeiro slept on a couch outside his mother's Bucks County home, suffering from opioid withdrawal. His sister took a photo of his mother, Susan Ousterman, on the other section of the L-shaped sofa, resting with him, the two lying nearly head-to-head.

Those days in September 2020 were exhausting and desperate for the family. The 24-year-old Cordeiro struggled with addiction for several years, and he had recently lost access to Medicaid insurance coverage. Ousterman and her daughter, Mary Cordeiro, called every 800-number and helpline they could find to help pay for addiction treatment.

It was, they said, a maddening process: Call one number. Don't get help. Call another. Get redirected back to the same worker who couldn't help before.

"It was hours of just talking to the same people, not getting an answer," Mary Cordeiro said.

Pennsylvania has a system set up specifically to help people in Tyler Cordeiro's predicament. A website for the state's "Get Help Now" campaign highlights a TV ad, which notes it was paid for with Pennsylvania taxpayer dollars, that promises trained workers will "get you or your loved one into treatment, regardless

of your access to insurance."

But Ousterman and Mary Cordeiro said they ran into an unexpected barrier for funding: Tyler Cordeiro's medical marijuana card.

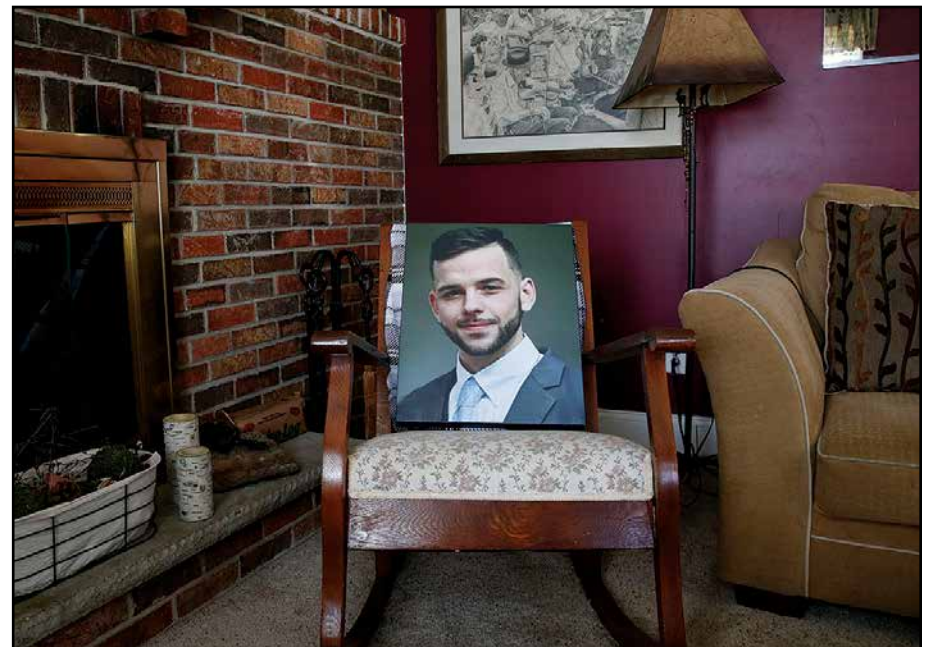
The federal government sends billions of dollars to states to help them respond to the opioid crisis and serve people suffering from addiction. In Pennsylvania, the state's Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs sends a large share of the hundreds of millions of dollars it receives each year to a network of 47 county drug and alcohol offices, which in turn help pay for addiction treatment for people who don't have insurance.

In late 2019, a wrench got thrown into that system. The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration told grant recipients that "funds may not be used, directly or indirectly, to purchase, prescribe, or provide marijuana or treatment using marijuana."

The agency also warned that the money could not be provided to any person or organization that "permits marijuana use for the purposes of treating substance use or mental disorders."

But the ban wasn't as wide-reaching as it seemed.

The federal agency said it tried to clear up confusion in January 2020, sending an email to all State Opioid Response grant recipients, including the Pennsylvania



Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, with a message: Providers could still treat people who used medical marijuana for substance use or mental health disorders.

But a Spotlight PA investigation has found many county drug and alcohol offices in Pennsylvania continued operating as if they couldn't spend federal money to serve those card-holders, and the state apparently didn't send out anything to clear up the confusion.

In September 2020 — nearly nine months after SAMHSA said it had sent out the updated guidance — Ousterman and Mary Cordeiro ran into the medical marijuana prohibition. At the time, Ousterman thought the rule was ridiculous, but she was desperate and didn't have

much time to think about it.

She and Mary kept searching. A few weeks later, on Oct. 5, 2020, Tyler walked from his mom's Bensalem home to a nearby gas station, went into the bathroom, and overdosed. Police tried to revive him with naloxone, paramedics treated him, but he was declared dead after arriving at a hospital, according to medical records and the death certificate.

The full scope of harm caused by the confusion between the federal government and state agencies — and the subsequent failure by Pennsylvania to clarify the issue with local officials — is unclear. But what is clear is that those missteps had serious

*Continued on next page*



## Spotlight PA continued

consequences in the case of Tyler Cordeiro.

The prohibition on using federal money to help those using medical marijuana for substance use or mental health disorders was widespread across many of Pennsylvania's drug and alcohol offices, according to Michele Denk, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators.

"That was a pretty uniform understanding," Denk said.

It wasn't until this month — after Susan Ousterman reached out to state officials with concerns about medical marijuana rules — that the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs sent out a public information bulletin that explained the more lenient rules.

The department didn't directly explain why it did not share the guidance sooner, but department spokesperson Ali Gantz referred to the January 2020 email from the federal agency as "informal." A spokesperson for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration said the federal agency considered the January 2020 email to be an official and formal communication.

Even now, it's unclear if county drug and alcohol offices across the state will make changes to how they fund treatment in response to the revised guidance.

"It seems like one hand is not talking to the other," said Jeff Riedy, executive director of Lehigh Valley NORML, which advocates for the legalization of recreational marijuana for adults.

Tyler Cordeiro was one of the more than 4,700 people who died from a drug overdose in Pennsylvania last year, according to preliminary estimates. His case shows how people at perilous points in their lives can be negatively affected by the conflict and confusion that exists as states expand access to marijuana, while the federal government still discourages its use.

Take, for example, the Wolf administration's own mixed-messaging. In May 2018, the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced it had added opioid-use disorder as one of the conditions that can qualify someone for medical marijuana. At the time, the Wolf administration said Pennsylvania was the first state to take such an action.

And yet that new access set up the potential for those in need to later be denied help.



YONG KIM / PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Susan Ousterman keeps her son Tyler Cordeiro's old notebooks, including one with a journal entry from a week or so before his fatal overdose. "You are going to have a family and kids and be trustworthy," he wrote. "This is not going to be a letter that your mom reads when you die."

Approximately \$369 million of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs' \$431 million budget this fiscal year comes from federal money. And the department has routinely warned county drug and alcohol offices that they will lose some of their money if they don't strictly enforce bans on marijuana use.

Denk, of the Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators, acknowledged the situation "has been kind of frustrating all the way around." But she said drug and alcohol offices try to get people into treatment multiple ways, including by using local money, though it's not clear how often that occurred for people with medical marijuana cards.

She also did not know how many people have been denied treatment funding based on their use of medical marijuana.

What is clear: Federal money is a major funding source. Local drug and alcohol offices were provided \$102 million in federal money this fiscal year, according to documents from the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. That's more than double the state dollars available to them.

In Tyler Cordeiro's case, Ousterman said

no one told her or Mary Cordeiro that county drug and alcohol offices could provide funding from other sources. And his mother and sister said Tyler Cordeiro wasn't given the choice to receive funding by giving up his medical marijuana card — which Ousterman says he offered.

"You'd hand over anything to be able to get help. It's so desperate," she said. "I can't express how desperate that time is, when you know he's ready for help."

Ousterman doesn't understand why the federal warning was ever interpreted to deny treatment money to someone with a medical marijuana card. She is still concerned state officials and county drug and alcohol offices haven't done enough to clear up confusion — or acknowledge that anything went wrong in the first place. She gets upset whenever she sees or hears one of the state's "Get Help" ads, and she worries that others won't get the care they need.

### 'Angelic look,' 'no fear'

When Tyler Cordeiro was about 9 years old, he stuck his tongue to a pole on a cold day — like that kid in the movie "A

Christmas Story." He was an adventurous spirit, the first one to jump into a bay to see how deep the water was, his mother said.

"He had no fear," Ousterman said. "He really didn't, which could have been part of the problem."

In a documentary released more than a year before his death, Tyler Cordeiro said his struggles with addiction started as a teenager. Pills and cocaine, he said, led to heroin, getting hooked, and more problems: a car crash, months of living homeless in Philadelphia, an overdose.

"That kind of changed something in me — where I realized that not only am I going to die," Tyler Cordeiro said, "but I have people that, you know, care about me and love me, and it's not just about me."

Tyler Cordeiro spoke while sitting on a bed inside a recovery home. He had a short beard and neatly combed hair. He wore a loose-fitting plaid shirt.

He had an "angelic look," said Steve McWilliams, an instructor at Villanova University and one of the documentary's producers.

*Continued on next page*

“We all thought he was the perfect representation of, one, success, because he was being successful when we interviewed him,” McWilliams said, “and also just his innocence.”

Tyler Cordeiro had a brief relapse in summer 2019, and then went into treatment, his mother said. But he started using again in early 2020, and it felt like chaos: multiple visits to detox facilities and rehabs, failed attempts to not use drugs, stretches of disappearing.

He had surgery in June 2020 for endocarditis, a life-threatening inflammation of the heart’s inner lining. But he still struggled to not use drugs.

Medicaid suspended

And then, in August 2020, he spent nearly two weeks in the Bucks County Correctional Facility in connection to a 2019 drug paraphernalia conviction, according to a county spokesperson.

That time in jail led him to lose access to benefits under Medicaid, a joint state and federal program primarily for people with low income.

That’s a common experience, according to the National Association of Counties, which has advocated for changes to the federal policy that cuts off Medicaid benefits for county jail inmates even if they haven’t been convicted of a crime. A joint task force report from the organization and the National Sheriffs’ Association said federal policy creates hardships for people suffering from behavioral, mental, or substance use issues when they leave jail.

“With little to no continuity of care services being provided, these individuals will often fall into old habits and end up back in jail,” the joint task force said in the February 2020 report.

Pennsylvania is one of the states that suspends Medicaid benefits — instead of terminating them — after someone is sent to county jail. That approach makes it easier for people to regain coverage, but there can still be gaps.

A letter dated Aug. 12 from the state Department of Human Services to Tyler Cordeiro notes that his Medicaid benefits were suspended, and that he had until Sept. 11 to formally contest the decision. But Ousterman said the letter was mailed to her house, and Tyler Cordeiro wasn’t living there at the time. They didn’t realize his Medicaid was suspended until after he relapsed again and sought treatment in

CONFLICTING GUIDANCE

**September 2019:** The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration begins warning addiction treatment grant recipients they cannot permit “marijuana use for the purposes of treating substance use or mental disorders.”

**January 2020:** The federal agency clarifies the rules, telling providers they can still treat people who use medical marijuana for addiction or mental health disorders.

**July 2020:** New operations and fiscal manuals compiled by the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs for county drug and alcohol offices — which provide funding for addiction treatment for people without insurance — take effect. Those manuals contain the confusing federal language about the marijuana funding ban without the clarifying guidance.

**September 2020:** Tyler Cordeiro, a 24-year-old from Bucks County, seeks help paying for addiction treatment, but is denied because of his medical marijuana card, his family says.

**October 2020:** Tyler Cordeiro dies from a drug overdose.

**Winter-Spring 2021:** Tyler Cordeiro’s mother, Susan Ousterman, reaches out to state officials with concerns about access to treatment for people who have medical marijuana cards.

**June 2021:** The Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs sends out an informational bulletin, sharing the nearly year-and-half old clarifying guidance from the federal government.

mid-September, she said.

Even though his Medicaid was suspended, Tyler Cordeiro knew that county drug and alcohol offices could help fill in coverage gaps, Ousterman said. But he told his mother that during an assessment at a Bucks County office of addiction treatment provider Gaudenzia, he learned that his medical marijuana card made him ineligible for that funding assistance.

Gaudenzia would not comment about Tyler Cordeiro specifically, citing privacy rules.

But Patricia McKernan, chief of staff for the addiction treatment provider that operates in more than a dozen Pennsylvania counties, said Gaudenzia wants to provide access to everyone who needs care, and pursues a variety of options, including helping them enroll in Medicaid.

McKernan said Gaudenzia does not deny treatment to clients who use medical marijuana. But she said Gaudenzia officials believed county drug and alcohol offices could not use federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration money to cover addiction treatment if the person had a medical marijuana card for certain conditions.

“So it put us in a little bit of a bind,” McKernan said.

In Bucks County, the executive director of the drug and alcohol office declined an interview request and didn’t address specific questions about the organization’s funding practices.

“Our priority is to ensure residents have access to services, via eligible funding guidelines, and if/when those guidelines change, our department follows DDAP direction,” Diane Rosati, of the Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission, said in an email.

The funding problems led Ousterman and Mary Cordeiro to make dozens of calls seeking assistance in mid-September, while Tyler Cordeiro went through withdrawal in Ousterman’s backyard. He stayed outside, as the mother and son tried to balance ongoing concerns over supporting his recovery and enabling his drug use.

They worked to get his Medicaid reinstated, and were asked to provide documents about income and proof of prison release. They tried to navigate the system without insurance. But Ousterman said they ran into problems. Someone Tyler Cordeiro knew from recovery found him a

“scholarship” for an inpatient detox and treatment facility in New Jersey, but his lack of insurance created problems when he got there, Ousterman said.

In another case, she said, a promised inpatient rehab center turned out to be a sober house with minimal supervision. He relapsed again.

Tyler Cordeiro came back to Ousterman’s Bensalem home. They had pizza and talked about options. He said he didn’t get any pleasure from using drugs but felt like it was beyond his control. He walked to a gas station to buy cigarettes. When he didn’t return after about 45 minutes, she drove around the neighborhood to look for him.

Eventually, she decided to speak with a gas station worker. She arrived at about the same time as the ambulance for her son.

New guidance

After Tyler Cordeiro’s death, letters arrived for him from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. One was dated Oct. 6, 2020 — the day after he died. The letter told him he qualified for Medicaid, and the change was retroactive, going back to early September.

“He would have been covered!” Ousterman wrote at the bottom.

On average, about 14,200 people in Pennsylvania have their Medicaid benefits suspended each year because they are incarcerated, according to the state Department of Human Services.

People sent to county jail still can lose Medicaid access in Pennsylvania. But the Department of Human Services says it implemented a change in late September 2020 that could lead to fewer suspensions. In the new system, there’s a 15-day delay before the department is formally notified that someone is incarcerated in county jail. That gives people more time to be released without having their benefits suspended.

While the Medicaid rules were difficult to navigate, Ousterman has focused her energy since her son’s death on the medical marijuana issue and the funding from county drug and alcohol offices.

She reached out to state officials with the state Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs multiple times earlier this year.

On June 2, the department sent out an



## Spotlight PA continued

informational bulletin with the subject line “Clarification on special conditions for federal funding related to medical marijuana.” The bulletin included a two-page document from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. That federal letter was dated Jan. 1, 2020. The guidance noted looser rules for medical marijuana funding — rules that reduce barriers for people seeking addiction treatment.

Denk, of the Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators, and McKernan, of Gaudenzia, said they had not seen that updated federal guidance prior to June 2021. McKernan said the guidance opens up another opportunity to assist clients. Denk said her members will review and discuss the guidance to see if, and how, it will change their practices.

“I think we’re glad that we finally saw somebody put something in writing,” Denk said.

Spotlight PA reached out to leaders of drug and alcohol offices in more than a dozen counties about the SAMHSA guidance. Most didn’t respond or declined to answer questions. But the executive director of Berks County’s office said the guidance allows providers to spend federal funds to treat medical marijuana users. But they have to agree to conditions, including

working toward alternative treatments, said Stanley J. Papademetriou.

It’s not clear why the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs didn’t share the guidance earlier through public policy or information bulletins. The department’s fiscal and operations manuals, which took effect in July 2020 and which county drug and alcohol offices follow, contain the stricter medical marijuana prohibitions, without noting the clarification from the federal government.

The department said it encouraged providers and county drug and alcohol offices “to seek guidance directly from SAMHSA on these special conditions, as DDAP does not have the authority to interpret federal guidance.”

But county drug and alcohol offices did turn to DDAP for guidance, according to Denk, of the Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators.

“Our members discussed this language several times at meetings with DDAP. Their legal counsel also responded to inquiries from individual counties,” Denk said in an email, after an earlier phone interview.

In statements to Spotlight PA, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs acknowledged receiving the January 2020 clarification guidance from the Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, but it did not provide details on how it shared that guidance with county drug and alcohol offices prior to June of this year.

The department’s statements to Spotlight PA did not acknowledge Ousterman’s role in bringing attention to the issue. Instead, the department said, “it was decided that there may be further clarification needed” after numerous conversations.

The department said it then reached out to SAMHSA “to request that an official communication be compiled to share information in a more formal way.” The department said it sent out the June 2021 bulletin after receiving information “on a formal SAMHSA letterhead.”

The state also defended its “Get Help Now” campaign, saying more than 76,000 Pennsylvanians have called the hotline since 2016. And the department said, “the Wolf Administration is committed to providing high-quality drug and alcohol treatment services to all Pennsylvanians living with a substance use disorder, without discrimination or prejudices.”

Ousterman continues to raise awareness around addiction issues and treatment. She hopes to create memorial gardens to honor children who have died. And she continues to grieve for her son. There are

reminders of him all over her home.

A school district calendar features Tyler Cordeiro on the cover, wearing a band uniform and carrying a drum. Framed photos from Ousterman’s wedding in 2019 show him walking her down the aisle, the two dancing together, and leaning in to each other. There’s a figurine that reminds Ousterman of the Christmas when her son wrapped the present in about 30 zip ties, making it nearly impossible to open. She keeps his old notebooks, including one with a journal entry from a week or so before his fatal overdose.

“You are going to have a family and kids and be trustworthy,” he wrote. “This is not going to be a letter that your mom reads when you die.”

But, of course, she did.

“It’s hard because,” Ousterman said, her voice choking up, “it’d be easier to think he didn’t want to live.”

**WHILE YOU’RE HERE...** *If you learned something from this story, pay it forward and become a member of Spotlight PA so someone else can in the future at [spotlightpa.org/donate](https://spotlightpa.org/donate). Spotlight PA is funded by foundations and readers like you who are committed to accountability journalism that gets results.*

*Published June 28, 2021.*

## Life is full of emotion.



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# Standard-Speaker

## ‘Our residents deserve better’

**By Jill Whalen**

Standard-Speaker

An employee at Kadima Rehabilitation and Nursing at Luzerne in Drums is both heartbroken and horrified.

Horrified, they said, because 30 of its 31 residents recently tested positive for COVID-19.

Heartbroken, they said, because of the filthy and deplorable conditions that residents, who’ve become like family to them, have to endure.

“I cannot stay silent anymore. The horror we have endured during this pandemic is unexplainable,” said the staffer, who spoke to the Standard-Speaker on the condition of anonymity.

The employee, fighting tears, described the COVID outbreak, along with the facility’s dirty floors, lack of cleaning supplies and soiled linens.

But perhaps most eye-opening was a plastic tarp tacked to a doorway. The see-through plastic, with a taped red-line through its center, was meant to separate COVID-positive guests from others.

“The plastic tarp was our original COVID wall,” they explained, saying it put residents and staff at risk. “Obviously, it did because it spread.”

The employee said the facility is understaffed, and even more so now that six employees also recently tested positive for COVID-19.

Just last week, the Pennsylvania National Guard sent 14 medical and general purpose personnel to help replace Kadima staffers rendered unavailable due to COVID-19 quarantines or other reasons. The staffer also noted that officials from the Pennsylvania Department of Health visited last week, likely because of complaints logged by staff members.

“I need to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Our residents deserve better,” the employee said.

On Tuesday, the Standard-Speaker contacted Kadima to speak to an administrator about conditions and COVID cases. The call was forwarded to a woman who declined comment before she disconnected the call.

A prior phone message left with an administrator at Kadima, made last week, went unreturned.

The facility had its first COVID case about two weeks ago, according to the employee. At that time, they alleged that personal protective equipment was not readily



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Dust accumulates on a fan inside Kadima Rehabilitation and Nursing in Drums. An employee there said regular housekeeping stalled a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic.**

available. They said another staff member took it into their own hands to provide for staff.

The employee noted that as COVID cases began to spread, residents were moved from their rooms and exposed to the virus. They paid for an agency to spray a disinfectant in the rooms, but the conditions were unsanitary nonetheless, the staff member said.

Linens are in short supply, shower rooms are moldy and the kitchen is a “nightmare,” they said.

Nurses are trying to fit cleaning into their own schedules, the employee said, noting some have broken down in tears because of what they’ve seen and because they’re stretched so thin.

“There was one weekend I witnessed a nurse on her hands and knees cleaning our dirt- and dust-filled med room,” they said.

The employee photographed towels they used while attempting to clean a resident’s floor. They didn’t have a mop or detergent, so they used body soap and a towel. It was futile, they said.

“The staff tries our best to clean up but we are understaffed, tired and we feel helpless,” the employee said.

Employees have also taken home residents’ clothing to

launder. And, the staffer said, they’ve brought food for them to eat.

“The residents are not getting the care they require, the items they need, and their necessities met,” the employee said.

They noted that they love the residents and can’t bare to see them living as they do.

“It’s affecting everybody, especially the residents. They don’t deserve to live like this. We have people who are veterans. We have people who have spent their whole lives working jobs, and they are being subject to inhumane conditions,” they said. “Our residents deserve better.”

Another employee described many of the same observations.

The Standard-Speaker contacted the Department of Health to see whether Kadima had been reporting its COVID cases since none appeared in the department’s “COVID-19 Long-Term Care Facilities Data for Pennsylvania.”

Deputy Press Secretary Maggi Brown said that the department reports and shares data submitted to it by nursing homes, which are required to provide the information.

“Although we have held meetings and webinars to discuss the importance of data reporting, and have worked with facilities in this regard, some facilities may not be properly reporting,” she said.

While Barton didn’t name Kadima or any other facility, she said the department continues to work with “these facilities” to ensure proper reporting is done so it can provide the most up-to-date and accurate numbers to the public.

“I cannot comment on specific cases or clusters of cases at facilities further than the data reported available on our website, but I can share that the Department of Health considers one case an outbreak and works swiftly to provide resources and supports to assist the staff and residents to minimize spread and prevent further outbreak,” she said. “These efforts include the National Guard” Pennsylvania’s Regional Response Health Collaborative (RRHC) Program, PA Patient Safety Authority and others.

Barton also said the department doesn’t confirm whether it visits facilities.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which also requires nursing homes to report data, have no information on Kadima. CMS fined the Drums facility \$650 in December for failing to report the data.

*Published Jan. 27, 2021.*

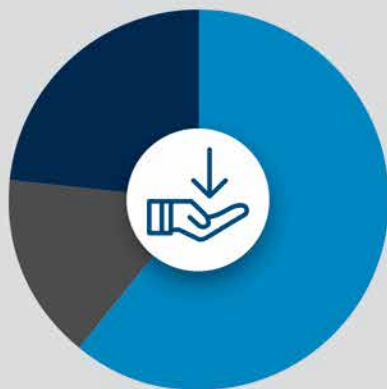


# 2021 ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT

## EXCERPT

### Economic Contribution of the Newspaper Industry in Pennsylvania, 2020

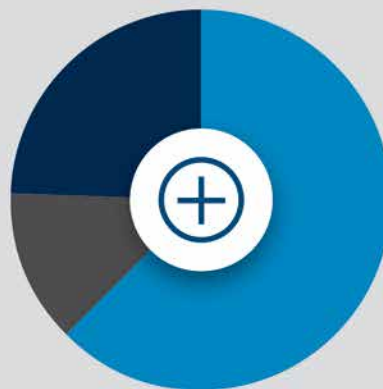
#### LABOR INCOME



TOTAL  
**\$528,796,016**

● DIRECT	\$322,285,591
● INDIRECT	\$83,166,735
● INDUCED	\$123,343,690

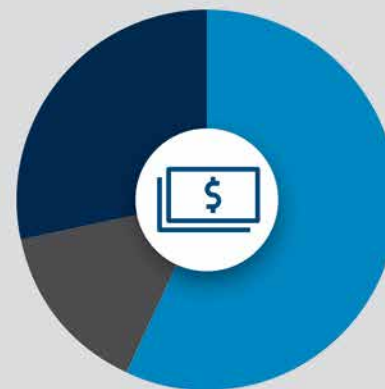
#### VALUE ADDED (Gross domestic product)



TOTAL  
**\$850,270,790**

● DIRECT	\$532,324,055
● INDIRECT	\$110,682,856
● INDUCED	\$207,263,879

#### ECONOMIC OUTPUT



TOTAL  
**\$1,250,123,435**

● DIRECT	\$713,779,833
● INDIRECT	\$184,695,015
● INDUCED	\$351,648,587

Source: Parker Philips using IMPLAN

For more information about the PNA Economic Impact Report, visit [www.panewsmedia.org](http://www.panewsmedia.org).

## ‘It’s going to happen expeditiously.’ What to know about the newly restructured election probe

‘Sometimes Republicans win. Sometimes Democrats win,’ Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman said. ‘We all move on. But if you don’t have faith in the results, you fracture your democracy’.

**By Marley Parish**

The 2020 election results are certified, but some Pennsylvania lawmakers — and supporters of the former president — have not moved on, resulting in what’ll likely be a lengthy and expensive review.

The Pennsylvania Senate is launching an investigation into the 2020 general and 2021 primary elections. The goal is to “uncover information” so the Republican-controlled Legislature can potentially act to improve the electoral process, Sen. Cris Dush, R-Jefferson, now responsible for leading the probe, said.

Two post-election reviews — a statistical sample required by law and a risk-limiting audit — were conducted after the 2020 election in Pennsylvania. Sixty-three out of 67 total counties participated in the risk-limiting audit pilot, and neither assessment found evidence of fraud.

Certified results show that former President Donald Trump lost the 2020 election by 80,555 votes in Pennsylvania. In the same cycle, Republicans triumphed in state races — maintaining their legislative majorities in Harrisburg.

But a months-long campaign, launched by Trump and embraced by supporters, has cast doubt on election integrity. And despite no evidence to prove claims of fraud, the Pennsylvania GOP has decided to investigate using the Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee.

“Sometimes Republicans win. Sometimes Democrats win,” Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman, R-Centre, told the Capital-Star. “We all move on. But if you don’t have faith in the results, you fracture your democracy.”



State Sen. Jake Corman, R-Centre, reacts to Gov. Tom Wolf’s budget proposal.

CAPITAL-STAR PHOTO  
BY CASSIE MILLER

During an interview last week with Pittsburgh media personality Wendy Bell, Corman said he doesn’t “necessarily have faith in the results” of the 2020 election. He added that there were “many problems” the General Assembly needs to evaluate, including actions made by the Department of State under former Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar and now acting Secretary Veronica Degraffenreid.

“I’m committed to taking it wherever it takes me and wherever it takes this committee,” Corman said of the investigation. “And it’s going to happen expeditiously.”

Though details about the scope, cost, and timeline of the investigation aren’t final, here’s what we know so far:

### **What kind of review is the GOP embracing, and what’s the scope?**

When Sen. Doug Mastriano, R-Franklin, was leading the investigation, he looked to the GOP-backed election review

in Arizona — a controversial probe carried out by a cybersecurity company with no experience auditing elections.

He and Dush, joined by state Rep. Rob Kauffman, R-Franklin, toured the facility hosting the review earlier this summer.

But now that Mastriano, a Trump ally, is no longer in charge, it’s unclear what the model will be.

Jason Thompson, a spokesperson for Corman, said Senate leadership is still working on the scope of the review. He told the Capital-Star that the Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee will also incorporate hearings conducted by the Senate State Government Committee, which began last week, as part of the investigation.

*Continued on next page*



## Pennsylvania Capital-Star continued

Corman has promised a “hundred percent” commitment to a full forensic investigation. Though he did not join the trio of lawmakers on their Arizona trip, Corman said he has been in communication with Arizona Senate President Karen Fann and Senate President Pro Tempore Vince Leach, both Republicans.

Dush, whose office deferred all questions about the investigation to Corman’s staff, told PennLive the review would include a mix of lessons learned from Arizona. In a statement, Dush said all evidence will be treated as such “and not as a means of obtaining publicity.”

“You may be frustrated with not hearing updates as quickly as you would like, but there is an investigative need to hold that evidence until the review is complete,” he said.

### When will the review start?

Thompson said hearings about the investigation could start this week, but they’ll likely begin the following week.

“They have a lot of different schedules that they’re working through,” Thompson told the Capital-Star. “Summer’s not a fun time to hold a hearing, but they’re working at it.”

With an active directive from the Department of State that prohibits third-party access to election equipment, the review likely will face roadblocks. Corman said Senate leadership is researching to prepare for legal challenges, citing a state Supreme Court “that’s dying to shut us down.”

“We have to make sure legally we are on the right spot, so we can absorb a challenge, which we will get,” Corman told Bell.

### Who is paying for the investigation, and how much will it cost?

Taxpayer money will fund the review, Thompson confirmed. However, the exact cost has yet to be determined.

“Trying to even pin down a ballpark is very difficult because there are so many factors that we still need to decide upon in terms of the scope of the investigation, how it’s going to be conducted,” he added. “We’re talking with different vendors that might be able to come in and help with that.”

The three Pennsylvania counties originally targeted in the review — Tioga, York, and Philadelphia — expressed concern about costs of compliance, citing possible decertification of election equipment if they participated. Philadelphia County estimated that it would cost more than \$35 million to replace county voting machines.

### What is the end goal?

In a self-published op-Ed, Corman said the investigation is not meant to conduct a recount, “but to find any flaws in the system that could be exploited by bad actors and take action to correct those flaws through legislative changes to our Election Code.”

“Our goal should be to proceed carefully, thoughtfully, and transparently,” he said. “I am not interested in a process that panders to any one point of view. We need to follow the evidence wherever it leads and get real results to make our election system stronger and more secure.”

### Will Mastriano have a role in the probe?

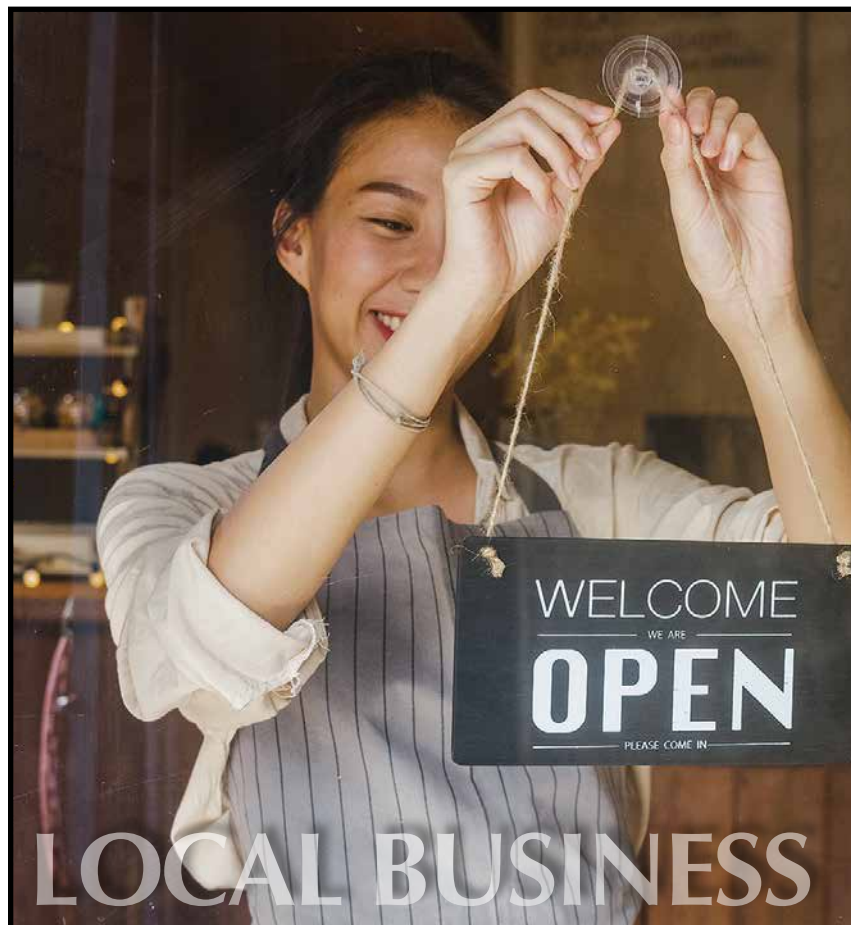
Since having his staff reassigned and Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee chairmanship stripped by Corman, Mastriano has kept quiet about his role in the newly restructured investigation.

As of Friday, Mastriano is still a member of the 11-member panel that’s leading the review. But since Dush took over as Senate Intergovernmental Operations chairman, Mastriano said he has “little confidence that a real investigation will ever take place.”

During a Thursday night Facebook Live, Mastriano, who was reflecting on recent events in Afghanistan, paused to mention the election investigation.

Addressing several hundred viewers, he said: “I know there’s a lot of things and a lot of questions on what’s going on domestically in Pennsylvania regarding the audit — the forensic investigation — but we’ll talk about that another time.”

*Published Aug. 29, 2021.*



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## Pa. only state that requires counties to fund public defense

By Marcia Moore

mmoore@dailyitem.com

*Editor's note: This is the first in a series of occasional articles looking at public defenders in Pennsylvania.*

Forty-nine U.S. state governments fund the criminal defense of poor people.

Pennsylvania's does not.

Pennsylvania's 67 counties are each responsible for funding the defense of the indigent and public defenders offices, a practice that Gov. Tom Wolf earlier this year said should be changed without specifying how much the state should spend or any other details.

"I know there has been talk of it, but there's been no in-depth discussion on either side," said Lynda Schlegel Culver, a Republican state representative from Sunbury. "I don't know how much it would cost."

Proponents of indigent defense reform argue that leaving the funding up to the discretion of each county is costing taxpayers more money.

There have been lawsuits across the state — including a federal suit filed last year and settled in March when Montgomery County paid \$310,000 to two former members of the county public defender's office who claimed they were wrongfully fired for criticizing the county's bail practices — said Nyssa Taylor, a criminal justice policy attorney with the ACLU-PA and former assistant public defender at the Defender Association of Philadelphia.

"Zealous representation requires money and doing things that are unpopular," said Taylor.

Sara Jacobson, executive director of the Public Defender Association of Pennsylvania, said the lack of adequate

state funding has "created an uneven playing field" since public defense lawyers are funded to the degree the county prioritizes them.

Every criminal defendant that appears before a judge in Pennsylvania is given an opportunity to apply for free assistance of counsel through the public defender's office. Eligibility is based on income and must be approved by a judge.

In Union County, defendants must fill out a five-page application that won't be processed if proof of income is not provided on the form. Applications must be completed at least 10 days ahead of a scheduled hearing and must include pay stubs, unemployment or Social Security check, or a copy of the most recent tax return.

But with public defenders serving at the will of the county commissioners who control the purse strings and determine how much they will be paid and their offices funded, Taylor argues, not every defendant in Pennsylvania is getting equal representation in the justice system.

According to the ACLU-PA, Philadelphia spends about nine times as much as Columbia County per capita on indigent defense.

### A 'moving target'

In Northumberland County, Chief Public Defender Ed Greco said his office has four full-time public defenders, each with a slew of cases to handle and more also coming in.

Greco is the only part-time public defender.

In 2020, they spent \$507,168 of a budgeted \$543,997. The same amount was budgeted for 2021 and the county is on pace to stay within budget again, according to county officials.

A public defender's salary in the county is

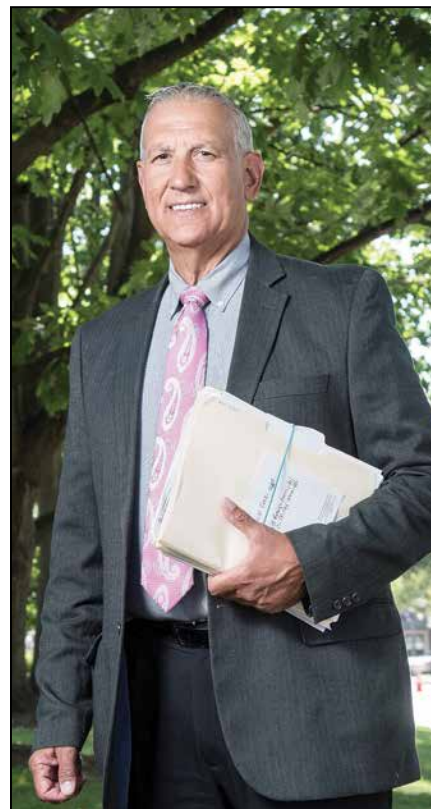


PHOTO: ROBERT INGLIS/THE DAILY ITEM

Ed Greco is the chief public defender in Northumberland County.

\$79,737 for a full-time employee. While the office also has a legal secretary at a salary of \$26,122 and an administrative secretary at a cost of \$9,532 per year.

Greco said the caseload for the office is about 2,000 per year. Even that, he said, "is a moving target. Cases vary and sometimes we can get them resolved at the district judge's level so they are done quicker."

Greco said his office also gets backed up and is constantly busy. "During the pandemic, it got very hard because of continues and so forth," he said.

The Northumberland County public defender's office is handling two of the 13 murder cases in the Valley. Those cases involve much more work and time.

"We have to meet with clients and all of this takes time," he said. "Then we must bounce to a different case and appear in court and it's just a lot of stuff happening at once on some days."

Greco said then some clients complain and attempt to fire their public defender, which then causes more delays.

"We could be representing them for months and then they hire a private attorney," he said. "Everyone is working above and beyond and I think we are all doing the best we can."

### Boost in staffing

Snyder County Commissioner Joe Kantz said his county's public defenders' office has seen a boost in its staffing in recent years.

In 2016, Snyder County employed one full-time public defender and spent nearly \$162,000 funding the office. Last year, the office had one full-time chief public defender and a full-time assistant public defender, as well as one full-time and part-time administrative assistant and a budget of \$190,425, according to Chief Clerk Tony Phillips.

The office today employs a full-time chief public defender — Jasmin Smith, who declined to comment for this story — and two part-time assistant public defenders and as of late July, had spent \$121,459, he said.

From 2016 to 2020, Montour County spent between \$44,000 and \$53,000 on salaries for its public defender, Bob Marks Jr., according to county Chief Clerk, Holly

*Continued on next page*



Brandon. In 2021, the county has budgeted \$51,639 for the office.

Montour County's totals do not count payroll costs and medical benefits.

Like Snyder County, Union County's public defender's office has also seen an increase in staffing.

In 2021, chief public defender Brian Ulmer has two part-time assistant public defenders, one full-time administrative assistant and one part-time administrative assistant. The office has spent \$121,459 as of July 28, county chief clerk Sue Greene said.

In 2016, Union County had one chief public defender and one administrative assistant. In 2017, they added one full-time assistant public defender and a full-time administrative assistant in 2018. Staffing remained the same in 2019 and 2020 — one full-time chief public defender, one

full-time assistant public defender, a full-time administrative assistant and a part-time administrative assistant. The county has spent between \$161,720 (2016) and \$191,064 (2019) to cover the office.

While district attorneys receive funding from the state and grants to support their offices, as well as having the state police available as an investigative resource, "underpaid and overworked" public defenders are limited by the county's funding priorities and must pay for their own investigators, Jacobson said.

The entire court system needs to be better funded, she said.

"Let's set aside fairness and justice," Jacobson said. "We want our courts to come to the right decisions."

Greg Rowe, executive director of the Pennsylvania District Attorney's Association, said the state reimburses counties 65 percent of the district

attorney's salary. All full-time DAs are paid the same \$185,000 salary. Rowe said the money for reimbursements goes directly to the counties, not to the DAs' office, so the salaries are "primarily paid for by county dollars."

### Oversight

How many indigent defendants are in the Pennsylvania criminal system is difficult to measure since there is no oversight she said.

"There is no tracking of public defender cases ... and no one seems to care," Taylor said. "And, meanwhile, the incarceration rate in Pennsylvania continues to rise."

Adding to the problem, she said, is that accused criminal offenders have no right to have a public defender represent them at preliminary arraignments which has led to many being held in jail for longer periods of time prior to trial.

The current system also doesn't allow for a uniform tracking of cases involving offenders represented by public defenders, Taylor said, though there has been a noticeable uptick in pretrial incarceration.

Jacobson is heartened by Wolf's comments about the possibility of state-funded indigent criminal cases and that the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee is assembling the caseloads of the individual public defenders' office in anticipation of the effort.

"Incarcerations cost counties dollars (so) it's financially smart," she said.

Culver said she's open to hearing the arguments.

"It definitely merits discussion if we can do it better," said Culver.

*The Daily Item reporter Francis Scarcella contributed to this report.*

*Published Aug. 8, 2021.*

# Wolf still seeks help for counties to pay for public defenders

By John Finnerty

jfinnerty@cnhi.com

HARRISBURG — Gov. Tom Wolf's budget proposal in February included a provision intended to confront the state's long-standing failure to help counties provide adequate defense for poor people accused of crimes.

The measure didn't make it into the final budget passed in June. The budget also failed to extend a small grant program created in 2019 to help counties deal with the extra cost of providing legal representation to poor defendants accused in death penalty cases.

Nevertheless, Lyndsay Kensinger, a spokeswoman for Wolf said the governor remains committed to trying to get the public defender funding reforms put in place.

"The administration looks forward to working with the Legislature to create this program in Pennsylvania in the future," Kensinger said.

Jason Gottesman, a spokesman for House Republicans, said that Wolf never made the public defender issue a serious priority during budget discussions.

"The governor never brought this plan to the budget table. Our understanding is it never made it past anything other than budget materials distributed to the media," he said.

In proposing the creation of an Office of Indigent Defense and the creation of a program to help counties pay for public defenders, Wolf noted that Pennsylvania is the only state that doesn't share the cost of public defenders and he pointed to a 10-year-old government study, commissioned by the General Assembly, that had documented the flaws in the way Pennsylvania's legal system provides representation to the poor.

"We have the resources to do something," said Joanna McClinton, D-Philadelphia, the House Democratic Leader. "We're not being fair," she said.

McClinton was a public defender in Philadelphia before being elected to the state House.

That 2011 study noted Pennsylvania is "the only state that does not appropriate or provide for so much as a penny toward assisting the counties in complying" with court rulings mandating that providing legal representation for poor defendants is required by the Sixth Amendment."

Authors of the report also noted that "this failure is particularly burdensome to the poorer counties, which contend with the dual handicap of scant resources and high crime rates."

### Grants

In 2019, the state budget included \$500,000 for a grant program to reimburse

counties for costs associated with providing legal representation to poor people accused in death penalty cases.

"Funding for indigent defense was not added to the General Fund in this year's budget," said Erica Clayton Wright, a spokeswoman for Senate Majority Leader Kim Ward, R-Westmoreland County. In the two years of that grant program, it provided just under \$440,000 in reimbursements.

In 2019-2020, the state provided \$218,892 to seven counties — Adams, Berks, Blair, Bucks, Lancaster, Luzerne and Northampton — for costs associated with providing legal defense in death penalty cases, according to information from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, which oversees the grant program. Last year, the state provided \$220,000 to another seven counties — Beaver, Berks, Blair, Bucks, Clinton, Northampton and Potter — for defense costs for poor people accused in death penalty cases.

Derin Myers, Director of Grants Management, Financial Administration and Administrative Services, for PCCD said that since the program has only awarded \$440,000 of the \$500,000 allocated in 2019, the commission is seeking approval to use up the remaining \$60,000 but that no additional funding has been identified to keep those reimbursements in place.

Wolf's proposal noted that while the state

hasn't been paying to help counties provide public defenders, the state has been paying to incarcerate people who may have been convicted in part due to inadequate representation.

"Acute underfunding of these services has not only created significant fiscal problems for the counties but has also cost the state hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to incarcerate and retry defendants, due to the inability of their indigent defense counsel to represent them effectively," according to the governor's budget.

McClinton said public defenders are too often "overworked" and without the resources to do their jobs.

### Significant issue

Members of the public who may not consider the issue significant should rethink things.

"You don't know when the tables will be turned," and individuals or someone close to them accused of a crime without the financial wherewithal to pay for legal representation, she said.

Ensuring that the state helps provide adequate legal representation for the poor will "make sure you're not one of these people who end up getting exonerated years later," she said.

*Published Aug. 7, 2021.*

## Killing the Chesapeake

Pa.'s polluted Susquehanna River is poisoning the bay.  
What can be done?

By Mike Argento  
York Daily Record

"Cold Beer and Hot Crabs."

Will Baker was driving through central Pennsylvania a couple of years ago when he saw that sign outside a tavern.

In a way, it validated his life's work.

He'd joined the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in 1976 as an intern after graduating from Trinity College. It wasn't his plan. He'd lined up a job with a Washington, D.C., architectural firm and was thinking that might lead to a career designing buildings. But it didn't work out, and he wound up working for a tree service in Maryland.

He was working on a property and got to talking with the owner, who asked him, "How would you like to save the bay?"

"That would be fine," he told the man, who turned out to be a Bay Foundation trustee. Baker has been with the foundation ever since, serving as its president since 1981.

The job covers a lot of ground — from chemistry and biology to politics and government to education and public relations. Some of the subjects can seem academic.

But they reveal how everything is connected.

How the many streams and rivers of the bay watershed are really one.

How decisions made in courthouses and statehouses can result in smallmouth bass

in the Susquehanna River and blue crabs in the bay either thriving or dying.

A lot of the work is technical, but the sign outside that Pennsylvania tavern pulled it all together in human terms.

"Cold Beer and Hot Crabs."

"That really brought it home," Baker said. "Pennsylvania folks love to eat seafood from the bay, and Maryland people love the produce grown in Pennsylvania. It's all connected. It's part of our history and culture, and we need to take care of it."

### Pennsylvania is killing the river and bay

Standing on the west bank of the Susquehanna near its widest point between Lancaster and York counties on a calm, cloudless morning, the water looks to be a clear blue, flowing slowly from its headwaters in New York to the Chesapeake.

It appears pristine, as clean as it had been before human beings began settling on its shores — drawn to the water as a source of sustenance and wealth.

It's an illusion — the water merely reflecting the blue sky.

Beneath that placid surface, something is very wrong. Beneath that placid surface, a stew of toxins lurks, carried downstream by sediment and stirred up by increasingly severe weather fueled by climate change:

*Nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from farms and development throughout the*

*Continued on next page*



### By the numbers: The Chesapeake Bay



**18 trillion**

Gallons of water in the bay



**51 billion**

Gallons of water flowing into bay each day



**64,000**

Square miles of the bay watershed



**3,600**

Species of plants and animals supported by the bay



**150**

Number of major tributaries of the bay



**3**

Major pollutants affecting bay water quality: nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment



watershed endangers natural habitats, flowing from the river into the bay.

Sediment drifts downstream from the thousands of Colonial-era mill dams constructed on just about every stream in the watershed.

Discharge from long-abandoned coal mines in the northeast and northwest corners of the watershed flows into creeks, turning them red, like open wounds on the earth, dumping acidic water into the river.

Sediment contains toxic bacteria flowing from outdated, inefficient wastewater treatment plants and farm fields fertilized with animal manure.

Pharmaceutical compounds that escape filtration from wastewater treatment plants remain suspended in the water.

These pollutants endanger wildlife essential to maintaining the health of the river and can have a devastating economic impact.

If the Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint designed to reduce contamination is not followed, that could drop by \$5.6 billion.

But the political will is lacking to spend the money to achieve the goals of the compact between the watershed's states.

Especially in Pennsylvania and New York. Pennsylvania is \$324 million short of its commitment to clean up the watershed. And that deficit might deepen if state environmental spending is diverted to cope

with the economic chaos created by the COVID-19 pandemic. New York's plan falls far short on nitrogen cleanup goals and lacks funding sources.

That has prompted Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and the District of Columbia to sue the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for permitting Pennsylvania and New York to fall short of their cleanup commitments.

The future of the litigation depends on what happens after January when a new administration takes over in Washington.

**The river and bay define our region**

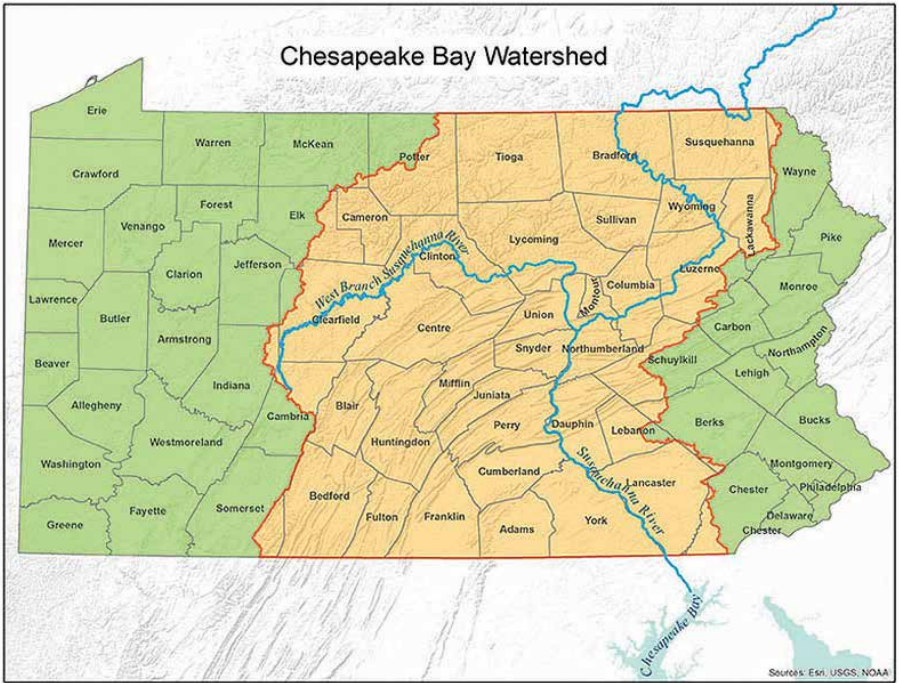
Beyond the politics, money and danger to natural habitats, the Susquehanna and Chesapeake help define our culture.

Generations of families who make their living from the bay and river have created communities. Kayakers flock to the river to become members of the 444 Club, paddling from New York to the bay. Anglers from around the world fish the Susquehanna for smallmouth bass and huge flathead catfish.

The river and bay live in our lore and history, and they are worth saving. For the watermen and the anglers and the kayakers.

For the bass and the shad and the hellbenders. And yes, for the cold beer and hot crabs.

Published Aug. 4, 2021.



**Additional stories in the series, found on ydr.com:**

- What can be done How it affects you A family's river life
- River water goes south
- Amish farms, mill dams harm river and bay – what can be done Toxic muck a vexing problem
- Raw sewage in the water Species struggle to survive
- Worst-case scenario for the river and bay





# READING EAGLE

## A health department for Berks County? Some say it's time to debate creating one

By Karen Shuey

In Jesse Royer's mind, the last 11 months could have looked a lot different in Berks County.

With the coronavirus pandemic raging, the county could have enforced restrictions on restaurants and other businesses. It could have set up mass testing sites. It could be getting vaccines into the arms of county residents.

But in order to do any of that, Berks would need to have a county health department.

Berks isn't alone in not having a county health department. Far from it, in fact.

Across Pennsylvania, only six of 67 counties have one. Four of the 57 cities in the state also have their own departments.

So while not having a health department is the norm, Royer doesn't believe that's what Berks should be striving for. He and a small group of fellow county residents have been pushing the idea of creating a county health department for quite some time, and the arrival of COVID-19 has only made their calls for its creation louder.

"This is something that people were talking about before the coronavirus arrived, but the need for a county health department is so much more obvious in the midst of a global pandemic," Royer said. "Regardless of the tone that is set by the county commissioners and the director of emergency services, we don't have the regulatory capacity at the county level to really respond to a global pandemic. So right now we're looking at a very obvious need, but without much more than the ability to make suggestions."

Royer, who ran for county commissioner in 2019, and his fellow residents aren't alone. Local health care experts have also begun a louder and louder clamoring for the creation of a county health department.



PHOTO: BEN HASTY - READING EAGLE

But Berks adding itself to the small list of counties with one likely won't happen anytime soon. The county commissioners have yet to take up the issue, and say that the middle of a pandemic is no time to do so.

That doesn't mean they aren't willing to explore it, though. While it might not happen as quickly as some like, creating a county health department is something that will get at least a look somewhere down the road.

### Not just for pandemics

Royer's interest in Berks starting a county health department may have been exacerbated by the pandemic, but he says helping to deal with a global health crisis is only one benefit it would provide.

"Berks County has a lot of ongoing and longstanding health issues, particularly lead poisoning because of our history

being the site of battery manufacturers," he said. "We have some environmental organizations in the state that give suggestions on how to handle that, but we don't have a local health department taking a look at how lead is impacting our soil and groundwater."

He said a local department would also be able to provide guidance to school districts; treat communicable diseases more effectively; provide annual exams for low-income residents; offer services to mothers and their newborns; perform restaurant health inspections; and create infectious disease plans.

"It's not that we've never needed to do these things before, it's that we can't because we don't have the bandwidth, the staff or expertise to do it," he said. "By nature of creating a health department we are bringing more medical expertise into the county government system."

The idea, Royer said, is the county will be more prepared for whatever comes its way.

"It's like hopefully you won't need an umbrella when you leave your house," he said.

"But if it starts raining you want to have it with you. And it's not something that you can go back and get without getting wet in the meantime."

"One of the reasons we need a health department is so that we don't scramble when things like this happen. I think the commissioners have been scrambling, and I think that they scrambled a fleet of resources in the most responsive manner that they could."

While Royer said the county has been doing the best it can given the circumstances, he believes a county health department would help ensure the county isn't put in a similar difficult situation in the future. And the time to start is working toward that is now, he said.

"I think it's shortsighted to say that this is a long-term goal but we shouldn't work on it right now," he said. "I think we need to get the ball rolling now."

### 'Have that conversation'

The belief that a county health department could be a benefit for the Berks community isn't a new one for many in the local health care realm.

It's something that has been floating around for quite a while – the thought that a county department could aid in providing public health services that hospitals and other providers are sometimes not equipped to handle or unable to handle.

The arrival of the pandemic has only made that more clear. And more urgent.

"There certainly seems to be some

*Continued on next page*



# Reading Eagle continued

benefits to a county health department,” said Dr. Michael Baxter, a member of the Berks County Medical Society and chairman of the Berks County Healthcare Advisory Panel.

“I think what we’ve seen, particularly with contact tracing and vaccine distribution, there seems to be some true benefit,” he continued. “But just from an organization standpoint, a county health department would contribute to the overall response.”

Baxter said now is the right time to have a broad conversation among county leaders and various leaders in the fields of health and social services to talk about the value of a health department.

“There are definitely some people who will push back and they may have some good arguments,” he said. “You know, the costs and whether it’s duplicative of other activities going on in the community. But it’s definitely time to have that conversation.”

He said that while existing systems and nonprofit organizations do address issues of public health because that’s part of their overall mission, it’s not their core mission as it would be for a department of health.

“Public health is a whole different issue,” he said. “In the past, we have let this topic slide because it didn’t seem to be the most critical issue. But a pandemic makes it very clear that public health is a very important issue that needs to be addressed.”

Baxter pointed out that having a health department will not make all our community health problems magically disappear, but having one in place is a pretty good place to start.

Baxter credited the county for stepping up to address some of the challenges that have emerged during the pandemic. But, he added, without a centralized department in the county to handle the crisis it appears that everyone is pulling together pieces to fill the role of meeting the public health needs of the community.

“In many ways the value of a health department in a crisis has driven a lot of the argument for a health department right now,” he said. “But, even without a crisis, there is a role that a county health department could play. And this will not be the last public health crisis that we see. It may, hopefully, be in another 100 years, but it could be a lot sooner than that.”

Baxter is not the only medical professional who feels this way.

In fact, the leadership team of the Berks County Medical Society have lent their voices to the call for the county commissioners to take action. They made their stance on a county health department clear in an open letter published in its winter edition of the Medical Record journal.

“We, the leadership of the Berks County Medical Society, believe the time has arrived for the creation of a Berks County Department of Health,” the letter stated. “A county health department would ensure a fair distribution of health resources,

about something they have been discussing long before the pandemic hit. “We have been talking about this for several years,” she said. “We were asked by the commissioners to provide some medical expertise during this difficult time. And so as we were looking at the things that were being coordinated we realized that the groups worked well together and began to think about how we could petition for a health department. So we decided the Berks County Medical Society should be in the forefront on that.” Sandel, who practices emergency

“We, the leadership of the Berks County Medical Society, believe the time has arrived for the creation of a Berks County Department of Health. A county health department would ensure a fair distribution of health resources, communication of proven beneficial health information and would coordinate with partner organizations for future health challenges similar to this pandemic or the opioid crisis.”

*From an open letter published in the Berks County Medical Society’s winter edition of the Medical Record journal.*

communication of proven beneficial health information and would coordinate with partner organizations for future health challenges similar to this pandemic or the opioid crisis.”

The authors of the letter wrote that they understand this is not a decision to be made lightly but one that must be confronted.

“There will be arguments to be made regarding costs versus benefits, redundancies and political considerations,” the letter stated. “However, as we have learned during these past difficult months, public health cannot be a second thought only pulled to the forefront in a moment of crisis. It must be the highest priority.”

Dr. Kristen Sandel, medical society chairwoman, said the leadership team published the letter in an attempt to bring more attention to the issue. She said they felt it was important for them to speak out

medicine at Phoenixville Hospital, said she has seen firsthand how the Montgomery and Chester health departments have worked with the health system to ensure that testing and vaccination efforts have been meeting the demand.

“The health systems are trying to do this, but there are times when we need additional resources,” she said. “Those county health departments have been working hard to coordinate those resources.”

Dr. Neha Majmudar, who practices internal medicine at Reading Hospital, said she has seen how those needs are not being fulfilled in the community she serves.

“I think the health systems here would have loved that help,” she said. “The county could have helped both health systems set up testing in a more organized fashion. And they would definitely help in

the distribution of the vaccine.” But even in times when there isn’t a global health crisis straining the health systems, Majmudar believes a county health department would be beneficial. “I think our health systems are not set up to do the work of a county health department,” she said. “A health department is primarily focused on prevention and taking a more holistic approach to community health issues.” She said health systems are financially rewarded in a way to help individual patients rather than a community as a whole. While Reading Hospital does provide a substantial amount of community services, she said they do it because they’re doing their best to fill a void.

As a Berks resident, Majmudar said the extra cost of having a health department would be worth it. “I think it’s insurance for when the community needs it,” she said. “Even in a nonpandemic state we can benefit from the programs and services that a health department would offer. If you think about it, in this particular situation, if we could have made sure all the schools could have opened up, how much easier would that have been for parents. “I’m hoping that this crisis has made them realize what an investment it would be,” she said, adding that she would welcome the opportunity to serve as an adviser and figure out what a county health department would look like.

## Plate too full, now

Creating a county health department is a discussion worth having, county commissioners said. But now is not the right time. While all three committed to exploring the idea in the future, each said it’s something that will have to wait until the pandemic subsides. And it’s not something that can be thrown together quickly to help with the ongoing fight against COVID. “A county department is a legitimate discussion after this crisis is over,” commissioners Chairman Christian Y. Leinbach said. “This is like deciding to buy a new boat while I’m in the middle of a storm sinking in my current boat. I might need a new boat, but now is not the time to focus on a new boat. Now is the time to deal with the current crisis.”

*Continued on next page*

## Reading Eagle continued

He said that instead of focusing on the feasibility of a health department people should be concerned with problems like vaccine availability, the headache of trying to schedule appointments to get a vaccine and the confusion created by things like pop-up vaccination sites.

Those are ongoing issues all counties are facing – regardless of whether they have their own health department – that need to be addressed by the state and federal government.

“The problem here is not that the county does not have a health department, the problem is that there is a crisis at both the state and federal level,” he said. “We need the state and federal government to step up. We need a much greater supply (of vaccines) from the federal government, and we need clear answers and consistent direction from the state. Neither has been occurring.”

Leinbach suggested that if the county’s public and health care providers really want to help the county weather this storm they should stop pushing for a county health department as a solution to this crisis. Pushing for that now, he said, is focusing attention away from where it really belongs.

“It would be helpful if the public and our health care partners would call on the state and federal government to do their part,” he said. “We’ve been doing our part since last March.”

Leinbach said that in the future he’s willing to have a deliberate and definitive study conducted of whether a county health department would be beneficial. But he pointed out there are some issues that need serious review.

Those issues include looking at all the responsibilities the county would be taking over that the state department of health already provides; examining what difference having a county health department during this pandemic in the six counties that have one; and understanding

the costs associated with establishing a department.

“There is a reason 60-plus counties do not and have not had a county health department,” he said.

Leinbach said the idea that there’s a large groundswell of support for a health department is an assumption that might not be true. He said that in his 14 years in office it has not been something he has heard much about from the public.

### After it’s over

Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt, who has also served for 14 years, agreed. He said that despite what current supporters of the idea might say the push for a health department is clearly tied to the pandemic.

“I know this has been generated by the pandemic, but I would rather spend a considerable time looking at this when that pressure is not on,” he said. “I have never been one to make a snap decision about something like this. And I’m not going to start now.”

Barnhardt added that he’s committed to looking at the possibility of creating a health department but said realistically it’s not something the board can do while the entire country is still in the middle of fighting a pandemic.

“It’s a little unfair to say that we should set up a health department in the middle of a pandemic,” he said. “If we were back in 2019 and someone asked me to look at this issue, I would say OK because I didn’t have the wind in my face. Once we are through this crisis we can begin to look at what we did without one and what could have been done with one.”

And Barnhardt said how a department responded during the pandemic would just be one aspect of his research. He said the most important factor would be examining whether taking on the multitude of responsibilities from the state would really

lead to better health outcomes for Berks residents.

“That is something that would really be a threshold issue for me,” he said. “Can we improve the life expectancy, the quality of care, the immunization rate if we have one? I don’t have that data in front of me and I haven’t been able to study information from the other county health departments.”

Making sure the county is not duplicating existing services is another concern, Barnhardt said.

He said weighing the possible benefits against the cost is paramount to his decision-making process, pointing out that the county has in the past spent money on issues that were the right things to do like supporting the library and park systems.

Creating a health department might fall into a similar category, he added.

“It’s not about dollars and cents, it’s about whether it makes sense,” he said. “And I’m just not in the position today to make that call.”

Commissioner Michael Rivera said the same thing, acknowledging the amount of research and discussion that would need to take place will take a long time.

“I’m open to looking at anything,” he said. “But people need to keep in mind that even if we decide to create a health department, it isn’t something that can be opened overnight. This is a process that would take years to go through.”

Rivera said there are alternatives to consider as well.

He said adding a medical professional to serve as a permanent county health director or entering into a formal contract with a local health provider to offer services are options he’s learned that other counties may be considering.

“I have already started to do some research on this issue,” he said. “I have read about county health departments during the pandemic, but I haven’t really

seen whether those counties have actually fared better. Did less people get infected? Did they have a lower spread rate? Did they have access to more testing? Did they have better access to vaccines? Those are all things to consider.”

Rivera said he needs to deal with facts, separating perception from reality.

The man who has been leading the local COVID response said the commissioners recognize that establishing a health department is something that needs to be studied.

Berks County Department of Emergency Services Director Brian Gottschall said the county needs to ask: Do we need a county health department just because we had a pandemic? Is the juice worth the squeeze? Is what we would have to pay and the daily process of operating a department worth it down the road?

“I think anyone with common sense would agree that it’s something we have to look at,” he said. “But I think to pre-decide that the outcome is that we need one is in my mind as much folly as pre-deciding that we don’t need one.”

Gottschall acknowledged that, based on conversations he’s had with officials from other counties, there are certainly examples where counties with health departments had a leg up. But those counties are also facing a significant number of challenges that are similar to the ones Berks is encountering.

“So it’s important to understand that having a health department doesn’t make you king of the hill because you’re still subordinate to the (state) department of health,” he said. “Clearly, one of the values is that you have people on staff who can provide you expertise on public health. But I would also argue that we have skinned that cat to some extent in Berks County due to our partnership with our health care systems.”

*Published Feb. 1, 2021.*

# What newspapers believe: **Facts Matter.**

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# Erie Times-News

## Carl Knight, freed from life term in drug kingpin case, will 'do right to Erie'

By Ed Palattella  
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and  
Lisa Thompson  
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When he was sentenced to prison on Aug. 17, 1999, Carl Anthony Knight had every reason to believe he would die an inmate.

Knight was convicted under the federal kingpin statute for leading the largest crack cocaine ring to operate in Erie up to that time. He and his associates were accused of smuggling crack weighing a total of 458 pounds — 208 kilograms — from New York City to Erie from 1993 to 1997.

The total value of the drugs at the time: \$20.8 million.

Knight was the first person in Erie to be found guilty as a drug kingpin. A jury at the federal courthouse on Perry Square convicted him in 40 minutes on April 7, 1999. Four months later, at 28 years old, he got the mandatory sentence that went along with his ignominious role as the leader of a massive ring that trafficked in crack: a life term in federal prison.

Knight is now free.

"It's just unbelievable. I'm so grateful," Knight said. "I have a chance again."

### First Step Act paved way for early release

Knight has been free since Feb. 2, when he walked out of the Federal Correctional Center Allenwood Medium, a medium-security prison south of Williamsport, and hugged the family members who had driven there to pick him up and return him to Erie.

Now 49, Knight benefited from a shift in federal sentencing laws — a shift that addressed the racial disparities between the harsh sentences for the mostly Black defendants convicted of dealing crack and the lesser sentences for the mostly white defendants convicted of dealing powder cocaine and other drugs.

The bipartisan First Step Act, which President Donald Trump signed in December 2018, gave Knight, who is Black, the final legal framework he needed to plead for early release. Senior U.S. District Judge David S. Cercone ruled in Knight's favor on Jan. 27.



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MILLETTE, ERIE TIMES-NEWS

Carl Anthony Knight, right, talks with Bishop Dwane Brock, left, Feb. 8, 2021, at Victory Christian Center, on Erie's east side. Knight, 49, of Erie, was the first defendant in Erie County history sentenced to life for drug trafficking. After spending 22 years in federal prison, he recently had his sentence reduced and was released from prison on Feb. 2, 2021. He was paroled under the federal First Step Act, which President Donald Trump signed into law in December 2018.

Knight got out after serving 22 years. All he has left is to serve five years of supervised release, similar to probation.

Since his release from prison, Knight, a father of eight and a grandfather of six, has been living in Erie with relatives, catching up with his family and working on a plan for the future. He contracted COVID-19 while in prison but has regained his health.

Knight wants to act as a mentor to troubled youth, to prevent them from making the same choices that led to his long stay in prison. One of his own guides to his new life is Bishop Dwane Brock, of Erie's Victory Christian Center. He is helping Knight plot his goals and create the

structure to achieve them.

Knight is ready for what comes next, he told the Erie Times-News on Monday. For years and years, he thought his only home would be a prison cell.

Carl Knight, federal inmate 10725-068, tried for years to get out of prison early before he finally got his reprieve in January. Knight and his lawyer tried to take advantage of changes to federal sentencing guidelines, but Knight's petition finally took hold after Trump signed the First Step Act, in 2018.

The act made retroactive the Fair Sentencing Act of

*Continued on next page*

## Erie Times-News continued

2010, which President Barack Obama signed. It allows for early release of some offenders convicted for crimes related to crack cocaine, as was Knight.

As of May, the First Step Act had resulted in 3,009 sentence reductions and the release of 2,168 inmates based on the provision of the law that reduces the disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine sentences, according to the latest Department of Justice report on the act, issued June 2.

Knight and his lawyer filed his First Step Act petition in September 2019, and it included a key document: a letter from Erie County Judge John J. Trucilla, who had prosecuted Knight as the lead assistant U.S. attorney in Erie.

Trucilla said he supported early release for Knight, calling the mandatory life sentence “unjust.” He cited a number of reasons, including that Knight had rejected a plea deal that would have sent him to prison for 15 years.

Knight also got recommendations from prison staff. A counselor wrote on his behalf, saying he had “earned the respect of staff and inmates.”

And his lawyer, assistant federal public defender in Pittsburgh, Khashayar Attaran, said Knight had turned his life around in prison, where, Attaran wrote to the judge, Knight had taken the “no fewer than 45 educational and vocational classes.” Knight also taught classes in prison. One of them, he said, was on reentry, on “getting ready to go home.”

**Question:** *How did you find out that the judge had granted your petition to reduce your life sentence and free you?*

Answer: We have these little computers we use for emails. And I didn't use it that day, but the next day I woke up and I had like 20 emails, family telling me congratulations. And I was like, what?

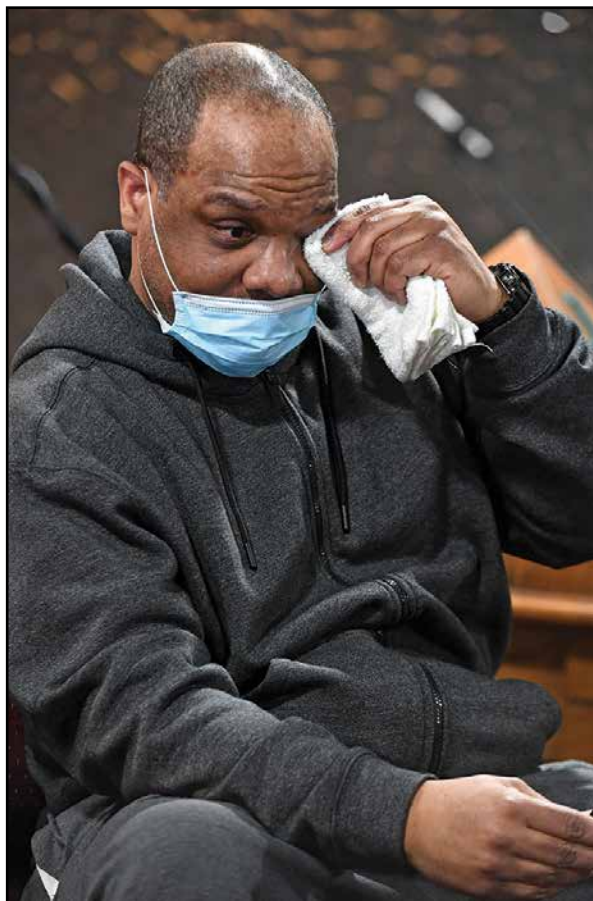
I got a guy sitting next to me. He's like, yeah, get on the phone. I get on the phone: everybody, family. I said (to a relative), do you have the order? How do you know? She said, well, it's in the newspaper. And I said, well, let me go in the back and talk to our unit manager and counselors. And the counselor came out and he's like, look, the order, it's not there yet. And it went on from there. And probably like two days, two days later, they gave me a date saying I was coming home.

**Q:** *You expected to be in prison for the rest of your life. What ran through your mind when you learned that you were going to be released?*

A: God is good. God is my foundation and has been my foundation all the while I was in prison. I never gave up hope. I just didn't know what day it was going to be. But I felt I was going to get another chance through God and my faith. I kept myself occupied doing prayers. Prayer is very important to me, every day. And I just think that is what helped me. And I think God just answered my prayer.

**Q:** *When did you think you had a realistic chance of getting out of prison?*

A: When Donald Trump passed the First Step Act. That



Carl Knight was the first defendant in Erie County history sentenced to life for drug trafficking. After 22 years in prison, he recently was released.

right there, as opposed to the (sentencing) guidelines and the statute. And on top of that, with Mister Trucilla and the prison guards and all they're giving me letters of recommendation and all the whole package: They're saying all what I've been doing in prison. I felt the time has come.

**Q:** *How did you cope while in prison?*

A: The education part of it was good coping skills. I needed the skills, but it's always God. I have to say this: scriptures, reading scriptures. I read them every day and it meant a lot to me. It gave me, I don't know if that was the coping skill. You see people in prison lose their mind. A lot of the guys, when you talk about God, you know, half the prison is probably on it, but a half the other they still have the mindset. They don't want to hear that stuff. So, I got around the guys going over scriptures every day: We wake up to prayer, scriptures. We build. That's the coping skill is God. That's the core. People don't want to believe that.

**Q:** *What are your plans?*

A: What I'm trying to do now, with Reverend Brock and Mr. Trucilla, with the juveniles and talking to maybe high schools, any place that I can send a message of my experience. That's what I'm giving back to.

**Q:** *What will the message be?*

A: I look at myself when I was that age. Dealing with that

mindset, you have to go back to that mindset. You give them the message. You can't make a child or a young guy change their mind at that moment, but it's to give the message and to lead by example. Having consistency and lead by example, I think that's the most important thing that you can do. Because when you give them that message, they're going to watch you to see if your example goes with the message.

**Q:** *What will you tell the youth about prison?*

A: The concept and images that I had, I come from an environment, listening to the guys, and I had friends that went to prison. I'm listening to this. What I found out, when I got in prison, it's not all what the talk is about going to prison. I would say they make it like a big thing; you don't want to do that. You want to downplay that and show the negativity and everything and how you lose your life. You just talk about all the negative things that's in prison and how it takes away from your family, how it affects them and your community. That's important. Like they're not realizing the damage that you do to your community, too. This is why I say I'm coming back again to do good deeds and repent. As Bishop Brock said at his service, about redemption. Beautiful message.

**Q:** *How do you define redemption?*

A: Redemption to me is, I would say as Bishop Brock said (in his sermon): I've done wrong, so, changing your ways and your mindset. Redemption is probably putting in the work, as Bishop Brock said, and staying focused. And the redemption is, now I got my blessing to get out. The redemption is that once you put yourself around people and you stay focused with the word and everything, that's the redemption. The redemption is, God just gave you another chance. I can't express it.

**Q:** *Looking back, why did you get involved with the things you did?*

A: The environment, but the influence on the mind when you're that young. Coming from a household that didn't have the foundation and support that I needed, it was easy to be swayed with my mind being manipulated at a young age, your concepts and the way you perceive life. You think at a young age, you are impressionable, you think that you know, and you don't know. I'm not proud of what I've done. Not at all.

I felt I was supposed to go to the NBA. I used to play basketball a lot at Academy High School. I had scholarships. It got canceled. Because I got involved with the wrong crowd, I canceled all that.

It's a sad thing. And this is why, once again, to go back to work with Bishop Brock and John Trucilla to help explain my story to these young children. If you need anyone to talk to, to understand that the crime that you think that is going to pay off for you, it will not pay off for you. You lost, you lost time, you lost your life. It's not even worth it. That's very important to me. They tell me I'm so passionate about things. I might get frustrated if they don't want the help, but this is where the community comes in.

*Continued on next page*



Bishop Brock, he's going to help me to get guys around for a prison reform for different experiences so they can see that. I did not have that. I didn't see. I didn't have that outlet: "I'm going through something and I need your help."

**Q:** *What would you tell the 28-year-old Carl Knight?*

A: Oh, man. Yeah, I had that conversation. If I could go back and tell him that the road that you were going down, it's not a good road. Not at all. It's a bad road. That Carl Knight, he wasn't educated. He didn't have understanding. My family wasn't there. The foundation wasn't there. And I felt like, why? As a young kid, why do I have these responsibilities as an adult? Mr. Knight, I would tell him, "Try to stay focused. If you need me, I'm here." I didn't have an outlet, unfortunately.

**Q:** *How did prison change you?*

A: At first when I went in as a young guy, frustrated. I understood what I really did to myself. The older guys in there, and they saw that. I got around the positive guys. After like a year or two, I got started getting around them and we started developing relationships. I told them, "I have to change. I just got a life sentence. But I don't know how or what to do. I need your help." And when I got around those guys, you can't play. They want to teach you consistency, discipline. If you're not serious, they are going to pull you to the side: You're not serious enough. You need to learn these things to prepare yourself for one day you're going to go home.

When you're young like that, you got these negative thoughts: I think I could be slick. That's the way it is with anything that you do. I've seen people in all professions in that prison, from politics on down, they take the mindset that you think you can be slick. And once that mindset catches you, you think you have the strength to get up out of it. But it took God. It took God for me and the men that I was with (in prison) to change that mindset.

**Q:** *What are your core beliefs now?*

A: My core beliefs are work hard, have support in your corner and just try to do the right thing and have discipline with yourself. And if you need help, I want to put myself around. I tell them, put yourself around positive people because I don't have all the answers. Even though at my age, God says, you can't learn everything. He gives you a little thing, but you still, to the day you die, you're going to learn. And I want to keep on this path with my positive thinking.

**Q:** *What are you praying to God about now?*

A: Just thanking him that he gave me another chance and asking him now the same blueprint that I was doing in prison, I want to stick to that and ask for your protection and to put me around good people that I can still serve God first and serve the community, serve the people. I want to keep that same mindset. Nothing's going to change.

**Q:** *How did your crimes and prison sentence affect your family?*

A: One of the epiphany moments I tried to shut out first (while in prison), it's when the judge gave me the life sentence. My family was really upset, but my mother, she broke down and cried. That really affected me, to the point I asked the judge, at that moment, "Your Honor, do you mind if the marshals can take me over here to the side," because she was crying. And we were sitting, one-on-one conversation. (Knight pauses as he cries). My family means a lot to me. The effects that you have on them. I knew I had to change. It affects you, your children coming to see you (in prison). It affects you, deeply. You don't realize the damage that you've done. After that moment, when I went into prison, I knew I had to change. I couldn't be there no more (for his family). I was taken away from them.

**Q:** *What about the effect of your crimes on the community?*

A: I was uneducated in terms of understanding, coming up with my upbringing. And I didn't have that information to say, "Hey, you know, you do this. You know, we are in society and this is what society is about: Being a model citizen, trying to work, work hard for what you do." I came from an environment that I was weak on and I didn't have that foundation. Going to prison, being educated around those guys (in prison), and they say, "Hey, not only just your family, we did wrong to the community." So that's a part of redemption: going back out into the community and do right because you did wrong. I apologize to Erie, PA. I thank them for just giving me another chance. Like I said, that's nothing to be proud of. I was uneducated and understand that. I'm coming to do right. I was wrong. I'm coming to do right to Erie, PA, in the community.

**Q:** *What do you think of Erie, 22 years later?*

A: Technology is upgraded now and lot more buildings that I see and highways and stuff like that. I feel Erie might be the still basic Erie that I knew, but it's always going to

(have) little enhancements there and there, as far as the city as I'm seeing now. Erie is a beautiful place.

**Q:** *Do you think the laws that put you in prison for life were unjust?*

A: They were unjust. Even as you see, like right now, President (Joe) Biden, he helped sign the crime bill back in 1994 (the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which included mandatory minimum sentencing). And when you have politicians like that, admitting that they were wrong for the penalties, the disparity between crack cocaine — yeah, they were unjust. It's not just me saying that, it's the politicians and the lawmakers are saying it, too. But hopefully as we, as a community, we can try to put it to the politicians: "Hey, you think that's a little rough right there?" As we studied the law in there, you have crack cocaine and (powder) cocaine, it's always the disparities, always different. And I was wondering while I'm studying the law, why is that? This is no racism stuff, but they targeted Blacks.

**Q:** *Any advice to give at this moment?*

A: Just remember, first and foremost, that through your hard times, as being a young person or older person, that, you may not believe in God, that's understandable. Some people just don't. But when times get rough and you need that outlet, try to find someone before you start thinking crazy and doing the wrong thing that can get you in a place that I ended up in. I want them to know that. I'm going to be trying back in the community to leave a legacy that Mister Knight changed his life. That's where I'm from this point on, from this day. That 28-year-old guy? He was young. He didn't know. He was uneducated. But I have a chance again. And they can make that same change. Sometimes it might take a little penalty, but when it happens to you, just think about it: If you get another chance at life, don't blow it.

**Q:** *What has been the experience of realizing that you are no longer in prison?*

A: Just grasping the moment of, wow, it really happened. And it did. Every day I wake up now, it's just like if I am riding in the car or something and I'm just looking. And it's like, don't think I'm crazy, man. I'm just trying to soak it all in. One day at a time, just one day at a time. Just trying to soak it all in. It's just unbelievable. I'm so grateful. Another chance.

*This interview was edited for length and clarity.*

*Published Feb. 11, 2021.*



## NEWSPAPERS ARE THE **FOUNDATION** OF LOCAL SPORTS COVERAGE

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– both young and old – and share the stories behind their success.

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the Foundation of **REAL NEWS.**

## How transparent is Allegheny County Jail compared to other Pa. jails?

### We requested their mental health policies to find out.

*Compared to the other five largest Pa. counties, ACJ was far less transparent in providing its mental health policies. PublicSource appealed ACJ's decision to the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records, but the appeal was denied.*

**By Juliette Rihl**

*Editor's note: This story was produced for Sunshine Week, an annual, nationwide celebration of government transparency and access to information taking place March 14-20. PublicSource frequently uses the Right-to-Know law, as it did in this story, and encounters varying degrees of transparency by Pennsylvania's public agencies.*

To better understand how incarcerated people are cared for, PublicSource sought all Allegheny County Jail policies related to mental health, suicide prevention, administration of medications and accommodations for people with disabilities through a public records request in September.

Of the six policies the county provided, five were almost entirely redacted with thick black lines, disclosing only the title and the policy's first few sentences. The county justified the redactions by stating in an accompanying letter that the information "would be reasonably likely to result in a substantial and demonstrable risk of physical harm to or the personal security of an individual."

PublicSource appealed the redactions to the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records; the appeal was denied. But the five other most populated counties in the state provided similar policies, either in full or in

part, providing insight into exactly the type of information withheld locally.

Lancaster and Delaware counties provided PublicSource their policies in full, while Bucks County provided one policy in full and four more policies with light or moderate redactions. Montgomery County provided its suicide prevention and pharmaceutical operations policies in full and two other policies with redactions. After a few months of delay, Philadelphia County provided its self-injury prevention program policy with far fewer redactions than Allegheny County and 14 other policies in full.

Correctional experts PublicSource spoke to described Allegheny County's redactions, which were made by Warden Orlando Harper, as outside the norm and harmful to transparency.

"The fact that other jurisdictions are far more transparent about their policies gives lie to any claim that what's in Allegheny's policy is somehow a risk to security and safety in the institution," said Michele Deitch, an attorney and senior lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin who researches correctional oversight throughout the country.

Gerard Bryant, director of counseling and adjunct professor of psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said the public should have access to all of the policies in full. Withholding the information

can actually be more dangerous, said Bryant, who has 22 years of experience in the Federal Bureau of Prisons as an associate warden and chief psychologist. "Why would you want to make this a confidential document... when you're trying to reduce suicides?" he said of the suicide prevention policy. "Bottom line is suicide is everybody's business, and this should be transparent for everybody."

### Could transparency be harmful?

In a six-page affidavit to justify the redactions, Harper stated that knowledge of the policies "could be used to interfere with the persons who carry out the duties defined in the policies, thereby putting inmates, employees, and the public at risk." In the document filed with the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records in October, Harper outlined specific reasons as to why each policy needed to be redacted. For example, he said the suicide prevention policy could be used to cause disruption or could allow an inmate to harm themselves without showing any of the signs that employees have been trained to look for. Every word of the 19-page policy was redacted, except the heading and the first sentence.

Bryant disagreed with Harper's reasoning. "All these policies could be released in their entirety, and it would not pose any threat to the safety and security of that institution, as far as I can tell," he said after reviewing the affidavit. "I just don't see the nexus between how the release of this information is going to lead to a disturbance or 'nefarious' behavior."

Joel Dvoskin, an Arizona-based psychologist and correctional mental health expert, called the redactions "absurd."

"I can certainly understand the possibility that some specific parts might be redacted," Dvoskin said, "But all of it, there's absolutely no possible way that's reasonable."

In denying PublicSource's appeal, Pennsylvania's Office of Open Records stated in its final determination that "the County met its burden of establishing a substantial risk of actual harm to an individual or the public if the requested policies are disclosed." The office typically does not review the policies themselves unless requested to do so, instead relying on written statements from officials. "Here, the [Office of Open Records] relied upon the testimony of the warden who is familiar with the security of this facility. No evidence was presented that contested his testimony or indicated that it was inaccurate," Executive Director Liz Wagenseller later wrote in an email to PublicSource.

Deitch said government bodies have long deferred to correctional institutions for fear of jeopardizing their safety, but that it's the "lack of critical inquiry" about what information can safely be revealed that puts more people at risk. "You've got to shine a light on what's happening at correctional facilities in order to keep people safe."

Tierra Bradford, a criminal justice policy advocate for the ACLU of Pennsylvania, agreed. She called the reasons Harper gave for heavily redacting the policies "vague" and noted that the lack of transparency is likely to increase public suspicion of jail leadership, rather than build trust. "At the end of the day, people

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Public Source continued

have a right to know what government officials are doing and making sure there aren't any secrets being kept, especially for no good reason," she said.

One of the policies that Allegheny County redacted was made public in the past, as were several other mental health-related policies that PublicSource was not provided, said Bret Grote, legal director of the Abolitionist Law Center, which is currently litigating several lawsuits against the jail.

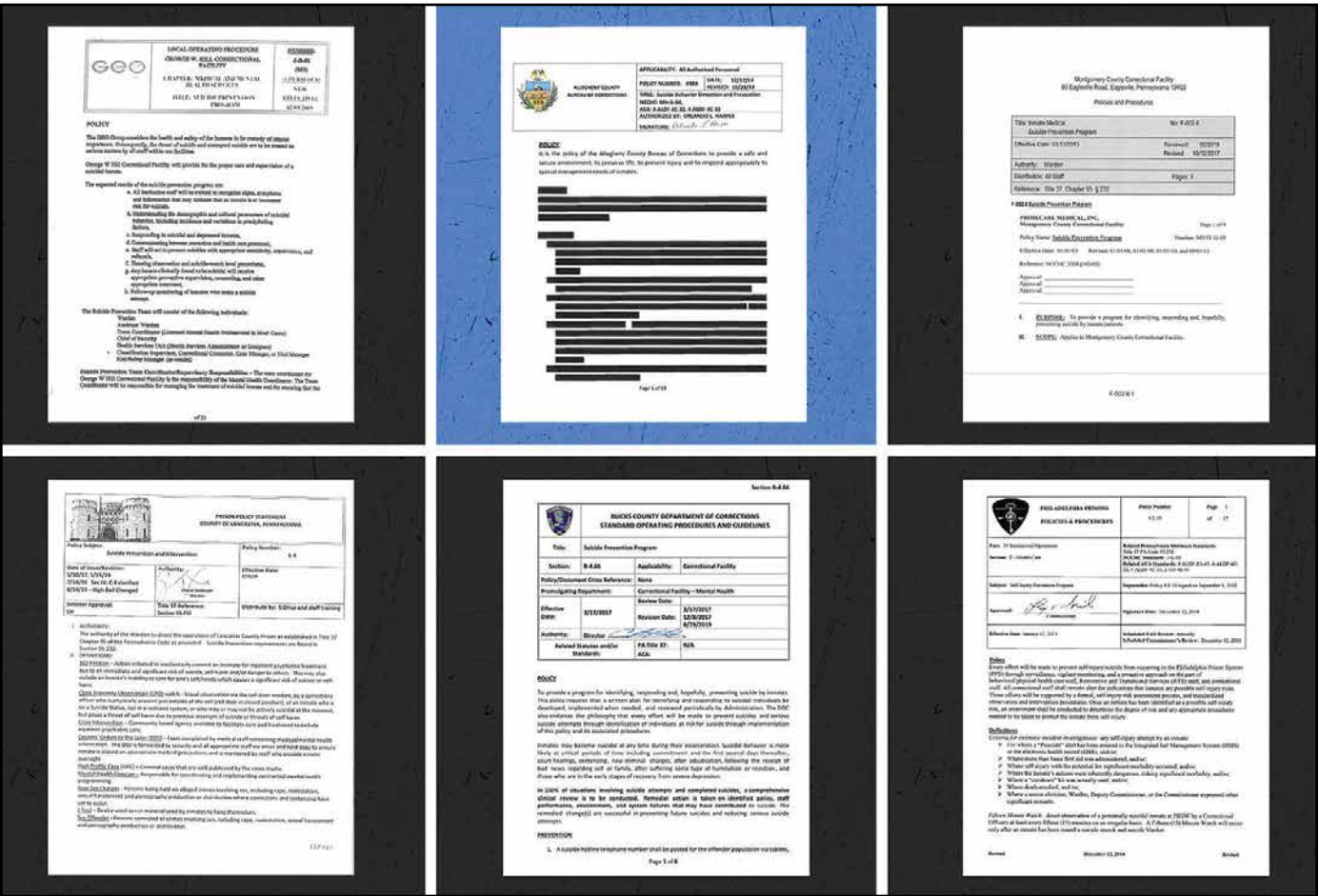
Roughly a year before PublicSource's request, Grote received a number of policies, including the mental health screening and commitments policy, through a public records request. The jail would no longer provide that same policy unredacted in 2020.

PublicSource reached out to all nine Jail Oversight Board members for this story. Brad Korinski, chief legal counsel for Allegheny County Controller and Jail Oversight Board [JOB] member Chelsea Wagner, said he thinks Harper honestly believes disclosing the policies could cause problems. But, Korinski said, the decision should ultimately be made by other leadership, such as the law department or county executive, not Harper.

"This is where I think that political leadership should say, ok, warden, we hear you ... but not ALL of these redactions are needed – give me what you can live with and what you can't," Korinski wrote in an email to PublicSource. "I don't think that conversation is being had."

JOB member and Allegheny County Council member Bethany Hallam said the redactions show the jail administration's "clear disdain for any oversight of their policies, procedures and practices whatsoever — the same disdain which I have personally experienced as a member of the Jail Oversight Board when requesting even the most basic information about what goes on in the facility which we have direct statutory authority over."

President Judge Kim Berkeley Clark, who is also a JOB member, said she believes it is inappropriate for her to comment after PublicSource's appeal was denied by the Office of Open Records. Sheriff William Mullen, also on the board, said he could not answer questions about the jail's transparency without consulting with the warden and his staff. "I never had a reason in the past to question the jail's transparency," he wrote in an email to PublicSource.



The remaining board members — County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, Judge Beth Lazarra, M. Gayle Moss, Terri Klein and Abass B. Kamara — did not respond to email requests for comment.

When asked about the disparity between Allegheny County and other counties, Wagenseller of the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records said different agencies have different policies and interpretations of what they consider public. Had PublicSource provided the other agencies' policies, she said, it would not have affected the outcome of the appeal.

"The release of similar information by different agencies does not preclude the County from withholding the information. In fact, the Right-to-Know Law recognizes that agencies have the discretion to release otherwise exempt records, in whole or in part," Wagenseller wrote.

The jail has more than 280 policies, according to Harper, and 50 policies are posted on its website. Publishing the remainder, even if redacted, would "jeopardize the safety and security" of the jail, Harper said at the September JOB

meeting. Harper previously declined to allow board members to view the unredacted policies, contrary to state law, but reversed his decision in February.

Much larger agencies have already made similar information public and easy to find online.

The New York City Department of Correction has many of its policies posted online, including its full suicide prevention policy. Similarly, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections posts many of its policies on its website, including its almost 300-page policy on accessing mental health care. The Federal Bureau of Prisons also posts its policies in full on its website, including its suicide prevention program policy.

The mental health policies are not the only jail policies the county has kept secret. After requesting the jail's restraint chair policy and receiving an almost entirely redacted copy, PublicSource appealed the request to Pennsylvania's Office of Open Records. The office in that case sided in part with PublicSource and ordered the county to remove some of the redactions.

Instead of doing so, the county appealed the decision in the Court of Common Pleas. The county dropped its appeal in February after PublicSource published the policy in full after obtaining it from a different source.

Bradford of the ACLU of Pennsylvania called Allegheny County Jail's redactions "totally against the spirit of the Right-to-Know law." With recent heightened interest in criminal justice reform both nationally and locally, she said, it's time for institutions to be as transparent as possible. "They shouldn't expect requests to go down any time soon, so I would just get on board."

Deitch also argued that transparency is essential for effective oversight. "If outsiders cannot get access to these policies," she said, "then how can the jail ever be held to account to whether it's even complying with its own policies?"

Juliette Rihl is a reporter for PublicSource. She can be reached at juliette@publicsource.org or on Twitter at @julietterihl.

Published March 16, 2021.



# Dillsburg paramedic earns merit award for saving boy on Yellow Breeches

By Carolyn Kimmel

Rex Carmichael, a paramedic with Penn State Health Life Lion Emergency Services, earned top honors recently for doing what he considers normal—but what others see as heroic.

The Monroe township man rescued a child who was caught in the roots of a tree on the Yellow Breeches creek in May 2020 after the family's kayak capsized in the swollen waters of the Yellow Breeches Creek.

Carmichael worked for more than an hour in the icy water—the only emergency responder who was able to reach the boy because of the swift current—using a reciprocating saw, or Sawzall, to cut pieces off the kayak and saw through tree roots to finally free the boy's foot.

And he did all this while he was off duty.

Carmichael was presented with the Meritorious Service Award, reserved for a certified EMS provider who goes above and beyond the call of duty. The award is given by the Emergency Health Services Federation, which is the regional EMS Council of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of EMS. He received the award on Thursday last month during a leadership meeting at Penn State Health Holy Spirit Medical Center.

"I am sure that Rex is going to say that he did nothing out of the ordinary and that it was a team effort," said his Life Lion supervisor, Kevin Dalpiaz. "But emergency personnel that were on the scene have described his interactions as exemplary and heroic, and his actions are believed to have saved this child's life."

Carmichael acknowledges the conditions were rough, but he's humble about the recognition.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – to get out there in swift water and figure



PHOTO BY CURT WERNER

Rex Carmichael works to free a boy trapped in the Yellow Breeches in May 2020. Last month, the Emergency Health Services Federation presented Carmichael with the Meritorious Service Award for his heroic efforts.

out what to do, and do it for that long," he said. "It took a village, if you saw what I saw – all the people up on shore, just waiting to help."

In reality, it was Carmichael who saved the day. Perhaps the inclination to help is in his blood—both his parents were nurses who ran with the ambulance in Upper Allen Township. Back then, everyone was a volunteer, and he watched them drop everything and go to help others throughout his childhood. So, when he became a paramedic 25 years ago, he just naturally did the same.

Carmichael always has at least one ear tuned into emergency services dispatches even when he's not working, which is how he heard the call for a water incident on the Yellow Breeches in Carroll Township that day. He abandoned the groceries he was helping his wife unload, grabbed his

swift water gear from the garage and made the short trip to the scene near Williams Grove Speedway.

When he reached the scene, Carmichael grabbed a life jacket and added himself to the crew of the initial rescue boat, which would turn out to be the only boat able to make its way to the overturned kayak about 50 yards from shore.

The force of the water had bent the kayak in half around a tree, and a frantic father was holding his trapped son's head above water.

At first, Carmichael tried pulling on the child's leg to loosen him, but that didn't work. That's when he began sawing.

Carmichael's heart sank as a rescue boat of firefighters got caught in the roots of a tree, sending the firefighters floating down the creek. Carmichael looked toward shore in amazement at all the first responders at



PHOTO BY EMERGENCY HEALTH SERVICES FEDERATION

Molly Carmichael with husband Rex after he receives the Meritorious Service Award.

the ready, with ropes and litters, but no one could get to him.

An hour and a new saw blade and battery later, the boy – who was hypothermic and had a broken leg – was freed, but the drama wasn't over yet. An incoming rescue boat got caught in the current and began to capsize.

"Just before they went under, they threw the boy as hard as they could back into our boat," Carmichael said. "It was absolutely the right thing to do, but his head smacked me right in the face and I was seeing stars." The impact broke Carmichael's glasses and gave him a black eye.

When they finally reached shore, the boy was flown by Life Lion to Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, where he recovered.

Carmichael never heard from the family, but he doesn't need their thanks, he said.

When Carmichael returned home after the ordeal, his wife, Molly, had no idea where he had been. After assessing the black eye and seeing he was fine, her first question: "So, are the frozen foods still in the back of the truck?"

Carmichael, who sported the nasty black eye for weeks as a testament to his heroics, said he won't hesitate to respond again, even when he's not on duty.

"It's just what you do," he said.

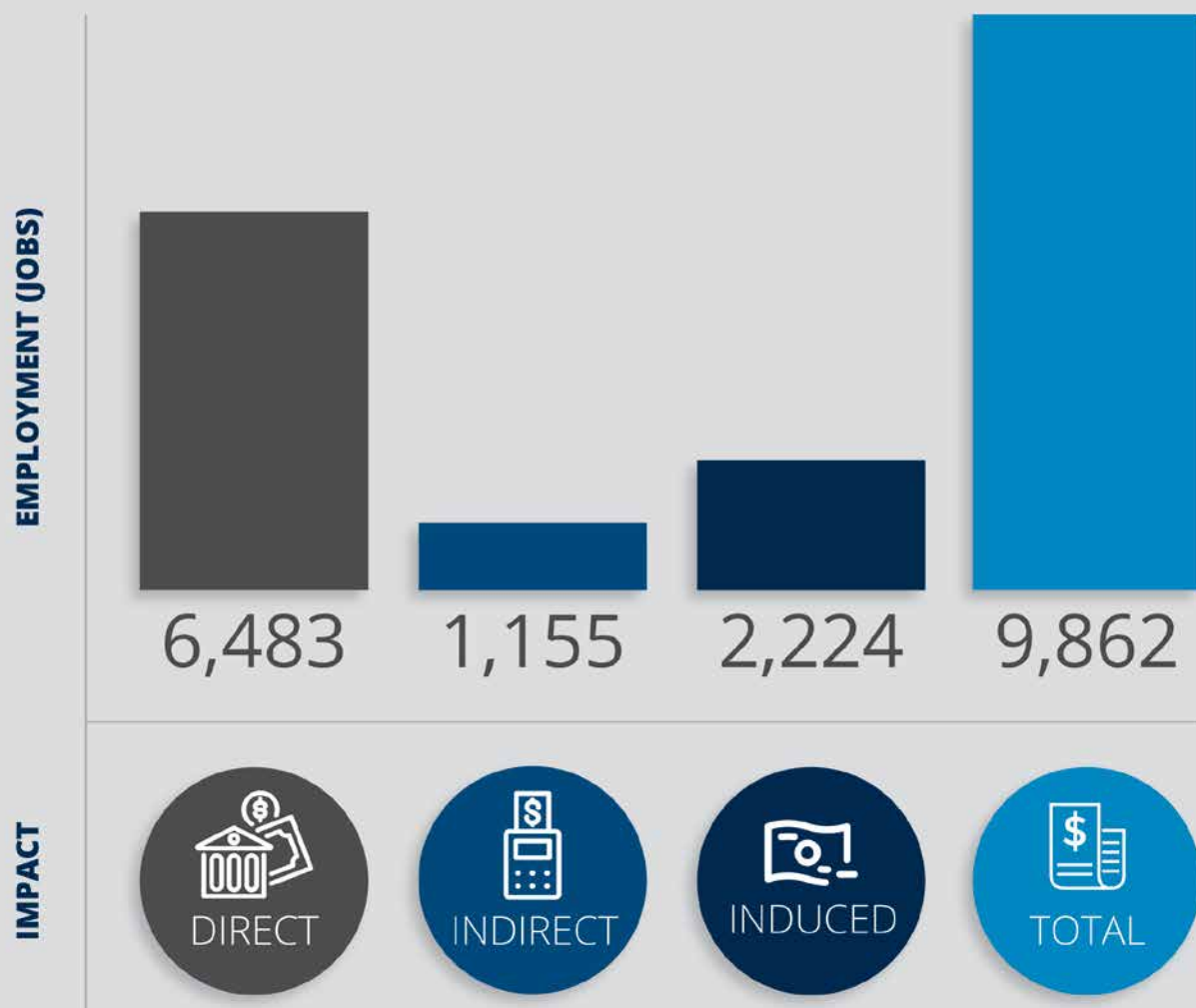
*Published June 17, 2021.*



# 2021 ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT

## EXCERPT

### Pennsylvania Newspaper Industry Supports and Sustains Jobs, 2020



Source: Parker Philips using IMPLAN

For more information about the PNA Economic Impact Report, visit [www.panewsmedia.org](http://www.panewsmedia.org).

# Appvion accused of spilling chemical into Frankstown branch

## Recreational fishermen noticed fish kill; chemical spilled used in security paper

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has told Appvion that it failed to report a chemical spill and is asking the company to investigate, explain and plan to prevent future similar releases.

In a letter dated Sept. 17, 2020, the DEP stated, "On August 27, 2020 the [DEP] responded to a report of a fish kill in the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River. During an investigation of the incident, dead fish were observed over a 4.5 mile stretch of the river that extended upstream to an area approximately 500 feet below the Appvion industrial wastewater treatment plant outfall pipe."

### Fishermen noticed

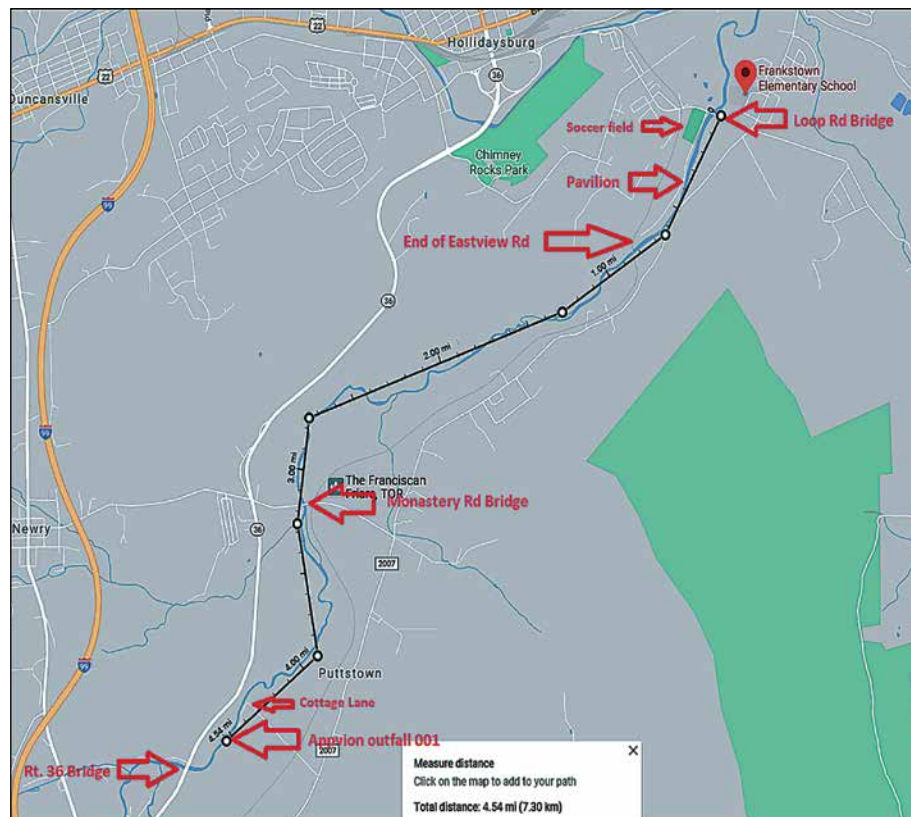
Recreational fishing social media websites noted the kill, with a moderator of paflyfish.com posting on Aug. 28, "Reported fish kill on the Frankstown Branch reported on FB ... Major fish kill being reported on the Frankstown Branch. Roaring Spring Paper Mill apparently had a chemical spill. No further details forthcoming. Please post more info as it becomes available."

Another fisherman posted, "I spoke to the person that made the report. No reported brown trout found dead and only warmwater species. I'm not saying this makes it any better, but just noting it was misreported with no wild trout OBSERVED to be affected."

### Permit limit exceeded

The DEP stated that it contacted Robert Stasik, environmental manager for the Spring Mill plant, regarding the alleged spill.

"After contacting Mr. Stasik,



[MAP COURTESY PA. DEP]

This map, provided by the Pa. Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP), shows the extent of the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River investigated following an alleged 3,700-gallon chemical release by Appvion on Aug. 20 and 21, 2020. The red arrows indicate places where DEP investigator Frederick Clark, water quality specialist, checked for fish kills during his investigation on Aug. 26.

Environmental Manager with Appvion Inc., the Department was notified of a chemical spill at the paper mill that entered the treatment plant on August 19, 2020. Mr. Stasik also mentioned that [a daily maximum permit limit] was exceeded on August 20, 2020."

The DEP subsequently conducted an

investigation and noted that "Appvion failed to immediately report a spill of approximately 3,700 gallons of the chemical Chlorostain to their wastewater treatment process in violation of [the company's] NPDES permit."

NPDES stands for "National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System." According

to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a NPDES permit is issued under the The Clean Water Act, which prohibits discharging "pollutants" into a "water of the United States" without a NPDES permit.

A NPDES permit sets limits on what can be discharged, monitoring and reporting requirements, and other provisions to ensure that the discharge does not hurt water quality or people's health.

According to the product sheet from the company that makes it, chlorostain is manufactured especially for use in the production of security papers. This product cannot be detected as applied. However, when paper treated with Chlorostain is exposed to a commercial ink eradicator, an orangebrown stain develops. Chlorostain is often printed on check papers with the words "fraud" or "void," which appear immediately when an ink eradicator is applied.

The DEP report notes that chemical's official description sheet states that the substance is toxic to humans but does not indicate its effects if spilled into an aquatic environment.

Appvion produces thermal, carbonless and security papers at the Spring Mill plant. The company's headquarters is in Appleton, Wisc.

### Investigation

Following news of the fish kill on Aug. 26, Frederick Clark, a water quality specialist with the DEP conducted an investigation, including a check of the affected streams.

Clark reported, "In the afternoon of August 26, 2020 I examined the stream

*Continued on next page*



## Morrisons Cove Herald continued

from the Loop Road Bridge in Frankstown Township, Blair County, about 150 feet upstream of the elementary school and observed 8 dead fish. The fish were 6-12 inches long and included carp, catfish and white suckers. The fish appeared partially decomposed. The water in the stream was clear with a light reddish-brown tint. There was no noticeable sheen or odor, except for the smell of decaying fish."

Clark investigated further upstream and at the pipe where the plant discharges into the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River, where he noted, "The discharge had its normal dark reddish-brown tint and mild odor. I did not see any dead fish at the outfall but did start to observe dead and decayed fish starting about 500 feet downstream, near the end of Cottage Lane. There were about 10 dead fish along the bank, some partially decayed or eaten and sometimes just skin or bones."

Further upstream from the outfall, Clark

noted, "the water is clear and there were no signs of fish fatalities."

Clark called Stasik, who reported, that there "was an incident last Wednesday August 19, 2020. About 3,700 gallons of a chemical called Chlorostain overflowed from a holding tank and was conveyed to the industrial waste treatment plant. This incident was not previously reported to the [DEP]."

Stasik told Clark that when he was notified of the spill in the late afternoon of the Aug. 19, he (Stasik) "instructed his operator to perform field checks of the effluent at points within the treatment plant for ammonia. He did this because a similar Chlorostain spill in 2016 caused a permit exceedance for ammonia."

Stasik told Clark that "none of the ammonia checks conducted on the 19th showed abnormally high results and the ammonia level of the effluent was below the permit daily maximum."

Stasik also reported that "none of the ammonia checks conducted on the 19th showed abnormally high results and the ammonia level of the effluent was below the permit daily maximum."

### DEP's conclusion

The DEP concluded that "Appvion failed to immediately report a spill of approximately 3,700 gallons of the chemical Chlorostain to their wastewater treatment process in violation of NPDES permit" and "In addition, Appvion indicated that they violated [an] effluent limit on August 20, 2020 and August 21, 2020 in violation ... of [its] NPDES permit."

The letter from DEP requests that Appvion "investigate these violations and submit a written report" to the DEP by Oct. 2, 2020.

The report is to include:

- a detailed timeline of the events leading up to and immediately after the spill took place

- an explanation the cause of the violations
- a description of any actions taken
- any measures put into place or planned to prevent future violations.

Clark reported that Stasik said "that based on his observation of the treatment plant and the ammonia testing results, he did not believe the chemical spill had an adverse impact on the plant or the plant effluent and that is why he did not report the incident to the DEP" and that "the company is investigating ways to prevent another overflow of the chemical storage tank such as changing the valving or installing a high-level alarm."

The Herald's information regarding this event came from documents provided by the Pa. DEP when requested.

Appvion did not return calls from the Herald requesting comment.

*Published Oct. 15, 2020.*

**Newspapers are the most trusted source of news and information among all age groups.<sup>1</sup>**

# Gen Z

**83% turn to newspapers** for trusted information and content.<sup>2</sup>

They prefer to **get their news by reading** versus watching it on television.<sup>3</sup>

**Gen Zers desire relatable content.** 72% say they only subscribe to or watch channels or personalities they can relate to.<sup>4</sup>

Gen Z considers itself **more accepting and open-minded** than any generation before it.<sup>2</sup>

They **embrace diversity** and inclusion.<sup>2</sup>



Generation Z  
**trusts print publications**  
over other media to deliver  
credible information.<sup>2</sup>

# CENTRE DAILY TIMES

## Group investigates Penn State's academic culture, racism — and comes to some 'painful' conclusions

**By Josh Moyer**  
Centre Daily Times

Gary King, a Penn State professor, couldn't read all his Black colleagues' comments on racism in one sitting. He'd read a portion, before his heart grew heavy and his mind became overwhelmed — and he'd take a break.

Then he'd come back and repeat the process. Until he was finished.

King — and five other co-authors with doctorates — recently published a 108-page report that surveyed African American faculty members at University Park and the commonwealth campuses, recording their concerns and analyzing their responses. The goal was to identify Penn State's shortcomings while also measuring the institutional racism and interpersonal racism that Black faculty here experienced.

Even King, a longtime professor of biobehavioral health, was stunned at how pervasive the racism was. And he couldn't stand to read the dozens of pages of anonymous comments in one sitting.

Someone wrote n— in the dirt on my car and other hate speech.

I was stopped while walking. I was surrounded by campus police. I have been followed around campus by police.

Told by students that I must be a genius because how else could I do what I do and be Black.

I have been greeted at Penn State Donor Relations events with "What are you doing here?" and "How did you get in here?"

"It was very painful, not only for me but for other co-authors to read that," King



said. "But we want the world to know that this exists. And we're not saying this only exists at Penn State — but we're only at Penn State. We're not at other universities, and we know that all universities do not necessarily have this problem."

King's report — titled, "More Rivers to Cross: Black Faculty and Academic Racism at Penn State University (Part 2)" — comes a year after the first report, which sparked change within the university by centering on its lack of recruitment and retainment of Black faculty members. This second report reiterated that point while focusing on a culture that allows racism to permeate through the university.

According to a survey of 134 Black faculty members — which eschewed the co-authors, administrators and research-only faculty — more than half (53.1%) said that they experienced racism from administrators or supervisors at least

"sometimes." More than two-thirds (67.7%) said they experienced racism from students in the last three years at least "sometimes." And 70.2% felt, at least "sometimes," that the academic culture at Penn State would not become an equitable environment in the next decade.

"It was very difficult to read and to say, wow, these things are still happening. These things are still going on," King said. "Because this is something that should not be happening."

### The Problems

In the comments and anecdotes from Penn State's African American faculty, the report's co-authors found pain, anger and frustration at virtually every level of academic life — whether it came from administrators, colleagues or students.

One respondent reported reading racial slurs on the forms students fill out to rate

teachers, called the Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTes). Another reported being harassed by a white student all semester and, when finally reported, concerns were dismissed as they were attributed to "philosophical differences." Another said a white colleague voiced that they were simply "tokens."

Those perceptions and realities were reflected in data that painted a view of distrust and disappointment toward the university. Among the survey's findings:

- 8 in 10 Black professors reported experiencing racism at Penn State, with slightly more at the commonwealth campuses than at University Park. Almost half (48.5%) encountered racism within the first year of their appointment, and one-third experienced racism within 1-3 years.
- Nearly 3 in 4 respondents (73.1%) who experienced racism chose not to report it. Several said they opted for that course because they felt nothing would be done about it.
- More than 1 in 3 (36.4%) respondents said they at least "sometimes" regretted the decision to join Penn State. At the commonwealth campuses, 13.8% "often" regretted it while 6.3% at University Park "often" felt the same way.

King hoped people might look at those numbers, read the comments and spend some time with the report to understand just how far Penn State must go to foster an environment where all truly feel welcome.

*Continued on next page*



Because, right now he said, all Black professors do not.

The culture of silence to racism is pervasive, and you become the monster by standing up for your rights.

When I have reported wrongdoing, my concerns have been dismissed. I have been excluded from diversity initiatives.

Because nothing was done, I am being retaliated against, and the discrimination continues.

"We think this is a very vital contribution to the university, as well as the general public," King said, referring to the report, "to present to them challenges that the university has not fully, or appropriately or strongly, addressed with regard to African American professors — and then their representation at UP and also at the commonwealth campuses."

Nationally, African Americans account for about 6% of college faculty. At University Park, that number currently stands at 3.11%, after little change over the last 20 years.

Unfortunately, King said, there isn't just a singular issue to address.

### University, Faculty Respond

Beth Seymour, president of Penn State's faculty senate, said her heart broke for her African American colleagues.

The associate teaching professor at Penn State-Altoona doesn't doubt the candor of their comments. And she doesn't doubt more could be done.

"I think we are at a hair-on-fire moment about racism, equity and inclusion at this university and in this country," Seymour said. "So I really think we need to do everything we can and take some hard looks and reevaluate what we're doing so we can create an environment that is inclusive and promotes belonging."

Seymour emailed King's report to every faculty senator, in addition to posting it on

the faculty senate website. In response to last year's report, the faculty senate also charged several committees to look at issues such as the SRTes, which the faculty senate initially acknowledged as biased back in 2017.

A joint task force is also in the midst of being formed on curricular changes for racial and social justice.

King complimented Seymour and the faculty senate's work, noting they've played an important role in the current progress. In the fall, the faculty senate helped tweak — with the approval of University President Eric Barron — new overall hiring practices and job search procedures for administrative positions, both of which now demand consideration for minorities. (In one case, advisory committees now require, whenever possible, women and members of minority groups.)

But King wasn't as complimentary toward the university administration. He labeled at least one of their commissions a "failure" while emphasizing that many of their goals are too vague or generic to carry a substantial impact. Penn State may desire more Black faculty, for instance, but it does not have any accompanying timetables or concrete goals.

In a detailed response, the university wrote that tangible progress is being made. Penn State pointed to a number of examples — such as increased diversity in the student body, efforts underway to identify salary inequity and SRTE bias, and new support for minority faculty members with career advancement resources.

"Obviously, it is with considerable distress and disappointment that we read about the racist experiences described by faculty who completed the More Rivers to Cross survey," the university wrote in a statement. "No one in our community should have to endure such treatment. The university encourages reporting so that it

can investigate and take action as appropriate against such discrimination and biases, which have absolutely no place at Penn State."

The report's co-authors took exception with that last line, noting in a statement of their own that the report itself is about Black faculty reporting discrimination at Penn State. Most respondents felt the system for reporting was "broken" and needed to be fixed.

No resolution and no action against anybody.

Nothing happened.

Why try if no action is going to occur?

"With such a tepid response from the administration, it is no wonder that our results indicated that most Black faculty do not believe that the academic culture at Penn State will change in the next 10 years to represent an equitable environment for teaching, research and service," the co-authors wrote.

### Moving Forward

Something all parties could agree to — the co-authors, faculty senate and university — was that more needs to be done.

"We will not rest until every student, staff and faculty member feels represented, welcomed and supported," the university wrote. "The president, provost, deans, chancellors and administrators across the institution are fully committed to this goal."

The main question is simply how to get there.

Seymour acknowledged it was a "tough job." With bias intertwined within society, structures across the university must be rethought, she said. And the co-authors seemed to agree, proposing several recommendations they believed the university should follow. Among them:

- A "Fifty by Five Plan" with recruitment:

The report's co-authors noted that, while Penn State is in favor of increasing the number of Black faculty, there are currently no dedicated plans or timetables. So the co-authors propose the university fund 50 tenure-track hiring lines for Black faculty — 10 each year, starting in December 2022 and extending until December 2026.

- Immediate discontinuation of the SRTes: Instead, replace it with a non-punitive system designed by a diverse committee across University Park and the commonwealth campuses.

- Creation and/or funding several centers: Penn State could create a universitywide research center dedicated to interdisciplinary study of anti-racism, critical race theory, Black history, culture and racial/social justice. It should also restructure the Affirmative Action Office and sufficiently fund it to better address Black faculty's reporting concerns — and it could create an independent Office of Anti-racism to combat academic racism.

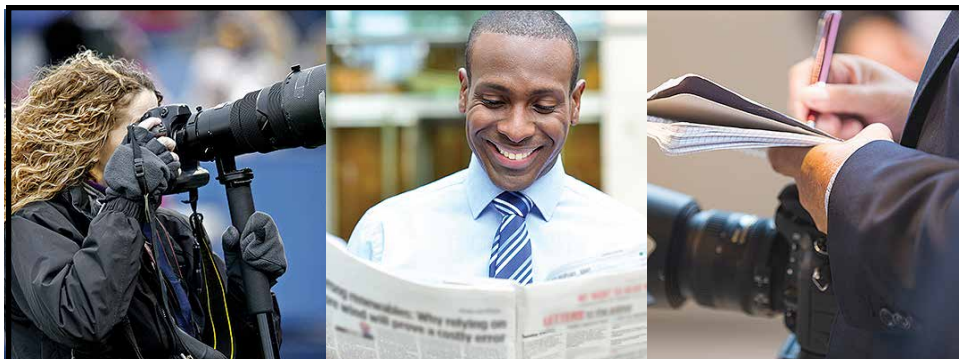
There must be more action behind the university's words, King said. Barron may issue supportive statements after issues like George Floyd, a Black man who died begging for air under the restraint of police, but those words dissipate after 24 hours.

King isn't sure what happens next for Penn State. But he's spent the last two decades here, and he isn't planning on going anywhere. No matter what.

"Like a tree that's planted by the water, I shall not be moved," King said, quoting a popular hymn of the Civil Rights movement. "And that's the way we feel about being here at Penn State. I shall not be moved; you're not going to run me away. And we can make Penn State better. And we have made Penn State better. But we're not going to let racism run us away from here."

"If anything, we're going to try to chase it away as much as possible."

*Published March 31, 2021.*



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# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## Losing Conviction

*Philly's murder exonerations raise questions about decades of homicide investigations — and whether the misconduct alleged in those cases was part of a pattern that led to many more wrongful convictions.*

**By Samantha Melamed**

When detectives walked Danielle Crawley through a maze of cubicles and filing cabinets in the Philadelphia Police Department's Homicide Unit, her hands and clothes were still stained with her brother's blood.

That morning, Crawley, age 19, was retrieving her things from her ex-partner's home when her protective older brother, Eric, a SEPTA bus driver, came to check on her. Patrol officers, dispatched there on a disturbance complaint, were outside, as was Crawley's mother. Minutes later, everything changed: One of the officers shot Eric, firing a single bullet to the chest, right in front of his mother and sister. Crawley rushed to stop the bleeding, pressing her hands onto the wound, but her brother did not survive.

In a tight cubicle in the Police Administration Building, a detective was asking about what would become the department's narrative of the incident: that Eric, who'd been agitated over the domestic incident, had pulled his licensed handgun from its concealed holster before he was shot.

"I told her, my brother never had his gun out," said Crawley, who a decade later still sobs thinking about the interrogation. "I kept telling her what happened. She said she was going to take my kid away. I just had my daughter. She said she's going to throw me in jail. She said my mom is old, I'll never see her again, and who's going to take care of my mom?"

According to Crawley, who first made those claims in a civil lawsuit, Detective



PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Danielle Crawley holds her daughter, Faith Williams, 10. Crawley said detectives threatened to remove Faith if she did not make a statement claiming her brother drew his gun before he was shot.**

Angela Gaines kept her for hours and would not let her leave or speak to her mother. "Sit there and think about what could happen to your daughter," she said the detective threatened. Gaines did not respond to requests for comment.

Finally, exhausted and scared, worried for her 2-month-old daughter, Crawley relented. She went with detectives into a room with a video camera, to read aloud and sign what she said was a fabricated statement, that her brother had drawn his gun first.

"She pushed me to say it," Crawley said. "They treated me like I did it."

The city settled with the family for \$210,000 — though lawyers for the city, answering the Crawleys' lawsuit, denied that detectives threatened the young woman, detained her against her will, fabricated statements, or covered up any misconduct.

Yet, Crawley's claims are hardly unusual. She is one of at least 15 people over the last 30 years who have said in testimony, court filings, and complaints to police that Philadelphia homicide detectives threatened to take away their children if they did not provide a satisfactory statement. She is one of at least 62, many

This is Part 1 of "Losing Conviction," a series about homicide investigations in Philadelphia.

Part 2: "One detective, dozens of allegations"; Part 3: "Sex for lies" and The Homicide Files database can be found online at [inquirer.com](http://inquirer.com).

of them vulnerable due to youth, addiction, illiteracy, or disability, who have reported being held in isolation for hours, cut off from a parent or lawyer, in what was known around the criminal courthouse as "homicide hotel." (At least two of those people were hospitalized, according to lawsuits, after being deprived of medications for diabetes and high blood pressure while at the unit.) And she's among 81 who have said detectives fabricated statements or supplied false information.

Those are some of the claims revealed in a new Inquirer database that for the first time aims to compile such allegations into a single resource. It is based on court documents, public records, interviews, and other reporting. The Inquirer database includes 49 allegations of physical abuse, 64 of threats, and 28 of manipulation or destruction of evidence.

The allegations cast new light on what has been a startling wave of exonerations:

*Continued on next page*



## The Philadelphia Inquirer continued

19 murder convictions tossed since 2018, most of them hinging on some alleged misconduct by homicide detectives or prosecutors.

In the last two years, Philadelphia alone accounted for one out of 10 homicide exonerations in the country, making the per capita rate here 25 times higher than the nation as a whole. Philadelphia also is second in the country, after Chicago, in exonerations of death-row inmates over the last half-century. And taxpayers here are paying a steep price: \$37 million in civil rights settlements just for homicide convictions overturned in the last decade, with at least 10 more wrongful-conviction lawsuits pending.

Among the most egregious cases was that of Anthony Wright, who signed a confession to the 1991 rape and murder of his 77-year-old neighbor, Louise Talley. He later testified that statement was fabricated by detectives, and he signed it only after they handcuffed him to a stationary chair, and threatened to rip his eyes out and “skull-f—” him. Detectives denied all of that, and said Wright was in custody just 14 minutes before he voluntarily confessed. Wright was convicted, and fought for years for DNA testing of the evidence, which matched a different man. Even so, prosecutors later introduced Wright’s 1991 signed statement at a second trial in 2016. This time, Wright was acquitted. The city paid him almost \$10 million to settle a civil lawsuit.

Such settlements raise questions about a unit whose case-clearance rate has plummeted. For decades, Philadelphia

homicide detectives were performing the extraordinary feat of closing more than 80% of cases. That figure has lately slumped to 42%, which is 20 percentage points below the national average.

That decline coincided with an era of reform in the Police Department that some say has led to a drastic decline in allegations of coercion and mistreatment. Yet, many convictions rife with such allegations remain intact — and many of the detectives who worked on those cases remain on the job, their credibility with the court unaffected.

One homicide detective, James Pitts, has been reassigned to a desk job since at least 2019. Two others who were fired or resigned are facing criminal prosecution. One, Detective Philip Nordo, is awaiting trial on charges he repeatedly raped, groomed, and intimidated informants, causing at least six cases to be reversed, downgraded or tossed out.

Current department leaders cast the allegations, if true, as problems of the past. They say DNA, video, and cellphone evidence mean detectives no longer need to build cases on a few reluctant witnesses. They say minors are never interviewed without parental consent. And, in response to the allegations against Nordo, supervisors now monitor staff far more closely. Other recurrent complaints have been resolved, they say, by policy updates such as videotaping interrogations and making it clear to witnesses that interviews are voluntary and they can revoke their cooperation at any time.

“Now, we have to ask the person. It’s not



PHOTO: MICHAEL BRYANT / FILE PHOTOGRAPH

**Anthony Wright holds onto granddaughters Romera Wright, 1, and Daria Wright, 8, as he leaves the grounds of a Philadelphia jail in August 2016, exonerated after 25 years.**

a situation where you can basically utilize your presence to convince that individual to come down and cooperate with the investigation,” said Capt. Jason Smith, who oversees the roughly 70 detectives in Homicide. He said all investigative units saw clearance rates dip as a result, though he said he likes the directive. “We shouldn’t strong-arm individuals to gain their cooperation.”

Chief Inspector Frank Vanore said the investigations have also become more thorough and forensic evidence more extensive. He said that also affects clearances. “That bottleneck gets larger and larger. There’s so much evidence that needs to be analyzed now.”

But looking at decades of practices, lawyer Patricia Cummings, who came from Dallas in 2018 to lead the Philadelphia DA’s Conviction Integrity Unit, said she believes Philadelphia’s problem of wrongful convictions may be the largest in the country. Her 12-lawyer team, the nation’s largest, has 120 cases under investigation; 1,400 more await review.

She noted that allegations against homicide detectives date back to the 1970s. “There’s not a ton that’s changed, except they got a little wiser,” she said. “I still think they employ a lot of really unreliable tactics to interview witnesses and suspects, and I think we’ve got a huge problem.”

An equally huge problem, she said, is that Pennsylvania courts — unlike the federal court system and many other states — permit prior statements to be

introduced as evidence in court, even if the witness has recanted the statement or claims it’s fabricated. “That literally gave a license to a bad cop, saying we can convict somebody based on a supposed statement that they gave to the cops to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that someone has committed a crime. We know that cops have done all sorts of things to develop statements that aren’t truthful.”

Over the years, many recantations and allegations of misconduct have been made in open court, by witnesses who testified to coercive practices they said began in the Homicide interview room and, in some cases, continued through the trial. Often, detectives have taken the stand and denied those allegations. And judges have frequently found the detectives more credible than their accusers, who sometimes had criminal records of their own.

In many instances, detectives or prosecutors suggested that witnesses “went south” not because their statements were fabricated by detectives, but because witnesses were intimidated by the defendant. Given Philadelphia’s entrenched no-snitch culture, there’s often reason to believe them.

“Most of the witnesses live in the same neighborhood as the person who committed the crime. ... While they’re in the safety of the Police Department they give truthful information, but when in court facing that individual, and that individual’s



PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Exoneree Terrance Lewis and Patricia Cummings walk past City Hall, during one of their walks through the city. The pair meet up regularly to discuss their work.**

*Continued on next page*



# The Philadelphia Inquirer continued

family or cohorts, they become afraid and then will change their testimony,” said Carlos Vega, a longtime homicide prosecutor now running for Philadelphia district attorney who has successfully prosecuted cases with reluctant or recanting witnesses. “That’s why we have a jury evaluate a witness’ testimony and [whether] what they said to the police or what they’re saying in court is true.”

Richard Sax, a former longtime homicide prosecutor, said he acted on the lone credible allegation of fabrication a witness brought to his attention. In that case, Sgt. Stephen Brader was fired over allegations he framed a man in a 1985 shooting.

But Sax questioned the integrity of recent exonerations, which include two convictions he obtained that he believes were beyond reproach. He sees the exonerations as part of DA Larry Krasner’s agenda to end mass incarceration. (In court filings, Krasner’s office has at times taken aim at Sax’s work, calling one of those convictions “an egregious example of police and prosecutorial misconduct.”) Likewise, Sax said, while he carefully evaluated any allegations of detectives’ misconduct from recanting witnesses, he rarely believed them.

“There’s only a couple of columns they can pick from: ‘I was forced into signing it.’ ‘I didn’t really see it.’ They can’t say ‘I lied’ because then they’re subjected to perjury or [making] false police reports,” he said.

“Word gets out as to what you’re supposed to say. It’s very easy to say, ‘Well, he threatened me,’” Sax said. So the fact that a dozen people say detectives threatened to remove their children, for instance, doesn’t raise an alarm, he said.

Teri Himebaugh — a Philadelphia defense lawyer who saw so many such allegations that she began developing her own database, called the Philadelphia Police Transparency Project, which also went online this week — said ample proof exists of a rampant and systemic problem, especially given that homicide detectives work collaboratively.

“What we’re arguing is every officer and supervisor who permits this to occur is just as complicit,” she said.

Himebaugh and a handful of other lawyers who specialize in post-conviction work have also begun presenting that pattern-and-practice argument to the court.

Many of those cases have centered on Detective James Pitts, a prolific



PHOTO: JOSEPH KACZMAREK/FOR THE INQUIRER

Detectives investigate the scene on the 7900 block of Rugby Street, where police shot and killed Eric Crawley.



PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Teri Himebaugh, a Philadelphia defense lawyer, says she saw so many allegations of misconduct that she began creating a database, the Philadelphia Police Transparency Project.

investigator who efficiently extracted witness statements and confessions during a decade in homicide — but who, in court testimony, also has been accused of slamming people into walls, choking them, punching them in their heads, and leaving them handcuffed to a chair for hours.

Pitts has repeatedly denied any physical abuse. He suggested that defense lawyers are coordinating on allegations, viewing his name on an interview record as a “winning lottery ticket” for anyone seeking to overturn a conviction.

“What’s the evidence?” he said.

“Especially if you want to talk about the racial aspect of something, since I hit Homicide, that’s the narrative: A Black man can’t conduct a conversation with somebody without being physically abusive.”

One man, Dwayne Thorpe, was exonerated in 2019 after his lawyer, Todd Mosser, brought in 10 people to testify about Pitts’ alleged abuse.

Himebaugh attempted the same path for Brandon Sawyer, who said Pitts coerced his confession to the murder of Charmaine McQuilkin when Sawyer was just 15.

But two homicide detectives, Brian Peters and Henry Glenn, and supervisor Lt. Philip Riehl testified that they had never seen Pitts hit or threaten anyone. In the Sawyer case, Common Pleas Court Judge Barbara McDermott found that testimony compelling. She wrote in her opinion: “None of [Sawyer’s] witnesses presented credible evidence to support a finding that Detective Pitts engaged in a habit or routine practice of coercion or intimidation in order to secure fabricated statements.”

One witness who testified in both cases was Katherine Cardona, whose then-boyfriend Obina Onyiah alleged that Pitts and Detective Ohmarr Jenkins coerced his confession to a 2010 robbery and murder. Cardona said she was at the Homicide Unit, and described hearing thumping noises and Onyiah’s screams for help through the wall. Even with that testimony, Onyiah’s confession was deemed voluntary, and he was convicted.

He was exonerated this week, after the

DA determined surveillance footage proved his innocence. For Himebaugh, his lawyer, it was a long-fought victory. Yet many other cases Himebaugh’s raised with similar allegations have languished.

“What no one wants is for these cases to see the light — because once you start to open this can of worms, there are a lot of worms,” she said.

She thinks that’s a mistake. “You have to have this level of transparency if we’re ever going to gain back any kind of trust between community and police.”

## ‘It was just: Solve the case’

Lead pipes. Blackjacks. Brass knuckles. A “swordlike instrument.”

In 1977, an explosive Inquirer investigation found homicide detectives routinely used these extractive tools, among others, to wrench confessions from suspects. In one in five cases, a confession was suppressed because of such conduct, the reporters found, concluding that many detectives “have come to accept breaking the law as part of their job.”

In the wake of that report, a grand jury was impeached. Six detectives who coerced a man’s false confession to a firebombing that killed five people would be convicted of federal civil rights violations. But then-Mayor Frank Rizzo did not announce any systemic reforms.

Michael Chitwood, a Philadelphia homicide detective who was featured in The Inquirer series — he reportedly took part in an interrogation in which a subject was stabbed in the groin and, ultimately, hospitalized — remained in Homicide through 1983. Later, he spent 14 celebrated years helming the Upper Darby Police Department.

To Chitwood, the homicide detective holds a unique post, on the front line of a lonely war on violent crime. “Except the victim’s family, no one cares about who dies or doesn’t die. It’s a sad commentary about the city we live in. I also believe, from day one, the only people that really cared were homicide detectives. And sometimes, we did things we probably should not have done.”

Back then, police didn’t have the ample data available today: cellphone records, DNA analysis. And, like now, they were facing upward of 400 murders a year, hampered by witnesses too fearful to come forward. Chitwood said detectives were

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## The Philadelphia Inquirer continued

not formally trained to meet that challenge. They handled cases as they saw fit.

"There was no set standard. It was just: Solve the case," Chitwood said. "Today it's a lot different, and you're seeing the results of that." Those results, he suggested, include today's low case-clearance rates, but potentially fewer citizen complaints. "Again, if that's what society wants, that's what society demands, then that's the right thing to do."

Looking back at the same historical climate, Nilam Sanghvi, legal director of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, said it's evident that detectives felt pressured to do whatever it took to close cases, amid rising crime.

"It was like, if we get somebody arrested for this, the means kind of don't matter," she said. "People who did these things are training the next generation of people and mentoring them, so you have these practices that are handed down over time."

Philadelphia's 80%-plus clearance rates, the highest of any big city, continued well into the 1990s. Homicide's most successful and celebrated squad was the Special Investigations Unit, which handled cold cases — cases the line squads couldn't close. It was known as "the wacker squad," according to news reports, for its offbeat characters, like Martin Devlin, a.k.a. "the Golden Marty," who was known to wear loud Hawaiian shirts and, according to one reporter's ride-along, bring a sawed-off shotgun for backup as he went out looking for suspects. In interviews and depositions, Devlin touted, among his career achievements, eliciting a confession from Walter Ogrod, accused of the murder of 4-year-old Barbara Jean Horn. Ogrod was exonerated in 2020, after 23 years of wrongful imprisonment on death row.

As early as the 1990s, there were also alarms raised about the methods of homicide detectives.

In 1994, at a hearing related to the prosecution of Percy St. George — after charges were dropped in a capital murder case built on a statement a key witness said was coerced — three detectives refused to testify about the investigation, invoking their Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination. Charges against St. George were dismissed. But some of the same detectives' other cases, including the conviction of Anthony Wright, remained intact.

"If you want to know why the Philadelphia homicide unit was running



PHOTO: MARGO REED/FOR THE INQUIRER

**Walter Ogrod, center, started crying while being interviewed directly after leaving prison. He had been on death row for 23 years, and incarcerated for 28 years.**

wild for years, look at that case," said lawyer Marc Bookman, who defended St. George on the case and now heads the Atlantic Center for Capital Representation. "What kind of prosecutors would let these cops stay on the force? They didn't get censured. They didn't get disciplined."

Lynne Abraham, who was DA from 1991 to 2010, declined an interview request.

A higher-profile example was the prosecution of Herbert Haak and Richie Wise, both of whom signed confessions that they killed Kimberly Ernest, a 26-year-old paralegal who became known as the Center City Jogger after she was murdered on her morning run.

Haak already had a criminal history, but he never experienced anything like the hours in Homicide.

It started, he said in an interview, when a detective smacked him across the face and told him to strip naked. Haak said he was sitting in his underwear when Detective Thomas Augustine entered, holding a metal fingernail file, asking: "Why are you looking at this? You think I'm going to poke you with it?"

After that, Augustine told him to get dressed and to sign 15 blank pages, then typed out a horrifying confession, Haak said. The way he tells it, he was so fed up he began answering sarcastically — "Yeah, sure, I threw her bra in the backseat. Is that what you want me to say?" Those responses were typed into the statement. When his sarcasm grew too caustic, he

alleged, Augustine began choking him until he nearly blacked out, then spit in his face.

"I just sat there and I felt so defeated," he said.

Physical and DNA evidence contradicted the incriminating statements, which both men recanted. They were acquitted in 1997 of Ernest's murder, an embarrassing outcome for the department and a source of anguish for Augustine.

Haak sued the city for police misconduct. It denied his claims but settled with him for \$50,000.

After the Haak and Wise acquittals, Philadelphia reversed a long-standing policy against videotaping confessions. Augustine said making recordings was an improvement: Video confessions always resulted in guilty pleas. (Retired to Florida, he said he still keeps tapes of 12 murder confessions he personally took, on a shelf below his desk.)

Yet, Augustine said, Haak and Wise's abuse allegations were obvious lies because their faces were unscathed in their mug shots — and by the fact that supervisors monitored every step of the interrogation. A federal civil rights investigation went nowhere, and Augustine was not disciplined. To this day, Augustine believes Haak and Wise were guilty, their confessions legitimate.

"I would rather be dead than to frame somebody and put them in jail just because I solved a murder. It may be hard

for people to believe that detectives think that way," he said. "Why would a guy sit down and confess to the most intimate details of a crime?"

Leon Lubiejewski, a retired longtime homicide detective, takes a different view. He said he found it hard to believe any detective would intentionally coerce a confession, but "it's possible, if you have a weak individual, to talk to that person into confessing. It's something detectives should be aware of."

Saul Kassin, an expert on false confessions and a professor of psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said physically and verbally abusive interrogation practices are not only illegal, but also render any statements gathered less reliable.

"Threats elevate the level of false confessions and reduce the diagnosticity of the confession," he said.

Each of the coercive tactics alleged in scores of Philadelphia cases has been linked by researchers to similarly untrustworthy results. For example, prolonged interrogations are a major driver of wrongful convictions, a national study found: 84% of documented false confessions occurred after at least six hours in custody. (Of those who made allegations of prolonged questioning in The Inquirer's database, 30 said their interviews lasted at least twice that long). Back in the late '70s, Pennsylvania courts went so far as to begin tossing out such confessions, under what became known as "the six-hour rule." But over the years, that timeline grew increasingly elastic. In 2004, Pennsylvania's Supreme Court scrapped it altogether.

The impact of such treatment is magnified when detectives target vulnerable people, such as minors: "They have a more difficult time than adults grasping their Miranda rights," Kassin said. "Juveniles are more compliant to authority, and they're more suggestible."

He analyzed Innocence Project data and found a startling number of wrongful convictions began with a false confession — which was then corroborated by more flawed evidence.

"When a confession is unleashed and it gets recanted, which means the main evidence going forward is in dispute, other errors in evidence like jailhouse informants

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# The Philadelphia Inquirer continued

and bad forensic science are far more likely to happen,” Kassin said. He noted the power of confirmation bias to drive poor decision-making. “By the time an Anthony Wright comes to trial, there is this appearance of a mountain of evidence — but it’s not a mountain of evidence. It’s a house of cards built on the back of a false confession.”

## Reforms, lies, and videotape

Lubiejewski, who joined the Homicide Unit in 1978, did not recall any training on how to avoid false confessions, either when he first started out or in the decades that followed.

“There’s not much training for a detective,” he said. Detective school, as he recalled, was three weeks. “In my case, most of that was spent in typing. Four hours a day in law, and then four hours a day for three weeks learning how to type.”

As of 2019, according to a review the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) conducted at the department’s request, there was still no formal training specifically for homicide detectives. The think tank’s review also found that detectives’ case documentation was inadequate, and the department did “no significant supervision or formal review of homicide investigations.”

Separately, the department collaborated with the Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice at Penn Law School to conduct “event reviews” to identify what went wrong in two exonerations. The review team made numerous recommendations, including to “implement policies that will promote information gathering, rather than confessions, as the goal of both witness interviews and suspect interrogations.” The team also concluded that the video policy should be expanded further, to include all interviews with suspects or witnesses from start to finish.

Not all of those recommendations have been instituted. But the department has made moves to reform.

In 2014, then-Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey began requiring detectives to remind witnesses they were free to leave. He introduced procedures like “double-blind” photo arrays — that is, administered by an officer who does not know which photos are fillers — to improve the reliability of eyewitness identifications. He limited the time suspects could be held to 36 hours, and required a supervisor’s



PHOTO: ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**ABOVE:** Former Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey in 2012. He instituted department changes that included requiring videotaping homicide suspect interrogations.

**BELOW:** A group of men freed after wrongful murder convictions gathered at City Hall in May. From left, they are Jimmy Dennis, Anthony Wright, Terrance Lewis, Chester Hollman III and Theophilis “Binky Bilal” Wilson.



PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

approval to go past 12. Most controversially, he began requiring video of homicide suspect interrogations.

At the time, Homicide Capt. James Clark lamented to a reporter that the new policies “have really handcuffed, and made it very, very difficult, for my detectives to do their jobs.”

But Smith, the current captain, said the department now embraces those reforms

and is drafting new policies to comply with PERF’s 2019 recommendations. Other changes proposed by PERF, like equipping each detective with a smartphone, have been instituted, he said. He’s also begun equipping detectives with body-worn cameras to ensure interactions with suspects are recorded in their entirety.

Out of 152 hours of detective training, just four hours are dedicated to interview

and interrogation practices and three hours on administering photo arrays to witnesses. Detectives do have access to professional development opportunities like the International Homicide Investigators Association symposium.

Asked what training the Philadelphia Police Department has instituted to guard against false confessions, Smith said video cameras had entirely resolved the issue. Supervisors monitor and review interrogations, and detectives are trained to seek corroborating evidence. He and Vanore said they were not familiar with research on false confessions, and did not believe false confessions were a problem.

James Trainum, a retired Washington, D.C., homicide detective who’s now a consultant, reviewing alleged wrongful convictions and developing police training, said far more — and different — training is needed. He argues police should abandon the accusatory approach to interrogations, which creates a climate in which suspects feel compelled to say what the detective wants to hear.

“Video does not stop false confessions,” said Trainum, who speaks often about how he once inadvertently took a false confession on video. It does allow for independent review, but he said that too must be more critical. “Just because you can see [the confession] doesn’t mean you understand what’s happening.”

Some defense lawyers said the improvements are noticeable, and allegations of abuse have declined.

Others still hear complaints of lengthy pre-interviews, which are not documented and are conducted outside the interview room before the camera is turned on.

Vega, the DA candidate, said if a suspect or a witness declines to be video recorded, that should not affect the validity of the statement. “Right now the state of the law is this: You have the right to refuse,” he said.

To Kassin, requiring video in all cases would be the best practice, in part because it insulates detectives from false complaints. Several years ago, he worked with a police department to conduct a controlled trial of video interviews, and found that people were just as forthcoming with the camera rolling.

Such reforms are already law in other states.

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According to an Innocence Project analysis, 25 states and the federal government require start-to-finish video of suspect interrogations. And 24 states have adopted legal requirements that police must use eyewitness-identification best practices for such statements to be admissible in court.

The next frontier for reform advocates, according to Kassir, is to ban lying to suspects and witnesses. He believes this routine, legal, and generally accepted practice should be prohibited, since research shows that it can alter people's memories or open them to manipulation.

Detectives like Augustine, though, see manipulation as just part of the process.

"What you do is you want to befriend this person," he said — bring them coffee, a snack, a cigarette. He never threatened anyone, he said. "You beat a confession out of somebody? You might as well take that and throw it down the toilet because you're not going to win. To me, it was like a contest. If I knew I was going to go in a room with a guy tomorrow I'd be up all night figuring out, How am I going to question him?" He'd offer the opportunity to minimize, to get ahead of the story, to tell before the other guy did.

"You con them into giving a statement. But is the con illegal? No. The courts decided you can lie."

## 'I've heard how they play'

The fallout of flawed cases lands particularly hard on the families of those who were killed, said Chantay Love, who with her mother runs the victim-support organization EMIR Healing Center. They started it in memory of Love's brother, Emir Greene, who was gunned down at age 20 in 1997 in Germantown.

"When you don't have someone who is held accountable for the loss, how do you move forward? Now when you have a clearance rate we have, where they are not able to solve cases and people are left in the community to cause more harm, that impacts the community as a whole, because you have this violence that's still there."

At the same time, she said, people need to be able to have faith in the convictions. "Even before, there might have been a 90% clearance rate. But if now they're getting overturned, you didn't have a 90% clearance rate. You had a large rate of creating destruction."

Shannon Coleman has been struggling

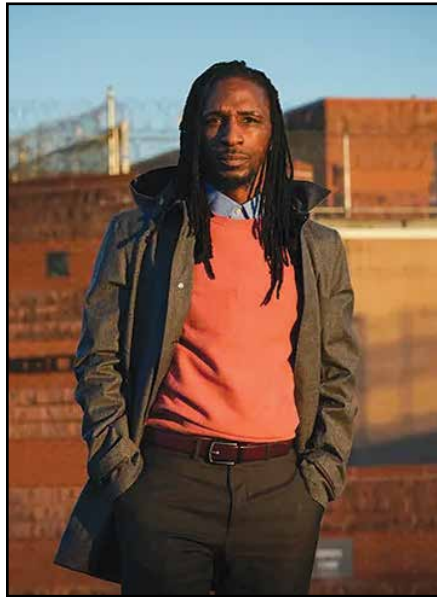


PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Hassan Bennett outside the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center in February. After being acquitted of murder, he began working as a bail advocate for the Defender Association of Philadelphia.**

with that since 2015, when she learned about the DNA evidence that cleared Anthony Wright.

The victim in that case, Louise Talley, was Coleman's great-aunt. "It was devastating in our family. She was a sweet old lady. She was a Christian. You wouldn't think anything like that could happen to her," Coleman said. Her family was especially terrified by the attack because Talley's siblings lived on the same block.

As Coleman learned more about the case, she became convinced of Wright's innocence. "It was just heartbreaking to find out that something like this could happen — and, more importantly, that this monster that did what he did to my aunt continued to walk the streets and terrorize other citizens."

The loss of trust has ongoing consequences, according to community organizers like Kendra Van de Water, the executive director of YEAH Philly, a group that works with young people to mediate the beefs that often lead to gun violence.

"The majority of the detectives are older white men," she said. (About two-thirds were white, and 95% male, a review of 2020 payroll records showed.) "When you're thinking about homicides in a community and you really don't understand that community, even if you've been a detective for 30 years the cultural

competency plays a large role. A lot of complaints I got from families of victims lost to homicide were about how nasty and disrespectful the detectives were to them. It made them not want to go out of their way to give information."

Often, the community knows who committed a crime. But when people do come forward with information, they often feel they are not heard. On one recent occasion, she said, she had to call a city councilmember to ensure that promised witness protection services were provided. On another, she tried to assist a man who had spent four months trying to give security camera footage that captured a 2019 West Philadelphia shooting to detectives who would not call him back. "To this day, the police still do not have that footage, and it is clear footage of the person that committed that shooting," she said.

The man, who didn't want his name used because he feared retaliation, said he called twice and even went in person to deliver the video, but each time was told the detective was not available. The next time his doorbell camera captured a shooting — which he described as a calculated setup that, though terrifying, did not result in injuries — he did not call the police.

"If you're not going to come and at least check it out, then why bother?" he asked.

On the other hand, crime levels have detectives overwhelmed, said Smith, the homicide captain.

As murders spiked, he had to switch his cold-case unit over to responding to incoming cases. Then, as they rose further, he was forced to bring his fugitive squad into that rotation. The last resort, one being considered, would be to recruit detectives from other units to Homicide — though he said he'd then risk short-staffing those divisions.

To Van de Water, though, it's a lack of confidence in the official response that enables the code of the street, and the cycle of retaliatory violence, to prevail. The way to change that, she believes, is by building relationships and respect between police and community.

Lubiejewski, the retired longtime detective, sees things differently. If the department can't close cases, it's because people won't speak up.

He said a total lack of resources for witness protection makes matters worse.

"The Police Department certainly won't protect you for any length of time. They might protect you up to the hearing. It sounds cruel, but once you're on the record they can read your testimony in."

Hassan Bennett — who was tried for murder four times for the same case, and spent 13 years incarcerated before being acquitted — said many people he knows are simply afraid to talk to homicide cops. They know the allegations of abuse, ones that he alleged, in a civil lawsuit, can be found in his case: hours of isolation in a dark room in handcuffs, intimidation, beatings, and threats.

Recently, a friend called him after being contacted by homicide detectives who were investigating the fatal shooting of a 7-year-old child in West Philadelphia.

"She said, 'I'm scared. I've heard how they play,'" Bennett said. She didn't want to go in alone, so he agreed to go with her. First, though, he said he called the Homicide Unit and warned them she'd only stay for 30 minutes. Then, he turned on location-sharing on his phone and asked a friend to monitor it. As a final precaution, he recorded himself going into the Homicide Unit, and refused to speak to anyone while he sat outside the interview room.

He could still hear the yelling through the closed door: "You're going to be out there marching for Black Lives Matter, and you won't even tell us who the shooter was?" His friend came out of the room shaking.

What struck Bennett was how crisply the shouting traveled through the Homicide Unit, within earshot of detectives and supervisors, but no staff seemed to notice anything amiss.

"All these people aren't making up stories about being verbally abused and physically abused," he said. Yet, detectives routinely testify they've never seen or heard of such abuse. In Bennett's view, that's the real lie: "You guys heard it and you ignored it."

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# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

## Region at forefront of future pandemic defense

### A 'space race' level attack on public health issues

*First in a series*

**By Daniel Moore**

Post-Gazette Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - Maureen Lichtveld's nearly 40 years in environmental public health- from her home country of Suriname, to the U.S. government, to the Hurricane Katrina-devastated Gulf Coast and, finally, to Pittsburgh this year - has focused on a central principle: how to prepare for the next big crisis.

Her "aha!" moment came early, in her mid-20s, as she worked to increase vaccination rates among children in the Amazon jungle. By training more health care workers and promoting vaccine effectiveness more widely, she helped send those rates from 5% to 95% in just three years, she said.

"I could not, as an individual, vaccinate all those thousands of kids," said Dr. Lichtveld, who took over as dean of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health on Jan. 1. The effort called for a public health solution that focused on the whole community, its culture, its environmental factors, long-standing inequities and health impacts.

Taking a broader view has become a central strategy to the federal government's efforts to bolster the nation's defenses after the COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities at the highest levels.

"The COVID-19 pandemic, as the limited coverage for childhood vaccinations back then, is a public health problem, requiring public health strategies of preparedness, vaccination and control," said Dr. Lichtveld,



who is aiming to position the Pittsburgh university — already an engine of health research — at the forefront of this deeper bureaucratic soul-searching that experts say is long overdue.

The worst health catastrophe in a century has prompted a renewed focus on research and innovation.

More than once, Pittsburgh has answered the call to supply expertise and research to help the nation deal with its really big problems. A little over a decade ago, Pittsburgh health system UPMC hosted dozens of government officials and private sector experts for a debate around

creating a new federal agency meant to bring new vaccines to market.

That agency — the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority — would eventually play a role in creating a public-private partnership that led to one of the vaccines now helping Americans fend off COVID-19.

Although U.S. officials have celebrated some breakthrough successes — including moving at breakneck speed to produce safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in less than a year — the virus's ability to capitalize on some of the government's long-standing weaknesses may have



What the pandemic has taught us and what it will take to reinvent Pittsburgh across key pillars of society.

exacerbated the pandemic that has killed nearly 600,000 Americans.

Those weaknesses include: a chronically underfunded public health system; an uneasy reliance on a messy global supply chain; a lack of communication between agencies; and bungled foresight planning for future pathogens, what former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously called the "unknown unknowns."

So what now? The response from President Joe Biden and lawmakers has been to launch the kind of patriotic push for federal investment in science and technology not seen since the Space Race of the 1960s.

From 1960 to 1973, the U.S. spent some \$28 billion — \$283 billion in today's dollars — on the space program to send a crew of astronauts to the moon, according to the Planetary Society's analysis of original budget documents at the NASA Historical Reference Collection. The Space Race helped to boost total R&D spending to a peak of 11.7% of all federal spending in 1965, up from 2.8% a decade earlier.

And now, at this moment in history, the push to do better in the future seeks to tap into that stunning moment of past success. Research and development, Washington leaders say, will allow the U.S. to compete with 21st century adversaries

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like China, combat climate change while growing jobs and guard against supply shocks halfway around the world.

The big ideas coming out of D.C. could send more dollars to Western Pennsylvania in search of answers.

One bipartisan proposal in Congress pledges \$100 billion for “strategically important” advances in science and \$10 billion for regional tech hubs such as Pittsburgh. Mr. Biden’s infrastructure plan calls for investing \$50 billion in the National Science Foundation, \$40 billion to upgrade facilities at federal laboratories across the country and \$30 billion in funding for research and development with a focus on neglected regions.

Mr. Biden has proposed \$6.5 billion to create a new advanced research agency for health care, ARPA-H, modeled on a similar program in the Energy Department’s ARPA-E and on the Defense Department’s DARPA, which doles out money to Carnegie Mellon University, among other places.

But it will take more than just throwing money at the problem.

Can U.S. leaders, adept at channeling massive resources to eradicate an existing threat, embrace futurist thinking to plan for the next pandemic?

“This is a window of opportunity,” said Anita Cicero, deputy director at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and part of a group of experts laying the groundwork for a possible federal COVID-19 commission.

“The whole country and our leaders and the world understand that we were not well prepared,” Ms. Cicero said.

Department of the Future

Anticipating future threats has always been a blind spot of the federal government, said Amy Webb, founder of Future Today Institute, a New York-based forecasting and strategy firm.

Decision-makers in Washington too often work in their silos across hulking federal buildings, she said, and the political leadership falls victim to a myopic focus on short-term election cycles and the rising two-party polarization.

Ms. Webb gained attention for her 2016 essay published in Politico that called for the creation of a U.S. Department of the Future. In 2019, she followed up with recommendations for a National Strategic Foresight Office, which “is needed now more than ever,” she said in a recent interview.

Health research funding pours into Pitt

The University of Pittsburgh has been awarded \$3.86 billion from 2013 to 2020 by the National Institutes of Health, which doled out more federal money each year to the school for health research. Pitt could see a boost from proposals in Washington for a new advanced health research agency, called ARPA-H.

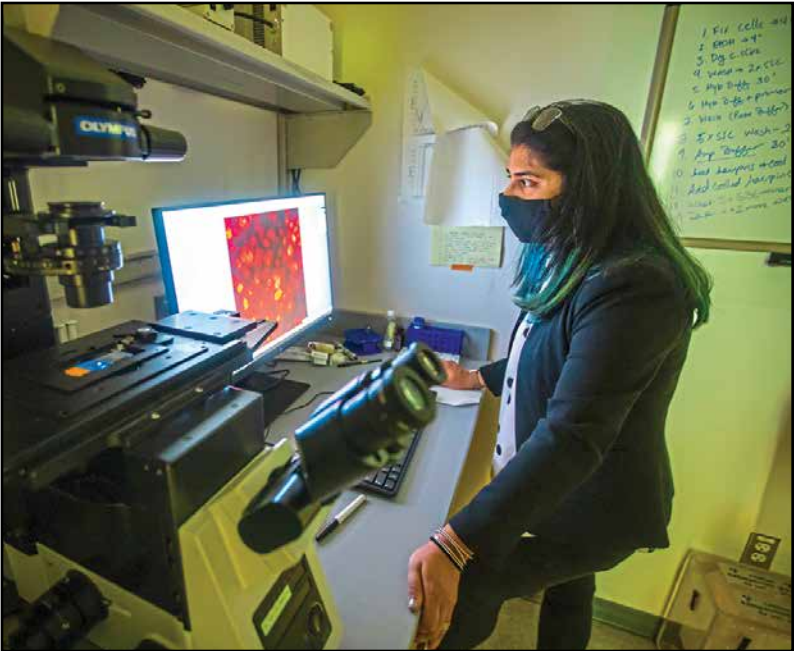
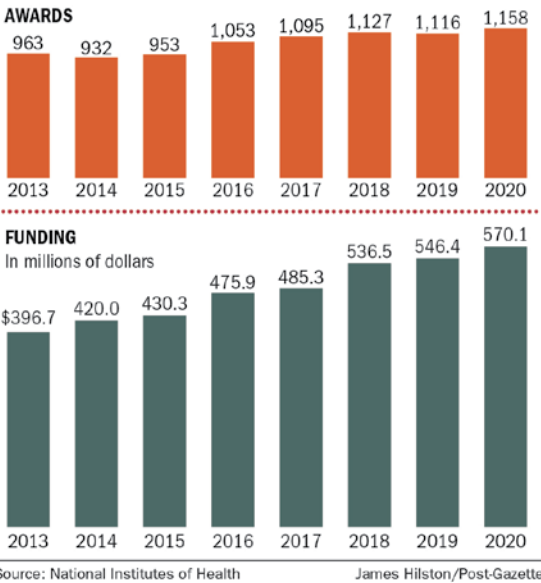


PHOTO: ANDREW RUSH/POST-GAZETTE

Seema Lakdawala, Ph.D., principal investigator with the University of Pittsburgh’s Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, looks at virus samples in her molecular lab in South Oakland.

The political strife has hurt funding. In April 2020 — not two months into the pandemic shutdowns — a Goldman Sachs study on federal science investment issued a stark statistic: Federal R&D spending equaled 0.6% of U.S. gross domestic product in the 2019 fiscal year.

That’s the lowest portion in more than 60 years, since before the race for the moon.

Funding for the National Institutes of Health — which gives out grant money for sometimes high-risk, high-reward research at universities like Pitt — has been essentially flat since 2004, the report found.

A less obvious problem lies in the tangled web of congressional appropriations subcommittees and federal agencies tasked with issuing dollars to targeted goals.

Sudip Parikh, CEO of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, estimated at least six federal agencies are seeking a cure for cancer and as many as 15 agencies manage pieces of climate change research.

From 2001 to 2009, Mr. Parikh served as science adviser on the Senate Appropriations Committee. He was responsible, working with former Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., for negotiating budgets for the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other scientific and health agencies.

“For the really big existential questions,” he said, “the coordination isn’t there across all of government ... and we need that.”

**Moonshot goals**

Search engine giant Google dangled \$30 million for a team to send a rover to the moon. A Portuguese organization offered up more than \$500,000 for research that monitors plastic litter on a global scale, using artificial intelligence and satellite data.

And the Center for American Progress and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute hosted a “Shark Tank”-style competition that awarded \$10,000 to educators to improve classroom learning.

Deep-pocketed investors and foundations have increasingly funded prizes and grant funding to spur people to achieve audacious goals, said Shawn Dubravac, an economist and self-described futurist with IPC, an Illinois-based trade organization that studies supply chains.

But federal agencies, particularly in the health space, must take a more active role in funding strategic ventures too risky or costly for private companies, Mr. Dubravac said.

“It’s always a challenge when you’re trying to produce something for the current period but also build something for much further down the road,” he said.

That’s one reason that planners look back with awe to the space race.

“We set audacious goals for landing a man on the moon,” Mr. Dubravac added. Today, the country’s vision is “not mapped out as much as it should be — what the timeline is and how we’ll get there.”

**Pittsburgh and BARDA**

In the health space, federal efforts to boost research have gone through Pittsburgh before.

In January 2007, four dozen government officials, health policy experts, infectious disease researchers and drug industry representatives gathered at a UPMC hosted event in Pittsburgh to debate a new federal agency that would bring to market new vaccines and therapeutics.

The participants hoped the agency — the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority — would address emerging threats by funding ventures through the costliest advanced research phase. It was a recurring problem that many ventures would get NIH money for research and then run out of money during clinical trials and development.

“There was a lot of excitement about this,” recalled Ms. Cicero, the Johns Hopkins deputy director who represented a consortium of drug companies at that

Pittsburgh meeting.

The Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority went on to aid 59 federally approved products and create more than 500 public-private partnerships, including the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

But Ms. Cicero said the research authority, too, has had too narrow of a focus.

Following the pandemic, she said, the agency should expand its focus from specific pathogens — known as “one bug, one drug” strategy — and instead attack broader viral families that could pose a threat.

Competing for NIH money

Dr. Lichtveld, the Pitt dean, has spent her career trying to improve the country’s defenses.

During her 18 years at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, she started a program that established centers for public health preparedness at 38 schools nationwide, including one at Pitt.

Those centers, which were later defunded, aimed to improve the ability of local public health systems to respond to infectious disease

outbreaks, biological attacks or other catastrophes.

In 2003, she was involved in discussions, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, to create a repository of drugs, vaccines and medical supplies known as the Strategic National Stockpile. The stockpile — spread across 12 classified locations across the country — likely resembles a warehouse-sized drugstore chain: shelves of pharmaceuticals and supplies sitting on shelves that can reach five stories high.

When she took a job at Tulane University in New Orleans in 2005, three weeks before Hurricane Katrina, she saw the stockpile in action, delivering tuberculosis drugs and other emergency medications to people in need.

She wants to grow that foresight capacity at Pitt — and by extension, the country.

The University of Pittsburgh has received \$5.3 billion in NIH money since 2010, according to the agency’s grant data. In 2020, the school received 1,158 awards totaling \$570 million, the ninth-most of any organization in the country.

(Mr. Biden’s budget proposal to Congress last month boosts the NIH budget by 21% to \$51 billion.)

Dr. Lichtveld’s administrative oversight at Pitt Public Health spans seven academic departments, 640 students, 160 faculty and 320 support staff.

“It excites me to have all the assets in place,” she said. “Federal funding is key for our research, but it’s also key in helping translate our research into action.”

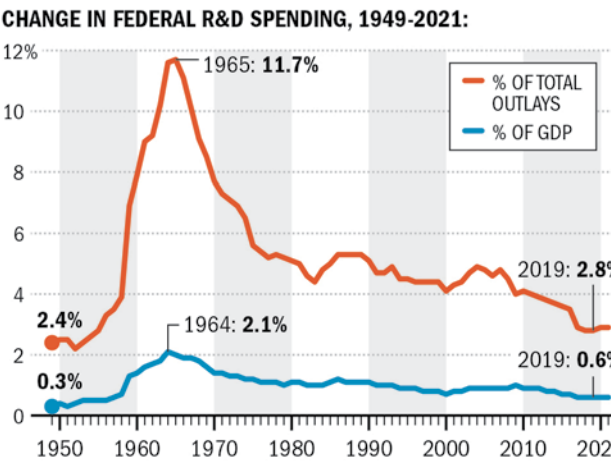
To that end, she envisions Pitt’s campus in Oakland, which connects public health researchers with those steeped in other disciplines like public policy and economics, as a place that can build cutting-edge modeling to help predict how future pandemics — the next COVID-19 or SARS — could affect the restaurants on Fifth Avenue, the paychecks of workers Downtown and the health of people living in Squirrel Hill.

“Just like we need to look at a body as holistic systems of organs, we need to look at the community as an entity,” she said.

Daniel Moore: dmoore@post-gazette.com, Twitter @PGdanielmoore  
Published June 6, 2021.

Pre-pandemic, federal R&D spending fell to lowest level in 60 years

In the decades since the Space Race of the 1960s, Congress has allowed federal research spending to dwindle. Lawmakers are calling for a new wave of funding in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Source: Goldman Sachs analysis of the Office of Management and Budget data  
Chance Brinkman-Sull/Post-Gazette


The Post-Gazette asked several Pittsburgh-area public health experts:  
What do you think is the biggest key in defending the nation against the next public health crisis?

“Preparation is key. There has been disinvestment in our public health infrastructure over the past decade including systems for data collection and dissemination, workforce development, and coordination, which prohibited an efficient or effective response to this COVID-19 crisis. Further, the delays in tracking and mitigating the impact of the pandemic in Black, brown and other vulnerable populations magnified the persistent health inequities that we’ve seen for decades. As a result of this lack of preparation, so many lives were lost unnecessarily.”




— **Tiffany Gary-Webb**, Ph.D, associate professor, associate dean for diversity and inclusion, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health; epidemiology section chair, American Public Health Association

“The fundamental thing to do is increase funding for public health. Public health is part of our national infrastructure, and we need to invest in it. There are many important improvements and initiatives to be taken with regard to the nation’s public health, but none of them can be done without increased resources.”



— **Martin Gaynor**, professor of economics and public policy, Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College


“Widespread shortages of the N95, the most common respirator used in healthcare settings, were reported even before the COVID-19 pandemic reached extraordinary levels. To defend the nation against the next public health crisis, it is imperative that health care workers are provided the respirators and other personal protective equipment that they need. NIOSH is working in partnership with other federal agencies and partners to further explore scientific innovations in advancing and deploying these reusable options.”



— **Maryann D'Alessandro**, executive director, National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory

“I don’t believe that there is a single biggest key for this huge problem. It is a multifaceted challenge [that is] exacerbated by the limited health literacy of the population.

Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, optimization and gamification applied to the vast repositories of scientific knowledge available in rich multimedia formats should be leveraged to provide appropriate information in digestible forms, particularly on ubiquitous mobile devices, to educate, inform and empower the public to face the unanticipated health related crises of the future.”



— **Rema Padman**, professor of management science and healthcare informatics, Carnegie Mellon University



It pays to read

# The SPIRIT

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## Summit sets stage for real change in police-community relations

By Ashley Caldwell

acaldwell@myspiritnews.com

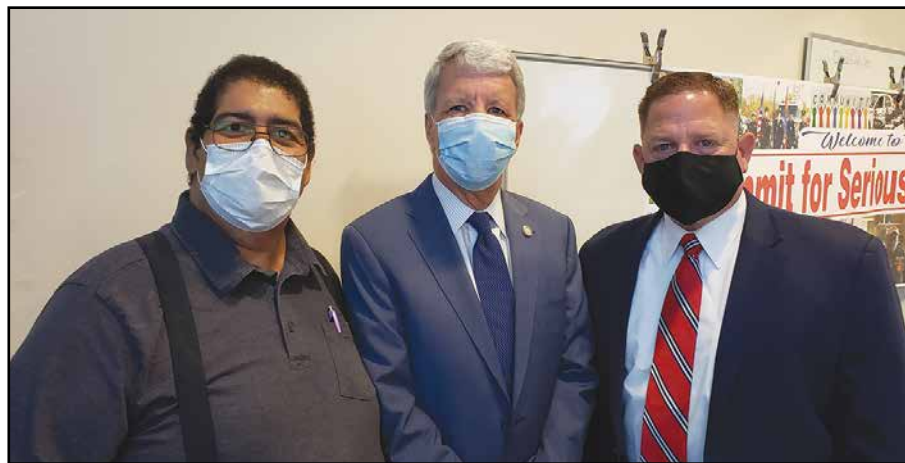
While dozens of cities, towns, boroughs and villages across the nation have seen vehement protests against their police departments in recent weeks for sins past and present, Delaware County, with the exception of a few peaceful protests and one riot-level activity in Upper Darby that spilled over from Philadelphia, has largely been spared.

It appears that many of the county's 44 police departments and the State Police have quietly worked to improve their operations and police-community relationships, though all attending the Summit for Serious Solutions last week agreed that much more work must be done.

A group of Delaware County police chiefs and leaders representing clergy, state government, unions, business, and community organizations gathered last week for a roundtable discussion focusing on concerns and solutions for the future of law enforcement and its relationship with the community.

Paul A. Bennett, publisher of the SPIRIT Media Group and editor of the SPIRIT newspaper, convened the Summit for Serious Solutions at the Delaware County Emergency Services 911 Center in Media to discuss concerns police and community people have with each other in the wake of local and global protests surrounding abusive police/community relations stemming from a spate of national police killings of unarmed Black men and women and to develop solutions that would create stronger, more trusting relationships.

"We see problems that need to be solved, concerns that need to be addressed, and by virtue of your presence (here), (it's) sending



Paul Bennett (left), publisher of The SPIRIT Media Group and editor of The Spirit newspaper, and Summit co-convenor Dave White (right), flank state Sen. Tom Killion (R-9) during the Summit for Serious Solutions last week at the Delaware County Emergency Services Center in Media.

a message that we want progress in Delaware County," Bennett said.

Most agreed that the non-existence of honest, fact-based communications between police and community people continues fueling negative perceptions on both sides.

Bennett's presentation included data from recent national surveys that indicated most cops become callous after taking the job (56 percent), including younger under 35 year-olds (62 percent); that most Black cops (68 percent) call police-community relations "fair to poor"; that 63 percent of cops believe being callous is "more useful in certain neighborhoods" than "being courteous"; and that 72 percent of cops believe that poorly-performing cops are not held accountable.

The event, Bennett said, was designed to lay bare such realities and to address them.

Martin Wusinich, a 42-year police veteran

and the Media Borough chief, said his department has not had any major incidents for the 35 years he's been the chief. But recently one of his officers got caught up in a social media controversy and was fired by elected officials with no consultation.

He said the officer's decades-long stellar career came to a crashing end because of one "mistake" he made on social media.

He continued, "I think we have to sit down and talk before these things (explode). I don't know, in Delaware County, where, in fact, law enforcement isn't trying to do everything they can to serve the public."

"We all bring cultural biases to the table," said Delaware County Sheriff Jerry Sanders. "We're raised by our parents and, whatever pros or cons they have related to, interactions with community people of other races, are deposited in us in various degrees – sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse."

Sanders said he has brought cultural biases to his career, but they can be dispelled through interaction with someone else.

"I always have my deputies imagine how they would like to be treated or a loved one would like to be treated," Sanders said. "The ultimate violation to human dignity is loss of home or loss of household."

Sanders continued, "The more we talk to each other, personally, the more we see (perceptions) dispelled. Whatever negative thing we can bring to the table can be dispelled by community interaction, as law enforcement."

Sheila Carter, president of the NAACP-Darby Area Branch and former Darby Township police officer, said officers have to be trained and made more aware of what they can and cannot do. She said, while Delco doesn't have a record of police brutality in which a person died, there have been incidents of police brutality among community members.

Carter said communities struggle with relationships with their police departments and chiefs need to "hear from those people."

"You need to go into your communities and know who your leaders are," Carter said. "I'm not talking about your political leaders. I'm talking about the people who live in the community, go to work everyday, your Grammys – those are the people you need to have in the room."

"I think we see people first, here in Delaware County," Sanders said. "But a conversation like today; we should never be comfortable with it. We should always be challenging ourselves because we're all human."

Published July 14, 2021.

## Oily slick probed anew

### Workers in Berwick seeking source of seep in river

By **Susan Schwartz**  
Press Enterprise Writer

BERWICK — The state is taking another stab at finding the source of a mysterious plume of gas or oil that has seeped into the Susquehanna River for about 20 years.

Workers are drilling six new groundwater wells to try to track the contaminant, which smells like gasoline and sometimes causes an oily sheen on the river a few blocks downstream from the Berwick-Nescopeck bridge.

No one knows exactly what the substance is, but it appears to be a petroleum product, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Two of the wells — each about 40 feet deep — are along the railroad on either side of Oak Street.

A third is at the entrance to the BIDA complex, two more are inside the complex and one is on North Vine Street, north of 10th Street. Those are 70- to 80-feet deep, said Andy Thornton, an environmental chemist with the state's cleanup program.

DEP also will use several monitoring wells it drilled around 2004 — the last time it tried to find the source, department spokeswoman Megan Lehman said.

#### Solving a mystery

"It's like doing detective work on cold cases," Lehman said. "And like a criminal investigation, you don't know where it might lead you."

The area uphill from the seep has been the site of various industries that used petroleum for years, she noted.

The BIDA complex has been the home of manufacturers since at least 1872, according to a history written in honor of the borough's bicentennial.

The borough, BIDA and SEDA-COG,



PHOTO: PRESS ENTERPRISE/KEITH HAUPT

A contractor for the Department of Environmental Protection sets up to drill holes and collect samples, looking for the source of an oily plume that has appeared on and off in the Susquehanna River in Berwick. The group is taking samples near the entrance to the BIDA complex.

which owns the railroad, are cooperating with the investigation, allowing the drilling and for people to take samples from the wells, Lehman said.

Ultimately, officials would like to find whoever is responsible for the contamination, and make that person or company clean it up, Thornton said. But that might not be possible.

"It's like we have a body that's just a skeleton, that's 200 years old," he said. "Good luck finding who is responsible."

Berwick has been a home to industry since before there were regulations and laws about handling hazardous materials, Lehman noted. And often, over the years,

records, if they were ever kept, are destroyed or vanish.

Petroleum products break down over time, making it harder to find chemical signatures that might point to a source, Thornton said.

Companies go out of business.

There also could be more than one source, Lehman said.

If investigators find a source but can't find a responsible party, the state might take over the cleanup or take steps to mitigate damage it's causing, if it has enough money in the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act fund, Lehman said.

Part of the point of the test wells is to determine the level of risk, Thornton said.

#### How they work

The wells are basically the same as the wells that supply water to rural homes, only without pumps, Thornton said. Pipes are fed into the drill holes, then capped level with the ground.

As the wells are drilled, workers take samples of the dirt, some of which are immediately field-tested by a geologist on site. Others are bagged up for laboratory analysis.

*Continued on next page*



The rest of the dirt dug from the hole is placed in barrels to be driven away.

Once the wells hit groundwater, they are purged of sediment from the drilling, then monitored until the readings stabilize before a sample of fresh groundwater is taken, Lehman said.

The department follows quality control and chain of custody rules, she said.

Two samples will be taken by mid-June

and tested by DEP labs, Lehman said. Afterward, people periodically will come to the wells and draw more samples for testing. Exactly when will be decided based on the initial test results.

The samples will be taken at the same time, to make sure the groundwater level is similar, Thornton said. Researchers will also keep track of the groundwater level each time a sample is pulled.

Higher groundwater means more water is flowing into the river, along with more petroleum, Lehman said.

Thornton said investigators hope to use the wells showing the highest levels of contamination to trace the contamination back to its source.

But Lehman cautioned there's no guarantee they'll succeed.

Some investigations take years, and

some never result in an answer, she said.

To see a video of the drilling and the soil samples, go to [tinyurl.com/DEPdrilling](https://tinyurl.com/DEPdrilling).

*Susan Schwartz covers the Berwick area. She can be reached at 570-387-1234 ext. 1306 and [susan.schwartz@pressenterprise.net](mailto:susan.schwartz@pressenterprise.net), or followed on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/PESueSchwartz>.*

*Published April 27, 2021.*

# State has lead on oil puzzle

## DEP aims to pinpoint source, clean it up before it gets in river

**By Susan Schwartz**  
Press Enterprise Writer

BERWICK — It appears the state Department of Environmental Protection has picked up the trail of the mysterious oil that, for about 20 years, intermittently has seeped into the Susquehanna River a few blocks downstream of the Berwick-Nescopeck bridge.

And even before they find the pollution's source, staff there are looking at ways to clean the water before it reaches the river.

Out of 12 monitoring wells, four recently had volatile organic compounds associated with old diesel fuel or heating oil at levels above drinking water standards, DEP spokeswoman Megan Lehman said.

No one's drinking water is at risk; Berwick residents get their water through Pennsylvania American Water, which pumps it from an underground aquifer at Canal Street. The water company reports all that water meets drinking water standards.

### Tracing trail

The two wells with the highest levels were on the railroad bed beside the river, on either side of Oak Street, Lehman said. They had a layer of the suspected diesel fuel floating on top of them.

The other two wells were in the Berwick Industrial Development Association complex, though they had a lot less of the contaminant, she said. The department is collecting a second round of samples to confirm those results, said Cheryl Sinclair, environmental group manager for DEP's Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program.

Investigators still don't know exactly from where the fuel is coming, Sinclair said.

But they suspect the source is soil saturated by an old spill.

The department probably will drill two more wells in spring to pinpoint the origin by next summer, Sinclair said.

Once that's done, workers probably will dig up the contaminated soil and remove it, she said.

### Multiple suspects

The fuel could be coming from more than one source, Sinclair said.

The BIDA complex uphill from the seep has been the home of manufacturers since at least 1872, according to a history written in honor of the borough's bicentennial.

But Sinclair said she still hopes the department can clean up most of the problem.

In the meantime, DEP is evaluating ways to remove as much of the contamination as it can before it flows into the river.

The current favored temporary fix is a pump-on-demand skimmer, suggested by the department's contractor, Amentum, Sinclair said.

The contaminated groundwater is flowing through cracks and voids in the ground along a path to the river, she explained. But it pools in the wells the department drilled by the railroad, and the lighter oily substance rises to the top.

The system would skim off the oil and pump it into a container, which DEP would remove when it fills up.

"It probably won't eliminate it, but we can minimize it," Sinclair said.

The pumping system won't take up much space, so it won't get in the way of the

Berwick Area Joint Sewer Authority, which has lines running through the area, Sinclair said. It runs on carbon dioxide canisters, so it won't require installing electrical lines. And it's quiet, so it shouldn't bother residents in nearby houses or the Berwick Brewing Co., which has an outdoor dining area on the hill overlooking the site.

The sewer authority has agreed to the plan, and officials at SEDA-Council of Governments, which owns the railroad bed where the wells are, agrees with the concept, though they still need their board's approval, Sinclair said.

"Not only are they on board, they're excited," she said.

### Long-time mystery

Residents, business owners and fishermen have complained about the oily sheen that sometimes appears on the river

near Oak Street for about 20 years.

Cleaning it up would improve the river's ecology, Sinclair said.

It also will get rid of the gasoline smell, which gets particularly bad when the river is low and the weather is hot and humid, she said.

The state drilled six new groundwater wells last April in the hope of finding the source of the contaminant.

Investigators are also using wells drilled in 2004, the last time the department tried to track down the source.

Anyone with questions or concerns about the project can reach Sinclair by calling DEP at 570-327-3636.

*Susan Schwartz can be reached at 570-387-1234, ext. 1306, and [susan.schwartz@pressenterprise.net](mailto:susan.schwartz@pressenterprise.net).*

*Published Aug. 22, 2021.*



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# The Times-Tribune

## Sources: Wright Center improperly billing for office visits for vaccine

By Terrie Morgan-Besecker  
The Times-Tribune

The Wright Center for Community Health is improperly charging for some office visits it requires for COVID-19 vaccinations and tests, skirting federal rules that protect patients from being unjustly billed, three sources with knowledge of the center's practices contend.

Their billing policy allows the center to charge Medicare, Medicaid and private insurers significant fees, often leaving patients who have not met their insurance deductible with bills.

The sources, former and current employees with direct knowledge of the center's billing practices, and two medical billing experts contend the center's policy violates billing regulations that dictate when a medical provider can charge for an office visit, as well as rules the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued specifically for the COVID-19 vaccine. The sources spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

They say there are three key issues:

- The center's policy violates American Medical Association (AMA) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations that mandate certain services be provided to bill for an office visit.
- The center is using diagnostic codes meant to show medical necessity that do not apply to some patients. They do this to justify billing for patients who had no underlying medical conditions and sought only the vaccine.
- The center's requirement of an office visit to receive the vaccine violates CDC regulations established Feb. 25 that say a provider "may not require additional medical services to receive COVID-19 vaccination."



AKE DANNA STEVENS / THE TIMES-TRIBUNE

The Wright Center for Community Health in Scranton on Friday, March 19, 2021.

### Center defends policies

Wright Center officials adamantly defended the center's policy over the past several weeks, calling allegations it was improperly billing "unacceptable and utterly unfounded."

"Our billing practices for all services, including but not limited to vaccinations and visits, are always high-integrity and absolutely appropriate for the specific level of care provided," Jennifer Walsh, a senior vice president for the Wright Center, said in a statement.

Wright Center spokeswoman Wendy Wilson said Friday that the center contacted the CDC and the state Department of Health on March 18 for clarification on whether it can require office visits to administer the vaccine.

"It is and always has been our goal to be fully compliant with all state and federal requirements, and hopefully the CDC and PA DOH will promptly clarify this language," she said.

Wright Center CEO Linda Thomas-Hemak

insists an office visit is necessary to ensure the vaccine is safely administered, especially because the vaccines were approved under a fast track with less scrutiny. The required office visits also help discover undiagnosed health problems, she said, noting 20% of the patients vaccinated at the center were diagnosed with high blood pressure.

It's unclear how the center made those diagnoses because standard medical practice requires three readings on separate occasions to diagnose high blood pressure, according to the American Heart Association.

### Complaints cause investigations

The center's policy angers some patients, particularly those with insurance deductibles who were hit with fees for a vaccine the government assured them is free. The center charges private insurers \$171 for a new patient visit and \$118 for established patients for the first shot and \$45 for the second, according to several patients' billing records. Their allowed

insurance rates ranged from \$76 to \$126. Other local providers charge only a vaccine administration fee, which insurance covers. Those facilities, including Scranton Primary Health Care Center, Geisinger Health System, Commonwealth Health System, Lehigh Valley Health Network, Wayne Memorial Hospital and multiple pharmacies, have safely vaccinated people without an exam for months.

Complaints caused the Pennsylvania Department of State and at least two insurance companies -Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and Cigna - to investigate the policy at the Scranton-based center, which has seven locations in Lackawanna, Luzerne and Wayne counties.

The vaccine is free, but the CDC allows providers to charge a nominal fee to administer it. Providers can charge an additional fee for an office visit only if the patient presents and is evaluated for a separate medical problem, such as a sore throat, according to three medical billing experts.

The center contends it can charge for the visit because it is providing a separate medical service - a medical exam. There are specific requirements that must be met to bill for the visit, however.

According to the AMA, a provider must document that it did at least two of three services to bill for an office visit: evaluate the patient for the number and complexity of problems; review medical records and/or tests and make a medical decision regarding the patient's care. The amount of the bill depends on how much time was spent or the degree of medical decision making that went into the visit.

"If the patient only presents for vaccine administration and the physician does not

*Continued on next page*



do or document any other service - i.e. does not evaluate and manage something for the patient - then the physician cannot report an office visit in addition to the code for the vaccine administration,” Kent Moore, a senior physician payment strategist for the Washington D.C.-based American Academy of Family Physicians, said in an email.

Moore declined to comment on the Wright Center’s practices. Speaking generally, he said it’s possible that conducting a general medical exam would qualify, but a physician still needs to show extensive interaction with the patient about an unrelated medical issue.

“The preventive medicine (exam) would still include more than just taking the vital signs,” he said.

Services would include “an age and gender appropriate history, examination, counseling/anticipatory guidance/risk factor reduction interventions, and the ordering of laboratory/diagnostic procedures,” he said.

Billing concerns

Thirteen Wright Center patients said they received none of those services when they were vaccinated or tested. Each said they had no underlying medical issues and center staff only checked their blood pressure and oxygen level and briefly reviewed their answers to the vaccine questionnaire.

“To me, it’s completely unethical what is happening,” said a former Wright Center physician who was billed for an office visit. “They are taking advantage of the fact people want the vaccine and using it as a revenue-generating scheme.”

AMA and CMS billing rules also require a provider document that the office visit was medically necessary to treat an underlying medical issue, two other billing experts said. They asked not to be identified so they could speak candidly about the issue without fear of alienating clients.

The experts criticized the center’s policy, questioning how it documents medical necessity for people solely seeking the vaccine. Each works for a company that provides billing audit services for local medical providers; the firm does not audit the Wright Center’s accounts.

“The purpose of them coming in was to get the vaccine,” one expert said. “If someone came for the vaccine, why was there a medical exam? There’s no requirement for that. It’s not medically necessary.”

Encounters					
Type	Date	Location	Provider	Dx	Diagnosis
Office Visit		TWCCH-Kingston Practice		Z23	Encounter for immunization
				R45.82	Worries
				Z71.9	Counseling, unspecified
Office Visit		TWCCH-Kingston Practice Vaccine Clinic		Z23	Encounter for immunization
				R45.82	Worries
				Z71.9	Counseling, unspecified

‘Worries’ and ‘counseling’

Current and former center employees say the center is flouting those rules by entering diagnostic codes that reflect patients expressed “worries” and received “counseling.” Those codes ordinarily refer to concerns about a medical issue. The center uses the codes to reflect that patients expressed worries about the pandemic and received counseling for those concerns, the sources said.

The sources, two who work in administrative roles and the other a medical worker, said the center developed a progress note template that lists those two diagnoses. Staff is directed to use that prefilled note in virtually all cases, they say.

“You are doing... thousands upon thousands of vaccines and all the progress notes are exactly the same,” one administrative source said. “They are templated. All the claims are going in with the exact same diagnosis.”

The medical worker said the staff is under immense pressure to comply with the directive.

“Whether or not they actually said they were worried or not, it does not make a difference,” said the medical worker source. “You still had to put it in to justify the (office) visit.”

Wilson said in an email that allegations the center directs staff to enter the codes, even if they do not apply, are “completely and utterly unfounded.”

Nine of the 13 sources who received vaccines at the center confirmed with their insurance carriers that the center used the “worries” and “counseling” codes, even though they did not express any concerns or receive any counseling.

“I didn’t say a word,” said Gregory Betts, 52, of Clarks Summit, an electronic health records specialist at the center who was vaccinated there in December. “The resident didn’t ask any questions other than the normal pleasantries. He didn’t even, after the fact, tell me that if I had symptoms to go on to the website. ... All he did was give me a jab. I was in the room less than 10 minutes.”

Kristine Rovinski, 57, of Peckville, Laura Burns, 49, of Clarks Green, Judith Ferraro, 52, and her daughter, Heather Bailey, 19, both of Clarks Summit, described similar experiences. The center billed their insurance companies \$171 or \$118.

“No one examined me,” said Rovinski, a registered nurse vaccinated Jan. 7. “He looked at my questionnaire and took my blood pressure and gave me the vaccine.”

Financial motives?

Rovinski said her insurance company’s allowed rate was \$126.05, which she must pay because she has not met her deductible.

Ferraro, a certified nurse practitioner, is responsible for \$76.15, while her daughter, a nursing student, has a \$109.36 bill.

“This is just wrong,” Ferraro said. “I really feel they are taking advantage of people and profiting off this.”

Burns and Betts said their claims are pending so they do not know yet if they will owe anything.

The center also charges an office visit for COVID-19 testing.

Candice Murphy, 36, of Moosic, who worked at the center’s dental clinic until December, said she was tested Oct. 24 and Nov. 18 after being exposed to a patient with COVID-19. The center required her to get a third test Dec. 1 because she had a slight cough.

Murphy said the staff member swabbed her nose on the first two visits and for the third, took her blood pressure and oxygen level. Her insurance was charged \$118 each time. She has no out-of-pocket expense because she met her deductible.

While Thomas-Hemak insists the center has patients’ best interest at heart, some question if its policy is financially motivated.

Providers not charging an office visit are paid only the government-set administration fee - for Medicare and Medicaid patients, the fee was \$16.34 for the first shot and \$28.39 for the second dose, which increased March 15 to \$40 per dose. The rate varies for private insurers.

The center gets that and the office visit

fee. As of March 15, it has vaccinated 22,832 people, Wilson said.

The center also bills Medicare and Medicaid. This year’s base office visit rate for facilities similar to it is \$176 for Medicare and \$194.60 for Medicaid. The rate varies by provider, so the center may get slightly more or less than that.

Thomas-Hemak insists money has nothing to do with the center’s policies, noting it’s a nonprofit agency. At the same time, she noted providers who are conducting “drive-by” clinics are likely suffering financially because the government reimbursement rate is so low that it does not cover the cost to administer the vaccine.

“We are never going to participate in a drive-by vaccination clinic,” she said. “It is outside of our mission and commitment to excellence. ... In addition to that, we could never afford to do it and do it well.”

Whether insurance companies will pay the claims remains unclear. Several patients said they filed appeals challenging the fees.

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield spokesman Anthony Masticriano said they are reviewing claims to ensure members get the care for which they are paying.

Cigna spokeswoman Courtney Nogas said the company “does not comment on active investigations.” Speaking generally, she said while billing for an office visit in conjunction with a vaccine may be appropriate in certain cases, “it generally is not the case with COVID vaccinations.”

Betts said he filed a complaint with the Pennsylvania Department of State and supplied a copy of a letter affirming an investigator was assigned to the case.

State Department of Health and state Insurance Department representatives said they cannot confirm if the departments are investigating.

An insurance department spokesperson said anyone with concerns or who wishes to file a complaint should contact the department at [www.insurance.pa.gov/Consumers/File a Complaint](http://www.insurance.pa.gov/Consumers/File%20a%20Complaint) or call 877-881-6388. For concerns or complaints regarding Medicare or Medicaid billing, contact the Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, by calling 1-800-HHS-TIPS or visit [TIPS.HHS.GOV](http://TIPS.HHS.GOV).

Contact the writer: [tbesecker@timeshamrock.com](mailto:tbesecker@timeshamrock.com); 570-348-9137; @tmbeseckerTT on Twitter.

Published March 24, 2021.

## ‘No light at the end of the tunnel’

### Parents seeking child care struggle with limited access, rising costs

By Joshua Byers

jbyers@tribdem.com

As Megan Garman's due date approached, she began making calls to several child care centers in the Johnstown area to get her daughter enrolled, but found herself signing up for waiting list after waiting list.

"It's very, very stressful," she said.

Garman began her search more than one year ago and is still waiting for a slot to open up. Thankfully, she said, a family member was able to fill in, but the working mother knows that's not a permanent solution.

Every few months, she calls the centers again to see if her family has moved up on the waiting lists and hopes for the best.

"It's like there's no light at the end of the tunnel," Garman said.

The Johnstown resident's story is not uncommon in Pennsylvania, which suffers from a lack of access and affordability for child care and early childhood education facilities.

There are more than 500,000 Pennsylvanian children under the age of 5 and about 300,000 infants and toddlers who need child care, according to advocacy group Start Strong PA. Roughly half in both categories are eligible for Child Care Works – a state subsidized program that provides low-income families with access to reliable, quality programs.

More than 80% of children under 5 are under-served, the group said. Infants and toddlers face a similar situation with about 85% under-served.

Additionally, Pre-K for PA, another advocacy group, reports that 60% of 170,000 eligible Pennsylvanian children don't have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.



#### ‘There’s a waiting list’

Garman said the stressful situation has caused her to consider quitting her job at Greater Johnstown Elementary School so she can take care of her daughter, which has left her feeling like she's "stuck between a rock and a hard place." The reason for the waiting lists, she's been told by area facilities, is a lack of employees.

Lisa Zayac, another Johnstown mother, is in a similar situation. Her 6-year-old, Jamison Gibson, is enrolled at a Learning Lamp facility downtown, and Zayac is expecting her second child in September.

Already having a child in a program doesn't guarantee a spot for her second child, though.

Zayac works for the kidney center DaVita and aims to keep working after giving birth. She wants her baby "nowhere else but The Learning Lamp."

"I have a lot of trust in them," she said. "They were great with my son."

Zayac spoke fondly about the provider and said the early childhood education agency prepared her son well for kindergarten. She considers the employees there family and still relies on the



PHOTO: JOHN RUCOSKY | JRUCOSKY@TRIBDEM.COM

Jeremy and Megan Garman pose for a photo with their daughter Hannah, 11 months, on June 8 outside their home in Johnstown's Roxbury section.

organization for after-school care. That quality of service is why she wants her newborn in the same facility, she said.

At the moment, Zayac hasn't found another option, but is on three waiting lists, just to be safe.

"Everywhere I've called, there's a waiting list for all of them," she said.

The situation is stressful for Zayac, who added that, if she can't find additional child care, her family will be in trouble.

#### ‘Know what to do’

A possible solution that could benefit some Johnstown parents and others across the state is if more funding were committed to child care and early childhood education programs, such as Pre-K Counts and Head Start.

In 2020, Pennsylvania spent about \$334 million on pre-kindergarten, up by more than \$30 million from the previous year, according to a recent study by the National Institute for Early Education Research. But additional funding would go a long way toward providing access to high-quality programs, the study shows.

The National Institute for Early Education Research recommends a state and federal initiative to achieve that goal. In Pennsylvania, that would mean spending about \$250 million more per year for pre-k and another \$57 million for the Head Start program.

Gerald Zahorchak, former state secretary of education and current chairman of the

*Continued on next page*



education department at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, is in favor of a funding boost.

"The key is like many, many things," he said. "We know what to do. We just don't have the will as government to do what we know will work and ultimately will cause much more productivity for our nation, our state, this region, this county, our local areas."

### 'Absolutely essential'

The 2015 "Early Childhood Education" study completed by Sneha Elango, Jorge Luis Garcia and James J. Heckman, all of the University of Chicago, showed that early learning not only provides short-term gains, but also generates "success later in life, boosting outcomes such as education, employment, health and reduced criminal activity."

"Early childhood education is absolutely essential for our country to do well," Zahorchak said.

According to a fact sheet from Heckman's website, [www.heckmanequation.com](http://www.heckmanequation.com), children who had access to early childhood education programs have lasting IQ gains and boosts in socio-emotional skills.

"We have to do a much better job at developing, supporting, paying for the early childhood care centers and education centers," Zahorchak said.

Quality care has been shown to benefit working mothers who want to build skills and enter the workforce as well.

"It gives children from lower-income families the same chance as kids from a more fortunate family," Somerset mother Deana Platt said.

Her three children have been enrolled in the various offerings by Somerset County-



PHOTO: BY THOMAS SLUSSER | TSLUSSER@TRIBDEM.COM

Deana Platt, of Somerset, with her two sons Otto Platt (center), 5, and Alex Collins, 12, at Union Street Playground in Somerset Borough on Thursday, June 17, 2021.

based Tableland Services Inc., and her youngest is currently participating in Head Start.

"They have been very helpful," she said. "Not sure how I would have paid for those out of pocket at those times."

Platt's expenses cost her \$48 per month because of a state subsidy. She said that, without the assistance, she wouldn't be able to afford care and would be in a bind.

### 'A good foundation'

According to the 2018 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report shared by the United Way of the Laurel Highlands for Somerset County, child care for a family with two children in a program could cost more than \$1,100 per

month, based on figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"I am truly thankful for Tableland and all of their services," Platt said. "Between the housing, work and kid programs they offer, they have made a positive impact in our family's lives."

Anne Garrison, director of early childhood education at Tableland, described such programs as having a benefit that lasts a person's entire life.

"It gives the country a good foundation," she said.

Garrison said the programs offered by Tableland Services are free for families that qualify – based on income guidelines and funded by grants – and many are connected to area school districts.

However, that doesn't mean that every eligible family is taking advantage of the offerings. Garrison noted that more affluent families tend not to send their children to Head Start and other similar programs.

That doesn't change the fact that those individuals need exposure to other "youngsters" and how to be part of a group, she added.

### 'They aren't alone'

For those who chose an alternate route, there are in-home programs, such as nurse-family planning, Tableland's Family Center and Beginnings Inc.'s Parents as Teachers initiatives.

Parents, often referred to as a child's first teacher, are provided with skills to support their children's learning.

"It helps them understand they aren't alone," Beginnings Executive Director Paula Eppley-Newman said.

Parents as Teachers has been implemented in the area for more than a decade, serves children from birth to age 5 and is completely funded so parents don't have to pay. Eppley-Newman said the program has a curriculum, but is specific for the individuals.

"We're just there to support the family," she said.

Eppley-Newman said Beginnings serves about 100 families per month with Parents as Teachers.

Pennsylvania offers a free service to locate quality child care and early learning programs called COMPASS. For more information, visit [www.compass.state.pa.us/Compass.web/ProviderSearch](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/Compass.web/ProviderSearch), [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov) and [www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov).

*Joshua Byers is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter @Journo\_Josh.*

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# why newspapers?

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**7 in 10 Pennsylvania adults**  
have read a newspaper in the past week.

# POCONO RECORD

## ‘An extremely vulnerable position’

Mental health calls are common for police in the Poconos.  
Is there a better way to respond?

By Brian Myszkowski  
and  
Hannah Phillips  
Pocono Record

Pennsylvania State Police responded to a call about a possibly suicidal person standing on a Route 80 overpass in Bartonsville on Dec. 30.

The caller, 19-year-old Christian Hall, paced along the cleared road with a realistic-looking pellet gun in hand. He was in between counselors at the time, his family said, and in a crisis.

Officers trained in psychology and crisis intervention negotiated with Hall for about 90 minutes before they said Hall disobeyed orders to drop the gun. He approached them with his arms raised over his head, gun in hand, and troopers shot Hall three times, killing him.

Monroe County law enforcement is no stranger to mental health related crises. According to the Carbon Monroe Pike Mental Health and Developmental Services, police responded to more than 250 of these calls in 2020 alone.

“Every officer that’s out there on the road is, at some point, going to face somebody who’s having a mental health crisis,” said Chris Wagner, chief of the Pocono Mountain Regional Police Department.

It’s a reality that forces police into the role of the mental health professional — the counselor, the negotiator and de-escalator — with regularity.

While many of these interactions end without casualty, those that don’t are prompting law enforcement and mental health professionals to re-evaluate how officers respond to mental health crises.

This conversation comes at a time when viral videos of officer-involved shootings



Jessica Brady, left, a Stroudsburg High School student who organized a march for Christian Hall in Monroe County, hugs Fe Hall, Christian’s mother, in Philadelphia on Saturday, April 10, 2021.

have sparked widespread distrust of police and calls for reform, when pandemic-related isolation has reports of mental illness at an all-time high, and when Pennsylvania State Police face scrutiny for the fatal shooting of Christian Hall.

The Pocono Record spoke with mental health and law enforcement experts to find out how officers assume the role of the mental health professional and what alternatives might exist. Here’s what we learned.

### How police are trained to recognize mental illness

Officers are taught to recognize the signs and symptoms of a person’s mental state

in short, digestible segments. Ruth Moore, director of the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, called it “signs and symptoms for the layperson.”

“I found that people didn’t want an eight-hour training. It wasn’t working well,” Moore said. “People did not pay attention after the third or the fourth hour.”

Instead, she fits her lesson into a three-hour PowerPoint presentation, which she has taught to Pennsylvania State Police for the last three years. Among the techniques she teaches for de-escalation: Keep your voice low.

“Law enforcement are trained to have this powerful command, and that isn’t always the way it would work with

somebody with a mental illness,” she said. “They’ll think that you’re the aggressor. Then things can go wrong.”

In addition to police academy and field training, state law requires that officers undergo mental health training annually. How an agency fulfills that requirement, or if they pursue additional training, is largely up to their discretion, police chief Wagner said.

Wagner enlisted the help of Carbon Monroe Pike Mental Health and Developmental Services to train Pocono Mountain Regional Police in 2020.

In one exercise offered by MHDS, trainees are told to fill out a job application while a voice speaks to them through a pair of headphones.

“You’re worthless,” it says. “You need to kill yourself. No one likes you. Shut up. Look down.”

The voice might be incoherent and jumbled until one word comes out clearly, said Jennifer Williams, an administrator at MHDS. Other times, it makes clear demands as trainees try to carry out a routine task.

Exercises like this are aimed at helping officers understand why a person in crisis may not listen to an instruction the first time, or why they may allude to something the officers cannot see or hear. Moore’s and MHDS training also encompasses things like active listening, implicit bias and displaying empathy.

Officers aren’t evaluated upon completing MHDS training, Williams said, but they are expected to self-evaluate and ask questions when needed.

Wagner said officers who appear to struggle in training will go through the curriculum again, though this is rare. Many

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## Pocono Record continued

officers have post-secondary degrees, he said, and “this isn’t the type of training the average person can’t grasp.”

Even so, the scenarios taught during training don’t always mimic what officers encounter in the field. Moore said she gives cadets the tools and resources they need to be a successful de-escalator in times of crisis, but de-escalation isn’t always an option.

“You’re going in there to try to protect yourself and the individual. Unfortunately if there’s a threat on your life, then you have to go back to your basic training,” Moore said. “I don’t get into that part of it.”

### Dealing with mental health crises in the field

The heart of basic training is what Stroud Area Regional Police Lt. Scott Raymond calls the “Priority of Life pyramid.”

At the top of the pyramid is the hostage. Raymond said officers have a moral and ethical obligation to prioritize their safety first. Next is the private citizen, and third is the police themselves. The suspect falls at the very bottom.

It’s a clean and easy tool, but it’s riddled with gray space. Consider a person in a mental health crisis who is armed and threatening to hurt themselves.

“They’re not really bad guys, because they haven’t committed any crime,” Raymond said. “It’s kind of hard to put them in a category other than as a citizen — but at times, a suspect as well.”

In 2017, a 17-year-old boy placed a call to 911, then pulled out a handgun and pointed it at the police who responded. Standoffs like these put police in “an extremely vulnerable position,” Wagner said.

“When somebody is intending to commit suicide by cop, they’re forcing a police officer into a shoot/don’t shoot situation,” he said. “At the end of the day, that officer is trained to go home safely.”

In the case of the 17-year-old, officers didn’t shoot. The boy was taken into custody after a brief standoff, yelling for officers to kill him.

Not all standoffs are resolved as peacefully — the most recent being the case of Hall.

“Any officer, at any time, if they feel that their life or the lives of others are in immediate danger, has the authority to utilize force,” Wagner said. “Whatever that force may be.”



A low-resolution still frame image taken from footage released by the Monroe County District Attorney's Office via a virtual press conference held in March. The footage shows the events leading up to the officer-involved fatal shooting of 19-year-old Christian Hall (left, standing) on Dec. 30, 2020. The incident has prompted a closer look at how law enforcement responds to mental health crisis.

Even Moore said police encounters with potentially volatile and armed individuals are not the time to be looking at signs and symptoms: “This is the time where you have to go back to your basic training and decide what is the best thing to do.”

It’s often a split-second decision, Wagner said.

“No officer out there wants to take anybody’s life. As a matter of fact, that’s maybe one of the worst things that can happen to an officer,” Wagner said. “They have to live with that the rest of their life. No officer wants to have to live with that on their conscience.”

The consequences of these decisions are often final and tragic, but experts say a solution is within reach.

### Does de-escalation work?

As numerous law enforcement agencies across the country embrace training for mental health situations, those in the field of academics are still curious as to whether it works in the end.

Authors of the report “The Deafening Demand for De-escalation Training: A Systematic Review and Call for Evidence in Police Use of Force Reform” provided an extensive look into police use of force in various scenarios, including mental health crises.

The report suggests that while de-escalation training is “a promising practice” and a “valuable tool for individuals responding to incidents of crisis, aggression or violence,” research remains “relatively weak” as to its effectiveness.

“Recommendations that de-escalation must be used as a primary tool should await additional evidence regarding its effectiveness and any unintended consequences that may impact officer and public safety,” the report states in its conclusion.

The authors of the report note that police agencies need to gather and analyze data to evaluate changes in use of force related to policies and training. “To do otherwise could unnecessarily place officers and citizens at increased risk for injury or death,” they wrote.

### The future of policing

Holona Ochs, an associate professor in Lehigh University’s Department of Political Science, has been researching perspectives on policing throughout the Lehigh Valley over the past five years, interviewing over 100 officers and community members about a variety of topics, including mental health care and crisis intervention.

“Officers are telling us that they are getting more mental health calls; they anticipate getting even more of them,” she said. “They do understand that this has a lot to do with the closing of the state hospitals and the increasing sort of pressures in society. So they do understand it, but they don’t often feel well prepared to deal with it.”

They are not mental health professionals, Ochs said, and they are asking for additional support.

Raymond is among those officers

exploring alternative ways to respond to mental health crises. He gave a recent example of a man threatening to commit suicide. When Stroud Area Regional Police arrived at his house, he barred the door and threatened to shoot.

So, officers retreated, Raymond said. They referred the case to mental health professionals within the community instead.

“I can tell you 10 years ago, we probably would have kicked the guy’s door down to the ground,” Raymond said.

It’s the way conflicts like these have been handled for years, he said, and it isn’t working.

In a report using data from The Guardian’s publicly sourced database on lethal encounters with law enforcement, Ochs and her co-authors found that “collaborative teams are more likely to offer better assessment and treatment options than the current punitive responses.”

“This is a policy matter as much as it is a matter of police practice,” with law enforcement officers playing too many roles to effectively deal with mental health crises.

In the report, the authors state that movements like Defund the Police — which have been misinterpreted as an initiative to eliminate law enforcement funding completely — aim to redirect money to “social service workers who deal with domestic violence, homelessness, drug addiction, gang interventions, etc. ... so that de-escalation and public health experts can be first responders when these incidents happen.”

Throughout the pandemic, Ochs said in an interview, many individuals have experienced a variety of crises — mental, health, economic, and others — that compound and create a formidable problem, one that is not evenly distributed amongst the population. This can lead to a feeling of apprehension in trusting law enforcement, especially in incidents where a mental health crisis is underway, potentially leading to deadly results.

“And these are the impacts of which are not evenly distributed across the population — people who are of color watching people of color being repeatedly killed by police ... is very traumatizing, and more traumatizing to some than others,” Ochs said.

*Continued on next page*

## Pocono Record continued

Opening up mental care to all, as opposed to just populations of privilege, could prove to be an effective strategy in reducing police standoffs with patients suffering from a mental health crisis, Ochs said. While people with high-quality health care coverage and greater income can access mental health services, those in underprivileged communities and communities of color tend to have little to no access.

"It's the mental health professionals who need to be the first responders in those cases," Ochs said. "The police shouldn't be tasked with doing something that then they're not well trained for. It sets them up for failure."

Hall's family is launching the Christian J. Hall Foundation in hopes of embedding dedicated mental health professionals into law enforcement agencies, Hall's cousin Nicole Henriquez said.

"We believe that if a mobile crisis team was called out for Christian on that day, he would be alive," she said. "They were on the bridge for 90 minutes, but I believe that our psychologists would have waited 90 minutes more — or even five minutes

more, or found a different way to speak with him."

Among those on the bridge with Hall was a state trooper with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in clinical psychology, who attempted de-escalation tactics before Hall was shot. An officer with an undergraduate degree in psychology is not the same thing as a licensed medical professional, Henriquez said.

"We know that we can never have Christian back," she said. "I know. We just want to make sure that his death was not in vain."

Police can still play a valuable role in assisting in mental health crisis situations when they do happen, Ochs said, by providing "that safe space for mental health professionals to do the work that they do."

"Police are very good at setting up a perimeter and keeping a safe space. Why don't they do that? Let's have them do the thing that they're really good at," she noted, adding that when police serve to secure the situation while following the lead of mental health professionals can lead to better outcomes.

Even in situations like that of Christian Hall, who police assumed at the time had a firearm, a psychologist or other mental health worker could play an integral role to maintain safety for both the patient, the public and police by "slowing down the situation," as Ochs put it.

Building connections between the police and the communities they serve could also help to create a relationship that may de-escalate situations before they turn deadly.

Ochs recently was in a trust-building exercise featuring local police forces and community members that was hosted at a local Hispanic Center in the Lehigh Valley.

Police chiefs from across the region, including Wagner, attended the event, and many expressed an interest in learning about 911 alternatives — programs that focus more upon mental and behavioral health crises over crimes.

Ochs found at least 29 such programs operating across the country, "from Chicago to Flatbush to Washington, Eugene, Oregon, Denver, Portland ...

Houston," and more, while cities including Philadelphia are "toying around" with similar methods.

Utilizing mental health workers and involving them in these situations and other endeavors can greatly benefit the police, Ochs said, as standoff situations that turn deadly do, in fact, have a strong effect on those officers. Continued collaboration with those two fields could also help law enforcement officers deal with their own mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, or other conditions.

By working with a blended force of mental health professionals and law enforcement officers to evaluate these situations, the team can focus on prevention.

"What were the mistakes that were made? How do we prevent them from happening again? These are all things that should be done (since) we're going to keep confronting these things. And we really need to start trying to address prevention," Ochs said.

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## Schools track higher failure rate

### Hybrid, virtual classes taking toll on learning

**By Jarrad Hedes**

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The numbers tell the same story across the country. Changes to educational learning models have coincided with increased course failure rates, leaving districts looking for ways to get the students, many who are attending classes virtually, the help they need.

During a school board workshop Tuesday night, Palmerton Area School District administrators presented data showing the percentage of course failures for 2020-21 compared to the last several years.

The high school saw a jump from 7.49% of students failing at least one class in the first marking period in 2019-20 to 13.01% for the same marking period in 2020-21. Out of 1,665 grades given at the high school during the first marking period in 2019-20, 45 of them, or 2.7% were an "F." In 2020-21, 130, or 7.6%, out of 1,710 first marking period grades were an "F." The percentage of students failing at least one first marking period course rose from 2.71% to 9.8% over the past year at the Palmerton Junior High School, from 3% to 7.66% at Towamensing Elementary, from 2.03% to 10.41% at S.S. Palmer Elementary, and from 1.10% to 4.90% at the Parkside Education Center.

"We're certainly not alone in this endeavor," Jamie Schuler, Palmerton's assistant to the superintendent, said. "This has certainly been the most disruptive school year in the lives of these students."

Similar increases were seen in Jim Thorpe Area School District, where 732, or 18.9%, out of 3,862 courses were failed during the first marking period of 2020-21, compared to a 6.4% course failure rate for all of last year. The course failure rate went from 1.9% to 4.3% at L.B. Morris Elementary, and from 1.8% to 4.8% at the Penn-Kidder Campus.

Palmerton and Jim Thorpe both started the school year offering hybrid and full virtual educational models. On Jan. 4, Palmerton returned to a hybrid model after a month of full virtual learning, while Jim Thorpe will be full virtual through Jan. 19.

The Pennsylvania departments of Health and Education on Thursday districts advised districts to keep elementary students in, at a minimum, a hybrid learning model, even if the county they are located in has a substantial COVID-19 transmission level.

"The research on offering in-person instruction during COVID-19 continues to emerge," Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. "While it is impossible to eliminate the risk of disease transmission entirely within a school setting where community spread is present, recent studies have shown that when mitigation efforts, such as universal masking, physical distancing, and hand hygiene are followed, it may be safer for younger children, particularly elementary grade students, to return to in-person instruction."

The Times News has requested failure rate data from other area districts.

Lehigh Area School District responded to a Right To Know request in December stating it did not track failure rates.

"While there is an increase in failure rates, the numbers are certainly not as high as I was thinking they would be," Palmerton Board President Kathy Fallow said during Tuesday's board workshop. "I think with our students being more responsible about logging on and getting on to school, I think that will help to improve some things."

Moving students out of the classroom and behind a screen has taken its toll across the country.

### A nationwide issue

According to a study by the Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, the percentage of students with two or more F

marks increased from 6% to 11% in the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year compared to the first quarter of the 2019-2020 school year.

The Associated Press reported that Austin Independent School District in Texas had roughly 11,700 students failing at least one class by mid-October, a 70% jump from that time last year. Meanwhile, 46 percent of students in grades three through 12 in Wilson County Schools in North Carolina failed at least one class, which is more than double the rate from the same period in fall 2019.

At a board meeting in October, Williamsport Area School District had a course failure rate of 32% at the high school and 31% at the middle school through Oct. 20.

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, in conjunction with the National Education Association, polled more than 1,300 middle and high school students around the country. A 58 percent majority of students said they were doing well academically before the virus; and only 32 percent believe they are doing well currently.

"Their school work has suffered and they crave the lost, personal interaction with their teachers," GQRR said in its summary report from the study. "Over half attend virtual classes and many report diminished academic progress since the COVID outbreak. Nonetheless, most believe their teachers are doing the best they can. Three-quarters believe they are getting a good education, including 74 percent of those who attend online, full-time."

### Academic assistance

Palmerton surveyed its teachers about factors that contribute to failing grades. Tardiness to school or class made up 21.3% of responses, attendance issues 65.8%, failure to complete and/or submit assignments 73.7%, and lack of understanding instructional material 36.8%.

While data does show increased failure rates as a nationwide problem, local district

officials and staff aren't sitting idly by without attempting intervention.

Schuler said teachers, guidance counselors and administrators in Palmerton make daily phone calls and emails to students and families with attendance issues and academic concerns.

"Students are also given multiple opportunities to complete and submit assignments," she said. "Instructional materials are posted in Schoology, hard copies are provided to support online instruction and videos of instructional lessons are posted to Schoology."

Schedules in Palmerton were also adjusted to allow for additional instructional support sessions on Friday afternoons. Instructional assistants, meanwhile, provide support in break out rooms during online instruction.

"Student progress meetings continue to take place during hybrid and remote instructional models, and enrichment periods are provided at the high school during both hybrid and remote instruction," Schuler said.

Guidance counselors in the district have also been active providing virtual Second Step lessons, conducting home visits, meeting with students virtually, and meeting with instructional teams to assist with supporting students and families. A mentor from AmeriCorps is beginning a check-in program for students and programs.

Frankelli said the district would continue to pursue grant opportunities to support after school and summer intervention groups, and contracted mental health services.

The district also encourages families to have a space at home conducive to learning, make sure students are logging on at scheduled times and completing and submitting assignments, stay in communication with the school on a regular basis and ask teachers for help when students are struggling.

*Published Jan. 9, 2021.*

# Inmate Ignored

## Internal reports show Mackey told a CO he had a seizure

**By James Halpin**  
The Citizens' Voice

In the moments leading up to the deadly struggle that would claim Shaheen Mackey's life, he informed a correctional officer at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility that he had just experienced a seizure, according to internal documents obtained by The Citizens' Voice.

Incident reports prepared by correctional officers in the aftermath of the June 6, 2018, struggle that led to the death of the 41-year-old inmate say many of them believed Mackey was high on drugs because, as one officer described it, his "resistance was like that of someone on bath salts."

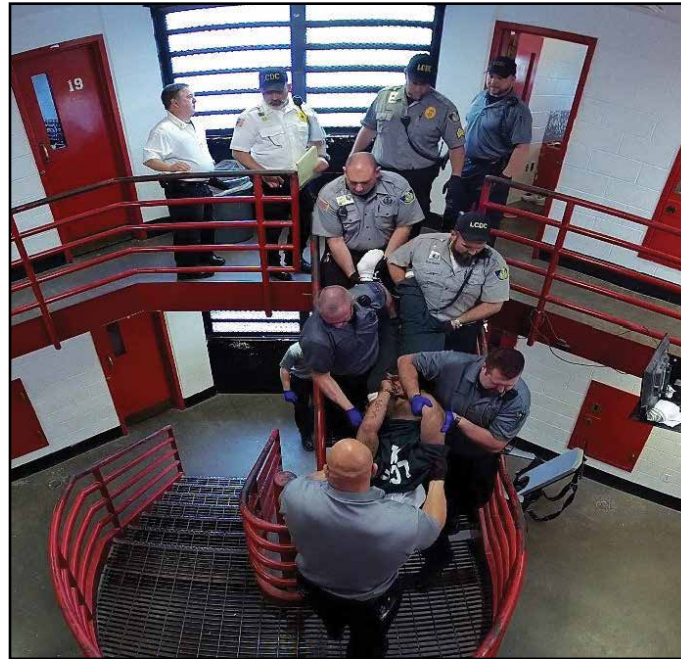
In fact, Mackey, who was being held on an alleged protection-from-abuse order violation, was not under the influence of drugs but had suffered from a seizure, according to attorneys at Dyller and Solomon Law, which represented his family in a lawsuit that resulted in a \$3 million settlement with Luzerne County.

The reports obtained by The Citizens' Voice show that medical officials at the Columbia County Prison, where Mackey was initially incarcerated, noted Mackey had been involved in "testing for seizures."

Two inmates also provided statements that they believed Mackey had been having a seizure. One of them reported Mackey's "eyes were in the back of his head and (he) was foaming out the mouth and shaking."

In a County Report of Extraordinary Occurrence, then-Capt. Frank Hacken wrote that officers initially responded to Mackey's cell at the request of his cellmate.

"(The cellmate's) request for assistance was determined to be due to Mackey's behavior in the cell, which (the cellmate) reported as follows," Hacken wrote. "Acting delusional, paranoid, scared and out of it, talking to self, more and more violent in



Luzerne County Correctional officers can be seen removing Shaheen Mackey from his cell on June 6, 2018.

demeanor, talking to things or people not there and at one point stated 'I just had a seizure,' screamed in a loud violent manner."

Mackey's cellmate wrote in a statement that Mackey told him he'd had a seizure and "didn't know where he was." The cellmate called for medical assistance and Mackey began spitting and screaming "as though he was arguing with himself," according to the statement.

The inmate described Mackey as becoming "violent and aggressive" as the incident progressed.

Another inmate who was working as a monitor said that after witnessing Mackey experience an apparent seizure, he heard the cellmate begin yelling that Mackey was becoming "extremely violent" and "ripping his own fingernails off."

The documents also show that the officer who initially responded to Mackey's cell for a medical situation was immediately told about his seizure.

"As this C/O waited for medical, inmate Mackey, Shaheen, stated he just had a seizure," Correctional Officer Joseph Katra wrote. "But this C/O Katra noticed inmate Mackey, Shaheen laying on his bunk picking at his fingernails."

Katra's account suggests that Mackey did not become confrontational until after his cellmate was released from the room.

Mackey then jumped down from the top bunk and stood up, prompting Katra to tell him to sit on the bunk so a nurse could check his vitals, the report says.

Mackey refused and approached Katra, who then instructed him to sit on the toilet, according to the report.

"He started pushing his way to the open door and possibly knocking over medical staff," Katra wrote. "This C/O Katra held inmate Mackey, Shaheen, back from running out of his cell by grabbing him by the shirt top and the back of his pants. This C/O then placed inmate Mackey, Shaheen onto the floor and called for an all available

(response). It took all this C/O Katra's strength to hold this inmate on the floor til help arrived. Inmate Mackey, Shaheen was fighting this C/O Katra the whole time by swinging his arms and kicking his legs and screaming the whole time."

Surveillance video obtained by The Citizens' Voice shows a squad of correctional officers rushed Mackey's cell. They handcuffed him, shackled his ankles and put a spit mask over his entire face, including his eyes.

Mackey was pinned in a restraint chair and repeatedly Tasered during an intense struggle that followed. He eventually went unconscious and officers performed CPR until he was taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, where he died two days later.

The Luzerne County Coroner's Office ruled Mackey died of heart failure in a death attributed to natural causes.

District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis determined that the officers who restrained and repeatedly Tasered Mackey did not break the law.

"This incident began with one inmate witness, who said he feared for his life, screaming for help because Mr. Mackey was violently attempting to chew and rip his fingernails off, ripping out his own hair and spitting, which was confirmed by another inmate," Salavantis said in a statement in August. "A C.O. responded with two medical assistants, but could not calm Mr. Mackey down or restrain him and in fact lost his radio in the process resulting in the cellmate running to the command center screaming that the C.O. needed help."

Luzerne County Council in June approved the \$3 million settlement with Mackey's family. Last week, the body declined to hire an independent consultant to review the case.

Contact the writer: jhalpin@citizensvoice.com; 570-821-2058

Published Sept. 13, 2020.



# Video surveillance shows prolonged struggle inside Luzerne County prison

By James Halpin  
The Citizens' Voice

Surveillance footage from inside the Luzerne County Correctional Facility shows officers rushing Shaheen Mackey's cell prior to a prolonged struggle that ultimately claimed his life.

Mackey, 41, of Berwick, died two days after the June 6, 2018, struggle that resulted in a \$3 million settlement between his family and Luzerne County.

Video previously released showed a swarm of correctional officers subduing Mackey by repeatedly stunning him while he was strapped in a restraint chair. Officers in the video can be heard speculating that he was under the influence of methamphetamine.

In fact, Mackey was not on any drugs and was in the midst of a seizure, according to his family's attorneys at Dyller and Solomon Law in Wilkes-Barre.

"You can see from this video that Mr. Mackey's medical emergency was mishandled from the very beginning," attorney Theron J. Solomon said. "There's been this false narrative floating around that he did something wrong at some point and this clears that up. At no point in any of this did Mr. Mackey do anything but beg for help from the staff at LCCF."

The newly released footage obtained by The Citizens' Voice, a Times-Shamrock newspaper, contains no audio but documents the moments leading up to the deadly struggle.

The video shows an inmate on the outside of Mackey's cell apparently conversing with Mackey's cellmate.

Around 6:09p.m., the inmate approaches



the cell and looks inside. A short time later, a correctional officer does the same.

The video shows an officer speaking through the door before two nurses go up the stairs to the second-tier cell, one of them carrying a medical cart.

The officer opens the door and allows the cellmate to exit prior to going inside the cell. Around 6:12p.m., Mackey is seen attempting to leave the cell several times, but the officer pulls him back inside.

A struggle then appears to begin inside the cell, prompting several other inmates to run over to look inside.

Seconds later, nine other correctional officers come running up the steps to Mackey's cell and begin restraining him on the cell floor.

Around 6:14p.m., an officer runs and gets

a restraint chair. Then at 6:19p.m., six officers carry Mackey out of his cell face-down, with his hands in cuffs and his ankles in shackles.

A white cloth also covers his entire face, including his eyes.

The officers carry Mackey down the stairs and strap him to the restraint chair before wheeling him to an adjacent corridor.

There, another struggle ensues during which at least 16 personnel watch or work to subdue Mackey, who was being held at the jail for an alleged violation of a protection-from-abuse order.

They eventually wheel him to an elevator, inside which his legs can be seen flailing and his face, completely covered by the mask, shakes.

At 6:27p.m. - 15 minutes after the struggle began - Mackey is brought into the first-floor lockup cage, where an officer begins filming with the handheld camera that recorded the previously released 23-minute-long clip.

In that footage, which does have audio, officers are heard repeatedly telling Mackey to calm down, comply and breathe.

Throughout the first several minutes of the video, Mackey can be seen straining and heard screaming and crying as correctional officers ask him what drugs he took.

"He's strong," one officer said. "I don't know what he's on. Probably meth. When they get pumped on meth they get power like this. Just make sure you control that other (expletive) hand."

The sound of stun guns firing repeatedly can be heard - the lawsuit alleges he was

shocked at least 20 times - before Mackey goes unconscious and nurses administer Narcan, a drug that can revive drug overdose patients.

According to the lawsuit, however, Mackey was not under the influence of any drugs.

Nurses and correctional officers initiated CPR while Mackey is still strapped to the restraint chair until an officer tells them Mackey needs to be removed.

A second clip from the restraint room, which the newspaper also obtained, shows Wilkes-Barre Fire Department personnel performing CPR on Mackey. At one point, one of them asks how long Mackey had been down.

Officers answer that it had been about 20-25 minutes.

"We might need to get him unhandcuffed here," one firefighter says. "You need to call 911 for me - somebody. Have them get an engine here, tell them it's a cardiac arrest, priority one."

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis investigated the incident and determined the involved officers did not break the law and were justified in their use of force.

Luzerne County Council in June approved the \$3 million settlement with Mackey's family. However, on Tuesday council voted against hiring an outside consultant to review the case.

County Manager David Pedri did not immediately return a message seeking comment Friday.

Contact the writer: jhalpin@citizensvoice.com; 570-821-2058.

Published Sept. 13, 2020.



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**PENNSYLVANIA NEWSPAPERS**  
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# Tribune-Review

## Zappala accused of abusing power

### Calls mount for DA to resign after he banned plea deals with Black lawyer who called his office racist

By Paula Reed Ward

Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr. is under fire after his email banning plea offers to a Black attorney who called his office “systematically racist” became public.

Elected officials and criminal justice advocates called for the resignation of the longtime prosecutor while at the same time a judge said he would no longer accept negotiated plea deals from Zappala’s office until the underlying issue is resolved.

Zappala has not offered any public response since the Tribune-Review on Wednesday published excerpts of the May 18 email sent to the supervisors in his office. Zappala declined to comment on that story.

In the email at the center of the outrage, Zappala told the deputy district attorneys that they were forbidden from offering any plea deals to attorney Milton Raiford, and that any withdrawal of charges against Raiford’s clients had to be approved by the front office.

“On May 13, we experienced another issue of unprofessional conduct in the courtroom of Judge (Anthony) Mariani, this one involving Attorney Milt Raiford,” it began. “The transcript will evidence what is presently considered a convoluted critical diatribe. You are being advised of what actions will be taken.”

Zappala’s email went on to say that effective immediately, “no plea offers are to be made.

“The cases may proceed on the information as filed, whether by general plea, nonjury or jury trial. Withdrawal of any

charges must be approved by the front office.”

A legal ethics expert said Zappala’s action is unethical and punishes Raiford’s clients for him expressing his own opinions. Local defense attorneys agreed.

“It’s wrong on so many levels and potentially sanctionable,” said Bruce Green, a law professor at Fordham University who runs its Louis Stein Center for Law and Ethics.

Raiford, who learned about the email from a reporter, was stunned.

“It’s numbing. It’s a vindictive thing to do. There’s no reason for it,” Raiford said. “I don’t know why he’s making my clients suffer because of something I said.”

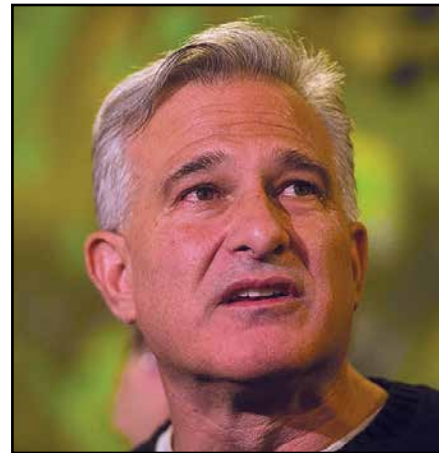
According to Raiford, the comments he made May 13 in Common Pleas Judge Anthony Mariani’s courtroom came as a result of frustration with what he sees as systemic racism in Pittsburgh.

“The winds of change are blowing in our country,” he told the Tribune-Review. “Where district attorneys across the country are finding ways of lessening the numbers of Black men in custody, it’s shortsighted for our DA not to make a statement of steps he’s going to take.”

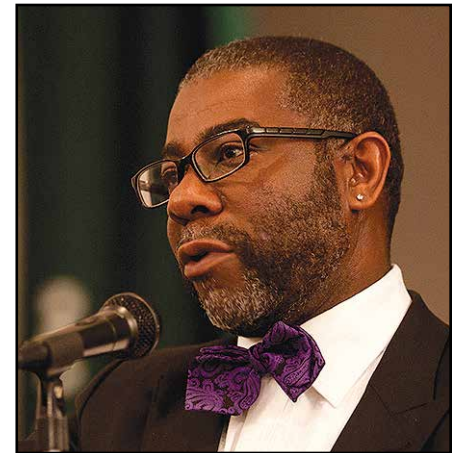
Raiford, who is 65 and grew up in Homewood, said his anguish goes beyond the prosecutor’s office. He practices law in Western Pennsylvania.

“I can’t tell you the depth of hurt in my spirit that our courthouse has been silent on it,” he said. “They’re not doing anything to assure our community of color that things are going to change.”

On May 13, Raiford was in Mariani’s



Attorney Milton Raiford, right, says he’s previously reached out to the office of Stephen A. Zappala Jr., left, to discuss systemic racism in the courts but got no response.



courtroom for a hearing in which his client pleaded guilty to aggravated assault in a 2019 stabbing. At the end of the hearing, Raiford asked the judge if he could put something on the record.

He then went on for what amounted to 20 transcribed pages about racism in the courts, the pandemic and how the court has responded to it.

“I just want to say that it is very disheartening that in this county, that we had no comment from the District Attorney’s Office, no comment from our administrative judge at this division, no comment from the Supreme Court, who seems like they are totally ignoring which way the wind is blowing nationally, that all of these people are being shot for nothing, all of these people are dying for nothing,” Raiford said, according to the transcript. “And we’re trying to get back to normal.”

At one point during the discussion, the judge asked Raiford if he believed his clients of color were offered worse plea deals because of their race.

Raiford responded, “Your honor, I think the DA’s office is systematically racist. And I think that the criminal justice system is systematically racist.”

Raiford specifically noted he was not

accusing the individual prosecutors on his current case of doing anything inappropriate.

In an interview about Zappala’s email, Raiford said he has asked — weeks and months before he made his comments in Mariani’s courtroom — to meet with Zappala to talk to him about these issues. He said he got no response.

“I’d think he’d know my heart by now, particularly since I’ve never done anything but support him.”

Still, Raiford, who once served as headmaster for Imani Christian Academy in Pittsburgh, cited studies that show Black people in Pittsburgh have worse outcomes in terms of health and earning potential and many Black people are moving away because of it.

“The worst part of it is the criminal justice system,” Raiford said.

By refusing to negotiate in good faith with Raiford, Zappala is punishing his clients, said Green, the Fordham law professor.

“It’s not equal treatment,” he said. “It’s undeniably harming the lawyer and their

*Continued on next page*



livelihood and deprives the clients of their right to counsel.”

There is legal precedent for a prosecutor being sanctioned for refusing to plea bargain with 15 separate defendants because he didn’t like their two defense attorneys.

The case, from 1976, resulted in the Oregon Supreme Court finding the behavior unethical and issuing a reprimand for the prosecutor.

Zappala could be subject to sanctions and so, too, could any of the prosecutors under him who follow his orders, Green said.

“If I were (Raiford), and I had a case, I would tell the judge no offer was made,” Green said. “I would move to disqualify the prosecutor’s office on the ground it was abusing its discretion.”

Frank Walker, a part of the Pittsburgh Black Lawyers Alliance, said Raiford’s criticism of the DA’s office is not wrong.

“There’s been no response from that office at all. There’s been movement in social justice across the country.”

But for Zappala to respond by stopping plea offers to Raiford’s clients, Walker said, is “terribly disappointing,” “totally

unprofessional” and “cowardly.”

“It shows the arrogance of his office that he can unilaterally take away due process.”

Pittsburgh attorney Turahn Jenkins, who ran against Zappa-la for district attorney in the 2019 Democratic primary, said Allegheny County has fallen woefully short in systemic reform.

“There’s been no advancement whatsoever.”

But, he continued, Zappala should not have taken Raiford’s comments so personally.

“Justice shouldn’t be predicated on your dislike for a particular individual,” Jenkins said.

On Wednesday, after learning about the email, Judge David R. Cashman told a prosecutor from the DA’s office that he would no longer accept any negotiated plea agreements from them.

In an interview, Cashman said Zappala’s emailed policy blatantly treats defendants differently based on who represents them.

“The defendant isn’t being treated for his crime but based on who he selects as his lawyer,” Cashman said. “That’s not the way it’s supposed to be done.

“It has nothing to do with their guilt or innocence.”

Cashman said he spoke with First Assistant District Attorney Rebecca Spangler and explained his position to her. She told him, Cashman said, that the office was reviewing Raiford’s previous cases to analyze how his clients had been treated.

Cashman said he felt he needed to take action.

“I can’t dictate the policy of that office. I can only express what I think is a good one or a bad one,” Cashman said. “I think it’s a bad one.”

Other criminal justice advocates are demanding an investigation into Zappala’s actions.

“It is unethical for a DA to order a blanket ban on offering plea deals to an individual attorney’s clients. It’s also a violation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution,” said Reggie Shuford, executive director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania.

Shuford said district attorneys are among the most powerful people in the criminal justice system, with the power to pick and

choose what charges to file.

“Indeed, retaliating against an attorney who complains about racism in the DA’s office by refusing to offer plea agreements to his clients is itself arguably evidence of bias,” Shuford said.

The ACLU is seeking an investigation by the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Attorney General.

University of Pittsburgh law professor and congressional candidate Jerry Dickinson called Zappala’s actions “deeply troubling.” He said the district attorney should resign.

Dickinson said Zappala’s actions could have a chilling effect not only on Raiford but other attorneys who might be fearful of possible retribution.

“Not only do we see the unethical dynamic playing out, and the unconstitutional aspect of it, there’s flagrant abuse of power that completely undermines the public trust,” he said. “It mandates the resignation.”

*Paula Reed Ward is a Tribune-Review staff writer.*

*Published June 3, 2021.*

# Zappala updates office policies

## *DA issues guidance on discrimination after having targeted lawyer*

**By Paula Reed Ward**

Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr. issued updated guidance to prosecutors in his office Sunday detailing how they should deal with allegations of discrimination.

A spokesman for the office said the new policy rescinds a previous one issued against defense attorney Milton Raiford. That policy forbade prosecutors from offering Raiford any plea agreements.

The latest memo outlining the updated policy was released on the DA’s office Facebook page on Monday.

It applies to all defense counsel, all defense counsel clients and all protected classes of individuals, spokesman Mike Manko wrote in an email.

The memo comes several days after Zappala came under fire following a report

by the Tribune-Review that he had authored a May 18 email forbidding plea agreements to Raiford, who described the DA’s office as “systematically racist” during a May 13 court hearing.

In the memo sent to prosecutors on Sunday, Zappala said “this office’s review of plea offers made to only one attorney and only about racism will not necessarily achieve the goals of consistency in treatment of all defendants or avoiding false claims of discrimination.”

Instead, Zappala wrote that if a defendant or their attorney raises an allegation of discrimination, a prosecutor should gather all facts and report, if necessary, to their supervisor.

“As usual, any plea offers must be based on evidence and all the surrounding circumstances. From now forward, if any attorney or unrepresented defendant raises concerns that the plea offer is treating the defendant differently because of the defendant’s protected status, then the assistant district attorney shall obtain all facts upon which the attorney or defendant

relies in making the assertion, including any cases that the attorney or defendant allege are comparable to the defendant’s case,” the letter said.

“The assistant district attorney shall investigate the facts and, if necessary, bring the matter to the attention of their supervising deputy district attorney or the front office for aid in the investigation and input on the appropriate plea offer,” the letter added.

Zappala said on Thursday that his policy prohibiting plea deals to Raiford, whom he did not name in Sunday’s memo, was “to ensure that this office makes consistent, evidence-based decisions, and avoids false claims of racism.”

The longtime district attorney also said in the Sunday letter that the claims of systemic racism made by Raiford during that May 13 hearing were the first time that he’d ever heard such an accusation.

Zappala asked the prosecutors in his office to make a written report to First Assistant District Attorney Rebecca Spangler whenever there is an allegation of

discrimination, as well as the outcome of the investigation, so the front office “can track and analyze the allegations in order to aid this office to maintain the consistency for which it strives.”

On Monday, Raiford said he doubts his comments were the first time Zappala heard allegations of systemic racism in Allegheny County.

“I make that argument just about everywhere. Systematic racism — the system starts with the encounter on the street between a police officer and a Black man,” Raiford said. “It’s revealing the heart of Stephen Zappala.”

Raiford called Zappala’s weekend memo “garbage,” adding, “I think it’s stonewalling the fact he violated my constitutional rights and the rights of my clients. The mule’s out of the barn, and he’s trying to protect himself. It changes absolutely nothing.”

Raiford added: “He has never apologized to me.”

*Paula Reed Ward is a Tribune-Review staff writer.*

*Published June 8, 2021.*

# THE MORNING CALL

## The untold story of how 1,000 acres of former Bethlehem Steel land became an economic powerhouse

By Anthony Salamone  
Of The Morning Call

When people think of south Bethlehem today — specifically the land once owned by Bethlehem Steel Corp. — thoughts invariably turn to entertainment.

People flock to ArtsQuest, the Wind Creek Bethlehem casino, an adjacent events center, hotel and retailers.

An industrial history museum and a Northampton Community College branch campus also have contributed to the transformation of about 200 acres between East Third Street and the Lehigh River — beneath the remnants of Bethlehem Steel's giant blast furnaces — a destination site for people in the Lehigh Valley and beyond.

But an untold story, at least an untold story, is the much larger, 1,600-acre portion of former Bethlehem Steel land, east of the Minsi Trail Bridge and along East Fourth Street and Route 412. It has become a giant economic engine that was resurrected from a brownfield site before the term "economic stimulus package" became politically fashionable.

"What has happened today is simply outstanding, and there is much more that is possible," said Curtis "Hank" Barnette, the former Bethlehem Steel chairman who has remained in the Lehigh Valley.

Twenty years ago this month, Lehigh Valley Industrial Park Inc. began the groundwork for what has become LVIP VII — 1,000 acres of development. Once part of the massive, 4.5-mile Bethlehem Steel campus, LVIP VII today has 32 business tenants employing some 4,200 workers.



PHOTOS: ASH BAILLOT

ABOVE: Lehigh Valley Industrial Park VII in Bethlehem turns 20 years old this year.

RIGHT: Kerry Wrobel, right, president and CEO of Lehigh Valley Industrial Park Inc., and Jeff Feather, left, an LVIP board member, are seen outside LVIP VII's offices in south Bethlehem.



The remaining portion, owned by Majestic Realty, houses giant warehouse operations that include Walmart.com and QVC.

The 20 years spent building LVIP VII, according to proponents, highlight an amazing accomplishment of infrastructure, marketing and more. The work is the culmination of a public-private partnership involving executives from Bethlehem Steel and its successors, businesses, local, state and federal officials, and perhaps most importantly, a nonprofit in LVIP. Its name, Bethlehem Commerce Center, remains today.

Together, they quietly and singlehandedly

"When I heard they had closed Bethlehem Steel, I thought, 'How do you do that? What do you do when it's in the middle of a town?'" asked June West, a University of Virginia business professor who uses the Bethlehem Steel transformation as a lesson in brownfield redevelopment.

Lehigh Valley's warehouse industry explosion catches New York Times' attention »

In an era when the Lehigh Valley has drawn national attention for its staggering growth in e-commerce warehousing, LVIP VII is showing how it's possible to reclaim the land for a project that benefits the regional economy.

What follows is the story of how LVIP VII went from brownfield to business park, based on excerpts of interviews from key players who lived through it.

### The prime mover: LVIP

Kerry A. Wrobel joined LVIP on June 4, 2001. A week later, Bethlehem Steel contacted the nonprofit about developing 300 acres along Route 412.

Former Bethlehem Steel executives, including Barnette, had a vision to preserve the company's historical importance with a National Museum of Industrial History. But that was a very small piece, and the challenge of redeveloping 1,600 acres of the site was the ultimate goal.

As a result, Bethlehem's elected officials approved a favorable zoning designation to help encourage development, and state lawmakers, though not with Bethlehem

saved the city from the brink of financial ruin.

When Bethlehem Steel went bankrupt and died, local and statewide leaders were faced with an enormous challenge: How does a community take nearly 20% of a city's land and revitalize it?

How does it replace such a significant job provider and tax revenue producer?

*Continued on next page*



## The Morning Call continued

Steel specifically in mind, passed legislation making it easier to put “brownfields” back into productive use.

Enter LVIP, a nonprofit formed ironically enough during a difficult period of several labor strikes that hit the steel industry, including Bethlehem. The Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce in May 1959 created Lehigh Valley Industrial Park Inc., which then opened its first park on about 225 acres north of Route 22 off Schoenersville Road.

LVIP eventually built six business parks — all on undeveloped, or “greenfield” land in Lehigh and Northampton counties.

This project — turning a brownfield into a revenue- and tax-generator — was starkly different, said Wrobel during a recent tour of LVIP VII. Not only did it involve demolishing buildings and cleaning up contaminated ground, Bethlehem Steel eventually would file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, leading to a successor company, International Steel Group, or ISG, to follow through on company officials’ pledges.

“There was certainly initial apprehension,” Wrobel, now LVIP’s president and chief executive officer. “Would businesses that had alternative options relocate onto a brownfield site?”

### First tenant, first private developer

Larry Alderfer doesn’t mince words.

“We’re here to feed the nation, not get accolades,” said Alderfer, president of United States Cold Storage, which operates a refrigerated warehouse in south Bethlehem.

But how it got there is possibly a microcosm of the massive LVIP VII project.

Cold Storage, based in Camden, New Jersey, was looking to gain a foothold in the Northeast when a company official heard of the redevelopment plans. The company became the first tenant of LVIP VII, opening in 2005, drawn there by the proximity to railroads and major highways.

Alderfer was the first employee of Cold Storage at LVIP VII, and it has since grown to about 200 workers.

“We were able to do that because of LVIP and Kerry’s work, and the state of Pennsylvania,” Alderfer said.

For example, improvements to Emery Street, where Cold Storage is located, had not received approvals but needed to be



PHOTOS: ASH BAILOT

**ABOVE and BELOW:** United States Cold Storage was the first business to build at the Lehigh Valley Industrial Park. It began operation in 2005.



completed before the company could open, he said.

“If not for [Wrobel] specifically, it wouldn’t have happened,” he said. “He made it happen.”

Meanwhile, Jim Petrucci, a New Jersey developer who had been drawn to the Lehigh Valley through other LVIP business parks, was attracted to LVIP VII. His entry in the late 1980s coincided about the time workers were completing the so-called, 34-mile “missing link” of Interstate 78 through the Lehigh Valley.

“One of our specialties is brownfields, and LVIP VII is the mother of all brownfield sites,” said Petrucci, CEO and founder of J.G. Petrucci Co. He has developed about a dozen parcels on the site, with businesses lured to the park, he said, because of the proximity to I-78, leading to New York City and other Northeast cities.

“And there’s history,” Petrucci said of Bethlehem Steel’s flagship mill, which forged gun barrels for battleships and steel girders for bridges and skyscrapers. “It wasn’t that there was just a dirty site; you

could make a case that it made an oversized impact on our World War II fortunes, and it was really wrapped around the community identity in the Lehigh Valley.”

### Mayors’ support

Three mayors served Bethlehem since the start of LVIP VII, and all played a role in the rebirth.

“I always felt the real story was the other 1,600 acres [including LVIP] ... and how the tax base has shored up Bethlehem’s budget,” said Don Cunningham, the city’s mayor from 1998 to 2004 and now president and CEO of Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corp. “Everybody talks about the [Wind Creek] casino host fees, which are significant, but if Bethlehem hadn’t redeveloped the 1,600 acres, the city and school district budgets would have been in a bad way.”

Scott Dunkelberger, a retired top administrator with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, recalled there was no road map on how to redevelop brownfield sites

a generation ago, and for-profit developers then saw them as providing low return on their investment.

“Everybody recognizes you’re not only removing the blight that’s a constant reminder of a steel mill disappearing, but it’s to create a new opportunity of rebirth,” Dunkelberger said. “They were risking their whole existence with everything they accomplished in the previous six parks. To see it now, it’s just amazing to me. It’s great stuff.”

Robert Donchez, whose final term as mayor will expire in January and who previously served 18 years on City Council, said the city faced challenging times financially.

“But when you look at it today, [Barnette] deserves a lot of credit,” Donchez said. “He could have put a fence up. ... They spent more than \$100 million tearing down, demolishing buildings, trying to clean up the site. He’s always been committed to Bethlehem, but Steel was not a developer. And LVIP has done a good job.”

### Opposition to costs, traffic

Not everything went smoothly, however, and some people thought the site could never be developed, given its size and environmental challenges, Barnette said.

“It proved to be just the contrary,” he said.

LVIP, with help from city, state and federal agencies, overcame obstacles such as environmental remediation. Others were concerned about the cost overhauling the roads to accommodate increased traffic.

For example, Northampton County Republicans and a group of taxpayers opposed then-Democratic Executive Glenn Reibman’s \$111 million bond in 2000 that included \$13 million earmarked for the construction of Commerce Center Boulevard at the industrial park.

During Bethlehem Steel’s operating days, the road network was rudimentary at best, and remaking the land into a business park required a major upgrade, proponents argued.

“I had a concern about the county going so far in debt with the \$111 million bond issue,” said J. Michael Dowd, a Republican who was early into his first term on council. Dowd later changed his vote.

“The more I thought about it, I looked at the opportunity,” he said. “What would

*Continued on next page*



## The Morning Call continued

have happened to Bethlehem Steel land if Northampton County had not made the investment?"

Bernie O'Hare, a Nazareth blogger, was among the taxpayers who led an unsuccessful lawsuit against the bond issue, arguing that public money shouldn't be used for private purposes.

"Did it generate jobs?" O'Hare asked. "Eventually, after a very, very long period of time. Was it worth the investment? I'd say no."

But those benefits are now being realized, Reibman said.

"I always consider Commerce Center Boulevard the greatest economic development project in the Lehigh Valley. And we said it would take about 20 years [for the benefits of LVIP VII]," Reibman said.

While one road — a major spine route inside LVIP VII that provides access to nearly all the businesses — created political controversy, leaders of two adjacent communities remain concerned about other streets.

Priscilla deLeon, a longtime Lower Saucon Township council member who is not seeking reelection this year, and Cathy Hartranft, manager of Hellertown, said trucks traveling in the area of the I-78 interchange sometime make their way along their streets.

"Overall LVIP VII has been a good neighbor," Hartranft said. "Some of our residents are employed at the various warehouses and many of the employees visit our local businesses. What we do deal with on a regular basis is tractor-trailers finding their way into our local roads, then not being able to maneuver. Somehow they make it into the borough."

Other trucks that exit LVIP VII on Easton Road have caused concern among residents, deLeon said.

Wrobel said LVIP officials believe the traffic generated by the companies using Easton Road is "minimal." He also said residents and municipal officials assumed early in the planning stages with Bethlehem Steel officials that there would be no traffic on Easton Road.

Former Mayor John Callahan (2004-14) said today's traffic pales in comparison with the past, when Route 412 was a two-lane road versus the four-lane highway expansion it underwent from I-78 heading into Bethlehem.



PHOTO: LEHIGH VALLEY DRONE/SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

Martin Tower, landmark of the Bethlehem Steel era, was imploded on May 19, 2019.

### Common knowledge?

Most people might not know that Bethlehem Steel's successor wanted LVIP to take over all its property, including the Martin Tower headquarters opened in 1972. The iconic, 21-story structure along Route 378 was imploded May 19, 2019.

It was a brief conversation, Wrobel recalled, with ISG leading the pitch to him and other officials, including Jeffrey P. Feather, who was then-LVIP chairperson.

"It was, 'OK, Bethlehem Steel just doesn't own 1,000 acres ... it would be great if we could get this to one person who would be responsible for these properties,'" Wrobel said.

LVIP officials demurred.

"We were like, it's bold of us to look at 1,000 acres," Wrobel said. "We know industrial parks; we know we can take the Bethlehem Commerce Center and create a world-class industrial park. We

don't have experience with large office towers. So we declined."

Feather remembered the ISG negotiator telling Scott V. Fainor, then a LVIP board member and a bank executive, that Martin Tower would make an impressive bank headquarters.

"You need a big doghouse if you want to run with the big dogs," Feather recalled the negotiator telling Fainor.

### The future

What's next for LVIP VII? Wrobel said its board wants to develop the south side of Route 412. Wrobel sees a mix of commercial and retail development, though prospects have slowed since the pandemic.

Feather, now a board member, said the Route 412 project "will be done tastefully" with a goal of securing leases to provide LVIP with income. Elsewhere along Route 412, a planned Walmart Supercenter inside Commerce Center Boulevard abruptly got

## LVIP VII BY THE NUMBERS

- **Size:** 1,000 acres
- **Employers:** 32
- **Employees:** more than 4,200
- **Public investment:** \$44 million in grants, loans
- **Private investment:** \$530 million

*Source: Lehigh Valley Industrial Park*

canceled in 2017. But a Wawa convenience store has received city planning commission approval to be built on nearly 2 acres along Route 412 occupied by the shuttered Chris's Restaurant, a former hot spot for dining by steelworkers.

With net assets of about \$38 million cash and land — according to its most recent IRS reporting form, anything is seemingly possible for the industrial park board, a group of more than two dozen business, government and community leaders who guide the direction of the privately run nonprofit.

"LVIP VII was a great project for us," said Michael J. Gausling, the current chairperson, noting the organization had \$3.8 million in net assets around 2001. "We hope to continue to do difficult projects that bring manufacturers and jobs."

Wrobel said LVIP's office building and a flex industrial building — both on LVIP VII — make up about one-third of its net worth.

Some tenants are expanding, including Reeb Millwork, a longtime distributor of building materials, Cigars International, and Ecopax, which makes recyclable products used by the food industry.

Another tenant, Bowery Farming, an indoor, vertical farming company, is scheduled to move into LVIP VII in about six months. "Our latest project might be the punctuation of LVIP VII," Petrucci said of Bowery Farms.

"Now we are going to be growing vegetables," he said, on land where I-beams and other structural steel products were once forged.

*Morning Call reporter Anthony Salamone can be reached at [asalamone@mcall.com](mailto:asalamone@mcall.com).*

*Published June 3, 2021.*



# Mountaintop Eagle

## Police chief contract extended as supervisors respond to public outcry

By Nicole Fay Barr

A large crowd gathered, bearing freezing temperatures on one of the last days of the year, to demand that their adored police chief be retained in 2021. The love was felt for Royce Engler as signs were hoisted high and chants of "Keep the Chief" were shouted.

When the board of supervisors held their Zoom meeting a few minutes later, the crowd turned out in that format too, and, instead of the usual three or four residents in attendance, the meeting had 120 people ready to cheer or jeer.

A unanimous vote was then held to extend Engler's contract until Dec. 31, 2021, giving him a three-percent raise and other benefits. The rally attendees hailed for joy, sounding like Times Square on a typical New Year's Eve.

The crowd didn't go off quietly, however, but proceeded to question supervisors for the next hour about why it was rumored the contract would not be extended. The answers given were few and insufficient.

The public uproar started on Dec. 23 when word hit social media that Engler had been working without a contract for a year and that some supervisors planned to let him go.

Word circulated fast and the result was unwavering support for Engler, residents calling him a treasure and an asset to the community, many expressing dismay that the supervisors would consider removing him.

Within a day of being posted, an online petition to retain Engler was signed by nearly 2,000 people. "Save the Chief" signs were put on lawns and a billboard was erected with the same sentiment.

Engler related then that he was grateful and overwhelmed by the community support. When the vote was taken to extend his contract, he noted that he was thankful and that he would accept the agreement.

A circus of sounds and confusion then overtook the Zoom meeting as dozens in attendance kept "unmuting" their profiles, allowing the noise from their private conversations to infiltrate the meeting. Dozens more were logged on from the municipal building parking lot where chanting and cheering was heard.

Township Secretary Pamela Heard handled the situation admirably, working hard to allow each resident who wanted to speak, the chance to do so.



**ENGLER CONTRACT RENEWED-** The Wright Township Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to extend the contract of Police Chief Royce Engler following a week of speculation that the chief's job was in jeopardy. The community was outraged as well over 100 people gathered to support Engler in the parking lot of the municipal building as the board held a Zoom meeting Dec. 30. **BELOW:** Shown with Chief Engler, at left, are supporters JJ Pavlick and Alycia Pavlick.



A television news personality jumped on for a sound bite for his 5:30 show, asking what changed from the previous week to make supervisors agreeable to signing back on with Engler. Solicitor Jack Dean stated that nothing had changed and that the Internet was full of "false rumors."

Resident Brad Kotarsky asked why those rumors weren't addressed by the board right away, rather than allowing the whole community to be upset for a week to the point of organizing a rally. He wasn't given a clear answer.

Another resident, Dorothy Petersen, asked what took so

long for the contract to be renewed and was told by Dean about the lengthy process of negotiating. Addressing daily newspaper reports of one unnamed supervisor telling Engler his contract wasn't going to be renewed, she asked who that person was.

No supervisors spoke. Petersen then asked Matthew Howton if he was the one and, each time she asked, he stated that he couldn't hear the question. Dean interjected that he shouldn't answer anyway, as that comprised of "personnel issues."

Others asked if a private meeting between Howton, Michael Marshall, and Colleen Macko had taken place to make the decision to oust Engler, as supervisors Donald Zampetti and Louis Welebob Jr. had earlier said they knew nothing of the plans.

Again, the supervisors remained quiet and Dean related that he "vehemently disagrees" that any private meeting happened.

Petersen advised the board to start working on Engler's 2022 contract now, since the new one took a year to develop. She was told by Dean, "Let's toast to the new year first."

*Published Jan. 6, 2021.*

# Police misconduct database now active in Pennsylvania

## An officer's 'red flags' will now be known to all police departments

**By Rob Taylor Jr.**  
Courier Staff Writer

Was Michael Rosfeld fired from the University of Pittsburgh police department? Or did he resign?

Either way, what is clear is that Rosfeld, while employed by Pitt as a campus officer, was suspended by the university's police department in December 2017 after he arrested three people following a scuffle at an Oakland bar. There were discrepancies as to what Rosfeld said occurred on that night and what surveillance video of the incident actually showed.

"Officer Rosfeld clearly had a pattern of issues in the previous police department that he worked for," state Rep. Austin Davis voiced during an interview with Lynne Hayes-Freeland on KDKA Radio (100.1 FM, 1020 AM) on July 15. If there had been a statewide police misconduct database three years ago when Rosfeld was hired by the East Pittsburgh Police Department, Rep. Davis said, "they most likely would not have hired him and Antwon Rose may still be alive today."

Today, it's state law. Every police department in Pennsylvania must refer to a newly-created police misconduct database prior to hiring any police officer, which alerts the department of that officer's prior incidents deemed questionable or controversial. Examples include excessive force, sexual abuse and misconduct, theft, discrimination and dishonest actions.

The legislation was signed by Gov. Tom Wolf last year, and on July 14, the database was officially up and running.

"Police and community agree that



Michelle Kenney, mother of the late Antwon Rose II, speaks during a July 14 news conference announcing the implementation of Pennsylvania's new police misconduct database. It's something Kenney, whose son was killed by a police officer with a checkered professional background, has been wanting for years. Also pictured are Attorney General Josh Shapiro, left, and state Rep. Austin Davis.

officers with a pattern of misconduct do not make our community safer," said state Attorney General Josh Shapiro, who fought for the database. "They should not be allowed to go from department to department. Misconduct records need to follow those officers."

The East Pittsburgh Police Department is no more, disbanded following the controversial police shooting of Rose, who was almost 18 years old when he was gunned down by Rosfeld. It was Rosfeld's first day on the job. Rose exited the car

Rosfeld had pulled over and was running away from Rosfeld when Rosfeld shot Rose three times on June 19, 2018.

Officers with a checkered past getting hired at a different police department is nothing new in Pennsylvania. Robert Gowans, who, like Rosfeld, is White, shot and killed Romir Talley, who was Black, while serving as a Wilkesburg police officer in 2019. Talley's family and supporters contend the shooting was unjustified, while Wilkesburg police said Talley fired a shot first at the responding

officers. The shooting is still under investigation, but Gowans was able to secure a job as an officer for the Penn Hills police department in May.

It's unclear if the Penn Hills police department was aware of the controversy surrounding Gowans when the department hired him, but when area community leaders learned of Gowans' hiring by Penn Hills police, it led to a backlash against Penn Hills city leaders. Those leaders, in turn, then fired Gowans.

"We're in a profession where there's a lot of power that's invested in us from the community, and every day you're put in a position where you can help change a life, save a life or take a life," Pittsburgh Chief of Police Scott Schubert said, standing in solidarity at the July 14 news conference with Shapiro, state Reps. Davis, Ed Gainey and Sara Innamorato, and Michelle Kenney, mother of Antwon Rose II. "It's something you can't take lightly, so we need to make sure we have the right people in those communities."

Chief Schubert added that the Pittsburgh Police unquestionably "wanted to be a part of this. It's long overdue. To be quite frank, this should have been done years ago. There's no chief that's frustrated more than when somebody retires before you can terminate them, and the lack of being able to share information with other police departments for fear of liability. This takes that all off the table."

The police misconduct database is not available to the public, Shapiro said. But police departments will now be held accountable for the hiring decisions they

*Continued on next page*



make, especially pertaining to officers who have proverbial "red flags" on their records.

"The public can have more trust in the people who are here to protect them," Shapiro said. "...At a time when too many departments are short-staffed, this is especially as important as ever, as they now look to hire more officers. We believe that this database will save lives."

Pennsylvania's police misconduct records were labeled as "mostly closed" in an Associated Press report from May which investigated the records for each state. Seventeen additional states' misconduct records were labeled as "mostly closed," 16 states were labeled as "restricted," and 15 states, including neighboring Ohio,

were labeled as "mostly public."

Getting to the point of having a police misconduct database become legislation in Pennsylvania, a state with a Republican-controlled House and Senate, was called "groundbreaking" by Rep. Gainey.

"Five years ago, would you have believed it?" he added.

But following the death of Rose, Rep. Davis said he and his fellow representatives were determined to "fight to change the laws" pertaining to police misconduct and overall police reform in the state. "Out of that activism came this database. It is a deposit in the bank of justice, a down payment on a more equitable and just society and better

policing system for all Pennsylvanians," said Rep. Davis, who was raised in the same Mon Valley area as Rose.

Kenney never asked to be thrust into the spotlight, never thought there would be a day that her son would be taken from her by a police officer. As she watched Rosfeld be cleared of all charges in the death of her son in March 2019, Rep. Gainey applauded Kenney for her ability to continue fighting for police reform and accountability.

"Michelle, I don't know how you do it," he said to her at the news conference. "A mom who lost a son, her activism steady talking to the A.G. (Attorney General) to make sure that something like this

happens...I told Michelle before; we didn't bury Antwon, we planted him."

Kenney said at the news conference she was adamant that the police misconduct database would be mandatory for all police departments in the state.

"Any police chief who looks on that database on a new hire knows exactly what they are getting, which makes a difference in the community," she said. "We will no longer have to worry about an officer being relocated into your neighborhood when you know that he took a life in the neighborhood next to yours. ...What is important to me is that no other family has to experience this pain."

*Published July 21, 2021.*

Newspapers are the most trusted source of news and information among all age groups.<sup>1</sup>

# Millennials

Millennials rank newspapers as **the most trusted source** of news and information.<sup>1</sup>

They prefer to **get their news by reading** versus watching it on television.<sup>2</sup>

**Millennials love the next big thing.**

They are drawn to trendy coffee shops, restaurants and the latest in technology.<sup>3</sup>

**89% of millennials trust recommendations from friends and family** more than claims by the brand.<sup>4</sup>

Millennials are **masters in the art of multi-tasking**. They digest mass quantities of information at a time.<sup>5</sup>



65% of millennials  
**trust paid news and information**  
more than free media.<sup>1</sup>

# How did they do it?

## Walberg credits flexibility of independent pharmacy, teams of employees and volunteers for delivering 37K vaccines

**By Caleb Stright**

cstright@recordargusnews.com

On Jan. 22, when Bretton Walberg received his first shipment of 2,000 COVID-19 vaccines, he admits he knew very little about putting together a mass vaccination clinic.

But that next day, his Walberg Family Pharmacies team vaccinated 1,000 people in Greenville. That was 36,000 shots ago. How's he done it?

Being able to be nimble and flexible is key, he said. As an independent pharmacy chain, he can move and adapt quickly.

There's that and what people call his well-oiled machine — a team of flexible, paid employees and motivated volunteers.

"I look out here, and I see my father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, sister-in-law," Walberg said at Thursday's clinic at Thiel College's Passavant Center. Family — including his wife, Stacey, who is a big part of the operation, and their two sons — is an important component, but needing a large number of people trained in medicine, he's had retired doctors, nurses and pharmacists reach out to offer a hand.

"You need help, we'll come help," said Dr. Janet Segall, who worked for 27 years in Greenville as an OB/GYN. She's one of many true, unpaid volunteers, offering their time and expertise to vaccinate their neighbors.

"I want to see people vaccinated," she said. "I want people to stay healthy and for life to get back to normal."

"I'm here because we have a big need for immunizations," said Sam Dailey, a retired, long-time local pharmacist. "And no one wants to be wearing a mask, do they?"

Some of the retired and current professionals are administering shots, others are filling syringes — which is one way that Walberg's nimbleness and flexibility comes in handy.

Call him the Henry Ford of vaccinations, but instead of an assembly line for Model Ts, Walberg's got the vaccination process down to a series of stations.

At Thiel College's Passavant Center Thursday, he had a table set up out front, where patients were greeted by



PHOTOS BY CALEB STRIGHT/R-A

Retired and active medical professionals (from left) Marcie Tulip, Bretton Walberg, Janet Segall, Russ Lauffer and Randy Clark load syringes with Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine Thursday at Thiel College's Passavant Center.

friendly faces in blue Walberg shirts and could sign in and print out their paperwork; they'd walk down the aisle of the auditorium like so many local graduates before, where employees and volunteers at laptops finished up the pre-shot process; and the patient would then make one last stop, where they get their shot.

Another station patients may not notice is where a big chunk of the innovation comes in.

Policies at many larger, corporate hospitals and pharmacies require that the vaccine be used within minutes of being drawn from its vial.

Shot maker Pfizer's guidance, though, is that it's good for six hours. So, Walberg has a station where a second set of trained medical professionals and retirees load the syringes.

That leaves one less thing for the eight to 12 people giving the shots to do and speeds up the process. It's

especially helpful to meet the rush once a vaccination event opens its doors.

Team members get there an hour or more before the doors open to fill syringes. For Thursday's clinic — during which Team Walberg administered more than 1,500 shots — they had 375 syringes ready to go before the first patient walked in.

Kylee Lewis, Walberg's clinical care coordinator, said preloading syringes has been an important key to the volume they're tackling. While other places are vaccinating a couple hundred per week, the Walberg team is vaccinating thousands per event.

"And it's something we can scale up and down, if we need to," said Matt Shellenbarger, Walberg director of pharmacy operations. In addition to the volunteers, Walberg credits dedicated, flexible employees, many of

*Continued on next page*



## The Record-Argus continued

whom come in on days off because they care so much about the work.

"I think it's rewarding for them," Stacey Walberg said of the chance to help people connect with a life-saving vaccine. "It's not something you see every day."

But Walberg and his family, too, are putting in extra hours. On top of the everyday work of running 11 pharmacies, they're putting in long days running clinics, on weekdays and weekends. In addition to leading a growing company and organizing the logistics of multiple clinics per week, Walberg spends a lot of his time at the events filling syringes and greeting patients as they find their way from station to station.

Although it's been a long few weeks, he wasn't complaining Thursday.

"It's part of being a businessperson — you don't have a lot of days off," he said. "And I love what I do. When I go home at night, I'm not sitting down and watching TV, I'm reading about pharmacy stuff."

Another step that he's taken that a corporate operation likely wouldn't, is that for the 37,000 shots delivered so far at clinics, he hasn't been reimbursed.

The data on the vaccinations has been submitted to the Pa. Department of Health, but the Walberg team still has a lot of work ahead of it to submit the info needed for reimbursement.

"We just want to get shots in people's arms here," he said. "We just want to get them in and out." Thursday's event was Walberg's last first-shot clinic for the time being.

Although the team has administered roughly 37,000 shots over a little more than nine weeks, the state



Walberg Family Pharmacies owner Bretton Walberg holds up a vial of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine Thursday at an event at Thiel College's Passavant Center.

announced last week that it would no longer — at least temporarily — be sending doses to most independent pharmacies, like Walberg's.

It's a move that Harrisburg says will spread the reach of the vaccine by focusing on roughly 250 larger pharmacies, and speed up its delivery.

The state has faced criticism for the pace of its vaccination effort, and considering Walberg's success and efficiency, he doesn't understand why the state wouldn't let him and his team continue to put their skills, knowledge and experience to use.

Thursday, a woman wheeled her 86-year-old mother, a New Castle resident, to the front of the auditorium and profusely thanked Walberg and his team for their efforts.

"That, right there, is the reason we do this," he said. "People that don't have access to the vaccine and need it. It shows you there's still people out there that need the vaccine."

While Walberg's won't be holding any more first-shot clinics for the time being, anyone that received a first shot through them will be scheduled for a second shot.

*Published March 26, 2021.*

## Life is full of emotion.



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# Changing the narrative

## Building a new generation of African American skilled trade workers for Philly's billion-dollar construction industry

### **ScoopUSA**

Philadelphia, PA

Philadelphia is The City of Brotherly Love - and major construction projects: \$2.5 billion proposed for a mixed-use development at the Navy Yards; at least 6 approved Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Districts - neighborhoods designated for enforced/precise building regulations on new construction (e.g., Strawberry Mansion, Queen Village, Powelton Village, Overbrook Farms, Roxborough and Wissahickon); and nearly 10,000 apartments under construction! Major construction in Philadelphia is a billion-dollar enterprise that employs thousands of people. Absent among this skills trade labor pool are indigenous African Americans who reside in areas where targeted major construction occurs.

Philly is an attractive draw for labor unions and construction companies from all over to build in the city. Unfortunately, those same labor unions and construction companies are notorious for not employing indigenous African American workers from the neighborhoods where construction is robust and creating gentrification of ethnic communities. Richard Allen New Generation (RANG), a designated Registered Community Organization (RCO) in Philly, is working hard to address this issue head-on.

RANG is an official 501(c)3 non-profit and RCO, its office is located at 1100 Fairmount Avenue, Suite One, Philadelphia, PA 19123. According to the RANG's website, "RCOs have been established by the city of Philadelphia to ensure that neighbors of proposed real estate developments are notified, and have opportunities to make an impact, concerning zoning decisions that may impact them."

RANG's board members include A. Bruce Crawley (Chairman), Billy Brown, and Algernon Hopkins - all former residents of the Richard Allen Public Housing Project in North Philadelphia. Crawley, a successful business leader, activist, and CEO/Founder of Millennium 3 Management recalls how he and childhood friend Billy Brown conceived the idea to develop RANG.

Crawley shared how he and Brown often get together with folks from the old neighborhood (Richard Allen Project); they talk to residents about what was going on and organize reunions to keep old and current residents



connected. "We started saying, we need to do more. People are wondering about what's going to happen to them with gentrification, and jobs are not forthcoming."

In 2020, local news outlet 6ABC/WPVI reported, "Over the last decade, some Philadelphia neighborhoods have experienced some of the most acute gentrifications the city and country have seen. For some business owners, it is practically the land of opportunity, as more white-collar residents, often homeowners with more disposable income, move into the neighborhood."

Gentrification disproportionately displaces African Americans from the neighborhoods where they grew up. The millions of dollars earned in construction and labor union income go to outliers from New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, etc., that employ mostly white male

construction and labor union employees. As a result, income opportunities skip over and push out indigenous minority residents from the gentrified neighborhoods. According to Payscale.com, the average pay for a construction worker in Philadelphia can range from \$18.50 to \$31.43 hourly. ZipRecruiter.com reports average union labor salaries can range from \$48,818 to \$100,000+ annually. Livable wages, indeed.

Why is this important? "Construction is a sector of the American economy that has historically been more resistant than most to calls for integration. That is a problem because the industry is a stepping stone to a solid middle-class life," reports PennLive.com, a statewide news outlet in Pennsylvania.

*Continued on next page*



## Scoop USA continued

Inspired by the urging of former Deputy Mayor for Public Engagement Dr. Nina Ahmad, Crawley, Brown, and other officials formed RANG as an official RCO. Then they sought to collaborate with builders/developers to help African American residents from the Richard Allen Project and surrounding community get trained and hired for the lucrative construction jobs that abound in Philadelphia. As an RCO city requirement, RANG had to communicate to city officials their preferred service area of coverage to get city approval.

"We wanted a footprint to go from Girard to Spring Garden (and) from Broad to 8th, which is essentially a neighborhood that has in its center in the (Richard Allen) Projects, but on the radius, it has about a block on each side." The RANG footprint primarily encompasses the triune neighborhoods within the 19121, 19122, and 19123 zip code communities –predominantly African American residents.

"We also found that the RCO can contract with developers to craft Community Benefits Agreements (CBA). Community Benefits Agreements result from negotiations between the RCO and the developer," Crawley. CBAs can hold construction developers contractually accountable to such things as local hiring agreements.

Once RANG was made and officially designated an RCO by the city, Crawley approached Post Brothers, a nationally recognized leader in innovative real-estate development. Crawley's inroads to Post Brothers proved successful. A CBA was proffered to hire residents from RANG's coverage area for a Post Brothers major construction project at 9th and Poplar Streets, a massive abandoned warehouse, now transformed into an elegant luxury apartment building: The Poplar.

"Over the years, we have interacted with a lot of RCOs and community organizations, and they are all a little bit different. But, the one thing that RANG brought to the table was this energy and the ability to act quickly," said Sarina Rose, Senior Vice President of Development/Post Brothers. Sarina mentioned that she shared in RANG's commitment and vision to "hire from zip codes around the project, and to help us penetrate that (indigenous ethnic) demographic."

Rose was transparent in admitting that her company did not have the depth of access to the indigenous qualified minority candidates that reside in the neighborhoods where her company has major real estate redevelopment projects. Her company had the genuine will and intent to hire locally, but there was a disconnect, and they needed help.

Rose shared, "So, if (indigenous minority candidates) are not in the periphery of construction, then we are not meeting them. So what RANG offered was this unique ability to know them, to know their parents, to know their kids, and to introduce them to us."

"RANG was open to, not just giving us contractors in the local area -which they also did- but they were on board with our idea that we could make a larger impact, quickly with the tools that we had."

Attracting residents to participate in RANG's training and employment endeavor wasn't a major challenge, the interest in good-paying jobs is always attractive to residents of distressed areas seeking work. But training the minority residents for skilled trades employment remains a challenge. Post Brothers stepped up to the plate to provide full scholarships to RANG's participants to attend trade skills training at a local technical college.

"RANG has partnered with JEVS (Jewish Education Services), our parent organization at Orleans Technical College, to offer pre-apprenticeship training to individuals from (RANG's) neighborhood group," said Christine Bronson, Director of Career Services-Orleans Technical College.

We were enthusiastic about engaging with RANG and Post Brothers on this RCO collaborative. Bronson stated, "We look to introduce minorities into an industry they normally struggle to get into, under apprenticeships and the building trades in the city of Philadelphia."

"We are training these pre-apprentices in basic electrical wiring, basic carpentry, and plumbing. I am very excited and happy about the outcomes," Bronson.

Over the last two years, RANG has recruited two cohorts of graduates (almost 50 individuals in total) that have completed their respective 8-10 week training program at Orleans Technical College. RANG graduates were hired to work on the Post Brothers' Poplar Street Apartment construction project, and they did extremely well.

"Bruce and I felt that we could start something meaningful, where people could get jobs," said Billy Brown, Co-Founder of RANG. Brown is proud of the socio-economic impact RANG is making in the lives of African American men and women that reside in RANG's coverage area, a swatch of the city where new construction development and gentrification are expanding.

Commenting on RANG's last two years of its collaboration with the Post Brothers and Orleans Technical College, Brown said "RANG has been very successful, I'm very proud to be the co-founder. At this particular time, in terms of jobs, we were able to bond with the developer (Post Brothers). All our people that got jobs, their training was free. They got (SEPTA transit) transpasses that were free" so that RANG participants could travel to-and-from training and the job site.

RANG also partnered with the Associated Builders Contractors to produce a job fair to introduce RANG graduates to other construction trade contractors for additional construction employment.

It should be noted that RANG's collaboration with Post Brothers involves non-union skills trade employment opportunities. Philly is a strong union metropolis. During the Poplar Apartments construction, local unions held picket protests outside the construction site. Eventually, the protests faded away. RANG's partnership with Post Brothers is a successful business model that matches construction developers with indigenous minority and female laborers from the very communities construction development is transforming.

Historically, unions are very homogeneous and blatant in their nepotism and hiring practices that have deliberately locked out minorities and women from lucrative construction employment, particularly the lock-out of African Americans. Proof of this is evident at any major construction project in the city. Tour any major construction site in the city, and you'll quickly notice that most of the construction workers are white males, and many of their vehicles have license plates from other states. This "disparity has roots in Jim Crow laws that came as a backlash to Reconstruction Era policies, and institutionalized discrimination in hiring, training, and access to capital that tended to lock African-Americans out of the field for generations," according to Pennlive.com.

Though the RANG/Post Brothers business model for indigenous neighborhood hiring might agitate union construction trade officials, it is a model that has proven successful. Underserved and underrepresented workers are being trained in lucrative skilled trade careers, and they get to participate in the construction redevelopment of distressed sections of the city. RANG presents a win-win for city officials, construction developers, and the minority citizens that have been historically ignored by trade unions. Hopefully, other construction developers (and union officials) will adopt similar partnerships with RCOs like RANG, to broadly scale the employment of qualified indigenous minority skills trade professionals.

To learn more information about RANG and its programs, activism, and services, email: [info@rang-rco.org](mailto:info@rang-rco.org) or call: 267-332-7264.

*Published on April 20, 2021.*

# UNITED WITH YOU



We look forward to brighter days ahead. Pennsylvania newspapers remain committed to serving the needs of a stronger, tighter and more connected community.

*Together we look to the future.*

## First they built relationships, then they built the 9/11 memorial

By Judy D.J. Ellich  
The Daily American

Forged out of tragedy and a collective need to preserve the memory of 40 heroes of United Airlines Flight 93, lifetime friendships have emerged and have spread and survived like a beautiful and intricate spider web made of steel.

They've shared heartbreak. They've shared the ups and downs of everyday life. They've shared good meals and sleepovers and watching each other's children grow into adults.

This is the story of two members of one of those families who lost a loved one traveling via United Airlines Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001, and a Somerset County resident who realized while planting trees on the memorial site years after the plane crashed there that her future would somehow be intertwined with the families of those 40 heroes — men and women who loved, laughed, yelled, cried and dreamed of a future that did not include a heroic role in the fabric of the American story.

But it did. It does.

The story of Flight 93 biggest message is the story of strength and friendship bringing out the best in people. It is still providing healing to a nation that even after 20 years is not healed, according to Ken Nacke, brother of Louis "Joey" Nacke II, who was one of the 40 on that fateful day.

### In the beginning, at Shanksville

When Patrick White arrived in Somerset County for the first time on Sept. 13, 2001, two days after his cousin, Joey, died on board Flight 93, he had no idea he would be returning numerous times during the next 20 years, along with his cousin, Ken, their family and the families of the other 39 heroes, not only to the memorial site but to lifelong friendships with many county residents.

"First we built relationships, then we built the memorial," Patrick said.

It was 10 years into creating and building the memorial when the Nacke cousins and Donna became acquainted.

Donna had joined a group of volunteers planting trees on the memorial site. It was 2011 and she had just moved to Shanksville from Pittsburgh.



PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE DAILY AMERICAN

Good friends are from left, Ken Nacke, Donna Gibbons and Patrick White. Their friendship began and was cemented at the Flight 93 Memorial. Ken and Patrick were brother and cousin with Joseph Nacke III, one of the 40 heroes who gave their lives to stop terrorists who had hijacked their plane and who planned to use it like a bomb against the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Gibbons felt a kindred with those who wanted to do something to keep those 40 heroes alive for future generations.

"I so wanted to become involved," she said. "So that was when the memorial had opened up to having people come and plant trees. That was the first year of planting trees."

Donna met Patrick through that first tree planting because he was part of the Friends of Flight 93 organization. A few years later, she met his cousin, Ken, in the same way.

"And then we just became close," she said. Her Nacke brothers.

The Nacke family felt that though Donna really did not have any connections with the memorial, the fact that she "cared so much about it" was inspiring.

"She has this personality and kindness that draws people to her," Ken said. "She is the kind of the people who were on Flight 93. She gives of herself and does not want anything in return."

Somerset County is loaded with these type of people, he said.

Ken drives three hours one way from Baltimore, Maryland, to Flight 93 National Memorial.

"It is harder to drive the three hours back to Baltimore than it is to leave Baltimore for the three-hour drive to Somerset County," Ken said.

When he sees the signs for Somerset County he said he feels "like I am coming home."

### Somerset County friends

All the families consider Somerset Coroner Wally Miller a good friend. Miller was at the site of the crash on Sept. 11, 2001, and has continued his relationship with the families over the last two decades.

"I have such respect for that man. We would not have what is out there right now if not for him," Ken said.

"In 2002, Wally said to the family members, 'You guys need to organize so your voices can be heard.'"

The families followed his advice. Families of Flight 93, Friends of Flight 93 became the fabric of the memorial.

For Ken, friendships with Somerset countians Dave McCall, Rick Flick and John Vogt and their families began over those first painful days in 2001.

"Dave McCall and his family opened up their home and their hearts just because they saw we were in need," he said. The Flick and Vogt families did the same."

When Ken, and often other members of his immediate family, come to town, they search out these families for a catch-up time at dinners.

"John's (Vogt) kids are almost the same age as my kids," Ken said.

He remembers driving with John to take his son, Donovan, to preschool on one of his visits to Somerset County. Donovan is now a junior in high school.

*Continued on next page*



## Daily American continued

"I don't know how I would have gotten through these 20 years without their respect, love and aspiration that has built our friendship," he said.

He holds these families in high esteem and although his friendship with Donna has not been as many years, he puts her right up there with them, he said.

Donna is considered a member of "the Nacke family."

### Ken and Patrick

Ken and Patrick have been part of everything since the beginning. Patrick, for example, is a member of Families of Flight 93, Friends of Flight 93, one of the 15 committee members who chose the design that visitors see every day when they enter the grounds at the Flight 93 National Memorial. White even worked behind the scenes to help secure the land where the memorial sits.

Pennsylvania state troopers salute as buses carrying family members arrive at the crash site of United Flight 93, in Shanksville on Sept. 17, 2001.

He, his family and their friends are the memory of the event that galvanized national pride and a united effort among some of the most unlikely individuals who had boarded a plane to go about their business not knowing they would be considered heroes as part of the proclaimed first battle won against terrorism on United States soil.

In the Nacke extended family, the words mother, father, brother, son, daughter, cousin, wife, husband, aunt, uncle, ambassador and friend are interchangeable.

Patrick was more like a brother to Joey than a cousin. Joey's younger brother, Ken, a police officer now for 33 years, has often come and shared time with White at family get-togethers and at the memorial over the past 20 years.

Neither one of them plan to stop.

On a recent visit, Ken's daughter told her dad as they stood in the memorial, "I see your handprint everywhere here."

At the beginning the relationships with the Flight 93 families and Somerset countians was pretty much formal.

"A hug and a handshake is the norm anymore," said Chuck Wagner, one of the first ambassadors at the crash site. He still is.

Over time the families and the ambassadors and volunteers like Donna began searching out each other on trips to the memorial and staying connected on social media through Facebook, conversations encompassing their lives with the 40 heroes and their lives now with their extended family — exchanging pictures, gossip and newly made memories while keeping their older memories alive.

"It is very fulfilling. The first years were very challenging. The temporary memorial was a very raw place with the elements and the weather," Wagner said.

Greeting visitors to the memorial and answering questions hasn't changed through the years for the ambassadors, he said. It is still needed.

He is considered a lifelong friend by the families of Flight 93.



Pennsylvania state troopers salute as buses carrying family members arrive at the crash site of United Flight 93, in Shanksville, on Sept. 17, 2001.

PHOTO PROVIDED  
TO THE DAILY AMERICAN

## The parallels

With the Nacke family members, the change in their relationships parallels the change at the memorial site, deepening and expanding.

In a way, those relationships reflect visitors' experiences at the memorial from the days of temporary wire fences adorned with notes with heartfelt writings to the tall white granite wall of names engraved with the individual passenger and crews' names and the heart-felt written notes placed at their base by awed visitors since its erection about a decade ago.

### Shared name

Patrick's son was named after his second cousin, Joey.

Joey was more like a brother to Patrick. On the exterior, the 42-year-old was rough and ready.

But in the inside, behind his smiling eyes: "He would put you in a headlock and say, 'I love you and I miss you,'" White said.

Ken aspires to be like his brother, Joey.

"I know I don't have the heart he had. He had a heart from an early age when his first impression was to be giving and understanding," he said.

Ken looks at the ambassadors such as the Wagners, volunteers and involved people such as Donna and Scott Gibson, and said that they are like his brother in a way.

"You can see their heart. They wear it on their sleeves," Ken said.

Last year, President Joseph Biden, then former vice president, known as "Joe or Joey," by friends and supporters, stopped by on Sept. 11 to lay a wreath at the memorial. While at the memorial, Biden, along with his wife, Jill, spent time with Patrick and his 12-year-old son. Among the things they discussed was the name, Joey, and the pride that comes with carrying on a name of someone special in the family. Patrick's son's middle name is "Joseph" in honor of his cousin.



PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE DAILY AMERICAN

Teresa Lamens writes a note on a memorial near the crash site of United Flight 93 in Shanksville on Dec. 11, 2001.

Biden and his wife, Jill, along with Vice President Kamala Harris will visit all three 9/11 memorial sites to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks and pay their respects to those killed that day, according to the Associated Press.

### Like brothers

For Donna, Patrick and Ken are family. She looks at them as her brothers, she said.

People ask Donna often if she had a family member on Flight 93 because of her passion for what the monument means to the American people now and in the future.

"I really care about keeping the stories of those 40 people alive," she said.

*Continued on next page*

## Daily American continued

That is the mission of the monument and the Friends of Flight 93, which resonated with her. Now she is president of the nonprofit Friends of Flight 93, taking over for Patrick over the last few years. Patrick chose her to be his successor and mentored her for a year before she took on the leadership position.

"You could say for a year we were very much attached at the hip from two different states," Donna said.

Since those first meetings, Donna and her husband, Scott, have befriended other members of the families of Flight 93, and several family members have stayed at their home when they visit the memorial over the years.

"That is the connection, because they see somebody who cares for them," she said. "My husband and I truly."

When she thinks of why she became involved in the project and how it has gripped her soul, she thinks back to the day of Sept. 11, 2001, and the days that followed.

"I felt so helpless. There was the sense of, 'What can I do, just as one person?'" Donna said.

Almost 10 years to the day later she was standing in a field at the memorial planting trees with almost 500 people when it came to her.

"This is the answer of what I can do," she said.

### Forever friends

A few years ago she facilitated a speakers series. Patrick and Ken were among her guest speakers.

"It was hard because it was almost like I'm talking to my brothers," she said. "That is how I think that connection is with them. They feel like my brothers."

Donna was honored at a recent Sept. 11 commemoration with the role of reading the names of the 40 individuals of Flight 93 who did not have a family member at the ceremony.

She stepped back so Ken could step in and read his brother's name.

"It felt wrong to read my brother's name without her," he said. He reached back and pulled her back up to the microphone and gave her a big hug and then read, "Louis 'Joey' Nacker II."

With his arms around her, Donna said it was all she could do not to have tears rolling down her face at that moment.

"You know," she said. "It was that connection."

### Sept. 11, 2001

On Tuesday morning, Sept. 11, 2001, four commercial airliners departing from airports on the East Coast were hijacked by proclaimed terrorists and used as weapons to strike targets on the ground.

After a delayed departure, that fourth airliner, United Airlines Flight 93 — carrying 33 passengers, seven crew members and four hijackers — departed Newark International Airport in New Jersey en route to San Francisco, California. Approximately 45 minutes into the flight, the plane changed course near Cleveland, Ohio, and was redirected southeast toward Washington, D.C.



An FBI agent looks over items left by family members of the victims of United Airlines Flight 93 as construction equipment sets idle at the point of impact in the background Sept. 17, 2001 in Shanksville.

PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE DAILY AMERICAN



PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE DAILY AMERICAN

Ken Nacker comfort Donna Gibbon, a friend who is family, as the names of the 40 heroes are read at a 9/11 Flight 93 commemoration.

The passengers had 30 minutes to learn what was happening through frantic phone calls from their loved ones, put together a plan, voted on it and executed it to thwart the terrorists' mission, which investigators believe was to use the plane as a weapon and strike and burn the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Members of the collective group stormed the cockpit to stop the terrorists as the plane flew over Somerset County. From the airplane's flight recording it appeared they were or had just overtaken the hijackers. They were trying to pull up the plane's nose when it crashed into a reclaimed coal strip mine near Shanksville.

It was 10:03 a.m. Sept. 11, 2001.

According to Patrick, who, with other family members,

was able to listen to the recording of the last minutes of those on Flight 93, Joey's voice could be heard on the flight recorder that is in the cockpit of a plane.

"What struck me is all the voices were so calm," Patrick said.

His cousin's DNA was later found in the cockpit's debris by investigators, he said.

"They gave their lives so we can continue to live our lives like it was Sept. 10, 2001," Patrick said.

### Twenty years

Patrick said that when he drives into Somerset County, many times a year watching the national memorial take shape, a homesickness feeling overcomes him.

Ken understands.

"Family is everything here. There is such respect," Ken said.

His cousin Patrick explained it this way: "I've learned there are so many more connections between us than we recognize. It is not just the bond of circumstances, but the bond to choose to act in those circumstances, that is the value of any relationship."

### September 2021

Since 9/11, White has visited the U.S. Capitol and walked through its halls, checked out the House and Senate chambers, looked at the artifacts and thought of what could have happened there if the terrorists would have been able to carry out their plan for United Flight 93 — the lost lives, lost artifacts, lost history, provoked national fear.

He has felt the closeness of family that includes Ken and Donna and of course, his cousin, Joey.

When White heard of the "riot" and the destruction at the Capitol on Jan. 6 in Washington, D.C., the lawyer wept ... for a long time.

*Published Sept. 7, 2021.*



# 2021 ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT

## EXCERPT

### Newspaper Industry Impacts State and Local Taxes, 2020

**TOTAL LOCAL AND  
STATE TAXES**  
*(Direct, Indirect and Induced)*



**SOCIAL INSURANCE TAX:**  
Employee and Employer Contribution

\$287,413



**TAX ON PRODUCTION AND IMPORTS:**  
Sales Tax, Property Tax, Motor Vehicle  
Licenses, Other Taxes and Special Assessments

\$35,344,830



**PERSONAL TAX:**  
Income Tax, Motor Vehicle Licenses, Property  
Taxes and Other Household Taxes

\$12,513,275



**CORPORATE PROFITS TAX**

\$3,662,656



**TOTAL**

**\$51,808,174**

*Source: Parker Philips using IMPLAN*

For more information about the PNA Economic Impact Report, visit [www.panewsmedia.org](http://www.panewsmedia.org).

# THE PUNXSUTAWNEY SPIRIT

## Virtual Groundhog Day will be 'substantial blow to economy'

By Ron Musselman  
Of The Spirit

PUNXSUTAWNEY — Katie Donald said the decision to make Groundhog Day a virtual event in February was not an easy one.

In the end, though, because of COVID-19 concerns, the executive director of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club said the Inner Circle had little choice but to ban guests for the annual prognostication by the world's most famous groundhog.

The virtual event will have a major impact on Punxsutawney businesses and Jefferson County, as well as a few surrounding counties.

"No one wants to make a decision that's going to financially hurt a business, or the economy or the community," Donald said Monday. "But the public standpoint of this just outweighed the financial implications of what having Groundhog Day would be."

Donald said it's tough to put a price tag on the loss of all the events surrounding Groundhog Day.

"It's a substantial blow to the economy, but we're not the only one in the world. It's really tough to say just how much because it's a multi-county related event," she said. "It will definitely be a tough and challenging year without having the income from Groundhog Day."

"The issue stems farther than Punxsutawney. The surrounding regions also rely on Groundhog Day for making money. We don't have a whole lot of places to stay in Jefferson County, so Indiana County and Clearfield County also see quite a bit of traction."

Donald said the Groundhog Club is trying to put a positive spin on the situation and circumstances.

"One thing we keep thinking is we got Groundhog Day 2020 in before all this (virus) happened, and that was a Saturday," Donald said. "Having a virtual Tuesday Groundhog Day (on Feb. 2, 2021) is a lot easier to swallow. The normal attendance on a Tuesday is smaller, just based upon people don't travel as much, kids are in school, except for in Punxsutawney."

"We're trying to look at the silver lining of things and see



Pictured is Gobbler's Knob, which will be mostly empty on Feb. 2, 2021, as the usual throng of Phil's Phanatics will not be allowed onto the grounds due to COVID-19 concerns.

how we can focus on celebrating Groundhog Day from afar and celebrate all over the world," Donald said.

Donald said very few people will be allowed to attend the event.

"It will be very, very limited, but those in the Groundhog Club and the members of the Inner Circle will be there," Donald said. "We're working on what forms of media will be permitted in."

"We are doing a live broadcast of the event online with PCN, so the live feed will still be available. But the overall

experience of Groundhog Day itself is not going to obviously be the same.

"The stage show generally starts at 3 a.m., but this year, we're going to be doing a pre-recorded bit for 45 minutes prior to the live trek and prognostication."

"From that point, once we get to 7 a.m., we'll cut to the actual live stage, and Phil and the Inner Circle will do the actual prognostication just like any other year."

*Published Dec. 7, 2020.*



# The power of reconnection

On Monday, Congressman Dwight Evans and Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester connected with activists in Wilmington, Delaware, and Philadelphia to discuss legislation to right a wrong.

**By Denise Clay-Murray**

If you're driving up Germantown Avenue from Center City, you've probably seen the Roosevelt Extension underpass in the city's Nicetown section.

It's a dark, foreboding looking place even in the daytime. While there is a vendor there that will sell you anything from clothing to box fans during the day, there's also trash and several homeless encampments, said Majeedah Rashid, CEO of the Nicetown Community Development Corporation.

"We try to address the issues with the homeless," she said. "But there's also short dumping and vandalism. It's a really unsafe looking area."

Nicotown CDC is attempting to create a sport park that would make that area a little less foreboding. It would include lights, as well as a place for children to play, a vending area, and other amenities.

It's the kind of project that Rashid hopes can get funding if the Reconnecting Communities Act becomes law.

"It wouldn't be just a destination for the community," she said. "It would also attract visitors, provide economic stimulation, and help repair the wound to the community. We hope that [the act] would provide resources that would then attract and allow us to leverage other resources."

Rashid was one of the community activists that talked with bill co-sponsors Philadelphia Congressman Dwight Evans and Delaware Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester, about the Reconnecting Communities Act. The \$3 billion act, which has already been passed by the House of Representatives, would fund projects like the Nicetown sport park, projects that would reconnect and revitalize neighborhoods divided by interstate highways.

On Monday, the two legislators did a whistle-stop tour



U.S. Reps. Dwight Evans (D-3rd District) and Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-Del.) join other lawmakers, leaders and stakeholders during Tuesday's roundtable discussion in Wilmington, Delaware.

PHOTO COURTESY OF REP. BLUNT ROCHESTER'S OFFICE

that began with a meeting of local officials and activists from Wilmington at the Chase Center on the Waterfront and ended with a gathering at the Crane Community Center on Vine Street in Philadelphia.

The hope is that the bill becomes a part of the Invest In America Act, a package of infrastructure bills being put together by the Biden administration in Washington, Blunt Rochester said.

Like it was for many of the people in attendance, the issue of highways and their impact on neighborhoods is a personal one, she said.

"I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress to ensure that whatever infrastructure package we pass includes this critical piece of legislation," Blunt Rochester said. "My family moved to the City of Wilmington in 1969, just a few short years after the completion of I-95. The impact of the interstate cutting through the heart of the city was evident back then and so many of the problems created or exacerbated by its construction persist to this day."

"It's time to put people before pavement and communities before cars," Evans said. "This federal

funding could help with things like removing or capping highways, or making other improvements in Philadelphia neighborhoods like Nicetown, Chinatown and the Delaware River waterfront area that have taken the biggest hit from highways."

The people involved in the roundtables told the Evans and Blunt Rochester stories about homes, businesses, churches and entire communities that were sacrificed on the altar of interstate travel.

"There were people whose homes were taken when the highway split the city," said Caren Turner, a longtime community activist in Wilmington. "There were people who were a part of the neighborhood that were gone after that. No one knows where they went."

But as it has become with most legislation in Washington, how this bill fares in the Senate will determine whether or not it ever becomes law.

Blunt Rochester thinks it has a chance.

"I'm cautiously optimistic," she said. "It has bipartisan support."

*Published July 16, 2021.*

## Transit-Oriented Development and a potential new path for growth in Pittsburgh

By Ryan Deto

ryandeto@pghcitypaper.com

Pittsburgh is primed for TOD. For the uninformed, which is just about everyone not obsessed with the wonky details of municipal zoning, TOD stands for Transit-Oriented Development. The term means encouraging dense housing and amenities within walking distance of frequent and high-quality transit, like a high-rise apartment building on top of a subway station.

Pittsburgh doesn't have many subway stations, but it still has scores of amazing opportunities for Transit-Oriented Development. There are transit stations along light-rail lines and busway stations that have little to no housing, offices, or amenities like grocery stores. Many of these stations have surface parking or vacant lots, practically begging for development.

The Port Authority of Allegheny County has created guidelines for municipalities on how to best implement TOD, in hopes the zoning changes will take off in the region. Breen Masciotra, section manager for Port Authority's Planning Department, says "the more frequent and reliable transit service is in a corridor, the more likely it is that a person could live in that corridor and rely primarily on public transit as their primary mode, and that is the ideal condition for TOD."

"So, yes, Allegheny County has some strong corridors for TOD, and we anticipate that our forthcoming long-range plan will include recommendations to develop more corridors and more opportunities for TOD," says Masciotra.

And at least one Pittsburgh-area community is close to adapting a whole new zoning code, one that is adaptive to its surroundings and includes two different sections of TOD. In May, Dormont borough started to advertise new zoning changes it hopes to pass through council. It includes two districts surrounding the borough's three light-rail stops that would encourage buildings of three-to-eight stories, with those structures oriented to promote pedestrian access to the light-rail stations and other nearby walkable amenities.

Dormont Planning Commission Chair Eamon Geary says these changes can help spur growth in Dormont, stabilize housing prices, and allow for the overwhelmingly white borough to become more diverse, as a means to attempt



Apartment complex directly above the M.L.K. Jr. East Busway in Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood

PHOTO CREDIT: JARED WICKERHAM

to rectify former racist housing policies like redlining.

Beyond those high-minded goals, TOD might also be necessary to solve traffic congestion and prevent it from getting worse. Pittsburgh is like most regions in the country, and development usually proliferates in greenfield plots of land (ones that have never been developed) located in suburban areas far from the urban core, and not served by public transit. That means more drivers commuting to our concentrated job centers in Downtown and Oakland, and more congestion on the Parkway North and Parkway West and other areas seeing growth.

But there isn't a simple switch to convert Allegheny County to TOD zoning. Those changes only happen municipality by municipality. With over 100 municipalities in the county, and many of them wary of big changes, a large trend of TOD needs to be set in order to convert much of zoning.

Geary doesn't expect Dormont's proposed changes to come easy, saying he predicts the next public hearing to have significant pushback from some community members. But he is hopeful that, if passed, TOD will give the old borough a new and unique path for growth, one that will set it apart from the more typical suburb.

"The single family homes in Dormont, we have enough, we are now focusing on density. The North Hills can have the Ryan Homes," says Geary of the construction company that focuses primarily on sprawling single-family home complexes on the periphery of Allegheny County. "I am excited, there are always people who want things to stay the same. But I think TOD will bring people into the community, and we will see them shopping at our stores. It's a win-win."

Dormont incorporated as a borough in 1909, making it the first independent municipality in Allegheny County's South Hills. The borough is less than one-square mile in area and it lies just south of Pittsburgh's Beechview neighborhood. Port Authority's Red Line light rail runs through Dormont and has three stations located in Dormont. The borough is also served by the 41 bus, which runs through West Liberty Avenue, Dormont's main artery.

If the zoning changes were to pass, Dormont would likely become the first municipality in Allegheny County to adopt the TOD zoning regulations. The changes also rewrite Dormont's Euclidean zoning code to a form-based

*Continued on next page*



## Pittsburgh City Paper continued

code, which would also likely be a first in Allegheny County.

Euclidean zoning is named after the town of Euclid, Ohio, which was the first to establish it after winning a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case in 1926. Euclidean zoning establishes single-use zoning, where only one kind of use or development is allowed per zone, and has become the predominant zoning style in the U.S.

However, it has been criticized for often making amenities and jobs located far from residential neighborhoods. Dormont borough manager Ben Estell told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in May that Euclidean zoning has been exploited and historically used to keep low-income people and people of color from moving into communities.

“It was used to protect wealthy, white property owners by segregating the single-family zoning, which was on the white side of the community,” said Estell. “It added all of the park districts into that area, while the poor section of town, which was where the people of color lived, was all the multi-family units and was also where the industrial zones were intended.”

According to the latest census estimate, Dormont is 92% white, which is much whiter than neighboring Pittsburgh and Allegheny County at large. “One of the reasons for that is it’s expensive to get a single unit,” says Geary. “We struggle with that. The history of redlining, Dormont wasn’t innocent by any means.”

Redlining was the practice of the home mortgage industry to suppress minority populations from receiving home loans in areas deemed desirable by the government-sponsored Home Owners’ Loan Corporation. Dormont was ranked as a “desirable” neighborhood by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation.

Geary says Dormont is dominated by single-family homes, and the borough has been very successful at attracting young families. He says the borough is a good mix of younger families, with parents who work white-collar jobs, and older retirees who come from more blue-collar backgrounds. However, he says housing prices have been spiking in Dormont, and supply for new or available housing units is drying up.

He says there really isn’t any room in the small borough to develop without changing the zoning. Existing single family homes make up the vast majority of Dormont. Without building up in some areas, there isn’t any room to add housing supply to the increasingly popular borough. Like many municipalities in Allegheny County, Dormont’s overall population has dropped since 2010, but residents aged 25-44 have increased by 16%.

This is why Geary says TOD is necessary for Dormont. Some of the borough’s very few spaces to develop include surface parking lots next to the Dormont light-rail station. He says developers have expressed interest in building multi-unit housing there, which he believes can attract new residents to the borough without bringing more cars and congestion.

“The only spot we have open is the two flat lots at Dormont Station, and that is the worst use of that space,”



**The Potomac light-rail station in Pittsburgh’s Dormont neighborhood**

says Geary. “I can tell you anecdotally, I have had people reach out to me, large developers. They are chomping at the bit to have this kind of access online.”

Masciotra says this kind of TOD could not only be a boon to Port Authority, but also improve quality of life for the communities that implement it.

“Taller buildings and fewer parking spaces are both ways to create more space that people can occupy close to public transit,” says Masciotra. “The more people who live, work, or play near public transit, the more people are likely to ride it. Studies have shown that people who live in transit-oriented developments own fewer cars and make fewer car trips than those who don’t live as close to transit; fewer car trips mean less traffic congestion and better air quality, resulting in safer streets.”

This runs in contrast to the typical American strategy of constructing more roads to improve mobility, reduce congestion, and improve quality of life. In Pittsburgh, like most other U.S. cities, there is little evidence that constructing more vehicle infrastructure has improved things over the last few decades. According to nationwide transit advocacy organization Transportation for American, the Pittsburgh region has seen an 8% growth in freeway miles between 1993-2017. With that small growth in new roads, Greater Pittsburgh has still seen a 90% increase in congestion, even as the overall population of the regions has decreased by about 1%. More Pittsburgh roads, fewer people overall, yet still significant growth in traffic congestion.

One possible solution to this phenomenon is providing homes near good public transit, especially housing that is attainable to populations more likely to use transit. Geary says TOD zoning is a way to attract denser development, and bring in new residents to Dormont who don’t have access to a car or limited access to vehicles. Geary says he and his wife only own one car, and they commute to their jobs easily via public transportation.

“Having the ability to move to a TOD zone, it opens up the

community to a lot of people who are underrepresented,” says Geary. Ideally, Geary says Dormont can work with the state to get subsidies for any new developments, so they include permanent affordable housing.

Geary says another way to keep housing prices down is to add more supply, and to ensure developers don’t have any extra and unnecessary costs. Dormont’s proposed zoning would also eliminate parking minimums where off-street parking is available and it would decrease parking minimums in areas without off-street parking from one parking space to every new unit, to one parking space to every two new units.

“People ask, ‘How do you not provide parking?’” says Geary. “Well, the folks that live there, they want to take the bus or light rail.”

Even though there are several benefits for TOD zoning, Geary predicts some pushback from these proposals. Dormont has already seen opposition before, when a development proposal near the Dormont Station was blocked by a lawsuit from community members.

Pittsburgh, which lacks TOD zoning, also saw a setback in an attempt to bring a TOD project to the East End. In April, Pittsburgh’s Zoning Board ruled against a proposed 230-unit and retail development — which included permanent affordable units and was located just feet from the East Liberty Busway Station. The board believed that development would create detrimental impacts involving traffic and blocking views for some nearby residents.

Lack of TOD zoning makes it easier for these kinds of projects to be blocked. The East End development needed a zoning variance because it wanted to build 25 feet higher than the code allowed. And without TOD zoning in place, developers can be required to build mismatched projects in areas well served by transit, like a recently proposed 42-unit, mixed-use apartment project in Carnegie that is required to include 45 surface parking spaces, even though the borough has several surface parking lots nearby. The mixed-use apartment project is just one-third of a mile from Carnegie’s Busway Station.

This is why Breen is hopeful Dormont’s proposed zoning changes will succeed, and that some TOD momentum will grow among other Pittsburgh area municipalities. She says Dormont used Port Authority’s TOD guidelines to write its new code, and other communities are currently in the development stage of future code rewrites. Wilksburg Council has already signaled friendliness to TOD in their borough just east of Pittsburgh city limits. Wilksburg’s main busway station is surrounded by a massive surface parking lot, which is less than one-third of a mile from the borough’s business district.

“Port Authority has and will continue to support municipal efforts to build transit-oriented development and infrastructure,” says Masciotra. “Zoning that encourages more development, a mix of live, work, shop, play, etc., and walking-friendly places — enables more transit use and other community benefits, such as spending at local businesses, physical activity, lower transportation costs, improved air quality, and safer streets.”

*Published May 26, 2021.*

# REPUBLICAN HERALD

## New owner of Pottsville 'skyscraper' has faced legal action over another county building

By Christine Lee  
Republican Herald

POTTSVILLE — The new owner of the vacant Thompson building unveiled ambitious plans this week to fill the six-story structure with retail shops, a museum, a technology incubator, recording and painting studios and even a "university" that would offer special courses from celebrities, professors and "top business executives."

Those plans, however, contrast with a number of residential properties that Advanced Consulting Inc. owns in Schuylkill County that are vacant and unkempt, and Ringtown Borough last year took legal action against the firm for the blighted conditions of a house it owns in the borough.

The company, which uses addresses in New York and Pennsylvania, purchased Pottsville's "first skyscraper," at North Centre and West Market streets in the heart of the downtown, in April for \$21,673.74 from the county tax claim bureau. The previous owner, Ben Agunloye, of New York, had owned it since 2014.

Gem Lake, chief executive officer of Advanced Consulting, is calling his concept for the building "Thompson 1909," paying homage to the year the building was constructed.

"Our goal is for the whole building to be operational," Lake said.

Though he agrees the building needs work — it is on the city's blighted property list — he believes it is structurally sound.

Code Enforcement Officer David Petravich, meanwhile, says it would cost more than \$1 million just to correct code violations.

Asked if he agrees with those who believe his plans are unrealistic, Lake said he respects everyone's opinions but that he's intent on making his project work.

"It is possible and I'm a part of it. I know how to do the construction," he said. "We believe in redevelopment."

### City input

Lake said there are partnerships for some of the Thompson operations he has planned, but he can't at this point disclose who the partners are.



The Thompson Building is seen at the corner of Centre and West Market streets in Pottsville. The new owner of the building has plans for there to be retail, lecture, store, museum and recording studio space in the property.

He said he was at the county courthouse Monday inquiring about the building's original blueprints as a starting point and is at the Thompson building weekly.

Mayor James T. Muldowney said he spoke with Lake for about five minutes early this week to set up a meeting to discuss the plans. He said Lake told him he wants to rehabilitate the building and wanted to know city's officials' feelings about the project.

The mayor said he was excited to hear someone is interested in the building, but that he was not aware of Lake's concept for the building.

City Administrator Thomas A. Palamar said Monday he

wasn't aware of the plans, nor had he talked to Lake about them, but planned to do so. He said it was "promising" that Lake wants to be engaged in the community and that city officials are willing to work with him as long as the project is "a legitimate investment."

The building is a target property in the redevelopment area, which encompasses all of downtown Pottsville.

Petravich said Lake contacted his office last month about putting in storefronts on the first floor, but didn't mention his plans for the upper floors.

Petravich said citations were issued to the previous owner over the cracking façade and heating and water issues (the main water line burst). The bathrooms need to be updated to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and UGI removed the gas line because the furnace it fed wasn't in operation.

"It would cost over a million dollars to correct the violations," he said, and a minimum of \$100,000 just to repair the elevator.

Lake said he has the resources and experience to fix the building and believes Petravich's numbers to repair it are "way off."

He added that he plans to address the water leaks and fix the elevator while restoring and upgrading the building. But he doesn't plan structural changes.

"It is structured for business," Lake said. "We want to preserve as much as we can."

### Other purchases

Since 2019, Advanced Consulting has purchased 25 properties in the county, all either from the county tax claim bureau or through a sheriff's sale. Seven of the properties are in Coaldale, four, including the Thompson building, are in Pottsville and three are in New Philadelphia.

Officials in Ringtown cited the company for a property it owns at 273 W. Main St. and then filed a civil claim in September alleging violation of the borough's fire protection fee ordinance and sewer system maintenance, and failure to pay a refuse disposal fee. Advanced Consulting appealed the suit in November, according to court records.

Lake said the company was found not guilty, that he is

*Continued on next page*



## Republican Herald continued

up to date on taxes for the building and that it is being cleaned out.

However, online court records show the court ordered default judgment to the borough for \$4,294.26 on Oct. 20 and that Advance Consulting appealed on Nov. 18. That is the last record of any activity in the case.

Ringtown Borough Council President Leonard G. Kamarousky Jr. referred questions to solicitor Robert E. Matta, who was on vacation this week. Mayor Phillip Beaver said he couldn't comment on the litigation as he was not familiar with the details, having served as mayor only since April. Code Enforcement Officer Scott Schuetrum did not return a call for comment.

Officials in Coaldale and New Philadelphia could also not be reached for comment on the company's properties there.

### Vegetation and rats

The Republican Herald looked at the Advanced Consulting property in Ringtown, its property at 317 S. Second St. in Pottsville, at 215 Coal St. in Port Carbon and at 54 Macomb St. in New Philadelphia Thursday. All four had peeling paint and some had tall weeds growing around them.

At the Ringtown home, heavy vegetation is beginning to cover one side of the building and the front porch, which is deteriorating. A vine has grown across exposed plywood where it appears a porch roof was once attached. There is no door knob on the front door.

Neighbors said they haven't seen anyone at the properties in Port Carbon, Pottsville and Ringtown in some time. Mail carrier Karl Mattern said he has delivered mail on Macomb Street in New Philadelphia for four years and has not seen anyone at the home in that time.

Daniel Kline, who resides in neighboring 217 Coal St. in Port Carbon, said he saw rats around the Advanced



CHRISTINE LEE / REPUBLICAN HERALD PHOTO

Advanced Consulting Inc. has owned the property at 273 W. Main St. in Ringtown since 2019 and has been cited by borough officials for lack of maintenance. Borough officials brought legal action against the company over the building in September 2020. Pictured July 8, 2021.

Consulting property, but they cleared out after he and a friend cleaned the yard.

But Lake said the inside of the home has been redone, with new paint and flooring. He said he uses the Port Carbon house as a business address, including for the Thompson building purchase, as "a way to connect to the area."

Lake said the company has rehabilitated six properties in

the county, the Thompson building being its first commercial property. Asked if he could provide the address of a county property about which he was particularly proud, Lake said his focus is on the Thompson building.

Petravich said his office had not had any interactions with Advanced Consulting prior to June and he wasn't aware of any problems with the company.

*Published July 10, 2021.*

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## Home Sick

Harrisburg residents face eviction, unpredictable future during the pandemic.

By Maddie Gittens

When the pandemic hit, all Bobby Mitchell wanted to do was stay home.

He would be considered at-risk for many reasons. He's 61 years old and has various health issues, including diabetes and high blood pressure, not to mention the kidney transplant he underwent.

Mitchell was receiving Social Security disability benefits, but it wasn't enough to cover rent, utilities and other expenses.

Before the pandemic, Mitchell collected aluminum, copper and other materials from nearby scrapyards to make up the difference. With help from his friend, he made around \$500 in a "good month."

As March ushered in COVID-19, he couldn't collect anymore. His son was out of work, and his son's mother wasn't working due to mental health issues. Mitchell fell behind on rent.

"You've got to think about your family," he said. "I had to take care of his needs, her needs and mine."

All Mitchell wanted to do was stay home, but that grew increasingly uncertain as back rent piled up and an eviction notice loomed.

However, after working with Kay Pickering at The Center for Peace and Justice in Harrisburg, armed with a federal document, Mitchell was able to postpone his eviction.

### COVID Chaos

When the pandemic hit in March, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court halted evictions, which Gov. Tom Wolf extended through the end of August. In September, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control picked up where the state left off, declaring a ban on evictions through Dec. 31. This applied to evictions for non-payment of rent, as in Mitchell's case.

Although the moratorium protected these residents from a lockout, landlords could still file for eviction.

In Harrisburg, between Sept. 1 and Dec. 7, there were 528 evictions filed, according to data from the CREATE Lab at Carnegie Mellon University and Philadelphia Legal Assistance. Of those, 151 tenants were protected under the CDC's declaration and could stay in their homes, at



least through the end of December. There were 171 cases with scheduled hearings, and in 206 cases, landlords were granted possession.

Caleb Cossick, a volunteer with Greater Harrisburg Area Tenants United, which advocates for renter's rights, explained the reason behind lockouts happening despite the moratorium.

"People aren't being told their rights," he said. "Information just isn't shared."

There were some people who weren't aware of the moratorium or the declaration that they were required to fill out in order for it to apply, Cossick said. There were others who were evicted due to a month-to-month lease, in which the landlord can cancel whenever they want. Some were evicted because they only had an "oral lease," which is less likely to hold up in court. Cossick calls these "loopholes." With the declaration being relatively vague, he said that a magisterial district judge was often left to interpret the rules how they saw fit for each case.

"If a landlord wants to get around it [the declaration], they can try," he said.

Throughout the pandemic, Greater Harrisburg Tenants United has set up tables outside court offices and at community events with the hope of stopping evictions by educating tenants of their rights.

In the declaration, the tenant had to certify that they had "used best efforts" to obtain all available government assistance, that they were unable to pay their full rent, but were paying as much as they could. They must also be facing homelessness if they are evicted, the declaration form said.

According to Harrisburg attorney Jordan Cunningham, this is one of the biggest issues. Renters are not paying anything even if they are able to.

"Zero isn't what you can afford if you are still working," Cunningham said. "My concern from the aspect of the landlord is, if we are going to have a moratorium in place, the landlord needs to have some way to enforce the lease and receive some rent, if not all of the rent."

After all, landlords have obligations, as well. They have

*Continued on next page*



## TheBurg continued

mortgages and taxes to pay. They also have a responsibility to keep up with the maintenance of the building, Cunningham said.

### Planning Ahead

Angela Parker-Quarles' phone has been ringing nonstop lately. She estimated that her phone calls have increased by 45% over the past months.

People call Parker-Quarles at The Fair Housing Council of the Capital Region frantic and desperate for help. When contacted recently, she was working with a 70-year-old resident in Steelton who was facing eviction.

The Fair Housing Council tries to bridge the gap between landlords and tenants, Parker-Quarles explained. They provide education on renters' rights and responsibilities.

During the pandemic, she has tried to help clients think long-term. She's afraid some people aren't preparing for what happens after the moratoriums end.

"You can flash that declaration, but if you're doing that without a plan, they're just going to be at your door when it ends," she said.

She's been helping people find employment and other support services in order to get back on track with rent. However, rental assistance is in short supply, she said.

For people like Bobby Mitchell, that would make all the difference.

With no one in Mitchell's household employed, they couldn't pay their full rent. Eventually, his son and son's mother found employment. While the family is able to keep up now, they have three months' worth of back rent.

Christian Churches United of the Tri-County Area is able to help families facing homelessness find shelter, Executive Director Darrel Reinford said. They also have some funds for rental assistance through their homelessness programs.

In December, the city of Harrisburg also launched a rent relief program to provide funds for those struggling to pay rent. They offered up to \$5,000 per household.

According to Sandy Ballard, public services coordinator for the Dauphin County Bar Association, one of the biggest issues is a lack of communication between landlords and tenants.

"What's surprising is people get an eviction notice and won't even call the other side and say, 'Hey, can we talk?'" said Ballard. "It's in both parties' best interests to come up with a plan."

Ballard worked with Matt Rich of MidPenn Legal Services, Reinford and others to come up with a plan to try to help stop evictions. They are hosting free mediation sessions for landlords and tenants.

Every Tuesday at 9 p.m. on Zoom, volunteer attorneys work with landlord-tenant pairs from Dauphin County to provide education and assist them in agreeing on a payment plan to avoid eviction. While there had only been a few sessions by early December, Ballard said that they are going well.



## Eviction and Rental Assistance Resources

**Center for Peace and Justice:** 717-233-3072

**Christian Churches United of the Tri-County Area:**  
[www.ccuahbg.org](http://www.ccuahbg.org), 717-230-9550

**Dauphin County Bar Association Mediation program:**  
<https://forms.gle/egB7ZQSXQU92zCeP8>  
[ProBono@DCBA-PA.org](mailto:ProBono@DCBA-PA.org)

**Fair Housing Council of the Capital Region:**  
[www.pafairhousing.org](http://www.pafairhousing.org), 717-238-9540

**Greater Harrisburg Area Tenants United:**  
[www.harrisburgtenants.org](http://www.harrisburgtenants.org), 717-461-2096

**Mid Penn Legal Services:** [www.midpenn.org](http://www.midpenn.org), 800-326-9177



### Uncertain Future

Mitchell has boxes packed around his house. He fills a few, here and there, "just in case," he said. When I called to check in on him on a mid-December morning, he said he was "hanging in there." But as a wet snow fell in Harrisburg, Mitchell said that he was worried. He still had around \$4,000 of back rent to pay. "It's cold out there," he said.

That same night, Harrisburg City Council voted to impose a 30-day moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent and lease expiration. Through the end of January, Mitchell was safe again, possibly longer, if the city chose to renew the ban on evictions.

"Prolonging this will probably help us," he said. But in this case, time isn't money, and Mitchell expected the debt would still be there once the moratorium ends, like the last one.

While moratoriums like the CDC's and Harrisburg's deal with the immediate need of shelter during a crisis, Cunningham said that extending them too long is "really just kicking the can down the road."

Parker-Quarles expressed a similar sentiment, adding that a moratorium should go hand-in-hand with some sort of payment plan requirement for the tenant.

"I'd like to see some kind of plan in place to get these individuals out of the situation," she said.

For now, Mitchell's family will keep saving a bit of money from each paycheck and keep some boxes packed, just in case they need to find a new place to live.

"All we want to do is have a roof over our heads," he said.

*Published Dec. 30, 2020.*

# Plain in a pandemic

9 out of 10 Amish and Mennonite households in Lancaster County have been hit by COVID-19, health expert estimates

By Nicole C. Brambila  
nbrambila@lnpnews.com

Late last spring a COVID-19 wave tore through the Plain community when they resumed church services, infecting an untold number of Amish and Mennonites in Lancaster County.

The administrator of a medical center in the heart of the Amish community in New Holland Borough estimates as many as 90% of Plain families have since had at least one family member infected, and that this religious enclave achieved what no other community in the United States has: herd immunity.

"So, you would think if COVID was as contagious as they say, it would go through like a tsunami, and it did," said Allen Hoover, an Old Order Mennonite and administrator of the Parochial Medical Center, a clinic that primarily serves the Plain community.

Public health officials and epidemiologists did not dispute the widespread outbreak Hoover described. But they voiced concern that a misplaced perception of herd immunity in a population that makes up 8% of Lancaster County might compromise the effort to turn the tide on the pandemic.

As Hoover observed, faith in herd immunity has prompted members of the Plain community to relax on key mitigation efforts such as masking and social distancing, and they might see little reason to be vaccinated.

Additionally, it is unknown whether achieving herd immunity last year would be beneficial now.

Six infectious disease experts with whom LNP | LancasterOnline spoke expressed unease with a reliance on the notion the Plain community had achieved herd

immunity here. And they pointed out that past infections and existing antibodies might provide limited protection.

"Herd immunity is only true at a given point in time," said Eric Lofgren, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Washington State University. "It's not a switch that once it gets thrown, you're good. It'll wear off."

This collision of science and personal experience could leave Lancaster County vulnerable just as county health officials seek to make progress vaccinating residents against COVID-19.

"You can have a long period where you think everything is OK, but you have this whole population that's susceptible," said David Lo, professor of biomedical sciences and senior associate dean of research at the University of California, Riverside.

Lo added, "All it takes is one person

who's contagious to give you this sudden outbreak."

## Risk of an outbreak

Hoover agreed with these epidemiologists.

He acknowledged that face masks and social distancing have been critical for mitigating the spread of COVID-19; he wears a face covering when interacting with non-Amish. But he also knows many in the Plain community don't take the same precautions.

"As a general rule, we want to respect those around us," said Hoover, who has been the medical center's administrator since 2004. But because of perceived immunity, Hoover said, the Plain community believes public health directives don't "apply to us."

It's a perspective Hoover understands but

doesn't share.

"We should be careful that we're not the cause of it spreading," Hoover said.

The Parochial Medical Center is not the only medical provider that caters to the Plain community, but with 33,000 active patients, it is arguably the largest.

The Plain community in Lancaster County, which includes Amish and Mennonites, is not insignificant. Combined, it represents nearly 8% of the county's population of just more than 545,000 residents, according to estimates from Elizabethtown College's Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies.

The dearth of COVID-19 testing among the Plain doesn't just mean a lack of scientific certainty.

"The reason it's important is because it's

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION / CHRIS KNIGHT FILE PHOTO



unlikely that 100% have had the disease,” said David Dowdy, a professor in the epidemiology department at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Under the right conditions, a single infected individual can trigger an outbreak.

Take what happened at Disneyland.

Two decades ago, measles was declared eradicated in the United States because of an effective national vaccination campaign. But that didn't stop an outbreak from infecting 150 people in seven states, Mexico and Canada in 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The outbreak was attributed to unvaccinated children.

The implication is this: If an outbreak of a highly contagious disease for which there is a proven vaccine could happen at the “happiest place on Earth,” it can happen in Lancaster County.

An outbreak among the Plain would impact the wider community because while these religious sects are insular, they are not isolated. The Plain mingle with the English, as they refer to their non-Amish neighbors, at grocery stores, their places of business and other public places.

"There could easily still be pockets of the (Plain) community who have not been infected, and if they're infected, there's a real risk of having an outbreak," Dowdy said.

### 'It was bad here in the spring'

The Plain community followed the example of its English neighbors and shuttered schoolhouses and canceled biweekly church services when the novel coronavirus threatened to overwhelm Pennsylvania's health care system last spring.

Initially, compliance with public health directives was about not being offensive to non-Amish neighbors, Hoover said.

But as the pandemic wore on, messages from skeptical lawmakers and English neighbors suggested that the virus wasn't a big concern.

For example, back in early May, Lancaster County elected officials – including state Sen. Ryan Aument, a Mount Joy Republican – said they would join a handful of other counties to defy Gov. Tom Wolf's stay-at-home orders to save the local economy, which had been battered in the shutdown.

County Commissioner Josh Parsons, a



CHRIS KNIGHT | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Parochial Medical Center at 1065 W. Main St. in New Holland caters to the Plain sect community. In late April and early May, when the virus ran unimpeded through the Plain community, the county's rate of positive tests exceeded 20%, its highest of the pandemic, according to Covid Act Now.

Republican, challenged the legal basis for requiring face masks. And state Rep. David Zimmerman, a Republican who represents a large swath of eastern Lancaster County, home to a large number of Plain, criticized the governor's handling of the pandemic.

"The Amish are a distinct group, but they also respond, in many ways, like many rural Lancastrians," said Steve Nolt, interim director of the Young Center. "I think there was a lot of non-Amish influence on the Amish."

As their English neighbors resumed pre-pandemic activities, the Plain community did as well, Nolt and others said.

By late April, when Pennsylvania was still under stay-at-home orders, the Plain community had resumed worship services, where they shared communion cups and holy kisses, a church greeting among believers.

Infections quickly followed.

"It was bad here in the spring – one patient right after another," said Pam Cooper, a physician's assistant at the Parochial Medical Center.

Just how deep into the community the infections spread is impossible to know. Hoover speculated that among those displaying symptoms, fewer than 10% consented to be tested.

In late April and early May, when Hoover said the virus ran unimpeded through the

Plain community, the county's positivity rate – the percent of positive tests – exceeded 20%, its highest of the pandemic, according to Covid Act Now, a nonprofit that provides local disease data. (Last year, the World Health Organization recommended governments use a rate of 5% or lower for two weeks as the threshold for reopening.)

If Hoover's assessment is accurate, and if more Plain patients had been tested, the positivity rate could very well have been higher.

Few were tested; however, many exhibited all of the symptoms that have become so emblematic of the disease.

Cooper estimated the medical center saw – on average – nearly a dozen infections a day, or roughly 15% of the patients it serves daily.

The disease, as has been true in the wider community, knew no boundaries. Hoover became infected in November; at least one of his children was infected twice.

"It really went through pretty quick, in a few weeks," Cooper said.

The number of patients ebbed in the summer before picking up again in the fall, although not nearly at the rate seen in the spring.

Cases now are rare. Hoover said Tuesday that the center hasn't had a patient present with COVID-19 symptoms in roughly six weeks.

## Herd immunity, and why it's necessary

Herd immunity occurs when a sufficient number of people have immunity to a disease to prevent a virus from finding new hosts, thereby protecting the wider population. Immunity can be achieved through recovering from an infection or by vaccination.

So, why is it important? Herd immunity is the only way to eradicate COVID-19.

The more transmissible a disease, the higher the percentage of a population needs to be immune. Initially, scientists estimated 60% to 70% of the population needed to acquire resistance to provide herd immunity. It's difficult to know the precise threshold for the novel coronavirus.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, late last year began moving the goal post, adjusting that estimate up to as high as 90%.

The reasons? Viruses constantly mutate, and COVID-19 is becoming more transmissible.

## Test the herd

Epidemiologists from the University of Pittsburgh, Washington State, Johns Hopkins, Emory and the University of California said a widespread outbreak leading to herd immunity in the Plain community would be rare, but possible.

"It's extremely unusual," Lofgren, at Washington State University, said of herd immunity to COVID-19. "It would be the first general population in the United States that's done it."

Significant outbreaks have been identified elsewhere.

The CDC, for example, studied COVID-19 outbreaks among smaller Amish communities in rural Ohio and Indiana.

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As the CDC has noted, the Amish emphasis on strong social bonds and religious gatherings posed a unique public health challenge during the pandemic.

Unlike the outbreak Hoover described in Lancaster County, however, the Ohio and Indiana communities conducted testing.

“They really contributed to a lot of spread of COVID in the community,” said Shirley Bixby, director of nursing for the Ashland County Board of Health in northeastern Ohio. “It was quite nerve-wracking.”

In Indiana, COVID-19 infections were so common among the Amish that residents believe most had been exposed.

At the height of the summer outbreak, 7 in 10 COVID-19 tests came back positive, said Dr. Daniel N. Kragt, a physician at Dayspring Christian Health Care in Middlebury, Indiana.

Dayspring is a cash-only provider in the middle of the Amish community, about 35 miles east of South Bend.

For all of the tests Kragt conducted, about 40% of Amish patients declined.

Making scientific conclusions about immunity is difficult, Kragt noted, because very often “the herd doesn’t want” to be tested.

“To say you have herd immunity, you’d actually have to test the herd,” Kragt said.

### ‘Plenty’ of death certificates

COVID-19 has been devastating to Pennsylvania seniors, with 9 in every 10 fatalities among those 60 and older. In Lancaster County, 96% of COVID-19 fatalities as of March 17 – 928 of 970 – have been people 60 or older.

The same appears to be true for the elderly in the Plain community, as Hoover estimated most deaths were 70 and older.

Cooper said she signed “plenty” of death certificates during that time.

But the death toll might never be known.

Lancaster County Coroner Dr. Stephen Diamantoni identified fewer than a dozen deaths in the Plain community, an estimate he derived at by using decedent location and last name.

Virus-related deaths, Cooper speculated, were likely listed as pneumonia.

Diamantoni does not dispute this.

“People have to die from something,” Diamantoni said. “If they don’t want any intervention done, these people could slip under the radar.”

Even if more virus testing had been done,



SUZETTE WENGER | FILE PHOTO

Amish buggies are parked at a home along the 900 block of New Holland Road south of New Holland for a wedding celebration on March 17, 2020. Initially, the Plain community shuttered schoolhouses and canceled biweekly church services, but as their English neighbors resumed pre-pandemic activities, the Plain community did as well.

it’s unlikely the public would know much more about the disease’s impact. That’s because demographic information collected by health departments – such as race and ethnicity – does not include religion.

The fatalities have not gone unnoticed.

A contributor to The Diary, a monthly newspaper published in Kirkwood with Amish reports on crops, births, deaths, weddings and ordinations across the United States, tallied the annual number of obituaries since 2015.

“As you can see, the number of deaths this year is 100 count higher than any of the five previous years,” Joas D. Troyer, of Hestand, Kentucky, wrote in January’s edition. “This may give us a good idea how many people died from coronavirus.”

### No ‘magic number’

Herd immunity – either through infection or vaccination – has been touted as the way back to normal.

“The only true herd immunity that we can bring as a community is for people to be vaccinated,” said Alice Yoder, executive director of Community Health at Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health.

Because immunologists don’t yet know what the threshold is for COVID-19 immunity, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease expert, has said the coronavirus could require vaccination rates as high as 90%.

“The key is that there is not necessarily a magic number,” said Dowdy, at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The lack of infection data on the notoriously private Plain community makes proving or disproving whether Anabaptists (a Christian community of which Amish and Mennonites are a part) achieved herd immunity impossible 11 months later. Testing could be conducted now, but the absence of antibodies, Dowdy and other experts said, doesn’t mean the lack of infection.

As the United States races to stay ahead of virus mutations, the more pressing issue, these experts said, was vaccine hesitancy. As of March 16, there were two other mutations in Pennsylvania: 68 cases of the U.K. variant and one South African case, according to the CDC.

“The higher the vaccination in the (Plain) community, the better it will be for the entire community,” said Dr. Amesh Adalja, an infectious diseases physician and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

Despite lower childhood vaccination rates among the Amish, there is no religious prohibition, said Nolt, at Elizabethtown College, who has written 14 books about the Amish.

In a 2017 doctoral study that examined Amish perceptions in Lancaster County, Cooper found the majority had a positive

attitude toward immunizations and roughly 6 in 10 surveyed were likely to vaccinate their children.

As Cooper noted in her study, 3 in 4 of those she surveyed said they had never discussed vaccination with their health care provider.

“Providers are missing many opportunities to discuss vaccines with Amish parents,” wrote Cooper, at the Parochial Medical Center.

### ‘God helps those who help themselves’

Vaccine efforts among the Plain community could prove challenging.

“I think it will be a very hard sell,” Hoover said.

The Amish have been persuaded to embrace mass vaccination efforts before, most notably after a polio outbreak in 1979 and a rash of measles in 1991. This has left health officials hopeful the Anabaptists will respond again.

The Pennsylvania Amish Safety Committee and other partnerships will be crucial to outreach efforts that already have begun.

Composed of five elected Old Order Amish men, the committee provides safety information and has helped spearhead issues such as the 2011 effort to cover holes in haylofts after emergency room doctors encountered Plain sect children who had fallen through.

The goal, Lancaster General’s Yoder said, is to achieve a vaccination rate protective of the entire community.

“Of course,” Yoder said, “there might be some concern that we don’t reach that.”

The way Dr. D. Holmes Morton sees it, these religious sects must take responsibility for getting vaccinated to protect their Lancaster County neighbors.

“I just think the Plain community has to get involved in a public-health sense,” said Morton, founder of the Central Pennsylvania Clinic in Belleville, Mifflin County.

Morton, who first created the Clinic for Special Children in Strasburg, is renowned for his pioneering work on genetic diseases among Plain children.

“Just because you’re Plain doesn’t mean you’re exempt,” Morton said. “God helps those who help themselves.”

*Published March 21, 2021.*



## ‘Afraid to teach’: School’s book ban targeted Black, Latino authors

By Tina Locurto  
York Dispatch

In 19 years of teaching, it was the first time one Central York High School educator had ever received an email like it: a list of banned books, movies and other teaching materials.

“This is disgusting,” the teacher, who requested anonymity to protect his job, said. “Let’s just call it what it is — every author on that list is a Black voice.”

The four-page list, sent by Central York High School Principal Ryan Cauffman on Aug. 11, names articles, videos and books from some of today’s most acclaimed creators of color.

It included the Oscar-nominated PBS documentary “I Am Not Your Negro,” about writer James Baldwin; a statement on racism from the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators; and a children’s coloring book that featured African Adinkra symbols found in fabrics, logos and pottery.

That ban was actually the product of a unanimous school board decision last November that itself followed an earlier series of discussions in August to September 2020 about whether to approve a social studies curriculum inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement.

School board President Jane Johnson said last September that the pilot program, which the board tabled in August 2020 over disagreements with its teachings on white privilege, would remain there until further notice.

In October, however, discussions surrounding the tabled curriculum and diversity list resurfaced.

During a long and contentious meeting, school board members and district officials clashed on the purpose of the list and what it was created for.

“We have diversity — we love it, we enjoy it, we celebrate it, we want it — we’re not rejecting that,” said one school board member. “We’re rejecting the one-sided pieces of those resources. It was one-sided teaching.”

One member said the list was produced by the diversity committee to be used for curriculum, while another school official in attendance clarified that the list was created after the diversity committee approved the curriculum — adding that they are two separate things.

Assistant Superintendent Robert Grove added that his interpretation of the list was a compilation of media discussed during

diversity committee meetings. In case somebody wanted to check out an article that was discussed, there would be a list with links available, he said.

Confusion surrounding the list was apparent among the board members, who each shared different timelines of its creation, including one board member who said teachers requested resources in dealing with sensitive issues relating to race.

“The diversity committee came up with resources and development to help them know how to deal with the subject,” the board member said during October’s



meeting. “And some of us took exception to what they were promoting to the teachers.”

Then came November’s vote.

Julie Randall Romig, a spokesperson for the Central York School District, said the banned diversity list is separate from the tabled curriculum.

“It was a separate list of resources created by our diversity education committee,” Romig said, in a written statement. “The committee members were sharing resources with one another that could be helpful in educating themselves and in supporting our diverse student population at different times.”

Lauri Lebo, a spokesperson for the Pennsylvania State Education Association, said she wondered if the Central York school board members had read any of the materials on the banned list.

“They’re banning material from ‘Sesame Street,’ but not David Duke. They’re banning PBS, but not the KKK,” Lebo said, in an email. “They’ve even banned the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators’ statement on racism — which acknowledges that racism exists and is bad.”

When reached Thursday, Johnson, the school board president, referred questions to Romig for further comment.

Lebo added that the move by school board members is an “outrage and insult,” and hinders the academic freedoms of teachers.

“We are concerned that the ban on these materials without offering any credible alternatives will create a chilling effect on teachers being able to teach anything about race — the history of slavery, the Civil Rights Movement or Brown v. Board of Education,” Lebo said.

One female teacher at Central York High School, who requested to remain anonymous, shared similar concerns.

“You have Black children who want to learn about themselves, and now teachers who live in fear of presenting that information to them,” the teacher said. “This targets Black people, and now my concern is you have teachers afraid to teach.”

Reach Tina Locurto at [tlocurto@yorkdispatch.com](mailto:tlocurto@yorkdispatch.com) or on Twitter at [@tina\\_locurto](https://twitter.com/tina_locurto).

Published Sept. 1, 2021.



# Once lost to addiction, Central Bucks grad brings message of hope to streets of Kensington

**By Marion Callahan**

Bucks County Courier Times

Under the weight of a soaked blanket, Megan Cohen inched her way, on foot, along a stretch of Interstate 95 in Philadelphia, the rain beating against her frail body.

She wasn't looking to be saved.

"I was so broken. I was homeless at that point for quite a while and I wasn't in the right state of mind at all," said Cohen. "Tons of people drove right past me. I may have driven right past me."

Coming off his shift as an Uber driver, Joshua Santiago spotted Cohen as she headed toward Bensalem.

"Something in my heart told me to stop," said Santiago. "I was about to go home and lay in a warm bed."

When he pulled over, Cohen was skeptical about his intentions, "but being so cold I didn't care what happened ... I had no hope or will to live at that point."

"I asked him why he would let me in his car when it's obvious what I am."

"You are still a person," Santiago told her.

For years, Cohen lived in a perpetual state of hunger, trauma and pain. Eventually, she landed on the streets of Kensington, the largest open-air drug market on the East Coast.

Not long after Santiago offered her a ride, two other "angels" stepped into her path — one gave her a hot meal and a place to shower; another offered her cold water and encouraging words.

Today, the power of those moments fuels Cohen's faith in humankind and strengthens her resolve to save others who feel trapped, as she once did, in the throes of addiction.

Nearly two years after her chance encounters, Cohen, 27, is in recovery, has reunited with her family, and found her way back to school and steady work in Bucks County.

Yet the Warrington native and Central Bucks South graduate still heads back to the streets she once so desperately wished to flee.

"If I could get out, anyone could get out," said Cohen,



MICHELE HADDON/PHOTOJOURNALIST

**ABOVE:** Maureen McGuire, left, and Megan Cohen walk along Kensington Avenue under the lights of the El tracks in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020.

**BELOW:** A man sits with his belongings in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia after receiving a lunch bag from The Grace Project.



who is intent on spreading hope and showing proof that recovery does happen.

But Kensington has changed since she left.

"It's worse. It's been forgotten."

The heroin epidemic has been overshadowed and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, displacing many users from shelters to the streets where few people wear masks.

Despite both health and safety risks, Cohen returns

weekly to Kensington, bringing food, clothes, blankets and her own story of recovery, hoping to show others a way out.

This time, she's not alone. With her mother, Jennifer, and dozens of supporters uniting behind her cause, Cohen has formed The Grace Project, a nonprofit to help people facing obstacles in life — whether it's addiction or something else.

The point, Cohen said, is to "show grace and bring hope to those in need."

Brian Kaye, a Grace Project volunteer and long-time recovery advocate in Bucks County, said Cohen's energy, message and project come at a critical time, as community help is needed to sway people to get help and give help, too.

"When it comes to people actually caring about us, especially at our lowest point, it's expected our parents are going to care. Unfortunately, that doesn't always resonate with us," said Kaye, who once was addicted to heroin and now works to get others off the streets. "But when a stranger steps in and shows they care and they make us feel like a human being, which is so vitally important, that's when we can become willing to seek help."

## Fighting for others

One recent night, walking through the littered streets of Kensington, Cohen was fearless, approaching clusters of people wrapped in layers of clothing hunkered in makeshift tents.

The scene is tough for many to stomach.

On Kensington Avenue, a man lay motionless on the sidewalk, while foot traffic moved around him. A volunteer checked to make sure he was still breathing, then left a bottle of water beside him. Most pedestrians passed by without a glance.

A few blocks away, blood streamed down the face of a drug user after he was jumped by a local teen gang. Bikers weaved through crowds, making exchanges. Syringes and needles were out and used plain sight.

*Continued on next page*



## Bucks County Courier Times continued

"This is normal," one volunteer said. "A week like any other."

Cohen's platinum hair bounced against a black shirt that read, "Hope Dealer," as she handed out water and asked people walking by, "Are you hungry?"

The hardest part, she said, is when she sees a familiar face, someone she knew when she lived on the streets.

"They can't believe it; a lot of times they don't recognize me," said Cohen, thinking about one visit to her "old block" where people gathered around her. "They said, 'Look who it is.' It gives them a little bit of hope."

They remember her when she was at her worst.

One recent night, after handing out clothes and food at Kensington's notorious Needle Park, Cohen squatted on the littered sidewalk under the soft glow of a street light and looked into the eyes of a 29-year-old woman from Quakertown who was devoid of hope.

The woman had been walking in shoes that were so small that she had to slice them with a knife to fit her feet in them. The woman, who has lived on the streets for three years, described her days.

"I don't necessarily live out here," she said. "I don't sleep — period. I don't have a spot that I go; I don't have a set up. I don't have anything. I literally walk around all day long, every day. I do a date, I get drugs, I get high. I do a date, I get drugs, I get high, over and over again. There is not a single thing else that I do."

She told Cohen about her past relapses and the time she begged for help and couldn't get it because she lacked insurance and money to pay for it. Cohen asked if she could help, but the woman said she didn't feel strong enough.

"I'm stuck this time ... I feel like I have no reason or desire to want a life. I don't feel like I'm going to have one. I don't feel like I have the energy to have one. I just need to be as high as possible at all times. I do outrageous amounts of drugs.

"I can't overdose for the life of me. I try."

Cohen asked the woman again. "Do you want to go into treatment?"

"Part of me does. But also, no," she answered.

As Cohen spoke, police cars and ambulances, sirens blaring, rounded the corner. Just a block away and minutes earlier, a man had been shot. A few feet away, the man who had been jumped by the group of teens stood as blood dripped from his forehead down his cheeks.

The group, sensing more violence was on the way, called on volunteers to head back.

"Listen," Cohen told her. "We are out here every Thursday. Think about it over the next week, and let me know."

In the woman's eyes, Cohen saw a reflection of her former self.

"I saw me in her; she's exactly where I was at," Cohen said. "She genuinely doesn't see a happy ending in sight. She even said she hopes to overdose. That's how I felt out there in the end. It's heartbreaking because if I can make it out, anyone can."



MICHELE HADDON/PHOTOJOURNALIST

**Volunteers with The Grace Project hand out clothing donations at McPherson Square, also known as "Needle Park," in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020.**

Before parting ways, she reminded the young woman that she would return the next Thursday — and the Thursday after that.

"I'm praying I see her again."

### A way out

Cohen can relate to people on the streets who refuse help, as she once resisted the idea herself.

She said living addicted on the streets evokes feelings of shame and guilt that are so deep "they are hard to know unless you've experienced them," she said.

After 71 stints in treatment and living homeless in Detroit, California and Lancaster, Cohen said guilt and shame over past failed attempts diminished hopes for recovery. It took the action and words of others to shine a light on what she could not see in herself.

Santiago, for example, "reminded me I was more than just a junkie."

"(He) was the start of my eyes opening up," she said.

Then there was a Hispanic woman who approached Cohen on the streets. She grabbed her and asked someone nearby to translate a message.

"She's been seeing you out here," the translator told Cohen. "She feels you don't belong out here, that you are better than this."

Cohen began sharing her story. How she had been on heroin and crack. How she robbed her grandmother, one of her closest relatives. How she was in and out of jail for

her crimes. And how she didn't see a way out.

The woman invited Cohen into her home to take a shower.

"She gave me clean clothes and food and gave me a hug. We couldn't talk, but she looked into my eyes, she teared up. I teared up. I remember looking at her and thinking, 'God, I see you.' "

Cohen had been praying for a sign. This, she knew, was it.

Leaving the woman's house, Cohen headed to Prevention Point, a refuge in Kensington for those seeking help. She called her mother, saying she was ready to turn herself in for the crimes she committed and ready to accept help.

Now, she believes it's her turn to remind others of their worth.

### Two crises collide

The heroin problem is worse than Cohen remembered. Addiction experts blame the coronavirus pandemic, which has disrupted treatment and recovery programs and left people more isolated. More than 40 states have recorded increases in opioid-related deaths since the pandemic began, according to the American Medical Association.

Dr. Nora Volkow, director of NIH's National Institute on Drug Abuse, highlighted growing challenges during a recent Zoom interview.

*Continued on next page*

"The health care system is not prepared to take care of them," said Volkow, adding that stigma and social issues — compounded with new distancing protocols — create more barriers.

"The concept of social distancing makes such people even more vulnerable because it interferes with many of the support systems that can help them to reach recovery. And, on top of that, drugs themselves negatively influence human physiology, making one more vulnerable to getting infected and more vulnerable to worse outcomes."

She said it's become harder for patients to be able to access treatment.

"And because of social isolation, if you overdose, the likelihood that someone can rescue you with naloxone is much lower," Volkow said.

Volunteers with The Grace Project gather outside The Last Stop in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia on Thursday, October 8, 2020, as they prepare to walk the streets handing out food, clothing, beddings and toiletries.

Pennsylvania leaders addressed the growing crisis amid COVID during a Dec. 8 press conference.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate the lives of loved ones, the opioid epidemic hasn't ended," said Jennifer Smith, secretary of Pennsylvania's Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. "We are losing far too many Pennsylvanians to drug-related fatalities."

Smith said the isolating nature of the pandemic has been

especially challenging to those in recovery who depend on people in the community and a support system. Now, with most help offered online, "support groups look and feel very different."

She encouraged people struggling with addiction to reach out for help by calling 1-800-662-HELP.

Cohen knows, however, that users addicted on the street don't always have a phone, nor a way to connect with resources. That is why street outreach is even more critical, she said. Yet, over the last year, Cohen has seen a decrease in the number of community volunteer groups out in Kensington.

"This is why we have to go every week," she said.

### Full circle

Cohen said it seems like a lifetime ago when she walked that stretch of I-95 in the rain. Months after she went into recovery, she thought about Santiago, that "first angel," and even tried to find him.

Then, in September, fate stepped in. Santiago found her.

Someone on Facebook thought she might like a post from a man who goes out to Kensington to give free haircuts to the homeless. When she clicked on the video, her eyes filled with tears.

It was Santiago, the man who changed her life.

Santiago had learned about The Grace Project and was in awe of the woman who he recognized behind the new

effort, so he posted an emotional video about his encounter with Cohen that rainy night.

Celebrating news of her recovery, he said: "She's running her own nonprofit organization, going back to the community she was getting high at trying to help people ... I feel a loss of words."

Cohen called him soon after and learned that Santiago was one of the angels she had been searching for.

"Anyone who has heard me speak has heard me refer to my 'angels' when I was out there," she said. "This is what I call the few strangers who showed me love when everyone else along with myself had given up on me."

"I was so broken and hopeless I would pray for a sign I was still worth it and that my life was meant for more. It was people like Joshua and a few others that reignited a spark in me to get my life back on track."

It wasn't just a life that Santiago gave her.

"When I started The Grace Project, the main point of it was to bring that feeling of love and understanding to others like me, to show them that people still see the human in them and that there is hope," Cohen said.

"To spread the same message Joshua gave me that night."

Help is available through the National Drug Helpline: (844) 289-0879.

*Published Dec. 22, 2020.*

Newspapers are the most trusted source of news and information among all age groups.<sup>1</sup>

# Baby Boomers

Baby boomers rank newspapers as the **most trusted source of news** and information.<sup>1</sup>

84% of baby boomers have **taken action as a result of seeing an ad** in a print newspaper in the past 30 days.<sup>2</sup>

**86% of baby boomers** use social media each day.<sup>3</sup>

**96% of baby boomers** use Facebook at least once a week.<sup>3</sup>





# The Herald

SERVING THE SHENANGO VALLEY AND MERCER COUNTY AREA

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## Rebuilding face-to-face ties

By David L. Dye  
Herald Staff Writer

SHARON — Like the other students in their group, seventh-graders Brayden Covert and Jordan White took turns trying to sketch each other's faces on a small easel.

Though Covert said it was difficult learning to draw, White said it came easily to him — but both students said they preferred the group activities Wednesday at the Hope Center for Arts and Technology over the remote learning they endured last school year.

"You could sort of interact with other people, but it wasn't the same," White said.

Getting students such as Covert and White used to a more "normal" school year was important not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well, since the 2020-21 school year included periods of remote learning and the 2019-20 year from March onward was all remote. To rebuild some of what was lost, the administration at the West Middlesex Area School District organized a program of activities this week, high school Assistant Principal Aaron Pernesky said.

The program included a day of activities at West Middlesex schools on Monday, a day of outdoor activities at Buhl Park Tuesday, some activities geared toward art and self-expression at the HopeCAT Wednesday, and a field trip to a Pirates game in Pittsburgh Thursday. The program was open to students going into fifth grade through students entering 12th grade, Pernesky said.

"We wanted it to be something fun for the kids," Pernesky said.

The program was paid for through funds provided by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief grant program, so students could participate free of charge. Students were also provided lunches if needed.

A similar program focusing on academics was organized this summer, where students could make up credits in classes if they struggled during remote learning. The academic program was also offered at no cost, Pernesky said.

"Basically we told the parents, 'if the kids wanted to participate, bring 'em,'" Pernesky said.

Among the instructors for the program were teachers, the guidance counselor and the nurse from West Middlesex Junior Senior High School, which Pernesky said

RIGHT: Jacklynn Munnal, an eighth-grade student at West Middlesex, works with clay Wednesday as part of a group project at HopeCAT in Sharon.

BELOW: Maria Fuentes laughs while Lucy Briggs attempts to draw her at HopeCAT in Sharon. Both are seventh-graders at West Middlesex.

PHOTOS: TANNER MONDOK | HERALD



gave students and staff a chance to get to know each other before the school year began in the fall.

Aside from sketching portraits, students also made tie-dye shirts, where sixth-grader Sarah Knechtel worked alongside a group of fellow students. Knechtel said that interaction with her classmates, something which was lacking during virtual education, was a factor in her decision to participate.

"I heard some of my friends were doing it," Knechtel said.

Another project involved the students making small clay objects that could be added to a large background

featuring "WM," the logo for West Middlesex schools. The entire project could then be placed somewhere in the school, where the student-made project could be displayed for their classmates, Pernesky said.

Among those students working on the project was seventh-grader Meredith Massey, who worked on a piece resembling her old school district's logo, "PL" for Purchase Line School District, where she moved from a couple years ago.

Overseeing the project was instructor Christian Kuharik, who said it might take a few weeks to prepare all the individual pieces and combining them into the overall project, then framing the piece and preparing it for display. However, the students Wednesday seemed to enjoy learning something while working with their hands.

"Older kids tend to have their minds made up whether they think they're good at art or not, but younger kids are more open-minded. They'll try anything," Kuharik said.

The visit Wednesday gave the students a chance to experience some of the HopeCAT's programs, such as an after-school program for high school students or a medical-assistants training program, which is offered at no cost for adults looking to enter the medical field and could be relayed by the students to their parents, Pernesky said. District Judge Mary Odem also stopped by to speak with the students during their visit.

Like David L. Dye on Facebook or email him at [ddye@sharonherald.com](mailto:ddye@sharonherald.com).

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# The transformation of an Easton neighborhood and what it's meant for residents



**By Rudy Miller**

For The Express-Times

Moving into the Delaware Terrace housing project in Easton changed Amelia Torres' life.

After being forced to move from home to home, and then ending up with nowhere to live, she finally found a stable residence. She made friends. She put down roots.

Then the city forced her out when it leveled the South Side neighborhood over concerns about crime, the age of the buildings and their layout.

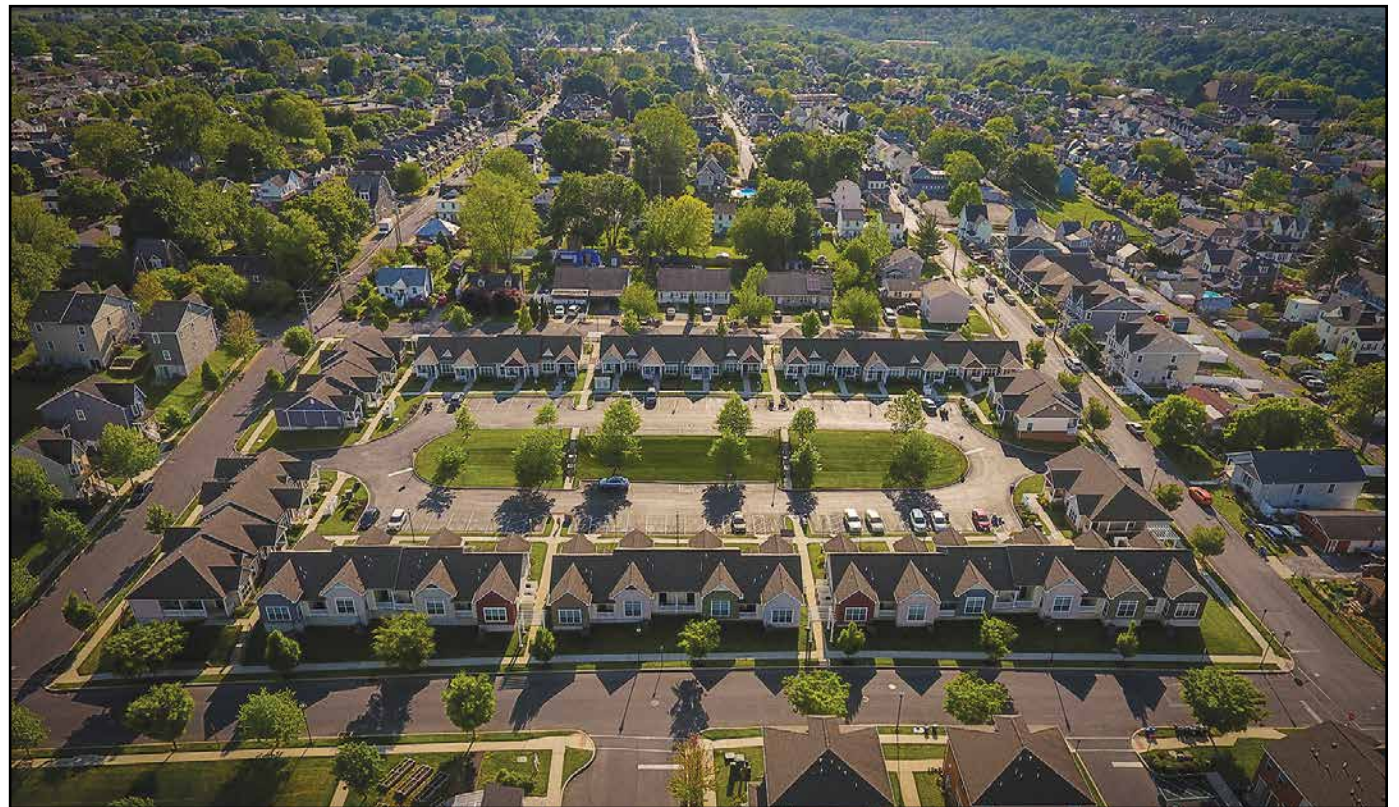
She cried when Delaware Terrace was torn down. But she believed in her heart the housing development replacing it would be a huge step up for her and her neighbors.

Now Torres lives in Neston Heights. Gone are the crowded-together, barracks-style brick homes. Instead there's a mix of duplexes, row homes and single-family homes. You can't tell where public housing starts and the rest of the neighborhood begins.

Ten years after moving to Neston Heights, Torres couldn't be happier.

But what about the rest of the Delaware Terrace residents? Fewer than 15% of families who lived in Delaware Terrace wound up in Neston Heights. These were among Easton's most needy families and yet they chose to live elsewhere when their critically damaged neighborhood was replaced with new homes designed to better meet their needs. Why didn't they come back? Was it worth the \$20 million investment to tear down Delaware Terrace and start over?

Elected officials and the Easton Housing



EXPRESS-TIMES PHOTO | SAED HINDASH

A bird's eye view of Easton's Neston Heights neighborhood in summer 2021.

Authority director offer an emphatic yes. But others? They say that Easton, like many cities that used the federal HOPE VI funds to re-imagine their public housing, got a mixed bag of results.

## Amelia comes home

Torres was only 22 when she moved to the U.S. mainland from Puerto Rico in 1980. She came to visit but enjoyed being here so much she learned English and stayed.

She got a factory job in Nazareth and

lived with her brother and his wife in Easton. She married, had two children, eventually divorced. While moving from place to place, she moved in with her sister. Then her sister left.

"When my sister moved to Puerto Rico, I had no place to go," Torres said. She found herself on the street and reluctantly moved into a shelter while waiting for public housing.

She finally found a long-term home in Delaware Terrace.

She loved her neighbors on Frederick Street, recalling "so many good things that happened in there. Like family parties, get togethers. We used to sit out on the porch."

Aljetta Broughton had the same attraction to the neighborhood. Her husband, James "Charles" Broughton, paid a random visit to Easton and fell in love with the city.

They had moved around northern New

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# The Express-Times continued

Jersey as James Broughton changed jobs. Now in their 50s, they were looking for a better place to spend the rest of their lives. In Easton they could conveniently get to the bank and the grocery store, but they enjoyed a rural character reminiscent of where they lived as young people in the South.

They moved to Delaware Terrace. Like Torres, the Broughtons loved their neighbors.

"They were so loving and caring and helpful," Aljetta Broughton said. She remembers movie nights and senior days.

"We tried to get them to come out for bingo but that didn't happen too well," she admits.

"It was always a welcoming place to me, particularly growing up as a young child," said Dean Young, who didn't live in Delaware Terrace but grew up on Easton's South Side. He spent countless hours at the Boys and Girls Club of Easton and has been the executive director there since 1986. The club was a fixture in Delaware Terrace, then was rebuilt and now lies in Neston Heights.

Generations of families lived in Delaware Terrace along with their uncles, grandparents and cousins.

"It was the village mentality. Everybody looked out for everybody," Young said.

## Doomed to fail

So what happened to Delaware Terrace? Why was it demolished?

The neighborhood was doomed from the start, according to Paul Felder. He's a professor of architecture at Lafayette College and served on the Easton Housing Authority when Delaware Terrace was torn down.

It shared the deficiencies of many post World War II housing projects: It had too many people clustered too close together.

"They were not designed to be integrated into their neighborhoods. They essentially were created almost as low-income ghettos," Felder said. "They were almost doomed to failure and they failed."

A PowerPoint presentation put together by the Easton Housing Authority after Delaware Terrace was torn down highlights the years of neglect at the project built in 1953.

The slide show included photos of cracked brick mortar, water damage, cracked sidewalks and broken railings. The



EXPRESS-TIMES FILE PHOTO

A look at the old Delaware Terrace neighborhood in Easton in the summer of 2006.

rooves, electrical system and plumbing needed to be repaired.

The heat was piped in from underground. The heating system was outdated, unreliable and hard to control.

"You could drive over there in the winter and tenants had their windows wide open," said Easton Housing Authority Executive Director Gene Pambianchi.

Broughton and Torres were willing to put up with these deficiencies. But neither would tolerate drug sales. Both of them served on the Delaware Terrace Block Watch. Broughton was president of the block watch and the tenants' association.

Torres fed tips to the police. She was accused of being a "snitch" but persisted.

Broughton said residents were reluctant to get involved with block watch for fear of retaliation. Broughton didn't care. She'd tell known drug dealers to leave.

Broughton tried to fight back with prayer rallies and trash clean-up campaigns. But the crime continued.

"It got bad to the point where there were shootings all the time," Torres said, adding "I didn't want to let the kids go outside because I was scared."

In 2005 Brooklyn resident Lamech James was killed in the housing project. Joey Mobley was shot dead at Kleinhans and Charles streets in 2007. Grant money was

allocated to target gangs. But it wasn't enough.

## A New Hope

By 2004 city leaders and the Easton Housing Authority agreed Delaware Terrace needed to come down.

They applied for a \$20 million federal HOPE VI grant to cover the cost of demolishing the development, relocating tenants and building a replacement neighborhood.

Felder called Delaware Terrace a "textbook case" for using HOPE VI funds. The government made a mistake when it built projects like Delaware Terrace, and now HOPE VI would correct those mistakes, Felder said.

"I think the federal government was extremely interested in funding this," Felder said. "It certainly was a triumph for Easton to get the funding. It also showed how dysfunctional and dangerous Delaware Terrace was."

Getting the grant was no slam dunk. It took Easton four tries over two years to secure the \$20 million in 2006. Only four HOPE VI applications were approved in 2006. None of them was a first-time applicant.

As pleased as she was over the victory, Torres had mixed emotions over leaving her home. She remembers the eerie

feeling of driving by the old neighborhood and seeing that her apartment had been leveled. Moving was bittersweet. She no longer had to deal with crime but no longer had the company of longtime neighbors.

"A lot of people got attached. We got attached to the good memories," Torres said.

Former heavyweight boxing champion Larry Holmes is probably the most famous former resident of Delaware Terrace.

The champ loved growing up there. When the Terrace was torn down, he took bricks from his former home and made a frame in which he displays a photo of himself at his old home. Delaware Terrace may be gone but the relationships aren't.

"We still, some of us, the ones who are alive, we still see each other," Holmes said. "We talk back and forth."

## Time to move

The \$20 million HOPE VI grant award meant the occupants of 250 Delaware Terrace homes had to abruptly find somewhere else to live.

"I think many people had to move to already crowded apartments with relatives and friends. I think it was a disaster and I think the way people were treated was a disaster," said former Easton resident Ken Briggs. He's a religion writer and editor who moved to Easton in 1985 and left in 2019.

He's long been a skeptic and critic of the conversion from Delaware Terrace to Neston Heights.

Neston Heights was a clear improvement over Delaware Terrace, but the residents forced to relocate deserved more help, Briggs said.

"In my opinion the destruction and emptying of Delaware Terrace was a tragedy and a very severe blow to human beings," he said.

They were given Section 8 vouchers, but landlords are often reluctant to rent to individuals using vouchers.

Many cities prohibit housing discrimination, but no law requires landlords to accept Section 8 rental vouchers, according to Lafayette College Professor Yusuf Dahl.

"This is a common problem," said Dahl, who founded an affordable housing development and management company in Milwaukee.

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# The Express-Times continued

Pambianchi said transition services for Delaware Terrace residents were mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and part of the grant.

There was a relocation fair, according to the Neston Heights PowerPoint presentation.

"We took them in vans to look at other apartments," Pambianchi said.

HOPE VI mandated a Community and Supportive Services Program, which was run by the nonprofit ProJeCt of Easton. The program helped residents find new homes, helped them get GEDs, get job skills and get childcare and transportation.

Also as part of the HOPE VI program, an overall assessment study was completed by the Meyner Center at Lafayette College. Lehighvalleylive.com obtained a copy of the study from the Easton Housing Authority through a right-to-know request. The study surveyed former Delaware Terrace residents to gauge their opinions on services offered, what services they took advantage of and where they wound up moving.

According to the surveys, few residents took advantage of ProJeCt of Easton's services. And the services they did take advantage of focused on acute-relief needs like getting bills paid as opposed to future-oriented services such as education and job training.

The surveys, however, may not accurately reflect the entire Delaware Terrace population. Out of more than 500 residents, only 99 participated in the telephone poll taken after they moved into their new homes. Even fewer participated in a follow-up survey.

ProJeCt CEO Janice Komisor provides some context to the survey. She remembers how frustrated her staff was at being unable to engage residents during phone calls to take advantage of the services.

Phone solicitations were an efficient way to reach the most people in need, but they didn't offer an opportunity for a face-to-face introduction or to begin to form service relationships with clients.

The residents were dealing with the myriad issues of moving and may have seen the phone calls as more of a hassle than a helping hand, she said.

"People have real lives and stress and things going on," Komisor said. "You don't just land and people suddenly come



Homes in the Delaware Terrace housing project at Charles and Kleinhans streets are demolished on May 14, 2009.

EXPRESS-TIMES FILE PHOTO

flooding through your doors. It doesn't work that way." It makes sense that people would want to deal with their acute-relief needs before looking at how they could better themselves.

"It doesn't mean that people don't want help or don't need the help. If people are struggling economically, they might want to satisfy their most essential needs first. People don't have the bandwidth to think about the future when they don't know where their next meal is coming from," Komisor said.

She said her staff worked hard and helped a lot of people. But they were constrained to work within their budget and do their best to reach people with whom they'd had previous little interaction.

"They think we can herd the poor folks together and get them the help they need, but it's not that simple," Komisor said.

Of the 228 families relocated from Delaware Terrace, only 26 moved into Neston Heights.

According to the Meyner Center survey, some residents were skeptical crime would be cleaned up in the new neighborhood. Others didn't want to bother moving again after so recently relocating from Delaware Terrace. Others were daunted by the long application and rules for the Neston Heights residents.

## It's like heaven

The first Neston Heights homes were completed in early 2011. Torres was among the first to move in. She lives in one of the

56 low-income rentals. There are 48 owner-occupied homes and 40 rental homes in a section dedicated to senior citizens, according to Lisa Weaver. Weaver works for Pennrose Properties of Philadelphia, the property manager at Neston Heights.

Torres would never think of moving again.

"Compared to before, this is heaven," said the 63-year-old grandmother.

The homes are deliberately spread out. The street grid was returned to the way it was before Delaware Terrace and integrated back into the neighborhood.

All the homes have central air, ceramic tile in the bathrooms, dishwashers, electric ranges and stainless-steel refrigerators, Weaver said.

Torres appreciates the convenience of having her own washer and dryer. Before she had to hang her clothes outside to dry.

No one argues that Neston Heights homes are a huge upgrade from Delaware Terrace, Pambianchi said.

"Buildingwise it's certainly been a success. It's certainly an attractive development," Pambianchi said.

There's little crime. Weaver said the block watch disbanded because residents didn't see a need to continue it.

Easton Mayor Sal Panto Jr. said crime that once plagued Delaware Terrace is virtually nonexistent in Neston Heights. Residents from Delaware Terrace scattered all across the city and the region when the neighborhood was torn down, so the crime

in that neighborhood was dispersed as well, he said.

It's so safe the mayor helped his father, Sal Panto Sr., find a home in Neston Heights.

"It's very quiet. You can hear a pin drop," said Panto Sr., who is 95 years old.

Mary Weidman has lived in Neston Heights for eight years. The 75-year-old is widowed and lives alone.

"I don't have to worry about shoveling snow, cutting grass, the upkeep," she said. "If your faucet leaks or your toilet doesn't work, they come. You don't have to wait three days."

Neston Heights' amenities make it a sought-after neighborhood for low-income individuals. Weaver tells prospective residents to expect to wait a year or two before a vacancy opens up.

## Too much scrutiny?

No neighborhood is perfect.

Broughton's old enemy was drug dealers. Now that she's in Neston Heights, her new one is Pennrose Properties.

She got off on the wrong foot with the property manager before she even moved in. After working hard to get the HOPE VI grant and waiting patiently for Neston Heights to be built, she was told her husband didn't qualify to move in.

She had to apply for a home separately and live in Neston Heights for eight

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# The Express-Times continued

months by herself before her husband retired and became income-eligible to join her. She complains there are too many rules.

The stoves have motion sensors. If someone walks away from the stove for more than five minutes, it shuts off.

There's a ban on grills, since they pose a fire hazard, Torres said. Same goes for live Christmas trees. The homes have no screen doors, Torres said.

The annual application process can be tedious, Broughton said. You need to send in six months worth of bank statements, Broughton said.

"If you get one penny of interest on your life insurance, they want to know about it," Weidman added.

New residents need a credit check and a criminal background check, Pennrose's Weaver said. They must report other people living with them.

Once they're in, all members of a household must maintain clean criminal records. A criminal offense usually leads to a sit-down with management.

"If it continues, we may try to go with the eviction process," Weaver said.

Visitors can only stay about a week because Pennrose wants the ability to vet anyone living at Neston Heights.

There are periodic safety inspections. Inspectors are looking for things like loose refrigerator gaskets and non-working smoke detectors, Weaver said.

Broughton said she failed because she had too much dust in her bathroom fan. She worries about failing because she can't figure out how to keep her linoleum tile cleaned.

The inspections can be as frequent as four or five times a year, she said. She said she was threatened with eviction once because she failed to replace a burned-out light bulb.

"That really made me wonder why I moved here," she said.

Pennrose maintains high standards to prevent the neighborhood from returning to the way it was before Delaware Terrace was razed, according to Torres and Broughton.

Pambianci said most of the rules at Neston Heights apply to all public housing in Easton. If Pennrose is tough on residents, it's because they want people living there who take pride in their neighborhood, he said.



PHOTO: SAEED HINDASH | FOR LEHIGHVALLEYLIVE.COM

**Mary Weidman lives in the Neston Heights neighborhood on Easton's South Side with her dog, Tinkerbell.**

Torres can deal with the rules. But she misses the neighborhood spirit she once experienced at Delaware Terrace. She wouldn't give up her current amenities, but more frequent friendly get-togethers would be nice.

The homes may have been packed together in Delaware Terrace, but that led people to spend more time together, said Young, of the Boys & Girls Club.

He recalls a former club member telling him, "I miss coming outside and there were all my neighbors."

"People who grew up here miss the old Delaware Terrace, but I think they understand that it gave way to a new life and new opportunities," Young said.

## Is Easton better than it was 10 years ago?

Panto Jr., Easton's mayor, touts Neston Heights as a big win for the city. It took a blighted neighborhood and replaced it with beautiful new homes. It blends working families in owner-occupied homes with low-income renters.

"I think it works because of the mix of people," he said. "It's more representative of what society is like."

He said working families who own their own homes can serve as mentors to their renting neighbors.

"It lets kids see what life can be like if they grow up and get a good job and get a good education," Panto Jr. said.

Not everybody who rented in Delaware Terrace could afford to buy a home, though.

"This is a great point often missed by policymakers and elected officials," Dahl said. "Property ownership is not for everyone, especially for people who are unprepared for the responsibilities of homeownership, financial and otherwise."

Briggs doesn't dispute that Neston Heights is an improvement on Delaware Terrace, but said the city needs to do a better job providing affordable homes for low-income residents.

By demolishing Delaware Terrace, the city sacrificed a significant number of public housing units. Delaware Terrace had 250 homes and Neston Heights has only 140.

The nationwide trend isn't to build more public housing but to sell off what's already there, Pambianchi said. He said the federal government has encouraged "repositioning," which is the sale of public housing and reliance instead on Section 8 vouchers.

During the HOPE VI era between 1990 and 2018 the nation lost 200,000 public housing units, according to Susan J. Popkin. She's a fellow at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., and got involved in public housing 30 years ago with the Chicago Housing Authority.

So is it worth ripping out neighborhoods like Delaware Terrace if it means leaving fewer housing opportunities for poor people?

That depends on how you measure success.

Felder said it's much better to integrate neighborhoods than segregate the poor. Dahl said public housing best works when it enables people to improve their lives and eventually move into private housing.

"Public housing is not meant to be a lifetime public good," he said.

But some people, such as Weidman and Torres, need public housing because they're disabled, aging and can't afford to better themselves, Popkin said.

"They are not going to work their way out of public housing," she said "They need a place to live. Others are individuals who are working but the jobs aren't paying enough. That is where we are today."

While HOPE VI left many low-income individuals scrambling for new homes, it eliminated deteriorating properties that couldn't be fixed and needed to be removed, Popkin said.

HOPE VI has been replaced by the Choice Neighborhoods program, which address the full needs of the neighborhood in addition to housing, she said.

"I wouldn't declare HOPE VI a failure. Like many policies, it was a mixed bag," Popkin said.

## Two views

After fighting to try to clean up Delaware Terrace, then fighting for the HOPE VI grant, Broughton wonders whether it was all worth it.

She's aggravated with the annual paperwork she needs to file to stay in her home. She said Pennrose employees don't take her concerns seriously. She said she wanted to start up a tenant association when she moved in but Pennrose wouldn't recognize it.

She feels like she and her husband have outgrown their small home. She's starting to consider her husband's suggestion to move back to Georgia, where she was born.

"It gets tougher every year as we get older," she said of the re-application process. "And I don't want to do it anymore."

Torres has no regrets.

Sure, there are rules. But they're there to lift up the neighborhood.

"Do you really think I'm going to permit this place to get the way it was before?" she asked.

*Published Aug. 29, 2021.*

# Studies show caring for older adults requires a holistic approach

**CITY &  
STATE  
PENNSYLVANIA**

By Harrison Cann

Pennsylvania is getting older quickly. By 2030, when baby boomers will be 65 or older, seniors will outnumber children 18 and under for the first time in history.

It's no secret the state struggled during the pandemic to control COVID-19 outbreaks in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Issues like staffing shortages and a lack of resources, which existed before the pandemic, were exacerbated by the grim conditions.

The question is: with services failing to meet the current population's needs, and the population only getting older, how can the state prepare for what's ahead?

"The reality is that society tends to treat older adults as an afterthought," Adam Marles, president and CEO of the trade association LeadingAge PA, told City & State. "I think [the pandemic] shined a light on how much work there is to do to make sure that older adults have what they need to not be isolated, and to make sure that they are still thought of as contributing critical components of our communities."

Currently, one in four Pennsylvanians is over 60. That number is expected to reach 4 million, about one-third of the state's population, by 2030. Those 85 and older are expected to grow steadily, as well.

According to the Independent Fiscal Office's five-year outlook, Pennsylvania's retiree cohort grew by 3.3% over the last five years, and is expected to grow by 2.6% in the next five years. The elderly cohort, including those 80 years and older, is expected to grow by nearly 4% in the same period.

Serving older adults goes beyond just health care, and with people living longer, more active lives, the demand for services is only going to increase. Homebound seniors may need assistance with getting food and medication, accessing home care and social services, and learning how to use technology and avoid isolation. Others may need help paying rent or utilities, or need additional mental or physical therapy in a post-pandemic world.

The state's Department of Aging, led by Secretary Robert Torres, must develop a State Plan on Aging to provide a vision for the next few years. The department's most recent plan outlines five goals Commonwealth agencies will pursue. They include strengthening the aging network's capacity; improving services for older adults; enhancing efforts to supply a sense of community for



older adults; emphasizing a citizen-first, diverse culture; and advocating for the rights and protecting older adults from abuse and exploitation.

As need grows, so does the demand for more resources. Torres said regardless of future funding, the state has to use technology and evidence-based programming to increase efficiency and capacity.

"Whether we get more support or not, we must continue to improve data collection and analytics in order to be more efficient and build our capacity," Torres told City & State. "[The population's] also becoming more diverse, so one of my priorities is to make sure that we're being effective in our outreach to diverse communities, meaning there's not a one-size-fits-all method."

Torres and advocates agreed that a person-centered approach to health care is required going forward. Being proactive and pushing preventative medicine now can prevent emergencies and other problems in the future, he said.

The pandemic revealed the urgency for a holistic approach to health, and that socioeconomic status and lifestyle choices play a major role in health outcomes. But just to start, advocates and workers in the industry say they need to be provided the most basic necessities to properly serve their communities.

"Everything that we went through during the pandemic has always been there. COVID exposed the ugly truth and the monster that was already in the closet," Tisheia Frazier, certified nursing assistant (CNA) at the Saunders House outside Philadelphia, told City & State. "Nursing homes were like the Titanic. In the movie, when the boat was sinking, they told the band to keep playing while people were out there dying."

The Saunders House is one of 12 nursing homes that voted in June to authorize strikes. Frazier said current contract negotiations with the facility have been focused

*Continued on next page*



## City & State Pennsylvania continued

on not only improving wages, but also providing better health care and other benefits like tuition reimbursement. Those are two important factors in both attracting and retaining a quality workforce. As it stands now, she said, the options given to workers are nowhere near where they need to be.

"It's the most dangerous work in the country right now," Matthew Yarnell, president of SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania, told City & State. "A workforce that is largely impoverished – this chronic, low wage-high turnover workforce – is ultimately bad for care."

According to Yarnell, there are more than 234,000 direct care workers in the state. The existing shortage, which he blames on low wages, minimum training and high emotional and physical demands, creates obstacles for access to quality services and the continuity of care necessary to improve health outcomes.

SEIU, which represents workers at more than 100 of the Commonwealth's 700 nursing homes, was requesting a \$250 million investment to the bedside, what Yarnell called a "down payment toward equality."

Marles and LeadingAge PA, which represents more than 380 senior service providers across the state, was looking for \$450 million, including \$396 million for nursing homes. He said nursing homes receive funding through medical assistance, Medicare and Medicaid, and private and long-term care insurance. While Medicare pays these properties enough to continue operating effectively and generate some margin, medical assistance underfunds homes by about \$45 per person per day. With resources lacking in numerous areas, resources will have to be allocated toward specific purposes to ensure workers are paid well and homes are properly reimbursed.

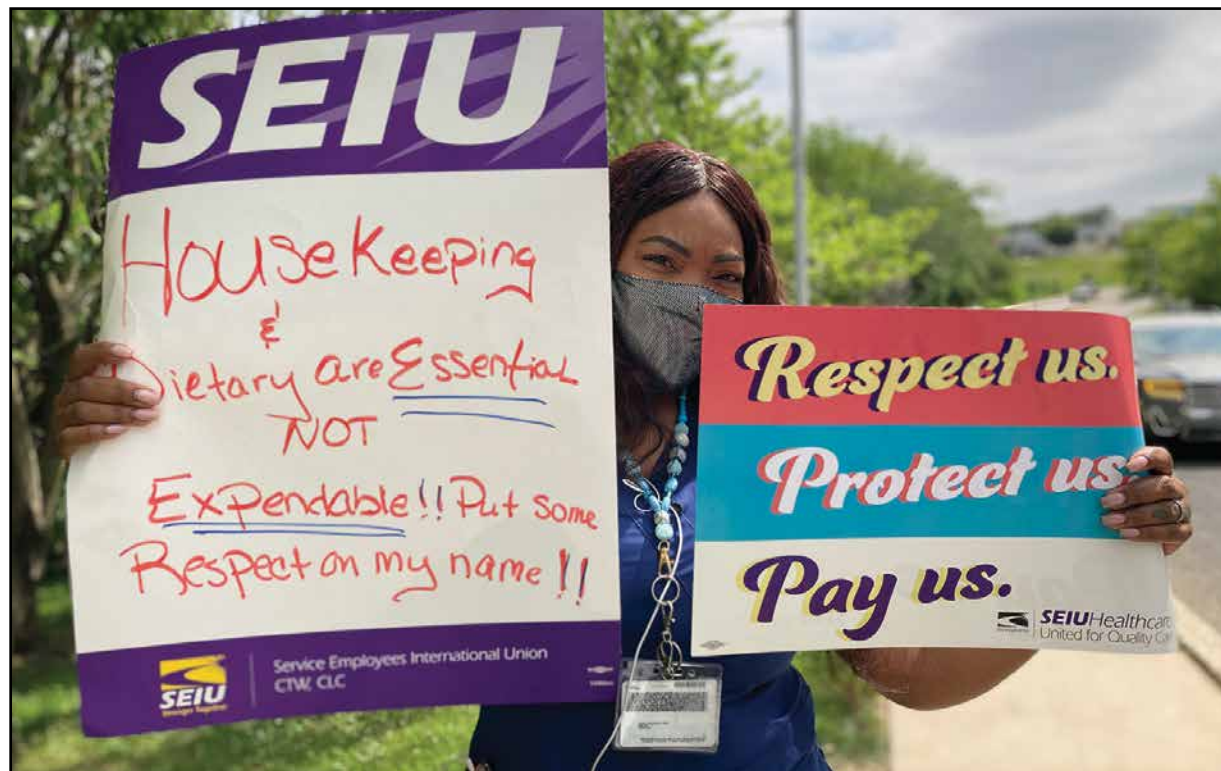
Roughly \$282 million of this year's budget will use American Rescue Plan dollars for nursing homes and long-term care support, with about \$250 million toward staffing and bedside care. Yarnell said the investment was a long-time coming, but that it doesn't go far enough to address both short-term and long-term staffing needs.

The \$282 million allocation in the state budget also includes \$30 million for personal care homes and assisted living facilities and \$5 million for grants to develop indoor air management practices, as well as funding to provide home and community-based services to 501 more seniors.

Yarnell said increased funding could get CNA minimum wages up to \$17 an hour, and licensed practical nurse wages up to \$25 an hour. With one worker caring for up to 20 residents during the day, and up to 40 residents overnight, he said a lot more must be done to get homes to "humane staffing levels."

"If you're taking care of someone who's completely dependent and needs care for toileting, bathing, mobility and eating – you name it – that is totally not the appropriate level of care we ought to be giving Pennsylvania seniors," he said.

Yarnell says the new investments don't necessarily mean workers at those 12 homes won't take matters into their own hands. Contract negotiations are continuing with the



relief funds in mind, and a potential strike is among the last things workers want to do to get what they want.

"We're not being greedy ... we're just asking for the basic fundamentals every health care worker should have," Frazier said.

The state has a long way to go if it wants to fully address the issues older adults are facing, and will continue to face. Agencies and advocates may disagree on what exactly should be done, but they can agree that breaking down silos between providers will be crucial in treating people as a whole.

"We need to make sure that the attention and

collaborative spirit on lawmakers' behalf continues, but we're moving in the right direction," Marles said.

Torres stressed that improving efficiency and capacity is a necessary step, but that creating partnerships and working collaboratively will help the state, as well.

"There are a lot of things, whether it's affordable housing, prescriptions and food, or mental health and addressing trauma, that we need to make sure we're providing for older adults and keeping them healthy with good, evidence-based programs," Torres said. "I want to make sure that we're being very effective in our reach to diverse communities, to LGBT older adults and that we're being responsive and working with trusted partners."

One of the first decisions made by the state Department of Aging will be how it will spend the \$59.3 million it received from the American Rescue Plan. Although the department has three years to allocate the funds, Torres said much of it will go to area agencies on aging (AAAs) to help them develop individualized plans. Across the board, he said, their focus moving forward is to align services across all industries to focus on the population's growing list of needs.

"I want to tell the story, at the end of the three years, that this money helped achieve these outcomes, and that the demand for services is only going to increase," Torres said.

The pandemic deepened what was already a massive hole in the area of nursing and long-term care. Coming out of all this, it's up to the state to dig itself out before it's buried.

*Published July 23, 2021.*



## Wyndmoor hospice director details pandemic obstacles she's overcome

By Elspeth Lodge

When institutions, corporations and individuals are competing for the same resources during a pandemic, it's not a sympathetic atmosphere for health care providers who aren't associated with hospitals.

This has been the case for Gail Inderwies, President and Executive Director of KeystoneCare Homecare and Hospice in Wyndmoor. During the initial stages of the Covid-19 onslaught, Inderwies had difficulty obtaining the resources she needed to take care of her staff such as personal protective equipment, PCR testing and vaccines. She proved to be a creative, pro-active problem solver, however, navigating the turbulent health care waters in an environment that she describes as a "bad rendition of The Hunger Games."

When Coronavirus reached the U.S. in early 2020, Inderwies prepared for the worst. She ordered equipment, but she wasn't ready for the volume of gear she would need: "It was hard not being able to acquire items in quantity," she said. "I actually started having people in the community make us masks with paper towels and rubber bands." Many patients, especially those in the inner city, couldn't get hold of thermometers; people started donating them to KeystoneCare workers to bring to patients in their homes."

Seeing her fellow health care workers struggle to find supplies at the start of the pandemic, Inderwies gave away some of her badly needed equipment to people standing in her hallways crying, especially staff from nursing homes, because their institutions had been ravaged by the virus.

"Home care and hospices, as well as direct care workers across the state, if not affiliated with hospitals, were left on a dingy to their own devices," she said. "It was the relationships with each other and our institutions and long-term connections that helped us all survive under extreme circumstances."

One of the advantages of being an experienced nurse was that Inderwies knew how to be crafty and forage for the supplies she needed to get by, even though it meant paying a 500% mark-up on personal protective equipment:



Gail Inderwies, president and executive director of KeystoneCare Homecare and Hospice in Wyndmoor: "We have applied to be a vaccine site and hope we will be able to provide this ... service to those senior citizens who are sick and disabled and are not able to get out."

"I needed supplies," she said, "and I wasn't going to get them from traditional Medline or McKesson. All of them were saying, 'You have not bought enough from us, so you're on restriction.'"

Inderwies found someone in China to supply her.

"I was lucky," she said. "I'd buy different quantities at

different times to try to keep my shipment from being blocked by the FDA. Basically, we were all in competition with the FDA."

Now Inderwies feels confident that she has enough supplies to last her institution through the year, though she does stock up occasionally in smaller quantities through U.S. suppliers.

Testing posed even more complicated resource problems. Inderwies needed a way to test her staff three or four times a week for the coronavirus, and she knew that conventional testing centers would not have the availability to take care of her staff. She found a lab testing facility out of state and set up her own testing tent outside Keystone House as a service to her staff, the community and friends of KeystoneCare.

Currently Inderwies is navigating another obstacle. She needs to get her staff fully vaccinated in a climate where health care workers who aren't associated with hospitals are finding it difficult to locate and receive the vaccine.

Hospitals, pharmacies and federally qualified health centers should be allocating 10% of their vaccine inventory to non-hospital affiliated health care workers, according to the PA Department of Health's website. But this hasn't been the experience of Inderwies, who has had trouble obtaining vaccines for her staff.

"It's like a free for all, and there's no public health system," she said, "and it's hard convincing people that the vaccine is safe." The problem is that "the virus is actually getting smarter. If we don't move things along, this virus could outsmart us." Then all of the vaccines we are getting will be worthless.

Despite everything, Inderwies says her institution has been doing OK. She believes that out of tragedy sometimes good things emerge. She hopes this will mean the next time the country experiences a pandemic, we will be better prepared. "Hopefully we'll learn from this..."

"We have applied to be a vaccine site and hope we will be able to provide this much-needed community service to those senior citizens who are sick and disabled and are not able to get out."

*Published Feb. 18, 2021.*



## Delta variant symptoms differ from previous COVID-19 illnesses, doctors say

### The infection presents more like the common cold

By Tracey Romero  
PhillyVoice Staff

Some doctors are reporting that COVID-19 patients infected with the Delta variant are experiencing different symptoms than other coronavirus patients, though most evidence is anecdotal.

Instead of the loss of taste and smell, often one of the first COVID-19 symptoms, these patients are more likely to experience nasal congestion, sore throat and headache during the initial stages of infection.

The Delta variant originated in India, but now is the dominant variant in the U.S. It accounts for more than 51% of all COVID-19 cases in the U.S.

While it isn't dominant in the Philadelphia region yet, public health officials in New Jersey have just reported that it is the dominant variant there. Forty-one percent of the state's new variant cases in June were caused by the Delta variant.

Health experts are concerned that this variant will hit the unvaccinated hard, causing a surge in cases and hospitalizations. Patients with this variant are more likely to have complications and need oxygen.

Since these symptoms aren't specific to COVID-19, doctors say it is easier for people to brush them off as allergies or just a minor cold. Symptoms of the Delta variant include stomach pain, sore throat, headache, stuffy nose, loss of appetite, vomiting, nausea, joint pain and hearing loss.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the most common symptoms suggesting a COVID-19 infection were fever, cough, shortness of breath and loss of taste and smell. Now, according to researchers at King's College London, the top COVID-19 symptoms being reported are headache, sore throat, runny nose, fever and persistent cough.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the best way to protect



PHOTO CREDIT: PUBLIC DOMAIN IMAGE/PEXELS

People infected with the Delta variant are more likely to experience nasal congestion, sore throat and headache during the initial stages of infection.

yourself against the Delta variant is to get vaccinated. All three of the currently available vaccines – Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer – offer protection. Early research has shown that people who are fully vaccinated are at very low risk of getting sick from the Delta variant.

If you are experiencing any of the possible COVID-19 symptoms, get tested as soon as possible, even if you just think it is just a cold. If you have been vaccinated, talk to your primary care doctor about whether testing is necessary.

*Published July 13, 2021.*



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# TOWN AND COUNTRY

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## DA: Police kill sword-wielding man

By **Bradley Schlegel**  
Correspondent

A distress call from a family member in Pennsburg on Tuesday night regarding another member of the family, armed with a weapon, ended in tragedy. Trey Bartholomew, 27, of Valley Court, Pennsburg, was pronounced dead by EMS after being shot by an officer of the Upper Perk Police Department two blocks from his home.

According to information released by the Montgomery County District Attorney's office, Bartholomew charged an officer wielding a samurai-type sword in the area of East Eighth Street and Long Alley. Neighbors heard three gun shots, which were fired at Bartholomew.

Police officers immediately rendered first aid, but the man died at the scene. A sword was recovered near the body, according to information provided by Kate Delano, the director of communications for the District Attorney's office.

The name of the police officer involved is not being released at this time, according to the news release from Delano.

Joe Adam, chief of the local police department, did not return a phone call or an email message seeking comment prior to Wednesday afternoon's deadline. Pennsburg Mayor Charles Shagg also declined to release the name of the officer who shot Bartholomew. He deferred all related questions to Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele.

The DA's office is investigating the incident. Anyone with any information is asked to contact Montgomery County Detectives at 610-278-3368.

"I know these officers," said Shagg, who oversees the local police department as part of his official duties. "I know they are

very professional and very responsible, that they take their police responsibilities very serious. In an incident like this, the use of force is a last resort."

Upper Perk's officers are not equipped with body cameras, according to Pennsburg Council President Diane Stevens. She declined to comment further on the incident until the DA's office and the state police have issued a statement.

At 7:41 p.m. a 911 operator dispatched Upper Perk Police for a call about a family member armed with a bladed weapon threatening to harm others. According to the initial investigation, an Upper Perk police officer who arrived with his vehicle lights and siren activated encountered Bartholomew in Long Alley.

Detectives responded to the scene following the shooting per protocol for officer-involved shootings.

Approximately 30 minutes before the incident, Adam presented a citation to one of his officers – for helping a woman the department arrested 15 months ago come to grips with drug addiction – during a council meeting at the Pennsburg Municipal Building. The meeting, hosted on Zoom, kicked off at 7 p.m.

Two years ago, the state police charged Bartholomew with summary disorderly conduct following an incident in East Greenville. According to authorities, on May 22, 2019, at the intersection of Main and Second streets, Bartholomew was cited for approaching a marked police vehicle, while the officer was conducting a traffic stop, with his hand on the handle of a samurai sword

He pleaded guilty to that charge on Oct. 30, 2019 before District Magistrate Maureen Coggins, according to information posted on a state judicial website.

*Published Feb. 11, 2021.*



BOB ESPOSITO / TOWN AND COUNTRY

**ABOVE:** Law enforcement officials investigate the scene of a police-involved shooting in Pennsburg into the early hours of Wednesday morning. An officer fatally wounded a man who allegedly charged him with a samurai-type sword on Long Alley on Tuesday night.

**BELOW:** Police tape surrounds a vehicle involved in the shooting incident Tuesday night on Long Alley in Pennsburg.





# Local childcare workers look for financial solutions

**By Adam Michael**  
Times Assistant Editor

While working in the childcare industry, Ashley Drechsler said she spent more money to keep her two children enrolled than she brought home in a paycheck.

The Saint James Early Learning Center assistant director was one of several Adams and York county childcare leaders who provided a testimonial during a virtual forum aiming to find financial solutions for the dysfunctional business model.

"That is the reality of childcare," said Suzan Siebel-Willard, St. James Early Learning Center director. "That's a sad reality and we need to change that reality."

Pennsylvania recently learned it would receive \$1.18 billion in funding, part of a national \$39 billion package aimed at providing lifelines for childcare providers, providing safe and healthy learning environments, and helping parents return to work.

The forum, hosted Thursday by the Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA), was designed to get input on how the state should spend those funds. It was one of 12 gatherings that are part of the Start Strong PA campaign designed to gather feedback that will inform recommendations made to the governor's office. The forums will continue through May 17.

"We want help to re-imagine and engage our operation's bigger goals," said Shawn Towey, PACCA public policy and community outreach manager. "There's a long way to go to make that happen."

Ruby Martin, York YWCA Chief Child and

Youth Programs officer, described childcare as a "failed business model" prior to the introduction of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus. Without raising tuition to unaffordable levels for families, childcare centers cannot provide adequate wages, scholarships, technological improvements and benefits to attract talented staff, she said.

Once the pandemic hit, businesses were forced to temporarily close last spring. Upon reopening, the businesses had to invest in personal protection equipment (PPE). Meanwhile some employees did not return, either out of concern they would become ill or infect loved ones, or because unemployment benefits paid more than childcare centers could offer, she said.

"Funds to cover basic operating costs is my plea," she said. "There was already a need for that support."

Universal childcare is the only way to address the needs of all students and staff, said Dr. Irene Hudson, Crispus Attucks York Early Learning Center director. Currently, different funding models allow for low-income parents to receive government subsidies for childcare, putting a burden on lower middle-income families.

Meanwhile, parents who qualify for subsidies are less likely to take pay increases while in need of childcare, she said. The average childcare workers wages help them to qualify for such subsidies, so some may refuse a raise in the current system, she said.

"Any child or parent that needs childcare should have it," she said. "I don't

understand these sliding scales and income criteria. It doesn't matter how wealthy you are, we need to educate our children from birth on up."

Adams County leaders called for the return of two funding initiatives previously offered through the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) Keystone STARS program. The first type, Merit Awards, provided funds to develop or enhance computer and internet access for childcare centers.

"When the merit rewards were done away with, high quality programs struggle to get technology to communicate with parents," said Teresa Rodgers, child enrichment program administrative director at the YWCA Gettysburg and Adams County. "It's important for there to be financial support programs to help us keep up with things without that cost being put on families."

The second Keystone Stars initiative, Education and Retention awards, provided thousands of dollars in awards for highly-qualified directors and teaching staff. Those funds were instead dispersed evenly among childcare workers this year, reducing motivation for the most qualified workers to stay in the industry, said Siebel-Willard.

"The Keystone STARS standards are changing," she said. "Not only are they expecting us to do more work, but they're expecting us to do their work. They want us to do the assessments ourselves while we're short-staffed."

Mental health support was also high on the list of requests for Adams County providers. When children who have not yet

reached grade school are referred for services, they often face six-to-nine-month waiting periods, said Rodgers.

Siebel-Willard said school-aged students receive priority.

York Community Progress Council (CPC) is looking to start an apprenticeship program in the fall that would teach young adults to be childcare providers. The program would also get them started on an associate's program to eventually become grade-school teachers said Ruth Robbins, CPC chief program officer.

"Our staff says, don't let them take our teachers because we're training them," said Robbins. "I say we're holding them back if we do that. We don't have the means to support people and their families on the wages we provide."

At least one panelist in the forum was not a fan of accepting the limitations of the system.

"That's not an investment in children, that's a disservice to children," said Rodgers. "They need to know they'll be with a consistent person who can provide quality care for them. To do that, we need teachers who are electing early childcare as a field they want to invest themselves in, so they can invest themselves in the children."

PACCA, a state-wide nonprofit that represents nearly 2,400 childcare center, group and family childcare agencies, will gather responses from the 12 forums and make recommendations to Gov. Tom Wolf's office, said Diane Barber, PACCA executive director.

*Published May 1, 2021.*

# Gun violence epidemic leaves families in pain and fear

By Dwight Ott

Tribune Correspondent

Principal Leyondo Dunn of Simon Gratz High School Mastery Charter is a big man who doesn't seem easy to frighten.

But, for a while, Dunn was afraid to pick up his own phone.

He was afraid he might get another call with more bad news — that another of his students had been shot or killed. Four had already died of gunshot wounds this school year, prior to the June 8 graduation of his class of 2021. Another 19 had been either wounded or fired upon during the school year.

Now it was August, and Dunn had returned from vacation a few days earlier. Like his students, he was making excited preparations to begin the next school year in late August. Then the phone rang.

So much hung in the balance these days, just answering a call seemed dangerous.

He answered.

He was stunned. It was another tragedy. One of his students, along with a student from Boys' Latin High School, had just met their deaths on the streets of Philadelphia. Both were killed, sitting in a car with friends, waiting to go to shoot baskets at a nearby basketball court.

The Gratz student was 18-year-old Tommie Frazier. The Boys' Latin student was 16-year-old Kaylin Johnson. Tommie was the fifth Gratz student killed this year. Kaylin was the seventh student from Boys' Latin killed in the last five years.

Like the four Gratz students killed earlier in the school year, Tommie's death seemed totally senseless to Dunn. A waste of hope. A waste of the future. An 11th-grader going to 12th, Tommie was shot while sitting in a car waiting to go to practice for his basketball future with his



TRIBUNE PHOTO/ABDUL R. SULAYMAN

Leyondo Dunn has been the principal at Gratz for two years. In the first year, he lost a standout basketball player named Ross Carter to gun violence. That was only his first loss.

friends. But there would be no future, at least, not for him and his friend Kaylin.

An email sent out to the faculty later that day listed Tommie as a member of the "Mastery Harritty, Hardy High and Gratz High School" communities, the campus where he had attended school, where his cheerful face had been seen day after day.

A photo circulated showing Tommie standing with a dean, Tommie's ebony face and cherubic smile gleaming like a 100-watt bulb. Easy to remember. He stood out. A treasure for the community, Dunn must have thought. A scholar and basketball player.

"K.J." as young Kaylin, Tommie's friend, was called, was another talented basketball player. Like Tommie, he was in the car with two other friends about to leave for practice. A photo of "K.J." showed him exhibiting Ben Simmons-like virtuosity as

he zipped past a player on the court.

"K.J. just got his driver's license and his mom rewarded him," his aunt told reporters.

"It's horrible for the family, horrible for his mother. She lost her only child, her son, her best friend," said the aunt, who preferred not to identify herself.

Meanwhile, Tommie's mother was numb.

"I just want everyone to know my son was a good kid, everyone loved him," Umbrenda Barksdale said.

Dunn echoed that sentiment.

As he ended the call, Dunn knew he would now have to make another one much more painful — to Tommie's family to offer condolences. Though he did not say it, the thought must have occurred to him that he was supposed to be an educator — not an undertaker.

"This can't be normal, this can't be accepted," a Boys' Latin football coach was reported to have told his players at the school.

But, unfortunately, it was getting to be normal for Dunn, 30, a new principal, just breaking in with only two years under his belt at his new school here in Philadelphia, a long way from the bayous of his native Louisiana.

## All too common

Gratz was one of 25 schools in Philadelphia that are in areas with a high concentration of gun violence deaths of victims under 18 years of age.

The neighborhoods where these schools are located combined to account for 50% of the total deaths of victims under 18 during the school year.

According to Dunn: "What all 25 schools have in common is ZIP codes and almost exclusively Black students."

For Dunn, himself a 6-foot-6 former college athlete, the deaths of such fresh-faced, smiling youngsters were becoming an all-too-common occurrence.

In his first year, Dunn lost a standout basketball player named Ross Carter, a 19-year-old who was shot and killed as he sat on steps in his neighborhood.

He wondered how such a thing could be so common. So far over 130 children under 18 had been shot since January.

Possibly, not since the Vietnam War — when Philadelphia's Edison High suffered more war-related deaths than any school in the nation — had violence emptied seats in the School District of Philadelphia the way the recent gun violence upsurge had this last school year. Edison too had been predominantly Black.

*Continued on next page*



## A strange year

But Gratz was only a piece of the Philadelphia puzzle. Throughout the city, gun violence continued to surge in 2021, though it seemed to slow a bit in August.

It was a strange year in which everyone was blaming everyone else for the upsurge. With the violence slowing from 34% over the previous year to 26% of what it had been last year, Mayor Jim Kenney said — with no one disagreeing — that it was not yet time to declare victory.

For instance, just as the internet has been blamed for costing lives by hosting anti-vaccine postings from “Q Anon” and other right wing, according to President Joe Biden, so have some local officials blamed the internet’s social media for spiking the loss of life in places like Philadelphia by broadcasting violent rap music, personal disputes, gang beefs and misinformation.

In one high-profile case, authorities said they believe three neighborhood teens fired two dozen shots at two best friends misidentified on Instagram in a botched attempt to retaliate against members of a rival group.

If the pace of summer homicides continued, officials said, the city would soon see more homicides for 2021 than any year in history. Already it was well ahead of last year in per capita killings.

Gunfire had already taken over 309 lives, a number the city didn’t hit last year until Aug. 14. The city was said to be 34% higher than the previous year in per capita killings.

The violence seemed to continue apace in the wake of the Fourth of July. While it trended downward a little in August, even if it all stopped tomorrow, the city would be left with a plague of physical trauma of youth in wheelchairs, in hospitals or undergoing therapy for mental wounds like PTSD.

The shooting last month in Washington, D.C., outside a stadium during the Washington Nationals-San Diego Padres game had left experts edgy about whether the violence would slow or not.

For Dunn, back at Gratz Mastery Charter, the Washington shooting hit a nerve. It seemed like déjà vu. The incident brought back memories of his first year at Gratz when two gangs of youth traded gunfire outside the Marcus Foster stadium during a football game attended by 500 members



TRIBUNE PHOTO/ABDUL R. SULAYMAN

**ABOVE:** Gratz Principal Leyondo Dunn says mentorship, mentored jobs and enrichment activities will be made available to students most at risk of involvement in gun violence.

**BELOW:** Gratz senior Ross Carter drives down the court last year. The 6-foot-5 forward died not long after he helped lead Gratz to the Public League finals and the PIAA District 12 Class 6A championship.



TRIBUNE PHOTO

of Gratz families and community. Dunn said the shooting didn’t have any connection to Gratz, but it had been unsettling.

As with the incident in Washington, the gunfire in Philadelphia happened outside the game, with few, if any injuries.

## No time for blame

Meanwhile, at Philadelphia City Hall, neither the mayor nor the police commissioner was accepting “blame” for

the overall uptick in gun killings. Both Kenney and Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw had said previously that the upsurge in gun violence was a national trend — not merely a Philadelphia phenomenon.

They conceded, however, that they were responsible for “fixing” the problem.

Pinning the blame on any one thing or any one person would have been difficult. The gunfire broke out and reached alarming proportions in the wake of a pandemic, civil

unrest, lowered police morale, the emptying out of jails due to the pandemic, the halting of in-person court proceedings (as well as schools), quarantines, lockdowns, Donald Trump-inspired political bickering, and an unprecedented insurgency at the U.S. Capitol building.

The panicky purchasing of guns that ensued, along with the quarantines and shutdowns, took top billing in the minds of many officials in Philadelphia and elsewhere as the source of the gun violent carnage, but others argued that there were plenty of illegal guns already on the street and much frustration and anger in inner cities over racial injustice.

The real blame was hanging out there somewhere but was obfuscated by the plague within a plague going on at the time — the epidemic of partisan bickering.

The only real certainty was that an additional pandemic of gun-related homicides had hit the nation, and Philadelphia was in the thick of it.

One bespectacled woman at one of the shootings in the city was unabashedly certain she knew the reason for the killings. She refused to identify herself other than to say that she was a local resident and a former “bio-ethics professor” at a local college.

“There’s something called Occam’s Razor,” she volunteered, “that states that the simplest hypothesis or explanation is the most reliable. For instance, if you hear hoof beats, you don’t posit a zebra, but a horse. The same is true with gun violence. The more gun violence you hear about, the more you know guns are the culprits.”

She said Australia and Canada have used gun control laws to quell the violence. But she said there was no Second Amendment in the constitutions of those countries to protect guns as there is here.

## ‘Crazy times’

Meanwhile, a “perfect storm” of deadly factors helped revive an old nickname for Philadelphia popularized by its detractors — “Killadelphia.”

As one activist, Isaac “Ikey Raw” Gardner, put it: “This is crazy times.”

So crazy were the times that statistics for the gun violence in Philadelphia broke out of step with other crime statistics in general, like a spiking EKG. While Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) showed gun violence spiking, other crimes in Philadelphia

*Continued on next page*

## The Philadelphia Tribune continued

continued a downward or steady trend in 2020 and 2021.

And Philadelphia was not alone. Other large cities were also experiencing more shootings at a time when other crimes were decreasing.

Black males remained the highest percentage of victims. That added to the argument from those who blamed racial injustice for the outbreak of gun violence.

They argued that the upsurge in recent gun violence killings was merely a continuation of ongoing gun killings in the Black community.

According to recent police data, the three main causes of gun-related violence were arguments, drugs and domestic disputes. Social media was said to be stoking many of the arguments and disputes.

Regardless of the causes, it seemed as if a civil war was raging in urban areas, particularly in places like Philadelphia.

One observer speculated that if one were to run pictures of “collateral damage” from Philadelphia’s ongoing gun violence wars across the front page of local newspapers the way pictures had been run in The New York Times of Palestinian youth killed in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the numbers of youth killed in Philadelphia would rival the number of Palestinian youth pictured as having lost lives.

Meanwhile, schools like Gratz and Boys’ Latin in Philadelphia — like so many other urban campuses — seemed to have continued as normal amid the daily loss of life violent street skirmishes involving guns flooding into inner cities into the hands of juveniles and young angry Black males boxed into segregated and impoverished communities. The warfare seemed to jeopardize the futures of not only the students but the nation.



Community activist Isaac “Ikey Raw” Gardner says the surge in Philadelphia gun violence shows “this is crazy times.”

So much talent seemed to be draining away amidst the bloodshed in these urban areas.

Gratz, for one, has graduated a lengthy list of notables including: U.S. Rep. William H. Gray III, baseball great Roy Campanella, NBA star Rasheed Wallace and other well-known athletes, activist Joan Little, Chester Mayor Willie Mae James Leake and Temple coach John Cheney, who began his career coaching and mentoring at Gratz.

As the summer break wound down, there seemed to have been a little break from killings and nightmares of friends and acquaintances dying at schools like Gratz in Philadelphia.

But this year Dunn was determined to

lessen the casualties at his school. He had morphed from educator into protector-educator.

“I have hired a new position at the school,” said Dunn. “It is a director of Healthy Communities. A portion of his role will be anti-gun violence in this community and on this campus.”

He has also brought in CeaseFire Philadelphia, a national anti-violence program.

“Any student at the high school that is high risk or vulnerable — once identified as needing cognitive behavior therapy and eligibility for mentorship — would receive help.”

Dunn said mentorship and mentored jobs

would be made available, as well as enrichment activities.

If situations were possibly gun-related, he said, the students would be connected with the anti-violence program Ceasefire Cure Violence to get support in resolving the situation.

Meanwhile, city officials have drawn some hope from Biden’s American Rescue Plan. Biden has encouraged states to draw on the assistance included in the plan to address violent crime.

Dunn said he hopes the plan works as he tries to hustle his students into safety while looking over his shoulder in fear of the next phone call.

*Published Aug. 16, 2021.*

# why newspapers?

Newspapers are rated as the source that  
**operates in an ethical manner**  
and has the public’s best interest in mind.

Source: Nielsen National Cross-Media Engagement Study



# Backpack food program expands into the summer

**By Amy Cherry**  
Staff Writer

ST. MARYS - This summer eligible elementary school students will continue to receive food supplies through the Second Harvest Backpack Program at St. Marys Area School District.

As part of the program students receive a bag of shelf-stable, nutritious, child-friendly food items each week when other resources, such as school lunches and after-school meals or snacks, are not available to them.

Last year program co-organizers Amanda Vollmer, a Fox Twp. Elementary teacher and Ashley Kline, school counselor, discussed offering the program through the summer, however plans did not come to fruition. This year marks the first year they are offering the program during the summer months of June, July, and August.

"We figured if we were going to do it over the summer, this would be the summer to start," Vollmer said.

The summer extension tacks on an additional 12 food distributions to students and their families.

The program, a partnership between SMASD and the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, is in place at all three public elementary schools including South St. Marys Street, Fox Township and Bennetts Valley. It is now in its third year of being offered in the SMASD.

Currently the program serves 40 students at South, 17 students from 12 families at Fox Twp., and 26 students from 19 families at Bennetts Valley.

Vollmer stated they were able to continue the program during the school shutdown until the remainder of the school year. During that time school resource officers delivered food to students or families could pick up their backpack food when they



PHOTO BY AMY CHERRY

**Amanda Vollmer, a Fox Twp. Elementary teacher, and Ashley Kline, school counselor, are shown packing food donations for students enrolled in the Backpack Program. The program provides weekly food supplies to students and their families during the school year with this summer marking the first time they will receive donations in June, July and August.**

stopped by the schools to get their free breakfasts and lunches.

"When we got close to the end of the school year we started talking about the fact that we thought things were pretty tight for families and we might want to look into continuing the program over the summer," Vollmer explained.

From there they contacted South St. Marys Street Elementary School Principal Chrissy Kuhar about continuing the program through the summer. Kuhar contacted Second Harvest who stated they were able to provide the food through the summer months and that the school district had enough funds in their account to cover the expense for the addition distribution.

Organizers consistently seek donations to the program as part of a rolling need to sustain the program.

"Especially with the extension into

summer, we are using more funds than originally anticipated," Kline said.

Last year the cost to feed one student for a school year was \$120. As part of the program SMASD does not purchase the food, rather donations are made in the school district's name to Second Harvest to help fund the program at the local level. Monetary donations may be made to Second Harvest anytime online by visiting their website, at <https://nwpafoodbank.org>. Simply indicate the donation is for the SMASD program.

Vollmer emphasized they plan to continue the program into the fall regardless of back to school plans. At that time the school district will send out information for those interested in participating. Each year this is the time when they adjust their numbers of students participating in the program.

"Perhaps someone has a new situation

where it may be a helpful program to families where they may have not needed it before. Then they are able to sign up for it," Kline said.

Vollmer added, "it's hard to say what fall will bring, but I am anticipating probably our numbers will be a little bit higher. There are no guarantees, but knowing the economic situation right now."

In previous years food items were distributed each Friday, from October until the end of May. The food was expected to last the student through the weekend, when school meals are unavailable.

Since the end of the school year Vollmer and Kline have been delivering the food directly to families living in Fox Township and Bennetts Valley. They utilized Google maps to input all of the addresses into then went about their delivery route which initially took them four hours to complete. Since then they have improved their time cutting it in half, spending a little over one hour to deliver for each of the two schools.

Kuhar said at South they opted for a single home delivery to families during the summer by providing the entire month's worth of food at once rather than delivering the items week by week.

"We've already delivered June and July, with August's delivery still to come," Kuhar said.

Second Harvest operates the Backpack Program at 41 sites within their 11 county coverage area across northwest PA in Elk, Cameron, Clearfield, Jefferson, McKean, Warren, Clarion, Erie, Venango, Crawford and Forest counties.

The organization selects and obtains the food for chosen sites and vendors. It is then delivered to the schools where local volunteers sort and assemble the bags for distribution. Each backpack contains enough items for multiple breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks.

*Published July 21, 2020.*

# CRANBERRY EAGLE



## Glade Run Lake healthier than it has ever been

**By Eddie Trizzino**  
Eagle Staff Writer

MIDDLESEX TWP. — Those who enjoyed Glade Run Lake thought they never again would see it in its heyday after a 2011 decision to drain the lake.

But several of them returned Sunday to see the body of water healthier than it ever had been. These were the people who formed the Glade Run Lake Conservancy, which celebrated its 10-year anniversary Sunday with a community event and the dedication of a new facility.

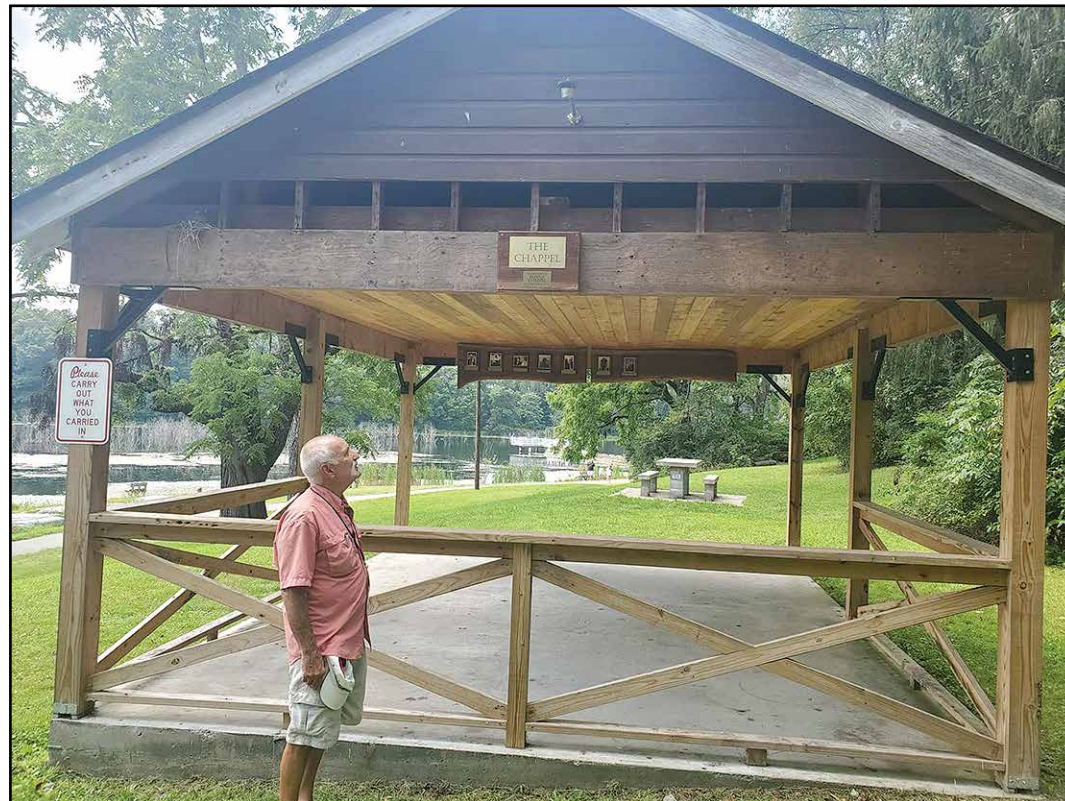
"We all wanted to make a difference with the lake," said T. Lyle Ferderber, treasurer of the conservancy. "This is now better than it was when it was built."

Glade Run Lake was drained in an effort to prevent potential dangers related to its busted dam. The decision left several people who used and enjoyed the lake saddened.

According to Ferderber, the Glade Run Lake Conservancy started as a grassroots effort to save the lake, but it now has the support of thousands of people, and just as many people visit the lake each year. Its members started the organization as the lake was being drained in 2011, but by 2017 they had raised enough money not only to have it refilled, but also to have it stocked with fish and equipped with habitation devices.

On Sunday, the conservancy members started the anniversary event with the dedication of a new pavilion, dubbed "The Chappel" in honor of its original vice president, the late Bonnie Chappel.

The daylong event offered food vendors and a fishing contest for children. Tim Wilson, fisheries biologist with the Fish and Boat Commission, said the lake has



Siggy Pehel, president of the Glade Run Lake Conservancy, looks at the newly installed "Chappel" honoring the organization's former Vice President Bonnie Chappel, who died in 2019.

PHOTO: EDDIE TRIZZINO,  
BUTLER EAGLE

been stocked with about 10 species of fish, and even more types of animals have populated the area since it was refilled.

"It's a fairly simple fish community, but in a lake this size, that's what you want," he said. "We're really happy with the development of the lake."

The lake has since been popular for fishers, boaters and kayakers, who go out onto the water for its unique setting. Karlee Holmes became a board member with the conservancy after kayaking on the lake a few times.

She said it is a fun place to kayak because of its accessible coves.

"I always liked to come kayak here," Holmes said. "It's rewarding to see all the people who come now to kayak after it was empty before."

Siggy Pehel, president of the conservancy, said the nonprofit's continuing goal is preserving and protecting nature. He said the conservancy has received money from the Butler County Tourism and Convention Bureau and from Middlesex Township for development in the past, and it is working to get grant money from the Division of Conservation and Natural Resources to pay for conservation easements.

"Those conservation easements mean

properties can't be further developed on, but property owners still own their property," Pehel said. "We do this for the love of nature and the environment and the lake."

Throughout the day Sunday, people came through the area around the lake to eat and talk to members of the conservancy. Ferderber said through teary eyes that the dedication of the pavilion was his favorite part of the day.

"Seeing multiple generations out here enjoying it, that was my million dollars for the year," Ferderber said

*Published Aug. 31, 2021.*



# NEW CASTLE NEWS

## Withdrawal saddens mom who lost son in Afghanistan

By Dan Irwin

New Castle News

It was the worst day of Kathie Greenawalt's life. Staff Sgt. Edward Mills Jr. — Greenawalt's son and a Pathfinder with the Army's 101st Airborne Division — died May 26, 2011, along with five others with him when insurgents attacked their unit with an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province.

Now, her heartache has returned in the wake of a U.S. troop withdrawal that has enabled the Taliban — a group her son gave his life to suppress — to regain control of the country.

"This has brought back many, many emotions," she said Tuesday. "This has just set me back because this brings everything back. Our whole family has been affected by this.

"When I heard Kandahar had fallen, that hurt very badly because I know that's where they all lost their lives."

Mills, just 29, was on his third tour of duty in Afghanistan at the time of his death. As a Pathfinder, the 2000 Union High School graduate was one of a group of specialized soldiers who live by the motto "first in, last out." They are inserted to set up and operate drop zones, pickup zones and helicopter landing sites. Mills, Greenawalt said, also worked to teach military skills to Afghan commandos.

"They weren't over there to kill, kill, kill," she said. "They were there to help the Afghanistan people. My son helped train the Afghan commandos.

"And he was fighting for America because of 9/11. That's why he signed up. He joined the military because he didn't want them to get power and strength and come back and attack us again."

Just five weeks ago, President Joe Biden



U.S. ARMY | ARMY.MIL

Staff Sgt. Edward Mills, a Pathfinder with Task Force Palehorse, talks with Afghans as his platoon provides security during a March 18, 2011, humanitarian assistance mission in Deh Gholaman village in southern Afghanistan. The Pathfinders worked with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the local Afghan National police to coordinate the event to support the struggling farming community. Kathie Greenawalt has made this photo her profile photo on her Facebook page. Sgt. Mills was killed in Afghanistan on May 26, 2011.

declared that there would be no repeat of the humiliating U.S. evacuation from Vietnam nearly a half century ago and "no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States from Afghanistan."

Greenawalt believes the president had no idea what he was talking about.

"Seeing what's on TV, it breaks our hearts," she said. "It makes us all feel very sad. I feel bad for the decision. I'm not for it. Leaving there, of course, we wanted to leave there; it was the way that he did it, and his comments. There's no remorse for his decision and how he did it.

"He didn't have a clue of what our military was doing over there, and he has

no idea how we feel, and I don't like it when people say that. The president said, 'I was over there five times.' No, no, no — absolutely not. I'm talking about the Pathfinders who were there. They're first in and last out. They were right there, boots on the ground."

Greenawalt leads her Facebook page with a photo that shows Mills speaking with a group of Afghan people.

"That picture tells it all," she said. "They're people, just like us, and the way this president has handled the situation is a disgrace. He doesn't have a clue.

None of them who are in charge of this pullout do. They wanted out, and they didn't care."



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Kathie Greenawalt is shown with her son, Staff Sgt. Edward Mills.

She questions Biden's claim that the Afghan army would not defend its own country.

"Those Afghan commandos, the president said they didn't do their job," she said. "Yes, they did. They fought. But the Taliban was just too much, and the United States was just, 'We're out of here.' "These people depended on us." Greenawalt understands that the U.S. could not stay in Afghanistan forever, and a pullout had to come some day. But she blames Biden for initiating one without understanding the situation.

"Yes, we should have pulled out," she said, "but we look like the weakest we've looked, militarily. It's not fair to the military, it's not fair to the guys who went over there and did their best and came back without limbs, they came back hurt, they came back maimed, they came back hurting from the inside out.

"And some of them, like my son, never came back."

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Published Aug. 18, 2021.

## Disinformation hampering vaccination effort

By Mike Jones  
Staff Writer

Early in the vaccination effort this winter, many Americans were desperate to get their COVID-19 shots as they either struggled to find available appointments or patiently waited for their turn in line.

As more doses became available in the spring, the United States ramped up the vaccinations with a peak of 4.4 million shots on April 8.

But the urgency earlier this year to get shots into arms is slowing down significantly. Last week, the country averaged just 400,000 shots a day, raising concerns from public health officials who are trying to remind people that the COVID-19 pandemic still isn't over.

While there was hesitancy for some early in the process, there now appears to be an outright disinformation campaign against the vaccine on social media and within some local communities.

"The state has been anticipating hesitancy for a while," said state Rep. Tim O'Neal, who is a member of the state's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force. "I think there's always going to be a contingent – I think it's a relatively small contingent – that will never trust the vaccine and will never get it. That's OK. That's their personal choice."

More concerning, however, is the conspiracy theories and disinformation that is bubbling up about the vaccine, prompting the Biden administration to change its approach recently as it tries to educate the unvaccinated to protect themselves from the virus.

"Health misinformation is an urgent threat to public health," U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said Thursday. "It can cause confusion, sow mistrust, and



PHOTO: OBSERVER-REPORTER

These signs announcing "The Vaccine Will Kill You!" are popping up in front of several houses along Route 19 north of Waynesburg. Local health experts said disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine are hampering the effort to protect people from the virus.

undermine public health efforts, including our ongoing work to end the COVID-19 pandemic."

That has been the case locally after signs began popping up a few months ago in Greene County announcing that "The Vaccine Will Kill You!" The professionally made yard signs began multiplying recently and are now in front of several homes along a stretch of Route 19 a few miles north of Waynesburg. One resident who was approached by a reporter last week to discuss the sign declined to comment, except to say she will never get the vaccine.

Dr. Amesh Adalja, an infectious disease expert in Pittsburgh and senior scholar at

the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, thinks some people have "shut their minds off" to science.

"I think there will be some segment of the population that will be adamantly against the vaccine no matter what the evidence will show," Adalja said. "These people are probably out of reach because they are beyond rational thought of reason and science."

There are others, however, who are hesitant to get the vaccine because they are worried about possible side effects, are waiting to see how others react to it or they want to see it receives full approval by the Food and Drug Administration, Adalja said.

There have been some adverse reactions from people who have received the vaccine, most notably three people who died from blood clots that were tied to the J&J vaccine, prompting federal regulators to temporarily pause administering that particular brand. But Adalja said the benefits from the vaccine far outweigh the risks associated with it, which are low compared to the effects from the virus itself.

"I have run into a brick wall with some people. ... I've also been able to talk to other people while walking them through the data," he said.

But he was disappointed to hear about the signs on Route 19 in Greene County spreading disinformation, which could lead to an uptick in infections in the area if people remain unprotected from the virus. Less than 13,000 people in Greene County are fully vaccinated – about 40% of its eligible population – putting it near the bottom of the list in the state, according to state Department of Health statistics.

"Signs like that are false, spreading lies and defaming the vaccine companies," Adalja said. "There's no place for that."

Washington County Commissioner Larry Maggi, who received the vaccine last summer as part of Pfizer's clinical trial, isn't surprised by the reaction from some and thinks the hyperpartisan mood of the country has contributed to the problem. He remembers being called a "sheep" by some on Facebook last fall after first announcing he was part of the clinical trial.

"What I've seen locally and nationally, we had a heated presidential race last year and we were in the middle of a pandemic, and it became politicized," Maggi said. "You had these two forces come together and it really made it difficult."

*Continued on next page*



## Observer-Reporter continued

He continues to return to Columbus, Ohio, for regular checkups while remaining in the clinical trial, and he is still comfortable with his decision to get the vaccine. He hasn't had any troubling side effects and believes the Pfizer vaccine has kept him safe from the virus.

"I believed in the trial, I felt comfortable, I researched it and I don't have any regrets," Maggi said. "You've got to trust something, and I happen to trust the medical professionals and the scientists."

The conversation between patients and their doctors can change people's minds, although Dr. Ben Kleifgen is cautious about how he approaches the subject with patients. Kleifgen, a pediatrician at Washington Pediatrics in the Washington Health System, speaks to many parents about it, letting them know the options for children 12 and older who are currently eligible to receive the vaccine. He's also

talking to parents with children younger than 12, explaining that the vaccine will likely soon be available in phases to those different age groups.

"I feel like a lot of people have already made up their mind. It runs the gamut. But it does seem to be polarizing," he said.

"I try to do a lot of listening. 'Why do you feel that way? What have you heard?' Typically, there are a few reasons people raise. I try to listen without feeling like I'm lecturing," Kleifgen added.

One of the biggest concerns is that the vaccine was rushed into production, but Kleifgen points out that there's never before been a worldwide effort with seemingly unlimited resources to develop one so quickly. He added that his discussions with children and their parents is a "low pressure sale" since his office doesn't currently offer the vaccine, although that could eventually change.

"Most people have questions, and I respect that. I try to get to the specific concerns before firing off some facts and figures at them," Kleifgen said. "I'm trying to leverage the relationship as their pediatrician. 'Hopefully I'm someone you trust. I have your kid's best interest in mind.' I trust the data."

That's something O'Neal, the state representative on the vaccine task force, has been particularly proud of as WHS has led the way in the vaccination effort in Washington County.

"They've played a significant role to put medical professionals at the front of this," said O'Neal, R-North Strabane. "The trust for the government just isn't there."

But O'Neal and others have growing concerns about a resurgence in COVID-19 cases among unvaccinated people. He noted that the task force has found that more than 95% of the most serious

illnesses and deaths from COVID-19 in Pennsylvania are occurring in people who still have not been vaccinated. O'Neal said the task force is trying to focus its resources on educating ethnic minorities and people living in rural communities, where there is the greatest mistrust of the vaccine.

"I definitely wouldn't describe it as a brick wall," O'Neal said of the vaccination progress. "There are many people who haven't got it for a variety of reasons."

But with three vaccines readily available, it's ultimately up to individuals to protect themselves and others in their community, said Adalja, the infectious disease expert in Pittsburgh.

"The virus is completely in the hands of people who live in (the community)," Adalja said. "Any future deaths are completely self-inflicted."

*Published July 18, 2021.*

## Newspapers are the most trusted source of news and information among all age groups.<sup>1</sup>

# Gen X

Gen Xers rank newspapers as the **most trusted source of news** and information.<sup>1</sup>

**75% of Gen Xers** read newspapers to learn about products with which they are not familiar.<sup>1</sup>

**Gen Xers are twice as likely** to say that newspapers are their most important news source compared to YouTube.<sup>2</sup>

When Gen Xers consume news, **60% is entertainment** and 40% is informational.<sup>2</sup>

**41% of Gen Xers** said that most journalism isn't relevant to them.<sup>2</sup>



59% of Gen Xers  
**trust paid news and information**  
more than free media.<sup>1</sup>

# NORTHEAST TIMES

## Coming together to conquer cancer

**By Tom Waring**  
Northeast Times

The fourth Save 2nd Base Wiffle Ball Tournament took place Saturday at Hayes Playground/Bustleton Bengals fields, with organizers hoping to raise \$10,000 for cancer patients and organizations.

The day included a 37-team tournament, a memory tent, a food truck with a portion of water ice sales going to the fund, volleyball, T-shirt sales, a 50-50 and raffles.

In the end, the Rising Sun Sluggers were crowned champions. The Fox Chase-based team consisted of Tim Breslin, Joey Breen, Bob Lang, Jared McLaverty, Mike Trudeau, Joe Leyland, Tom Leonard, John Forsythe, Tom Wismer and Christian Von Hofen. The champs donated their \$500 winnings to Fox Chase Cancer Center.

Chris Tarducci and her son, Nick, organize the event. In 2019, they honored 33-year-old Holly Colwell, who had been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer a year earlier, with the disease also developing in her liver. But Colwell was doing well at the event, and she donated the \$2,500 raised through Home Runs for Holly to others fighting cancer.

Sadly, a week later, Colwell died.

The Tarduccis renamed the tournament in her memory.

"We don't want to forget her," said Chris Tarducci, a breast cancer survivor.

In addition, they donated a memorial stone that was placed next to a tree that previously had been planted in Colwell's memory.

Also on Saturday, they donated money to cancer organizations in memory of the following women who have died since 2019: Mary Reed, Connie Cifelli, Maryann

Meckfessel, Lisa Dombrowski, Cheryl Leigh Palantino, Randi D'Amico and Margaret Zampirri.

Chris Tarducci said some of the money raised this year will likely be donated to people undergoing cold cap treatments, a grueling process that allows cancer patients to retain most of their hair while undergoing chemotherapy. Colwell underwent such treatments, which can help patients feel better emotionally and mentally.

The Tarducci are thankful for all the tournament participants and their support of the cause.

"Every team I go to, somebody in everybody's family has been affected. Everybody relates. It's sad," Chris Tarducci said.

Tarducci and her son are also thankful for the T-shirt and field sponsors, along with the two dozen volunteer umpires and everyone else who helped out on Saturday and set up in the days leading up to the tournament.

UPS donated \$3,000 to the Bustleton Bengals to distribute as part of a "Swing for the Fences" contest. Anyone who hit a home run received \$20. If the ball landed in a kiddie pool just outside the fence, the payout was \$100.

Nick Tarducci said the whole day was "awesome," with a record 37 teams braving the heat, including nine affiliated with Colwell. The tournament – shelved in 2020 due to the coronavirus – will continue because the need is there.

"I hate the statistic, but everybody knows somebody affected by cancer," Nick said.

*Published Aug. 18, 2021.*



ABOVE: Event organizers presented the family of Holly Colwell with a memorial stone to be placed next to a tree planted in her memory. From left: Dorothy Busha, Chris Tarducci, John Colwell, Joan Lafty, Nick Tarducci.

BELOW: The Fox Chase-based Rising Sun Sluggers captured the championship and donated their winnings to Fox Chase Cancer Center.





# Bedford Gazette

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## Fire destroys Everett thrift shop

**By Paul Rowan**

Gazette Managing Editor

Firefighters from across Bedford County and the region responded to a massive fire that destroyed the Love in the Name of Christ's Seek and Find thrift shop in Everett on Wednesday afternoon.

Everett Deputy Chief Chuck Stone estimated that at least 14 fire companies were at the scene, with many others on standby. "Just about every company" in Bedford County was involved either at the fire or on standby, along with others from Blair, Somerset and Fulton counties and a tanker from Clear Spring, Md.

The fire began about 1:15 p.m. and was caused by burning rubbish in the rear of the building.

"It was in a fire container," Stone said. "It just got away from them."

Crews were able to connect to a hydrant near the Rite Aid pharmacy, although numerous tankers helped supply more water.

The problem, Stone said, was that the

building had several roofs and drop ceilings.

"There were several layers of roofing, and it got between the layers," Stone said. "It was inevitable. It was what we were waiting for it to do."

By the time the fire eventually broke through the roof, aerial units from Bedford, Saxton and Martinsburg were on three sides of the structure.

The aging structure previously was the home to Zimmerman's Hardware and Gerald Clark Well Drilling.

Along with the blaze, crews had to deal with temperatures in the upper 80s. Ambulance crews from Raystown and Bedford and Southern Cove's rehab unit helped to provide relief.

"They did a great job of keeping everybody hydrated," Stone said.

"The public really supported us," he continued. "They brought food and beverages for us. They brought water by the caseload."

There were no injuries.

The fire, forced Everett Area School District officials to do some scrambling



when it came to dismissing elementary school students.

"They told us five hours — minimum (for the fire)," Superintendent Dr. Danny Webb said.

With 1st Avenue, the only paved way in or out of the school, blocked by fire apparatus, and the only other route to the school an unpaved road unsuitable for buses, school officials opted to have teachers walk the students about 60 yards through private property to Meadow Lane,

which Webb said could be used to load the students.

"The homeowners were very kind and accommodating, and we appreciate it," he said.

The toughest problem, Webb said, was that some parents who pick up their children were unaware of the district's phone alert for the change, but the issue was resolved, Webb said.

*Published May 20, 2021.*

## Still standing: Love INC undaunted by thrift shop fire

**By Paul Rowan**

Gazette Managing Editor

Do you believe in miracles?

At Love in the Name of Christ (Love INC) of Bedford County ministry in Everett, faith is a way of life.

But after Wednesday afternoon's massive fire that roared through the building that houses the organization's Seek and Find thrift shop, that faith has only gotten stronger.

After watching dense black smoke pour out of the building for hours, followed by

flames shooting skyward as firefighters began to peel off multiple layers of roofing, when folks from Love INC were able to inspect the damage they found that much of the stock for their thrift shop was undamaged.

In fact, Amy Speed, clearinghouse coordinator, reported on Thursday that a bowl of Hershey's Kisses was discovered unmelted.

As for the fire, the organization is taking it in stride.

"No one was hurt," Speed said. "All of those other things can be replaced."

The building across 1st Avenue that houses the organization's ministry was undamaged, and Love INC remains committed to helping the community.

"We were here through the pandemic, and we're still here," Speed said.

Wednesday's fire brought crews from at least 14 fire companies to the scene, who fought the fire for more than six hours.

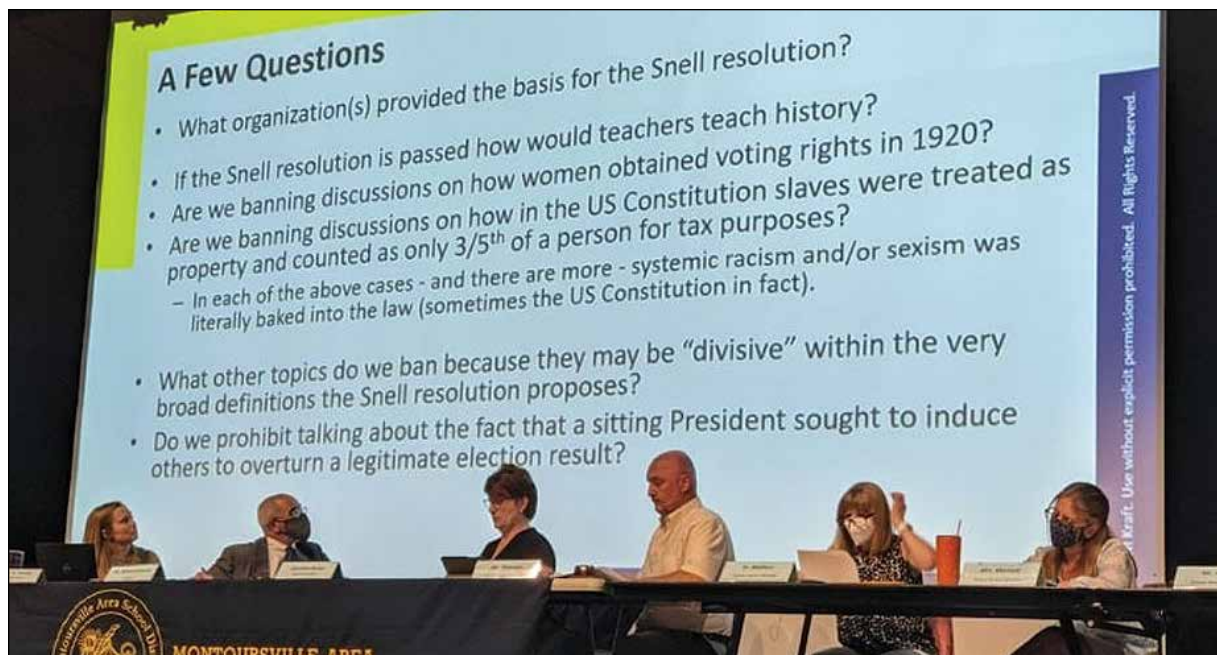
Chuck Stone, Everett deputy chief, said he believed that every Bedford County company was either at the scene or on standby. All three of Fulton County's departments were at the scene, and others from Blair and Somerset counties

and Maryland also either responded or were on standby. Raystown and Bedford ambulance services and Southern Cove's rehab unit worked to keep everyone hydrated, with the help of mountains of impromptu donations of food and water from the community.

The fire will force Love INC to improvise it's mission somewhat.

"It will put that on hold for a little while," Speed said, explaining that money generated by the Seek and Find Shop went back to the community in different forms of financial assistance.

*Published May 21, 2021.*



# Resolution opposing Critical Race Theory dies with Montoursville School Board non-vote

By Carrie Pauling

Montoursville, Pa. – The concept of “Critical Race Theory” went undefined yet was highly contested during a nearly three-hour School Board meeting on Tuesday.

Most notably, a resolution, dubbed the “Snell Resolution” after Board Member Ron Snell who introduced the document, was met with more overall support than opposition, yet still failed to pass during the meeting.

The reason: the nebulous nature of the language within the resolution’s statement. Gray areas, undefined parameters, and ambiguity within the copy, put several board members on alert.

On the agenda was “G-1: Motion to approve a Resolution for the Montoursville Area School District to oppose Public School and Publicly Funded Charter School Curriculum Instruction, or Materials promoting Critical Race Theory or advocating Similar Divisive Concepts relating to Sex, Race, Ethnicity, Color or National Origin.”

The theory itself was not defined in a way that appeased either side of the aisle. In fact, a true definition was not offered by any speaker at the meeting. Michael Kraft of Montoursville, offered a presentation on Critical Race Theory (CRT), identifying the subject as a means of informing policy reform in government.

“CRT is an uncommonly taught law school/graduate level sociology topic that is neither in the Commonwealth of PA curriculum expectations nor is it appropriate for K-12 study.”

Nikki Young, associate provost for Equity and Inclusive Excellence at Bucknell University offered a similar viewpoint. “CRT is an academic study within higher education,” she said. “How people engage with the concept is more likely to be in a high school curriculum.”

More appropriate, Young said, is instead of tackling the construction of a “notion of race,” she said schools should be asking, “does this curriculum apply to everyone? Is it accurate? Is this a narrative that leads to further oppression?”

Teaching more inclusive, “closer to accurate,” less “leaving out” of the narrative of underrepresented races is not the same concept as CRT, according to Young.

“Re-structuring how we’re telling stories of race in America,” should be part of the conversation in schools, Jocelyne Scott, director for Equity and Inclusive Excellence at Bucknell, added.

When the motion was put up for vote Tuesday night by Snell, not one board member followed with a second, leaving the issue to die on the floor. It was the language within the resolution, according to a few who explained their hesitancy, that gave them pause.

“I’m against anything that promotes division of people based on color of their skin,” said school board member Bill Ruffing. “I never saw an issue with more gray area than with CRT.”

Who decides who disciplines teachers who teach content that is deemed within CRT curriculum? Who even decides what CRT curriculum is? He questioned. “I see no need for it.”

School board Director Dave Shimmel agreed. “I have confidence in the staff to teach kids how to think critically. This [resolution] is not needed. It’s an insult to staff to say we need this,” he said.

Community members came to the podium in support of the “Snell Resolution” before it was put to vote.

Karen DiSalvo, local attorney asserted that “Critical Legal Studies” is the backdrop to CRT, and that the theory “is rooted in Marxist ideology. We’re indoctrinating our children to hate Americans,” she said.

Montoursville resident Catherine Burns said the foundation of American Democracy is not being taught in schools anymore. “We’ve canceled God and replaced him with Satan,” she said, referring to CRT as “racism on steroids.”

“Whether they know it or not, they’re trying to push an

*Continued on next page*



agenda that's divisive and political," said Brenda Oberheim. "We need more than the district's word" that they won't allow the "divisive and wrong" message that she said CRT promotes, "we need this resolution."

"The goal is division," said Kyle Taylor. "[CRT] breeds resentment because it presents an unwarranted victimhood mentality. Perceived racial disparity doesn't hold up to fact or reason," he added.

"The truly oppressed, those who are minorities, deserve the real root of the problem," Taylor said after the meeting. "Instead of investigating what caused the disparity, we just assume racism," he said, advocating a "more rigorous" curriculum that "actually works."

But long-time English teacher at Montoursville Area High School, Cindy Wentzler, questioned what would be ok to teach and what wouldn't under the resolution. The goal of studying literature, after all, is to explore issues considered "Divisive Concepts relating to Sex, Race, Ethnicity, Color or National Origin."

"If we couldn't discuss texts because of one group [being at a disadvantage] to another, as a major theme, we'd lose: A Thousand Splendid Suns; The Kite Runner, To Kill a Mockingbird; Huck Finn; Jane Eyre; A Doll House; The Canterbury Tales; The Crucible; A Raisin in the Sun," she said.

"And arguments could be made that these are potentially divisive: Brave New World; Animal Farm; Of Mice and Men; Sold; The Glass Castle," she continued. "And that's just in English class. Imagine the ramifications in social studies. You can't talk about the election without it being 'divisive.'"

Wentzler noted the ambiguity of the definition of CRT as

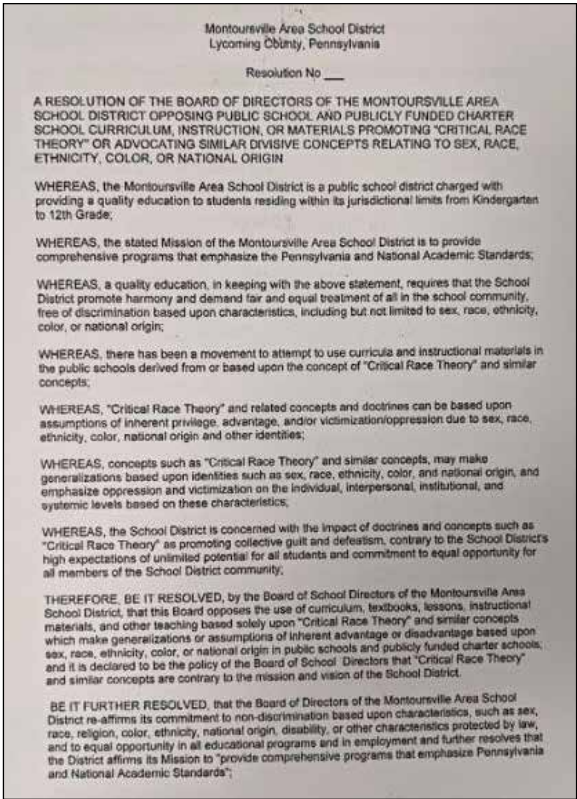
## Brittanica definition of Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Intellectual movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of colour.

Critical race theorists hold that the law and legal institutions in the United States are inherently racist insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and nonwhites, especially African Americans.

presented in the resolution. "As a professional, I know how to discuss a controversial subject without 'indoctrinating,'" a word used by many of the parents who said they were there to protect their children from "progressive rhetoric" and "activist propaganda."

Young, the associate provost at Bucknell, suggested practical issues for any K-12 school district to consider. "A change-up in the authors we read," she said. Also, who and how are we reading? What concepts are important, what resources are available, and what simple learning activities could we implement that relate to a more



inclusive curriculum? What budget is in place for more inclusive learning materials?

"If there is no budget," she said, "they're saying we've already invested in the narrative we want to teach."

Published Aug. 11, 2021

## Life is full of emotion.



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## Key questions for the proposed sale of Cumberland County's nursing home

By Zack Hoopes  
The Sentinel

Debate amongst the Cumberland County Commissioners and the general public continues apace as the county continues to move forward with the potential sale of Claremont Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, the county-owned nursing home.

Republican commissioners Gary Eichelberger and Vince DiFilippo have indicated their desire to press forward negotiations after Transitions Healthcare, originally the county's primary bidder, bowed out of the process, leaving Allaire Health Services as the sole interested party.

Democratic Commissioner Jean Foschi has voted against moving forward with the process, saying the proceedings have been too focused on a fast sale.

The county's primary interest in selling Claremont is not to make money on the transaction, the commissioners have said, but to avoid future financial liability as Claremont's position has gone into the red.

Advocates against the sale believe it's worth holding on to public ownership and have the county make another attempt to turn the facility around, before selling to a private operator and losing control over Claremont's quality of care.

Below are common questions and points of contention about the debate, and the background behind them.

### How long has Claremont been losing money, and will it continue to?

Claremont has been running deficits since 2015, and the county's anticipation of future losses are built on that trend-line.

It's important to note the difference between an operating deficit — in which expenses in the budget year are greater than revenues — and Claremont's fund balance. Operating at a loss means that Claremont has slowly drawn down its operating account to the point where it is now negative, requiring subsidy from the county's general account in order to pay basic expenses.

That subsidy is estimated at \$2.56 million over the current budget year, if the county were to retain ownership of the home through Dec. 31, 2021.



JASON MALMONT, THE SENTINEL

Claremont's future losses are hard to predict, although the county's finance department has indicated that the annual subsidy requirement will continue to grow unless Claremont's numbers change significantly.

Chief among these is patient count. Claremont's occupancy began to slide in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold; the average daily headcount in 2019 was 257 patients, but that dropped to 230 for 2020.

Average daily census for January 2021 is only 145 patients, leading to a loss of \$767,269 in the first month of the year.

Compounding this is a lack of staff, which limits the facility's ability to intake new patients, even as the pandemic tapers off. County officials said Claremont currently has dozens of unfilled positions for skilled nursing staff, including Certified Nursing Assistants, Licensed Practical Nurses and Registered Nurses.

How fast the facility can rebuild both its patient and staff counts will determine how fast it can stem its financial losses.

### The county has millions of dollars in cash on hand — can it use those funds to help Claremont?

Yes, but only to a certain extent. The county's general fund balance is sometimes referred to as a "reserve," but this is somewhat of a misnomer.

The general fund balance at the end of 2020 was pegged at \$33.9 million. Due to the county's slight structural deficit, that number is budgeted to be drawn down to \$29.4 million by the end of 2021, although the decrease will likely be less due to miscellaneous cost-saving measures implemented throughout the year.

However, the county cannot spend this account down to zero without creating cash flow problems. The general fund cash balance is much like a family's checking account; if it is spent down close to zero, and an expense is incurred before another receipt of revenue, the family will need a line of credit to bridge the gap.

*Continued on next page*



Based on local governments' timing of expenses and revenues (which are predominantly property taxes), financial regulators generally recommend a certain number of days' worth of operating expenses that should remain in the general fund balance at the close of each budget year.

Cumberland County aims to have its budget years balance at 100 days' of average operating costs, and 70 days at an absolute minimum; a lower value will create significant cash flow problems during the fiscal cycle.

The county will end 2021 with about 111 days of operations as general fund balance, meaning that it has about \$10 million that could be drawn down before hitting the 70-day minimum, after which the county would begin to have fundamental solvency problems.

Note that larger governments can get around this by loaning money to their general operating accounts from other accounts they control. This is how the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is able to operate with only a few hours' worth of operating expenses in its fund balance, as the state treasury routinely loans money from investment accounts, such as the state's pension fund, to patch the cash flow in the general fund.

### Could the county use future federal stimulus funds to support Claremont?

Most likely, yes. The American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA), which became law in March, includes \$65.1 billion in direct aid to counties, based upon population.

On resident count alone, this would come out to about \$50 million for a county of Cumberland County's size, although ARPA includes a hold-harmless clause for urban counties that receive funding based on population density; this would reduce funding for counties that do not meet the urban threshold under federal housing law, which Cumberland County does not.

Still, the county will almost certainly receive an eight-figure sum, and stipulations for the funds' use are relatively broad — the money can be used to compensate for any revenue declines relative to pre-pandemic levels.

Although Claremont faced operating deficits before the pandemic, COVID-19 has clearly exacerbated them; Claremont's 2020 cash deficit of \$989,119.70 would've been drastically worse without federal assistance throughout the year.

Claremont benefited from \$2.8 million in direct federal assistance in 2020; in addition, the county paid for several projects at Claremont using its discretionary share of federal recovery dollars, which were also paid out to small businesses, charities and a laundry list of others in the county.

### Can the county incur taxes to help support Claremont?

Yes, although not directly.

Cumberland County currently levies a property tax of 2.195 mills, or \$2.195 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. In addition, there is a library tax of 0.166 mills — this is not general fund money, but rather goes



JASON MALMONT, THE SENTINEL

directly to the county's public library system, which is an independent agency.

Pennsylvania law allows for specific tax additions to be established for specific services; in addition to libraries, separate property tax levies to support volunteer fire companies are also common. Such taxes are typically established by referendum. But such a provision does not exist in Pennsylvania's local government code for nursing homes.

That does not prevent the county from transferring tax dollars out of the general fund millage to assist Claremont. The major issue would be coordination, given that the county's property tax rate would need to be raised each year on a projection of Claremont's operating loss for the year, which in the current scenario is difficult to predict.

The county's property tax revenue for 2021 (not including the library tax) is budgeted at \$55.45 million; assuming the Claremont subsidy estimate of \$2.56 million holds true, this would mean that, if the county were to have decided to raise taxes this year in order to break even on the nursing home, it would have hiked the rate by about 4.62 percent.

For a \$200,000 home, this would be an extra \$20.28 in tax. Projecting the number going forward is less certain, but the amount of subsidy needed in future years will almost certainly be more, given that federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars would not be there.

If the county were to decide to retain Claremont for a longer period of time, the county's finance office projects that a tax increase of eight to 14 percent would be needed to give the facility sufficient breathing room, particularly given the sharp revenue declines in the first quarter of 2021.

For a \$200,000 home, this would increase the tax bill by \$35.12 to \$61.46.

### Would selling Claremont mean that it would accept fewer low-income residents?

Not necessarily, although there are different incentives between publicly- and privately-owned providers that make it difficult to predict how the facility's payer-mix would change.

The county has said that it intends to negotiate a sale provision that will require a buyer to maintain a Medicaid population of 75 percent or more for at least 10 years, although the county's sale adviser admitted this is difficult to enforce.

But such a provision is not out of the question. Allaire Health Services, the county's primary bidder for a possible purchase of Claremont, maintains a high Medicaid census at the home it runs in Montour County (the company also operates three homes in New Jersey).

In 2019, Allaire's Grandview Nursing and Rehabilitation operated with 77.02 percent of its occupied bed-days being Medicaid patients, according to its most recent cost report on file with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. Claremont's Medicaid census is almost identical, at 76.35 percent.

While county homes have traditionally been seen as a haven for disadvantaged residents, that paradigm has been diluted in recent years due to a number of policy changes.

Medicaid per-diem rates are calculated by the DHS slightly differently for county homes than they are for privately-held facilities; the patient case-mix for county facilities is adjusted annually instead of quarterly, and county homes — as of the last rate setting — are not affected by the so-called "budget adjustment formula"

*Continued on next page*

that decreases rates due to inadequate funding in the state budget.

This may still provide some incentive for county homes to accept long-term stays by Medicaid patients, although the effect has been reduced by stagnation in Medicaid rates overall. Claremont's current Medicaid per-diem is \$215.79, according to state data. Ten years ago, it was \$203.98, which comes out to a cut of \$27 per day in current-dollar terms after adjusting for inflation. Privately-run homes have not fared much differently.

Increasing numbers of patients – at both county-run and private facilities—are also not paid for directly by Medicaid. Pennsylvania, like most states, has transitioned to a managed-care model for individuals who are eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare – in such a system, private insurers who receive an allotment of pooled state and federal dollars then negotiate with health care providers on rates (Medicare otherwise covers rehabilitation stays but not long-term residency).

The per-diem rates set by DHS still serve as a floor for rate contracts with managed care companies – but the transition to managed care introduces a significant amount of variability compared to years past in which county homes were guaranteed a single, consistent rate by state fiat.

### **Poll: Cumberland County residents willing to pay more to keep Claremont in county hands**

A majority of Cumberland County residents would be willing to pay more in taxes to keep Claremont in county hands, according to a poll commissioned by the Partnership for Better Health.

The survey, conducted by Susquehanna Polling and Research using a representative sample of 400 Cumberland County residents, indicated that 57 percent of

respondents would be willing to pay \$20 more in annual property tax to cover Claremont's operating deficit; 32 percent said they would not, and 11 percent were undecided.

Given Claremont's projected deficit, \$20 is the approximate tax increase on a \$200,000 home that would be needed to compensate for 2021's losses at the nursing home; the county has cautioned that this number would likely grow each year if Claremont's patient count remains low and federal COVID-19 assistance wanes.

County Commissioner Gary Eichelberger has voiced objections to the poll's results based upon this, saying that the inclusion of the \$20 figure is a leading question given that the number will likely not hold in forthcoming budgets.

While tax rates are not an issue for the majority of voters, according to the poll, voters are less certain about the ultimate question of whether or not the county should sell Claremont — 45 percent of respondents said the county should retain the facility, 14 percent said it should sell, and 41 percent were undecided.

A clear majority of respondents — 72 percent — had heard about the issue, and 55 percent ranked Claremont's ability to serve low-income residents as a 10 on a scale of 1-10.

Susquehanna's poll sample of 400 people was achieved by both landline and cell phone interviews of registered voters, as well as through the company's web-based platform that included some non-voters as well.

Age ranges of respondents were evenly-distributed, according to poll data, and political affiliations were representative of the county, with 50 percent of respondents registered Republicans, 34 percent Democrats, 13 percent independent or third-party, and 3 percent not registered to vote.

### **Would selling to a private operator hurt Claremont's quality of care?**

One of the advantages of having the nursing home in county control is oversight over its operations.

At a high level, privately-run homes have a greater risk of declines in quality; for the specific transaction between the county and Allaire Health Services regarding Claremont, the answer is less clear.

A recent paper published through the National Bureau of Economic Research, for instance, pointed to an increasing rate of private equity investors buying stakes in homes as a risk for for-profit nursing home operators. The study found that resident mortality rates were about ten percent higher for private equity-held homes versus the overall average, and those homes saw a 50 percent increase in the likelihood that antipsychotics would be used on a patient, problems linked to cost-cutting measures.

Comparing Claremont to Allaire's four existing homes shows that their Centers for Medicare and Medicaid ratings, a five-star system, are roughly on par with each other — two of Allaire's homes rate worse than Claremont, one better, and one the same.

CMS data also shows that the number of reported deficiencies in the last three years' inspection periods is roughly the same. Both Claremont and the Allaire facilities, taken in total, had just over seven deficiencies per resident over the three years, or one deficiency per 21 residents on an annual average.

Judging on the most recent inspection period alone shows Claremont doing better, with one deficiency per 37 residents, and Allaire faring worse, with one deficiency per 16 residents.

*Published April 25, 2021.*

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# THE PROGRESS

## Camp Hope Run Landfill permit vacated

By Mikayla Heiss  
The (Clearfield) Progress

WEST DECATUR — The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board recently granted summary judgment, overturning a permit approval for Camp Hope Run Landfill in Boggs Township.

Clearfield County had appealed the approval of the permit. The county's argument must be strong if summary judgment was granted, according to Commissioner John Sobel.

"That was a solid win for Clearfield County," Sobel stated. "Summary judgment motions are usually not granted."

For summary judgment, no facts can be in dispute, according to Sobel. The county previously expected the matter to go to trial, according to Commissioner Dave Glass.

The landfill controversy has been an ongoing issue. PA Waste, LLC submitted an application in 2006 to the Department of Environmental Protection. This was denied and successfully appealed only to be denied again. PA Waste submitted another application in 2017.

In February of 2020, the department approved PA Waste, LLC permits to build a 5,000 tons-per-day, double-lined, municipal waste landfill, according to previous stories by The Progress. Clearfield County appealed this decision.

According to Act 101, the department cannot issue a waste management permit unless the landfill is in the county's municipal waste management plan. If the landfill is not in the county plan, the applicant must show the landfill doesn't interfere with the plan, the location is at least as suitable as other locations and the county can object to the landfill.

A focal point of the county's argument was the origin of the waste. The landfill would not take waste from Clearfield County. Details, including the origin, composition and quantity of the waste, must be included in the application.

The county stated these requirements were not met. PA Waste noted that its application stated that these were not known at the time of the application. The application gave a general idea that "waste will be delivered from surrounding jurisdictions, as well as from sources outside of Pennsylvania."

The vague language and admission of the unknown was evident to the board, according to the opinion.



An aerial view of the proposed site of Camp Hope Run Landfill in Boggs Township, Clearfield County.

The issued opinion stated, "In the case of the field of dreams that is the Camp Hope Run Landfill, imaginary customers currently unknown, and in PA Waste's view unknowable, will emerge from the mists to dip themselves in the magic water."

The department also only compared the harms and benefits of the Camp Hope Run Landfill with other permitted landfills. The department failed to offer potential alternative locations for the landfill.

The future of the landfill remains unknown. PA Waste may have to return to the department and begin again, addressing the concerns raised by the hearing board, according to Sobel. The board's decision could also be appealed.

"PA Waste and/or the Department of Environmental Protection may choose to appeal the decision of the Environmental Hearing Board," Sobel said. "We hope they do not, but we are prepared to defend against the same."

*Published June 12, 2021.*



A resident living along state Route 153/Crooked Sewer Road in Boggs Township is one of many opposing the proposed Camp Hope Run Landfill with a posted 'No Dump' sign. At one point, numerous homes and businesses had signs protesting the dump located on their properties, but very few remain.

# Deaf dog finds empathy in deaf-education teacher's home

By Chauncey Ross

cross@indianagazette.net

He was an incorrigible cur.

This mutt puppy wouldn't listen to anything he was told.

Three families tried.

Three families brought him back to the Four Footed Friends shelter, each time with worse habits than before.

When he went up for adoption again in late 2016, he had a penchant for chewing apart anything that was stuffed — toys, cushions, and the like. He had a name, too — Flynn. And he had a diagnosis. He was deaf.



The Hill family's faithful little guy Wyatt suddenly up and died that year.

Their furry companion, a 10-year-old Husky mix, gave no clues. He was faithful as could be, and had made a habit of cuddling with Annah Hill, who had been having a few down days of her own.

A checkup after Wyatt passed revealed stunning news. He was riddled with cancer. But he had never, well, whined about it.

"He was always comforting me," Annah said. "I can't imagine an animal not feeling well himself, yet giving you that devotion."

Soon, Annah and Greg Hill and their daughters, Jeanice, Leannah and Brooke, and their fat orange cat Mr. PIB were ready to replace Wyatt in their home.



A sign on Flynn's cage at the shelter warned that he would tear up stuffed items.

He was a bundle of energy and the Hills were ready to harness him.

He ran circles through the kitchen, dining

room and living room of the family's ranch style house along Carter Avenue in Indiana, bouncing off the furniture, his first day in the house.

"He was like a ping-pong ball!" Annah said. It's been suggested that he's a mix of beagle and rat terrier. A "raggle," with the signature traits. High-spirited, high-strung, hyper.

From the start Flynn was affectionate, too. He reciprocates every scratch and belly rub with dog kisses.

One day Flynn greeted Annah full force, somewhat painfully as he leaped toward her chest and shoulders.

Double checking for a bruise, Annah found worse. A lump that had eluded her detection in her breast. Doctors said she had stage three breast cancer.

"If he had not been all crazy and ran up and hit me, I never would have found that lump fast enough," she said. "Flynn helped me find the cancer."

The cancer, she figured, was the unexplained reason she hadn't been feeling well all those months. She believes it was the illness that Wyatt had intuitively responded to with his comforting cuddles in his final months.

Mastectomy and a rugged course of chemotherapy followed. Medications will always be part of life. The risk of flare-ups is there, too.

"Flynn saved my life."



How the deaf dog, Flynn, came into the Hill family was kind of a destiny that the girls made true. It was a month after they lost Wyatt.

Leannah and Jeanice found his listing on Four Footed Friends website.



PHOTO: CHAUNCEY ROSS/GAZETTE

Annah Hill and Flynn relax in their home in Indiana.

*Continued on next page*



# The Indiana Gazette continued

"They said 'Mom, there's a dog and he's deaf! We have to check him out!" Annah said.

It was natural. Leannah and Jeanice practice American Sign Language. Brooke took it up, too. They communicate with their mom that way.

Annah Hill — Dr. Hill, that is — is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Disorders at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and is Program Director for Disability Services, where teaching sign language is her thing.

But wait.

It was out of necessity. Hill has neared deafness herself since 2005, when she was first diagnosed with loss of hearing in her right ear. She was studying that year for her master's degree in deaf education at the University of Pittsburgh.

How many planets could possibly align like this?

In a household of sign-language users, establishing communication with Flynn was an immediate goal.

Someone at Four Footed Friends had tried to train him in the hand signals that dolphins follow in water parks. He didn't grasp it.

But Annah, Greg and their daughters developed a set of commands fundamental to any well-trained dog and coupled the signals with universal facial expressions and a system of rewards to bring Flynn to understanding.

A thumbs-up, like the world over, is his sign of affirmation.

A collar that vibrates and sometimes shocks has helped Flynn to learn his boundaries.

Literally.

He has been conditioned to stay in the Hills' backyard and gets a reminder when he romps too far.

Flynn soon mastered "sit," "lay," "play

dead" and "roll over" with ease. He retrieves his toys when told, if he wants to play.

Annah Hill said her daughters challenged him further.

Climbing up and going down the sliding board in the backyard is part of his skill set. He jumps through a hula hoop on cue.

Flynn once climbed the ladder to a top bunk bed in the older girls' room. He enjoys winter sled riding with his humans.

That's a range of performance that has made the Hills a resource for other families with hearing-impaired dogs.

"Four Footed Friends will contact us and say 'we think we have another animal that is deaf. What did you do with your dog? What do you suggest?'" Annah said. "I love that. I don't mind. I tell them to let the people who adopt the dog contact me. I can say what I did; I don't know if it will work, but I'll let them know."

Research posted at the American Kennel Club (AKC) website reports that 5 to 10 percent of dogs are partially or fully deaf.

There are no numbers for deaf dogs for which owners successfully establish communication, but the site gives owners plenty of encouragement.

"Deaf dogs can live normal lives but need to have a special dedicated owner. Deaf dogs are not suitable for families with young children as they can be startled easily," the site offers.

Pshaw.

Jeanice is 13. Leannah is 12. Brooke is 7, two years older than Flynn. When he was first adopted, Brooke called him "little brother."

Life without sound is natural to Flynn. Overcompensating visually could make it natural for him to pick up on signals and

cues from humans. But it's his advantage over humans that lose hearing well into a life of enjoying all the sounds the world offers.

Annah and Greg started their family as her hearing deteriorated.

"I had Jeanice in 2007 and the first thing I thought was, 'is it progressive and is it going to be so fast that I am not going to hear her speech?'" she pondered. "And then I thought, I'm not going to hear Greg's voice anymore. I had so many things going on in my head because I knew too much from my schooling in deaf education. So that really hit me hard."

Annah Hill said she and her doctors haven't pinpointed the cause of her dramatic hearing loss. Acoustic neuroma, scar tissue, use of erythromycin, ototoxicity, environmental factors from her childhood on the Neal family farm in Center Township and genetics are the factors on the table. She said she's leaning toward genetics because some in her family have developed hearing trouble in recent years.

The progression of her hearing loss was slow at first. But in 2013 her "mild to moderate" classification jumped to "moderate to severe."

Her own education in the subject became her understanding of her condition, how she had to adapt, and how she has empathy for Flynn.

Annah Hill said some parts of the sound spectrum are easier for her to hear than others. High frequency sounds are lost. She suspects it's the same with Flynn, and that he either hears very low frequencies or is sensitive enough to vibrations to recognize things like footsteps.

Or a passing motorcycle.

A year ago, he tugged and broke the chain that tethered him to a tree in the Hills' front yard. He ran into the street and bit the tire of a passing motorcycle, Annah said.

Flynn was thrown to the side of the road and left in a daze, but suffered nothing worse than a broken tooth and a hard-learned lesson.

Much of his days now are spent watching the world go by from the picture window in the living room. The Hills call it Flynn's TV.

The reason for Flynn's deafness hasn't been a major concern.

"Deaf dogs can be trained using the same luring and hand signals that dogs with the ability to hear use," the AKC website advises. "Eventually you can begin to rely on hand signals alone. Have fun and be creative! You can use American Sign Language to teach your dog all kinds of words and tricks!"

That's all second nature now to the Hill family. Call them all trilingual, conversant in English, ASL and doggy signing.

Coincidences to some — Hill's hearing loss, her professional understanding of deafness, and her family's adoption of a deaf dog that has outperformed expectations — are part of a plan with a purpose, Annah is certain.

"God has a reason. He knows," she said. All the steps pointed toward this. She gave up her dream to attend the highly-touted deaf education program at Bloomsburg University and followed her father Brad Neal's wishes to attend IUP.

Otherwise she would not have met Greg Hill.

"I've been able to persevere through all these things. My hearing loss. Not going to Bloomsburg. Getting my doctorate. Having children and working at the same time — again the perseverance and determination," she said. "Then when I got diagnosed with cancer. I think, in my life, these things have been up to God: 'She can handle it.'"

*Published July 3, 2021.*



## NEWSPAPERS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF CULTURAL REPORTING

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## Huge crowd voices feelings in response to board member's anti-LGBT comments

By Mike Crowley  
Meadville Tribune

HAYFIELD TOWNSHIP — Three weeks after a PENNCREST School Board member referred to an LGBT-themed library display as “totally evil,” approximately 175 people came out on Monday to the first board meeting held in the aftermath of the controversy.

Anyone who expected board member David Valesky to dial back his comments critical of about a half-dozen books displayed in anticipation of June being Pride Month, however, was disappointed — and they will likely remain disappointed.

During the meeting, Valesky spoke repeatedly to explain his opposition to an anticipated tax increase that the board will vote to approve on Wednesday, but he did not address the controversy that resulted when he wrote in reference to the book display, “Besides the point of being totally evil, this is not what we need to be teaching kids. They aren’t at school to be brainwashed into thinking homosexuality is okay. Its [sic] actually being promoted to the point where it’s even ‘cool.’”

In an interview following the meeting, Valesky told the Tribune, “I definitely do plan to follow up” on the controversy during the board’s voting meeting, which takes place Wednesday instead of the usual Thursday.

“I’m not taking anything back, but I guess I would like to clarify on it,” Valesky said. “I don’t regret anything I said.”

The controversy has provoked an online petition calling for Valesky and board Vice President Luigi DeFrancesco to be removed from office. Both men shared a Facebook post that drew attention to the LGBT-themed books, which were part of a larger display of approximately 70 books on various themes.



PHOTO: MIKE CROWLEY, MEADVILLETribune

DeFrancesco shared the post without comment; Valesky stated, in part, “This is not what we need to be teaching kids. They aren’t at school to be brainwashed into thinking homosexuality is okay.”

By late Monday the petition at Change.org, which was open to people around the world, not just district residents, had more than 4,500 signatures.

The audience drawn to the meeting largely by the controversy was approximately 20 times larger than that of a typical PENNCREST board meeting. While those members of the public did not hear from Valesky on the topic, the board did hear directly from six members of the public and indirectly from many more.

Several dozen audience members displayed their support for Valesky by wearing large stickers affixed to their clothing with the phrase “I stand with David” in all-caps. About two dozen more showed their opposition to Valesky’s comments and support for gay rights with various signs, T-shirts and other pride symbols.

Four speakers voiced their support for the

library staff that had created the display of books at Saegertown Junior-Senior high, for gay students in the district and for freedom of expression generally. Two of the speakers were critical of the display and said that the apparent endorsement of a “worldview” represented by the books was inappropriate in a public school.

Rising Saegertown sophomore LaWrynn Edwards, the social media editor for Saegertown Pride Alliance, a club at the school, cited the Constitution’s guarantees of freedom of expression and equal protection under the laws in addressing the board and calling on them to represent all students in the district.

“Public schools cannot single out students that are LGBTQ+ for negative treatment,” she said.

Saegertown English teacher Stacey Hetrick told the board that “books are not evil.”

“The only problem with books is when people perceive a threat that doesn’t exist and behave accordingly.

“If you don’t want your child to read particular books, then your child will not

sign out those books,” Hetrick said. “As a parent you have control over them. Books sitting on top of a shelf are a threat to no one.”

Centerville resident Ryan Weingard said he had not followed the controversy on social media but had read about it in the news and had not seen “any people being called evil.” Instead, Weingard said, “people are confusing a worldview with a personal attack.”

“I would encourage the school board to return to foundational principles in what you bring before our children,” Weingard added. “The principles of the Christian worldview are in fact what this nation was founded upon. It’s what sustained the nation.”

Superintendent Timothy Glasspool said that 12 speakers are already registered to address the board at its Wednesday meeting. Regarding Valesky’s comments about the book display, Glasspool noted that in making the comments Valesky did not speak for the board and said he did not anticipate the board taking any action. The display, Glasspool added, remained in place until the library closed at the end of the school year.

In response to numerous issues, including the social media controversy, a disagreement with Valesky over the proposed tax increase, and board member absences from recent meetings and district graduations, board member Jeff Brooks proposed a retreat that could allow members to work through some of their differences.

“It’s embarrassing to be a part of this school board the way we’re operating and the way we’re doing things,” Brooks said.

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# Officials decry permit process for parades

By Mark Maroney

mmaroney@sungazette.com

Organizations that want to sponsor a parade to salute American war heroes, celebrate a community's Declaration of Independence signing or watch Mummer string bands as Spiderman hands out candy are having a challenge this year getting special events permits from the state Department of Transportation.

Regulations from PennDOT require a municipality hosting the parade and the organization to sign-off, and the municipality to indemnify the state (commonwealth) from any lawsuit.

Other logistical matters, including rules to keep people safe from COVID-19 spread, have made the permitting process a lengthier and more complicated one, said numerous municipal leaders and parade organizers in Lycoming County.

Before COVID-19, a borough police chief would help an organization fill out and submit a special events' permit for a parade on a state road or right-of-way.

Those days appear to be over, and it's prolonging the process for organizations, which need to get a permit from PennDOT, state and local officials said.

Applicants must have proper insurances, copies and statement from the municipality will agree to full "indemnify" or protect the agency from any claims, suits or actions for injury, death or property damage arising from or because of the acts or omissions of the sponsor, its officers, agents or employees.

"The biggest impact it has on us in Muncy is our chief of police used to assist in helping groups to fill the permit application out," said Charles S. Hall, borough manager.

"Going forward, the individual group will



have to fill it out and submit the form," he said.

"That is not to say the chief won't assist to some degree, but at the end of day those folks have to submit the application themselves," Hall said.

As an example, he said, organizers of a Corvette show on Main Street had their special events permit returned two or three times for additional questions.

"It has been changed into a more bureaucratic process," Hall said. "It has become cumbersome."

"Due to the ongoing pandemic, the events need to comply with all current and applicable state orders regarding COVID-19 and all virus safety mitigation guidance, including but not limited to, guidance from the state Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control," according to

PennDOT permit guidelines.

These guidelines were forwarded to the Sun-Gazette upon request by Maggie Baker, community relations coordinator with PennDOT District 3-O in Montoursville.

Unlike in prior years, before the virus took hold, PennDOT may now also permit the temporary use of sidewalks or travel lanes in state right-of-way to accommodate additional public space for tables and seats and retail activities, the guidelines stated.

It is just one example of how the permitting process has become more complicated.

"The Commonwealth's COVID-era modifications to granting special event road and bridge closure permits involving state routes and highways has become unacceptably cumbersome," said Steven

W. Cappelli, borough manager and public safety director ahead of the borough hosting the 75th Mummer's Parade in October.

The permits are no longer handled locally, but, rather, heading to PennDOT central office in Harrisburg, he said.

"It is my understanding that said permit applications must be approved not only by PennDOT, but the governor himself," according to Cappelli. "Our borough will need to navigate these same burdensome waters for our 75th Mummer's Parade in October. ... With most pandemic restrictions having been lifted for indoor and outdoor gatherings, the state needs to return to a more simplified, and far less time consuming application process for reviewing and approving special event permits for community events."

In Williamsport, Joseph Gerardi, city codes administrator, said the fireworks will happen and the Market Street bridge will be temporarily closed for the duration of the fireworks for safety purposes. The permit took some time to get but it was approved and that includes proper indemnification to clear away and liability concerns for the state, he said.

"The biggest thing is the change makes it so what used to be a permit that went before the local district office now must go to Harrisburg," Gerardi said.

PennDOT regulations establish the minimum criteria for these events for local roadways and state highways, according to the permit guidelines.

Special event permits are used to authorize temporary road closures and other event-related uses of PennDOT's right-of-way. PennDOT doesn't not permit or sanction the event, only the occupancy.

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# The Daily Courier

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## Looking back: Flood of 2016

### Story of disaster, community strength

*It was the 100-year storm people often hear about that brings devastation elsewhere, but five years ago, it happened here.*

**"I never heard a sound from [the creek] like it was that night. It sounded like thunder, but it wasn't water, it was the sound of debris and rocks that the water was moving. "We knew it was really a problem when we began to smell fuel oil in the creek because it meant water was in houses."**

Bullskin Township  
Fire Chief Kyle Quinn

**By Joe Abramowitz**

The Daily Courier  
Connellsville, Pa

For two hours five years ago, the sky opened up and delivered a disaster of incredible proportion to Connellsville and two neighboring townships.

Over those two hours, 5 inches of rain fell, causing Mountz Creek to overflow its banks and turn Connellsville's Dutch Bottom neighborhood into a lake.

Bullskin Township was hit hard, too. Connellsville Township to a lesser extent.

Dozens of homes were demolished in Dutch Bottom and Bullskin.

More than 300 homes suffered some amount of damage.

Damage was estimated at \$7.9 million.

Many people were left homeless.

It was the 100-year storm people often hear about that brings devastation elsewhere, but five years ago, it happened here.

The storm was a terrible conclusion to what had been a mild, sunny Sunday.

Unaware trouble was brewing, Connellsville Mayor Greg Lincoln was at home that evening after an enjoyable Italian Festival on the city's West Side.

City Clerk Vern Ohler called him about the flood.

Ohler was at home watching TV when the storm began.

"I didn't think it was raining that hard," he said. "I do remember seeing the lightning in the background."

Then he received a call from Councilman Tom Karpiak, who said "Mountz Creek was rolling through Yough River Park," Ohler recalled.

Before Ohler got out of the house, Karpiak called from the North End, where Mountz Creek was surging.

"That's when all hell broke loose," Ohler said.

Ohler said a forgotten part of the storm is that Yough River Park flooded, but damage there was not severe.

He and Karpiak went down to the boat ramp in the park to check the Youghiogheny River level.

"It never went up," he said of the Yough. "It was all the creek."

A ride down to the City's North End, where Mountz Creek - usually - passes under the York Avenue Bridge was revealing. The water was over the bridge deck.

By then, it was almost done raining, said Ohler, who recalls a startling sight, the moon reflecting on the area beyond the small bridge.

"You could tell," he said. "It was like a lake."

As the heavy rain persisted, the New Haven Hose Company in Connellsville was staging at its Seventh Street station on the West Side.

Bob Topper Sr. was fire chief at the time, and contacted Friday, said he was out of town that night.

"That morning, I had left for North Carolina and the sun was shining," he said. "Then my son started texting me about the flood."

Topper Sr. said he thought Bob Topper Jr. was kidding.

"He started sending me pictures and my stomach turned," he said. "When you're fire chief, you want to be there when needed."

Bob Topper Jr. said Jeff Layton, then a New Haven officer and city emergency management coordinator, led the effort that night. Layton is now chief.

Topper Jr. said the firefighters were out all night and performed about a dozen boat rescues.

"We were going house to house in the boat, helping people as best we could," he recalled. "Some people did not want to leave."

Eventually, the water began to recede, and "we had to drag the boat out," Topper Jr. said.

One of Topper Jr.'s most vivid recollections occurred the next morning back at the fire station.

"Trucks started to arrive with food and supplies for flood victims and food for us," he said. "It shows you what kind of community we have."

Bullskin Township Fire Chief Kyle Quinn was on his front porch when the rain began to fall. At the time, he was assistant chief and emergency management coordinator.

"It was a normal night that turned into a storm," he said. "When it hadn't changed after 30 minutes, we started to have issues."

He said the first call came from Breakneck Road, near Gilmore store.

Quinn said firefighters blocked off Johnson Lane as the "monsoon" continued, and when they headed back to Gilmore's it was flooded behind it.

"It progressed on from there," he said. "People were trapped in their houses and we were unable to get to them on probably a two- or three-mile stretch of

*Continued on next page*



Breakneck Road. It was a real problem there.”

Quinn said he lives next to a creek.

“I never heard a sound from it like it was that night,” he said of the stream. “It sounded like thunder, but it wasn’t water, it was the sound of debris and rocks that the water was moving.

“We knew it was really a problem when we began to smell fuel oil in the creek because it meant water was in houses.”

Quinn said all the firefighters could do is react to the situations as best they could.

“There was no way to be proactive,” he lamented.

Ohler saw similar sights in the North End as tree limbs and large rocks were pulled down Mountz Creek.

At the time, Topper Jr. was Parks and Recreation Board president.

In the days leading up to the storm, the board placed picnic tables produced by Connellsville Area Career & Technical Center students in Mountz Creek Park.

He said some were found smashed up against trees hundreds of yards from the park after being carried by the water.

Quinn said it was a long night.

“We were fortunate that there were no fatalities,” he said. “A lot of people lost a lot of things, and we tried to get everybody the help they needed.

“The biggest thing I took from this was how thankful I am to live in a community like this.”

He said businesses and people immediately offered help with money and supplies.

“It shows you how good of an area this is,” Quinn said. “It’s unbelievable.”

The fact that no lives were lost fills many memories of the flood.

“God was watching over us that night,” Lincoln said. “It was the longest night of my entire life, standing by the York Avenue Bridge with water over it, standing side by side with first responders and couldn’t get across that bridge.

“That there was no loss of loss of life is the most amazing thing ever.”

Many said it was a miracle no one died or was severely injured.

One image - among so many - will forever remain in Ohler’s mind.

“Some guy on a motorcycle tried to drive through it,” he said of the floodwater. “He went in and he and the bike went under, and I thought he was gone.”

Incredibly, the biker popped up and grabbed on to a fence.

“He went back in to get the bike,” Ohler said. “He didn’t get it, but he got out.”

In another instance, a man was in a pickup truck with his family and braved the flood, Lincoln said.

“He gunned it and got through,” he said. “He got his family out.”

Some miracles might be small, and Ohler said one might have occurred the night of the flood.

“My phone was down to 1 % and I didn’t have anywhere to charge it,” said Ohler, who made numerous calls through the night in reaction to the disaster. “It never went dead. I kept calling and it never turned off.”

“There were a lot of miracles,” said Chip Rowan, who served as Connellsville Area Community Ministries executive director at the time of the flood. “We heard stories from people, and it’s amazing how they survived. ... There was a lot of potential for people to die.”

## AFTERMATH

*The rainstorm lasted just two hours, but the recovery effort that began the next morning continued on for years in one form or another.*

Many involved in that massive undertaking attribute much of its success to providence.

Numerous faith-based organizations rushed to the cause, among them Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, United Methodist Committee on Relief, St. Vincent de Paul Society and Connellsville Area Community Ministries.

Money to help affected families poured in from the area, across the nation and around the world, in total more than \$700,000, Rowan said.

The same was true for water, food, clothing, furniture and supplies of all types to benefit flood victims.

Lincoln said the flow of goods was hard to comprehend.

“You’d go to the fire station in the morning and it would be empty,” he said. “Come back five hours later and it was packed from front to back.”

Lincoln and Ohler asked Community Ministries to handle the money and coordinate the relief effort, a task that included distribution of money and accounting for every cent of it, Rowan said.

“It put Community Ministries on the map,” Lincoln said. “Chip was amazing through all that and so many deserve to be commended.”

It established the Flood Recovery Center, at first in City Church on North Pittsburgh Street and later in Trinity House, which Community Ministries owned on Fairview Avenue.

Numerous people were involved, Rowan said, including Amy Price and Rita Smith.

Price entered the picture as a volunteer, working to help flood victims in Bullskin Township, where she grew up.

The morning after the flood, a group of volunteers

formed, sort of on its own, and launched a recovery effort distributing food, water and clothing from a base established at the Bullskin Soccer Club.

“We connected with UMCOR and Community Ministries,” Price said.

Price began to volunteer at the Recovery Center and she eventually was asked become its manager.

She remained at the post for nearly three years before the program was closed out.

Price said it was a strong and dedicated team, both in and out of the recovery center.

“Greg Lincoln helped bring in a lot of money,” she said. “He was constantly out there telling our story to anyone willing to listen.”

Smith was on the Community Ministries staff and had experience in disaster recovery with AmeriCorps and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

AmeriCorps is dedicated to helping people through “trying times.” National VOAD coordinates 55 of the largest nonprofit organizations in disaster recovery, Smith said.

Among other disaster initiatives, Smith was involved in the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort.

Smith said Connellsville stood out in its response.

“Connellsville is such a great place, and the flood really proved it,” she said. “People came out of the woodwork to help, and it’s incredible that such a little town raised so much money.”

Rowan said help was immediately available after the flood.

The first call that Monday morning came from Jack Yard, Connellsville Walmart manager, who wanted to know what he could do to help, Rowan said.

“It kind of grew from that point,” said Rowan, adding a meeting was conducted involving first responders, school districts, Fayette 911 Director Roy “Barney” Shipley and charitable organizations that helped people to pay bills.

“We went full force,” Rowan said. “We had a meeting at the middle school for all those who were affected. All the organizations that could help had tables set up, and people went from table to table.”

Rowan said the charitable response was phenomenal.

“Stacks of mail came in every day from all over the country and world,” he said. “We had to get board members into the office to help open mail and process donations.”

Rowan said the day-after-day process was exhausting and the sense of responsibility was at times overwhelming.

“There was so much need,” he said. “While \$700,000 is a lot of money, it was not nearly enough to get everyone back where they were.”

He said the frustration level was high for victims, in large part because houses that were destroyed and demolished could not be rebuilt in Dutch Bottom.

"The term for them was 'the next new normal,' whatever that was, and it will never be the way it was," Rowan said.

He said the Flood Recovery staff faced people who were crying, frustrated and sometimes angry.

"It was a huge sense of responsibility because they look to us to be able to fix things for them," Rowan said. "There was no guidebook for this."

## FROM ABOVE

*Despite the pressure to do all they could for victims, Community Ministries staffers relied on faith to soldier on.*

"I felt God had me in that place at that time, and it was a fulfilling experience," said Rowan, adding that knowingly or not, Community Ministries was in place to handle the task.

Still, the toll was heavy, especially as time wore on.

"I had a conversation with God," Rowan said. "I said, 'I'll finish this up, and then you have to get me out of here.'"

Rowan said he was burned out at the end and was ready to move on when a door opened for the next stage of his career, as an Armstrong community marketing manager.

Price said God was at work after the flood.

"God had intention," she said. "He knew what was coming, he knows the beginning and he end. He knew what was needed and had people in place, people in the right places for such a horrific situation."

She described all that was accomplished to help the victims, from countless contributions of money and supplies to the ability to coordinate a multi-year process as "God's grace."

"We don't realize how much hope is needed until after an event like that," Price said. "God already had people in place ... It was amazing. Some may call it happenstance. I call it grace."

## CLEANING UP

*Lincoln cited the efforts of Ohler immediately after the flood, throughout the cleanup and for years afterward through demolition and property acquisition.*

Misfortune elsewhere helped Connellsville, Ohler said.

Money left over from a Federal Emergency Management Agency allocation for a snow disaster - \$1 million - was available to Connellsville, he said.

The city used \$400,000 of it, mostly for property acquisition and demolition of homes in Dutch Bottom, he said, adding the rest was returned, but might be available at some future time.

Anything developed on those parcels must be water permeable, a requirement that prohibits solid structures. Plans might include a park or campground.

That's in the future, though.

Ohler said the Dutch Bottom cleanup was massive.

"I called Advance Disposal and asked how many dumpsters they had and said send them," Ohler said.

Help came from sources large and small.

"People just started showing up to help out," Ohler said.

Lincoln, a constant presence, said two state legislators, Rep. Ryan Warner (R-57) and Sen. Pat Stefano (R-32) were key in the effort to bring government dollars.

On top of that, Warner was among scores of mud-caked volunteers who helped out in Dutch Bottom.

Much of the heavy lifting came from the business sector.

"Tuffy walked into council chambers and said 'what do you need?'" Ohler said of local construction-company owner Terrance "Tuffy" Shallenberger.

Shallenberger brought in heavy equipment, and when the city lacked enough dumpsters, sent over huge tri-axle trucks to haul debris.

With no power in the area, Ned Franks of Graft Oil provided fuel to keep machinery running.

Ohler said Westmoreland Electric provided crews to rewire homes from bottom down.

Lincoln said when Gov. Tom Wolf toured Dutch Bottom, employees from the Williams Company were head to toe in mud volunteering time.

All of the help was free.

Catholic Charities provided dozens for new furnaces in Connellsville and Bullskin.

"So many good things came out of this," Ohler said. "Looking back, I can't believe it. We do have good people here."

He recalled the efforts of a woman who took in laundry from victims, and wouldn't even take money for detergent.

Price said Carol Kirk, at the time a Connellsville Area teacher, worked with students to do the same for flood victims.

Lincoln said he was running fully on adrenaline the first week after the flood, getting everything in place, getting supplies, getting help.

"It was amazing to see all the volunteers working," he said. "Nobody was mad or upset, and they were smiling as they helped, enjoyed helping their fellow man."

"Families making food and sandwiches, driving around handing out food for volunteers."

## AFTERTHOUGHTS

*Lincoln said he will always be proud of what was accomplished in the wake of the flood.*

"People donated and donated," he said. "It's amazing. When there is a need, people step up big time. It was the worst time followed by the best time."

"I still get goosebumps today thinking about it. It hardly seems that five years have passed."

Still, all the vacant lots are a testament to the bad time.

"It changed that part of city forever," Lincoln said. "It was a tight little neighborhood with lots of relatives and it was majorly disrupted."

Joe Abramowitz is a Daily Courier staff writer.

Published Aug. 28, 2021.



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# The Sentinel

## MABL OKs debt resolution

### Lewistown to refinance debt of water authority

**By Jeff Fishbein**

Lifestyles editor

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LEWISTOWN — At a special meeting Monday, board members approved a resolution by a 3 – 1 margin that asks the borough of Lewistown to take over the Municipal Authority of the Borough of Lewistown's (MABL) debt.

In a roll call vote, board president Ben Rager and members Jennifer Miller and Frank Berrier voted in favor. Board member Jeff Rocco, appearing via Zoom, voted against, chastising the board in the process.

By allowing the borough to refinance its debt, the borough is a step closer to its previously discussed proposition to take ownership of the municipal authority and lease it to generate revenue for the borough.

As founder of the authority, Lewistown borough "Has the right, at its discretion, to pay off the indebtedness and take over the authority," said Thomas Smida, bond counsel associated with Mette Evans and Woodside of Harrisburg.

Under the resolution passed Monday, the borough's assumption of MABL's debt will mean a savings in interest paid of more than \$600,000. However, that money could go entirely to the borough, according to the agreement.

And, in response to a question asked by

board member Frank Berrier, Smida said the authority's debt service reserve fund of \$1.7 million will be used as part of the refinancing, leaving the authority without those funds.

There were further discussions on this later in the meeting, fueled by a question asked by Ron Napikoski of Derry Township, who wondered if Lewistown Borough Council will now have to approve expenditures for system needs outside the borough. No clear answer was given.

Because the authority's revenue will be pledged to the borough and MABL's hands will be tied as far as borrowing, the authority will have to go through the borough for future capital funds, and the borough may have to vote on whether to issue more bonds, Smida explained.

The resolution asks the borough to pay three obligations of MABL: A 2014 Water Revenue Bond (original principal \$4.3 million); a 2015 Water Revenue Refunding Bond (original principal \$15,975,000; and a \$2,992,996 (original principal) Water Revenue Bond that is related to the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVest).

The borough would issue one or more general obligation bonds that would retire the three MABL obligations, existing borough obligations and pay for street improvements and other capital projects of the borough.

The authority also must approve a subsidy agreement under which it would pay the scheduled principal and interest on the three MABL obligations using revenue and receipts from the water system. If MABL is required to pay the full amount of the bonds as they exist, as stated in the resolution, it would realize no savings under this agreement.

The final schedule of payments will outline the debt to be subsidized on annual basis. Savings amounts will not be final until the borough outlines the cost of the 2021 bond issue.

Smida said interest rates have been consistent and he imagined a rate of roughly 4% for the new bonds. The authority solicitor, David Consiglio of State College firm Miller, Kistler and Campbell, said that rate was lower than when the authority bonds were issued. However, the actual rate on the existing bonds was not stated at the meeting.

Although it regards a smaller debt, the PennVest loan had a 1% rate when it was issued and may still be below the 4% threshold.

Smida said the authority could have refinanced the debt on its own, maintaining its independence as a quasigovernmental entity — in fact, that was the authority's plan before the borough acted against it. He said the borough should be able to receive a better rate because municipals tend to have a better credit rating.

"This is not an unusual transaction in terms of financing across the commonwealth," he said.

It's still unclear whether the borough's actions will be allowed, pending a decision by Senior Judge David Grine of Centre County in a still-existing case against the borough over this action.

MABL initially sued the borough, but withdrew from the suit earlier this year after borough council appointed a new member to the MABL board, a borough employee. The Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association, of which MABL was previously a member, has asked to continue the suit, and Grine said in March he would rule on that request.

Mifflin County Municipal Authority, formed with the intent of replacing MABL, also has a request pending in court to enforce the Memorandum of Understanding approved by all municipalities that are part of the water system, including Lewistown.

The state legislature is considering a bill that would require authorities serving more than one municipality to have all municipalities represented on their boards. State Rep. John Hershey (R-Mifflintown) has said he supports such a move. House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff (R-Bellefonte) has indicated he will get behind the bill if it reaches the House floor.

*Published April 6, 2021.*



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## Debt of honor

### Vietnam vet repays family of fallen Plymouth soldier for battlefield loan

By Bill O'Boyle

boboyle@timesleader.com

HANOVER TWP. — It's been 55 years since Sidney Katz borrowed fifty dollars from Frank Glowiak, but the debt has finally been repaid.

However, this is about much more than repaying the loan — it's about honoring a hero.

Glowiak was a young soldier in 1966 when he went off to war in Vietnam, never to return: He was 20 when he was killed in action, and his family has mourned his loss ever since.

Glowiak's sister, Rosemary Gawat, related a story about her brother that showed the kind of person Frank Glowiak was and how highly regarded he was — he was far more than the first resident of Plymouth to be killed in Vietnam.

Gawat said her brother was killed in Vietnam on Oct. 27, 1966. She said she has been in touch with several of the men from his platoon. But recently, Gawat was contacted by one of the men in her brother's unit.

The man's name is Sidney Katz, who shared an amazing story with Gawat about Glowiak.

It seems Katz had borrowed \$50 from Glowiak before he went out into the field for the last time. Katz never got to re-pay the debt to Glowiak.

And that bothered Katz for years — decades passed before he decided he had to make good on the loan.

A few years ago, Katz attended a reunion of the U.S. Army's 5th Battalion 7th Cavalry and met a fellow soldier who had visited Glowiak's grave in St. Mary's Cemetery in Plymouth Township and had connected with Glowiak's sister, Mrs. Gawat.

Katz met up with Ray Dowdy, who was in the same unit, who had previously reached out to Glowiak's family. Dowdy gave Katz Gawat's phone number. Dowdy, who now lives in southern New Jersey, has visited Glowiak's grave twice and is planning a third visit soon.

"Frank was the perfect soldier," Dowdy said. "We went through basic training together and we were in Vietnam together."

Soon after the reunion, Katz decided to reach out to Gawat.

"Mr. Katz contacted me and said he was on a mission to return the money he borrowed from my brother," Gawat



PHOTO: BILL O'BOYLE | TIMES LEADER

ABOVE: Frank Glowiak's sister, Rosemary Gawat, holds her brother's picture and the card she received from Sidney Katz.

BELOW: Three of Frank Glowiak's medals are, from left, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry — the palm means there was a unit citation for action; the Purple Heart; and the Vietnam campaign medal.

said. "He said he wanted to give it to Frank's family. Mr. Katz told me he had been carrying this burden for over 50 years."

Gawat said her brother's anniversary of his death will be 55 years this October.

"And Mr. Katz told me he needed to pay the money back and that he wanted me to do something in Frank's name," Gawat said.

Some weeks later, Gawat received a card in the mail from Sid Katz. Enclosed was a check for \$500 — \$50 for the initial loan and, as Katz said, \$450 in interest over 50-plus years.

*Continued on next page*





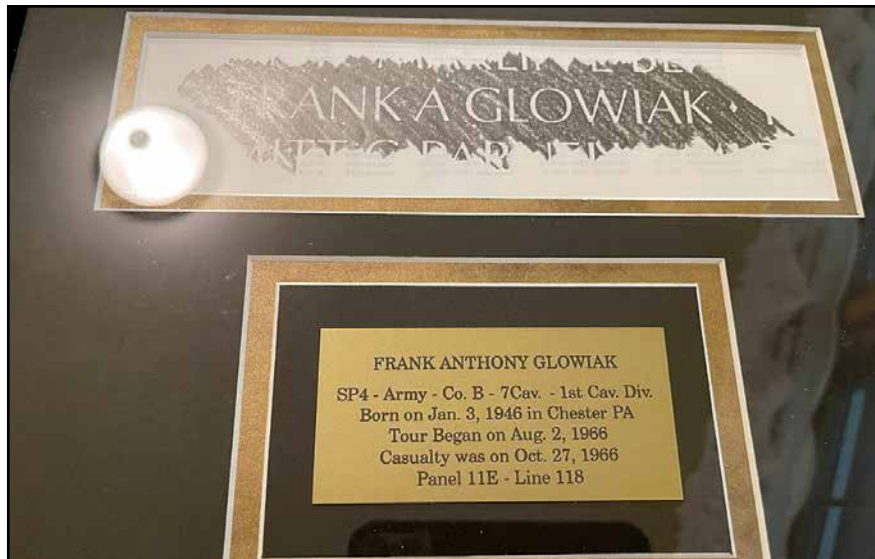


PHOTO: BILL O'BOYLE | TIMES LEADER

Gawat said she is deciding where to donate the money, but it will be given to help veterans. "I think it's important to do the best we can for our veterans," she said. "I have volunteered for several veterans' organizations over the years. It's very important to me that veterans get everything they deserve. They earned that."

Gawat said she wanted to tell the story and she wanted people to know about her brother. She hopes the story will receive national attention.

Here is what Sid Katz wrote in the card to Gawat:

*"More than thanks"*

*To Frank's family:*

*Peace has victories, but it takes brave men like Frank to win them.*

*My heroes are like Frank, who risked their lives for something bigger.*

*A hero is something bigger than oneself.*

*Thank you Frank, and rest in peace.*

Katz now lives in Yelm, Wash. He retired after serving for 30 years in the Army.

Asked why he borrowed the \$50 from Glowiak, Katz said he needed the money just to buy things at the Post Exchange."

"Frank was the first guy killed in our battalion," Katz said. "In training, we were told to never go down the same trail twice. On that day, we went down a trail and came back the same way and we got hit."

Katz and Glowiak went through basic training together. Katz was from upstate New York. He said he and Glowiak became friends and would eat together every day while training.

"Frank was very soft spoken," Katz said. "He was a real nice guy, very quiet."

Katz said the debt he owed Glowiak stayed with him throughout life and he had to get it resolved.

"I wanted to pay it back and I wanted Frank's family to

do something in his memory and honor," Katz said.

Mrs. Gawat said she will finally be able to close the book on her brother's military service.

"This is the final chapter," she said.

### About Frank Glowiak

**Bio:** He was born Jan. 3, 1946, and he was killed Oct. 27, 1966. His rank was SP4.

**Family:** Sisters Rosemary Gawat, Barbara Brandon, Joan Bohinski (deceased.) His parents were the late Frank (Sr.) and Mary Dowgiert Glowiak.

Rosemary Gawat said her father, Frank Sr., died from injuries he sustained when he fell off the roof of the family home on Gardner Street in June 1966 — the year of Plymouth Borough's Centennial. She said her brother came home from the Army to attend his father's funeral. The family requested that Frank be honorably discharged from the service, since he was the only mail child in the family, but that request was denied. Glowiak was killed just four months later.

**Military service:** Glowiak was drafted into the Army. He entered the service via Selective Service and he served during the Vietnam War.

He began his tour on Aug. 2, 1966. Glowiak had the rank of Specialist Four. His military occupation or specialty was Light Weapons Infantry.

**Killed in action:** Military records state that Glowiak was killed on Oct. 27, 1966 in South Vietnam's Quang Tri province.

**Memorial:** Glowiak is honored on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC. His name is inscribed at VVM Wall, Panel 11e, Line 118.

**Commendations:** Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman Badge, Marksmanship Badge, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Vietnam Gallantry Cross, Army Good Conduct Medal

*Published Aug. 15, 2021.*



# 2021 ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT

## EXCERPT

2020 Pennsylvania Newspaper  
Print Circulation

**2.8 MILLION**

2020 Economic Contribution

**\$1.3 BILLION**

2020 Labor Income

**\$528.8 MILLION**

2020 Employment Impact

**9,862 JOBS**

2020 State and Local  
Tax Impact

**\$51.8 MILLION**

First Newspaper Published in  
Pennsylvania: *American Weekly  
Mercury in Philadelphia*

**DEC. 22, 1719**

# Lancaster Farming

## Hemp tour begins journey of discovery

By Philip Gruber  
News Editor

LANDISVILLE, Pa. — Lancaster Farming's National Hemp Tour kicked off Monday with a gathering at Penn State's Lancaster County research farm.

"This is a very surreal yet wonderful day," said Eric Hurlock, producer of the Lancaster Farming Industrial Hemp Podcast and star of the six-week road trip across America.

Surrounded by hemp supporters — more than a few of them past guests on the podcast — Hurlock led a discussion of the developing hemp industry in a pole barn at the research farm, not far from test plots of hemp.

Just outside the barn was the Sunseeker RV that will carry Hurlock, his wife, Heather, and their daughters, Iris and Hazel, on their epic journey.

The vehicle was emblazoned with the logos of Lancaster Farming and the tour sponsors — not to mention a stylized picture of Hurlock himself.

Ag Secretary Russell Redding dubbed the journey a "tour of discovery," a reference to Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery, which set out from the East to chart the little-known West.

"We're going to send Eric across the nation to map this hemp industry," Redding said.

As he conducts the National Hemp Tour, Hurlock will pass through hemp hotbeds such as Kentucky and Colorado, and travel as far west as Oregon and Montana, home to tour and podcast sponsor IND HEMP.

Hurlock will meet with hemp farmers and innovators, focusing on grain and fiber. He will document his travels with podcasts, news articles and social media posts.

"We all believe the same thing, that agriculture is important," Hurlock said. "It's got to be part of the solution for the future that we want to build, and hemp is just a really elegant solution for a lot of our issues."

Hurlock's involvement in hemp has grown from a modest project to become one of the most ambitious undertakings in Lancaster Farming's history.

Hurlock launched the podcast in 2018 and planned to talk about hemp for a couple episodes before moving on to some other topic.

Instead, he kept making contact with interesting people,



and the podcast has swelled to 140 episodes and counting. The program has built a national audience and picked up state and international recognition.

The national tour will draw together many strands in the hemp industry, said Erica Stark, executive director of both the tour sponsor National Hemp Association and the Pennsylvania Hemp Industry Council.

The hemp industry includes both independent entrepreneurs and people who are collaborating on projects. As with other crops, there are regional differences based on the climate and the products that locals are focusing on, Stark said.

Alyssa Collins, director of the Penn State research farm, said the Industrial Hemp Podcast has given her a lot of ideas that can contribute to her work with hemp.

As an academic, she is used to people looking to her for answers. But that isn't what has happened with hemp, and she welcomes that change.

"We're all learning together," Collins said. "People in this room — so many of the people in this room — have been the people that I have been learning from."

Redding sees twin goals for the tour — gathering best practices from around the country and spreading the word about what Pennsylvania is doing in the hemp industry.

"These are the opportunities of a generation," Redding said. "How often do you get a chance to reset the conversation about a crop that was instrumental to the building of our nation?"

Redding said he thinks Pennsylvania is currently one of the top two or three states for the hemp industry.

He cited the state being one of the first to submit its regulatory framework to USDA for approval, being home to some of the top hemp advocates in the country, hosting hemp research and having historical ties to hemp production.



PHOTOS BY ANDY BLACKBURN, LNP MEDIA GROUP

**Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding speaks during the National Hemp Tour send-off.**

When it comes to hemp, Stark agreed, Pennsylvania is living up to its reputation as the Keystone State.

"I think we have a very important role to play," she said, "not only because of our history with the plant, the length of time that we've had it legal here and that we've been experimenting with it, but also our geographic location and our, just, importance in agriculture in general."

"So what happens here in Pennsylvania helps make it more real across the country."

At times, the success of the young industry has seemed more chimerical than concrete.

After the 2018 Farm Bill reopened hemp to commercial production, much of the enthusiasm went to CBD, a hemp extract with reputed health benefits. But the CBD bubble soon burst, leaving some farmers without a market for

*Continued on next page*



## Lancaster Farming continued

their product. Many in the industry, including Hurlock, now see the most promise for the industry in hemp grain — for human and animal food — and hemp fiber, which can be used in everything from plastics to construction materials.

“We continue to figure out how we can keep (hemp) at the forefront and look at this journey as the next link in the chain,” said Mark Lowery, director of commercial marketing at New Holland Agriculture, a hemp tour sponsor.

At the same time, the regulatory environment for hemp has been maturing.

The National Hemp Association is pushing for hemp food safety standards, legalization of hemp as a pet food ingredient, and a role for hemp in the Biden administration’s climate change plans.

Geoff Whaling, chairman of the National Hemp Association and president of the Pennsylvania Hemp Industry Council, has also been encouraging investment in hemp processing.

“Farmers are not going to grow hemp unless they know that there’s a market, and end users are not going to look towards hemp, even for research purposes, unless there is that supply coming in to them,” he said.

To end the kickoff, Hurlock held a toast with his family, Redding, visitors and Lancaster Farming staff. They raised cans of hemp tea supplied by Wild Fox Provisions and shouted “Hemp hemp hooray,” an award-winning Lancaster Farming headline.

Then Hurlock and his family got into the RV and drove off past the research center’s white bank barn and on to the open road. After stopping at home, the family headed to North Carolina this week for the first leg of the journey.

Follow Hurlock’s adventures at [lancasterfarming.com/hemptour](https://lancasterfarming.com/hemptour) or using the social media tag #HempTour.

*Published July 2, 2021.*



PHOTOS BY ANDY BLACKBURN, LNP MEDIA GROUP

## AND WE'RE OFF ...

**Eric Hurlock**  
Digital Editor

By the time you’re reading this, my family and I will have completed our brief tour of North Carolina. Two days is really not enough time to do justice to the Tar Heel State or its hemp farmers and hemp industry. But that’s the time we had available, so we made the most of it.

On July 1, we visited Eric Henry at TS Designs in Burlington, where he is establishing a domestic supply chain for hemp textiles, working with local farmers and processors in an effort he calls “dirt to shirt.”

On July 2, we visited one of the fiber growers Henry is working with. Gary Sikes is farming at several locations in the state, and we stopped by his home farm, Bountiful Harvest Farm, in Polkton.

After North Carolina, and a weekend in the Great Smoky

Mountains of Tennessee, we head to Murray, Kentucky, where we’ll meet up with Greg Wilson at HempWood, and the so-called Dean of Hemp, Tony Brannon, at Murray State University.

From there it’s up to Carrollton, Kentucky, where the folks at Victory Hemp Foods are taking the hemp seed to new and exciting places. And from there it’s off to Tiger Fiber in St. Louis, and then South Bend Industrial Hemp in South Bend, Kansas, which has just installed decortication equipment made by Formation Ag in Colorado.

As of this writing, we’re just finishing up outfitting the RV and will be pulling out of the driveway any minute now.

See videos and photos from the tour, and listen to Eric’s latest podcast, at [lancasterfarming.com/hemptour](https://lancasterfarming.com/hemptour). Follow the adventure on social media with the #HempTour hashtag.

ABOVE: Eric Hurlock poses with his wife, Heather, left, and daughters, Iris and Hazel, in front of the RV that they will drive across the United States during the National Hemp Tour.

BELOW: Eric Hurlock speaks during the Lancaster Farming National Hemp Tour send-off event at Penn State’s Landisville research farm.



# THE NEWS-ITEM

## Mt. Carmel native in Italy shares experience

By Larry Deklinski  
The News-Item

AVIANO, Italy — In Aviano the open-air markets are closed, the streets are quiet and the cyclists have disappeared from sight.

Located at the foot of the Dolomites mountain range in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of northern Italy, the atmosphere in the town of 10,000 residents has hit a serious tone as the novel coronavirus sweeps through the country.

U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant Brianna Farber, a 2014 graduate of Mount Carmel Area stationed at Aviana Air Base with her husband, Charlie, has witnessed significant changes to the region since the first case in Italy was discovered on Jan 31.

During the last week of February, small towns in two regions immediately to the west of Aviano, which is located about one hour north of Venice, were placed under lockdown as the number of people affected increased. Travel restrictions were implemented and conversations of closing schools began not long after.

"I don't think anyone anticipated how strongly we were going to be impacted," Farber said this week. "As for me, in the beginning, I honestly didn't pay much attention to the statistics. I knew many people were getting sick, but I didn't quite grasp the scope."

Italy, the original epicenter for the virus in Europe, has reported 147,577 cases with 18,849 deaths.

As the death total rose by hundreds on a daily basis, Farber grasped the serious nature of the pandemic and began having concerns for the people Aviano, her home since June 2019.

"I knew that if I contracted the virus I would likely make a full recovery, but there are a lot of high-risk people around me and I did not want to be the reason one of my elderly neighbors got sick," Farber said. "It was shocking to watch the numbers rise the way they did. The mortality rate among closed cases was at 45% for weeks."

Farber said restrictions set by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and regional governments were implemented gradually.

She noted that the concept of social distancing was "non-existent" during a trip to Verona, two hours west of Aviano, on Valentine's Day weekend. The next weekend travel restrictions to the Lombardy and Veneto regions were implemented and one week after that schools closed and social distancing was enforced.

On Friday, Conte extended the country's lockdown until



Brianna Farber and her husband, Charlie, hold a poster with the phrase "Andra Tutto Bene," translated to "Everything is going to be alright," from their home in Aviano, Italy. Brianna, a 2014 graduate of Mount Carmel Area, spoke about how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted the country.

May 3, with only minimal concessions to business demands. The mitigation efforts were put into place March 10 and scheduled to expire Monday.

Farber said Aviano residents are permitted to leave their homes only for situations of necessity, such as work, grocery shopping and medical appointments, and that anyone traveling must carry a travel declaration with them.

Since the lockdown was implemented a month ago, restrictions have only gotten tighter, she remarked.

"Regional governments are able to implement stricter rules than the national government if they so desire, which our regional government has," she explained. "No outdoor exercise or activities are permitted whatsoever, unless you stay within the confines of your personal property, such as your yard. I have since learned that 21 laps around my yard equals 1 mile."

The most recent update, she said, dictates that while going into stores every person must wear a mask and single-use gloves.

Farber said many of the policies that the Department of Defense (DoD) has put into place are very similar to what she and her husband have already been doing under the Italian decrees.

The DoD policy that has had the greatest impact on her

family, she said, was the 60-day stop movement established in early March. The stop order prevented Charlie, who was on a temporary duty assignment, from leaving Spain until May 14 — two months longer than initially planned.

"Fortunately, we have great leadership taking care of us and after a few weeks they were able to get an exception to policy approved and arranged travel for Charlie and his team to come home," she said. "He returned home a few days ago and has to quarantine at our home for two weeks as a precautionary measure due to his travels."

Farber, as member of the base's ambulance services team, has seen her work schedules modified to minimize the amount of contact team members have with each other. Personal protective equipment, including N95 masks, are provided when responding to emergencies.

She said the national and regional mitigation efforts have been working, adding that the number of new cases and daily deaths are now trending downward, leading to a "small" collective sigh of relief.

The Mount Carmel native said the feeling of reassurance has waned during the past few days as the number of cases have increased in the United States and near her hometown in Northumberland County, where her parents and many childhood friends still live.

The first-hand knowledge that conditions will most likely get worse before they get better has made it harder to be away from loved ones.

"I can't stress enough how important proper physical distancing and contact minimization are," she advised. "Try to limit how frequently you go out, and when you do go out try to keep as much space as you can between yourself and those around you. This also means only having contact with those you live with and not spending time with people outside of your family unit."

She said that although it can appear that mitigation measures will "last forever," the efforts that have been established will only be a "small portion" of their lives. The best thing everyone can do, she added, is to "stay home and stay healthy."

In addition to her family, Farber said the one thing she sorely misses about the coal region is the food.

"Italy has some great food, don't get me wrong, but you have no idea what I would do to get my hands on some Pepe's, a pizza from Tower, a Vine Street hoagie and some Middlesworth BBQ chips. There is nothing that can replace food from home," she said. "On a positive note, we somehow get Yuengling and Tastykakes on base — so thank God for small miracles."

*Published April 20, 2020.*



# Latrobe Bulletin

## Sweet Victory

9-year-old Unity opera singer makes history with show-stopping performance on AGT

**By Amy Fauth**

Bulletin Staff Writer

Victory Brinker, a 9-year-old opera singer from Unity Township, made “America’s Got Talent” history Tuesday night when she earned a “Golden Buzzer” from all four judges, advancing her to the live show, which will be held later this summer.

Victory, along with approximately 50 of her family and friends, watched the outcome of the show, which was taped in April, at a watch party held at Dino’s Sports Lounge.

Although Victory and her parents had to keep the results a secret, the evidence was written all over their faces all night long.

In the episode, which featured Victory as the last audition of the night, her mother Christine Brinker, explained how much her daughter loves to sing.

“There’s nothing more touching as a parent than to see your child do what they love to do,” Christine said.

Before her performance, Victory spoke with AGT judge Simon Cowell telling him a little about herself.

She told him that she lives in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and if she won the million dollars just what she’d do with the money.

“Buy Simon a rainbow shirt with glitter on it,” quipped Victory.

When pressed, she said the judge “needs a little color.”

Victory performed “Juliet’s Waltz” from Charles Gounod’s “Romeo et Juliette” and earned standing ovations from three of the four judges (only Cowell remained seated).



PHOTO BY AMY FAUTH

Victory Brinker and her parents, Eric and Christine Brinker, attend the watch party Tuesday night at Dino’s Restaurant.

Judge Howie Mandell called her “angelic.” Heidi Klum said she was “incredible” and Sophia Vergara said she was a “star.” Cowell called her “incredibly brave,” but made it seem that she would not be successful as he told her she would not be getting a yes.

But it was also Cowell who initiated the “Golden Buzzer” conversation by calling host Terry Crews over to discuss the

history-making decision to jointly — all four judges and Crews — give Victory the golden buzzer.

He can be overheard saying “let’s do something different, something we’ve never ever ever done.”

After the announcement, all four judges in unison hit the buzzer and gold confetti rained down on her on stage.

According to Christine, the actual

announcement much longer, but she believed in Victory and knew she had done well.

“They really played it up,” added Christine.

When asked whether she had any idea that she earned the golden buzzer, Victory was humble and just smiled and nodded her head.

*Published July 7, 2021.*

# Altoona Mirror

## Luck of the draw? Third lottery win comes with high cost

By Ike Fredregill  
Staff Writer

Mike “Lucky” Luciano scored \$500,000 Tuesday from a scratch-off lottery ticket purchased in Altoona, his third lottery jackpot score in just over 20 years.

Luciano was elated.

His wife, Shelly, was astounded.

His friends blew up his phone with congratulations.

And, yet — something about this win rang hollow, Luciano said.

“I don’t know why I’ve been so blessed, winning big three times in my lifetime,” Luciano said. “Most people are just looking for one win — and I know this is incredible.”

A dour expression creased Luciano’s clean-shaven face as he wiped down the bar at Mike’s Court, the tavern he purchased on Fifth Street in the ‘90s.

“But, I’m convinced no one wins this many times without playing more than they should,” Luciano said flatly. “I’m addicted to it.”

When Luciano won \$3 million from a scratch-off ticket in 2016, he was inundated by media requests, but he declined.

It was all too much, but despite his silence, Luciano watched as lottery ticket sales in Altoona sky-rocketed. A statistic, he said he hopes won’t repeat itself this time.

“People shouldn’t do what I do,” he confided. “I don’t want them to think — I mean, I’m not ungrateful, this is unbelievable and I couldn’t be more thankful it’s happening to me — but I don’t want people to think it will happen to them.”

Luciano declined to reveal how many lottery tickets he plays each day, but he said there were many. When impulsive scratch-off tickets are added to the mix, the purchases can be overwhelming.

“I went through some days when I knew I shouldn’t do this,” Luciano said.

### The purchase

An Altoona native who once dreamed of leaving Blair County, 54-year-old Luciano graduated from Bishop Guilfoyle High School before earning a business degree at



Winning three jackpots in a lifetime is no small feat, and Mike Luciano said it was a stroke of unbelievable luck, but with his third big win Tuesday, the enchantment is starting to wear off. A habitual lottery player, Luciano said he is addicted to the game, and if he could remove the desire to play from his brain, he would in a heartbeat.

MIRROR PHOTO BY IKE FREDREGILL

Saint Francis University.

After deciding to stay in Altoona to be closer to his parents, Luciano purchased his bar in 1992.

A few years later, he struck gold with the Cash 5 in 1999, winning \$100,000 on numbers he can still recite today — “1, 10, 19, 22, 37,” Luciano said. “I don’t know why I picked those numbers, but I did, and when I saw them on the computer, I knew I had them all.”

With the money, Luciano and his wife paid off their credit cards, student loans and took his parents to the beach. They helped out family with small things and invested a bit, too.

Luciano kept playing the lottery, winning small sums, but nothing big until Thanksgiving 2016.

“I think there’s all these little things that have to happen before you can win,” he said.

For years, he and a friend played basketball every Thanksgiving morning, but the friend had a hip replacement shortly before the holiday, preventing the tradition.

Instead of hitting the courts, Luciano headed for the bar to ensure the business was in order when it opened later that night. His wife called, and he agreed to go home early and cut the roast beef.

On his way home, he stopped to play a couple \$30 scratch tickets, which his wife had previously told him to avoid. The first was a \$50 winner, but the second was a dud. So, he bought another.

With chores on his mind, he quickly scratched the ticket and overlooked the winning numbers, thinking it another dud.

*Continued on next page*



## Altoona Mirror continued

When he ran it through the ticket checker, however, big words filled the screen informing him the ticket was worth \$3 million.

"I drove straight home, running three stop signs on the way," he said. "I figured I'd just pay the fines if I got pulled over."

### The payout

When a person wins the lottery, they only keep a fraction of the jackpot.

When Luciano won the Cash 5 in 1999, the take home was about \$73,000. But when he won the \$3 Million Extravaganza, his initial payment was \$2.1 million, and he owed the IRS another \$400,000 after that, leaving him with just about half the advertised amount.

"It's still a whole pile of money, but it's not as much as you think at first," Luciano explained.

That night, he bought everyone at the bar a lottery ticket and sold all his menu items for just \$2 each.

Luciano might not understand his luck, but his wife has a theory.

"He wins because he's such a giving person," she said. "He's always helping people, and I think this is how it comes back."

With his earnings, Luciano paid off all his parents' bills, bought a new car, invested, went on a few vacations and put some money into improving his business.

Letters filtered in with requests and advice about spending his money, but for the most part, Luciano said everyone was cool about it.

The sum, unfortunately, wasn't enough money for him to officially retire, and work started to become stressful.

"You'd think with a payout like that, you could call it quits," Luciano said. "But I realized I still had to work full time."

### The last time, maybe

Pensive, Luciano recalled the feeling of defeat when he



MIRROR PHOTO BY IKE FREDREGILL

**Altoona native Mike Luciano hit a lottery jackpot Tuesday for the third time in his life, winning \$500,000. But on Wednesday, he was back to work at his bar, Mike's Court, just like any other day.**

first started playing the Tree-mendous scratch off tickets.

"They were \$10 tickets, and the most I'd won on them was \$100," he said. "It was really bad. I'm a competitor, and sometimes, I have trouble with someone beating me. And the ticket was beating me."

While casual gamblers stop playing when they reach a set loss limit, people with a compulsive gambling problem can be compelled to keep playing to recover their money — a pattern that becomes increasingly destructive over time, the Mayo Clinic reported. Luciano kept playing the frustrating game, and Monday, it paid off, but he wouldn't realize that until Tuesday.

Like with the \$3 million-winning ticket, he thought the scratch card was a loser. He tucked it into the console of his car, and went about his day.

Sixteen hours later, he was purchasing another lottery

ticket — an often daily occurrence as he runs errands — and decided to verify the losing card with the ticket checker.

It was worth \$500,000.

"To grab two needles in the haystack, and in this town?" Luciano said. "It's unbelievable. I am so thankful."

Luciano said he will be more careful about how he spends these winnings, remembering how quickly his previous payout disappeared.

While appreciative of another big win, Luciano said he wouldn't hesitate for a moment if he thought a doctor could cut the lottery addiction out of his brain.

"I get mad at myself when I don't play my numbers, because it's just there — what if?" he said. "There's a pandemic of people addicted to gambling in this world, and I'm one of them."

Luciano once called a hotline for help, but the person he talked to wasn't nice, so he hung up. He said he's thought about seeking counseling, but never acted on it.

On the upside, the money will help offset the bar's losses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Restaurants and bars have come in last place throughout all this," Luciano said.

But, on the flipside, it might be time to call it for good.

"It wasn't overly exciting, this one," Luciano said. "I'm appreciative. I don't want anyone to think I'm taking this for granted, but it just wasn't the same."

When one of his patrons learned Luciano hit the jackpot, he advised Luciano to quit while he was ahead.

"This time, maybe — maybe," Luciano said. "I just might listen to him."

For more information about gambling addiction, call the Pennsylvania gambling addiction 24-hour hotline at 800-426-2537.

*Mirror Staff Writer Ike Fredregill is at 814-946-7458.*

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# Loved ones dedicate bench in memory of Jason Kutt

18-year-old shot  
at Lake Nockamixon  
remembered as gentle,  
giving and good-hearted

By Regina Young

Tricia Kutt stood with her daughter under a canopy of trees along the banks of Lake Nockamixon Sunday afternoon.

A warm breeze whispered through the reeds as ripples of water gently lapped the shore – it was an idyllic scene, one that frequently beckoned her nephew, Jason Kutt, to this very same Nockamixon State Park location on Old Ridge Road in Bedminster Township.

“It hits harder because this is the last place he was,” said Tricia, fighting back tears, “but it is so beautiful.”

Seven months earlier Jason, a 2020 Pennridge High School graduate, had been sitting on the pavement nearby when he was shot as he watched the sunset with his girlfriend, Erin Richardson. The hunter who was eventually charged in the incident would later tell prosecutors he mistook the Sellersville resident for prey. Jason died two days after the shooting but saved other’s lives as an organ donor. He was 18 years old.

On Sunday, Jason’s loved ones and friends gathered by the water’s edge to honor a young man who, his aunt said, was



Family and friends of Jason Kutt, who was fatally shot at Lake Nockamixon last October, attend the dedication of a memorial bench created in his honor. Sitting on the bench is Toni Palmer of Perkasie, Jason’s grandmother.

“just a really gentle person, really good hearted.” Like Tricia, Jason’s grandmother, Carolyn Ford, was making her first visit to the site since the October tragedy. Admittedly, she was nervous leading up to this day, but as she looked out across the landscape with her husband, Lee, sitting by her side, it was easy to see why the lake was, as Jason’s mother described, “one of his favorite places to be.”

To honor Jason, the Kutt family recently installed a memorial bench at the lake. The dedication ceremony was held on May 23.

Jason’s father, Ron Kutt, in accordance with Nockamixon State Park guidelines,

created the green bench. He incorporated the image of angel wings and the neck of a guitar into the design, as Jason was an avid guitarist.

While Ron, a third-generation welder, had never built a park bench before, the project was as personal as it gets and nothing short of perfection would do.

“I wanted this to look impressive,” he said. “There’s literally a lot of blood, sweat and tears put into this bench.”

The Sellersville family cleared debris and installed the pad for the bench earlier this spring. The Kutts also planted a tree and

added a memorial plaque next to it.

The bench and plaque were completed with assistance from three local businesses, Prodex Inc., Innovative Finishers and PrintWorks & Company.

Jason’s mother, Dana Kutt, said the family comes to the site often and wanted to provide their fellow community members with a safe location, off the ground, to watch a sunset or enjoy the lake breeze.

“Whatever you need this spot to be, if you need a place to think or pray, that’s what it’s here for,” she added.

*Continued on next page*





RIGHT: The family of Jason Kutt, an 18-year-old Sellersville resident who was fatally shot at Lake Nockamixon last October, watches a parade of boats pass by the site of a memorial bench that was dedicated in his honor Sunday. The boats, as they passed by the shore, played one of Kutt's favorite songs by the band Metallica. From right are Kutt's sister, Brianna Hill; his mother, Dana Kutt; and his father, Ron Kutt.

LEFT: A man reads the memorial plaque located next to the bench.

PHOTOS: REGINA YOUNG

Indeed, the lake offered serenity to Jason's loved ones as they reflected, reminisced and remembered their family member and friend.

A shy kid in high school who was bold when it came to coloring his hair, Jason was a person "who loved everybody," his sister, Brianna Hill, proudly shared.

She misses "the moments we'd joke around together, our FaceTimes ... just having him around."

Jason's affinity for the outdoors and the band Metallica converged on the water Sunday, when a boat parade passed by the memorial site and played one of the band's songs, "Nothing Else Matters." Jason's love for the heavy metal band was also reflected in the memorial T-shirts worn by several of those who attended the bench dedication.

The boat parade was organized by a group of anglers who go by the name, Nock Mafia Bass Fishing Club.

"We wanted to come out and show this family and friends that you're not alone. This really rocked our community, especially us that fish here and live here," said Revere resident and club member Dave Kimenhour.

"We hope ultimately this bench is the

comfort spot for this family and we hope to see them here every time we're out, and we hope Jason watches over us while we continue to fish this lake."

At the dedication, Jason's father thanked Bucks County detectives for working feverishly on his son's case.

Two months after the Oct. 24 shooting, 52-year-old Warminster resident Kenneth Troy Heller was arrested and charged with criminal homicide in Jason's death. Heller, Bucks County District Attorney Matt Weintraub announced, has agreed to plead guilty to involuntary manslaughter, and is set to appear in court in July.

The family, Dana said, has faith that a judge will hand down an appropriate sentence, but she added, "My son's not here and that's what I want."

In time, the Kutts will turn their attention toward advocacy. While hunting was permitted the day of the shooting, they'd like to see some of the rules changed so that the senseless act that cut Jason's life short doesn't happen again in the future, Ron said.

On Sunday, though, the focus was on honoring Jason, whose family expressed deep appreciation for the support they've received over the past several months.



"What's helping us get through it is the amazing outreach, support and love that's coming from all over," Ron said. "Not just friends and family, which they've been incredibly supportive, but from people who didn't necessarily know us or Jason. Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of tough times, but the community outreach has been phenomenal and that has really helped us get through it."

Along with the support of local businesses, churches and community members, the Kutts have even received cards from ZIP codes in Minnesota and California, among other states, Jason's mother added.

"Doing things in Jason's name helps us," Dana said of how the couple have coped with the loss of their child. "We'll see what

the years to come bring, but the first year – the first of everything, birthdays – is the hardest. Ron and I, we have each other and our family is close, but again the community has been amazing."

The Kutts will continue to seek ways to honor their son's life through a memorial fund established in his name.

"He was bigger than life," Dana said. "Jason was always helping. He wanted to help everybody. He'd give you the shirt off his back, the last dollar in his pocket, a ride to work. If someone called him in the middle of the night, he was there."

"We just want people to be good to one another," she added. "Let's be nice and help each other out – that's Jason's legacy and that's what we want to continue."

*Published May 27, 2021.*



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## ‘Truly a miracle’

### Beale Township firefighter back on job after life-threatening fall

By Becky Lock

WALNUT — Over the past seven months, firefighter Kenneth Zook has grown closer to God. His journey began not with a step but with a fall — a 17-foot fall that ended abruptly on a concrete floor.

Zook, who is an assistant chief at Beale Township Fire Company No. 5, fell from a roof Feb. 23 while working with a construction crew putting on an addition at a McAlisterville-area pallet shop.

“I don’t remember anything,” the 24-year-old Zook said on Thursday, Aug. 5. “I’m lucky I’m even talking.”

The oldest of Marcus and Anna Mary Zook’s six children, Kenneth spent three weeks in Geisinger Medical Center, Danville, before being discharged to the first of two rehabilitation facilities. He finally returned home April 14, just shy of the two-month anniversary of his accident.

“It’s been amazing,” Anna Mary said of her son’s recovery.

Personality and ability-wise, she said, it’s as if he never fell at all.

But on the afternoon of Tuesday, Feb. 23, Zook’s family and friends only knew he was in serious condition and had been flown by medical helicopter to the trauma center.

First responders from Fayette Ambulance and Port Royal EMS knew the injured young man looked familiar but couldn’t place him as a member of Beale Township’s 10-person active firefighting crew.

Zook remembers nothing of that day — not greeting his fellow co-workers at a job he only had held for about six weeks nor climbing the ladder to a roof damp from melting snow.

He can recall only to a point well after that day, when he was getting ready to go to a doctor’s appointment in the first or second week of May.

His mother’s recollection of the day is filled with shock.

“Kenneth’s cousin was working with the second [construction] crew and he called our second son,” she said.

At first, the family didn’t realize the extent of Kenneth’s



READY TO GO — Kenneth Zook is back behind the wheel of the Beale Township Fire Company tanker truck, following a fall that left him with a serious head injury. His recovery is nothing short of miraculous, his family says.

PHOTO BY BECKY LOCK

injuries. As it became clearer, they rushed to his side.

“We didn’t know if he’d be alive,” Anna Mary said.

“Within an hour and a half, the doctors said he needed to be rushed into surgery.”

### ‘The whole world stopped’

Kenneth is no stranger to hard work. After graduating from eighth grade at Shade Mountain Christian School, not far from the Zook homestead outside of Mifflin, Kenneth worked on the family dairy farm until he was 18.

He then learned small engine repair and worked a combination construction and manure hauling job before branching out.

“He had worked at UPMC for about two years,” Anna Mary said. “He was a night-duty maintenance man, but he quit at the end of 2020. He wanted more physical work.”

His parents were happy he had found the new construction position with a local company.

“We were glad for him. It was a little harder work,” she said.

Kenneth had joined the local fire company in 2017 and soon found the kind of friend you keep for a lifetime in Bill Harrison Jr., one of the fire chief’s sons.

“We’ve been close friends since then,” Harrison said.

*Continued on next page*



## Juniata Sentinel continued

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“We talk every day and work very well together.”

Joining the firefighting crew has been one of Kenneth’s goals since he was a child.

“Growing up, I always wanted to do that,” he said. “It’s been my dream to serve the community.”

The rural fire company and its complement of officers and crew are a tightknit group.

“We’re all pretty much like a family,” Harrison said. “That’s why it felt like the whole world stopped” when Kenneth was hurt.

### ‘Thousands of people praying’

Hours after Kenneth’s fall, the fire company’s webmaster, Jeffrey Harrison, alerted the community via social media. He continued making updates through Aug. 1, when a Facebook post announced Kenneth’s return to active service.

The road to that goal was more like a roller coaster, though.

In the surgery performed soon after Kenneth’s arrival, doctors removed two sections of bone in his skull because his brain was swelling.

Two days after the accident, Kenneth was able to move his arms and legs and recognized his name. However, his lungs were inflamed, due, doctors said, to his vomiting immediately after falling.

Physicians ordered an antibiotic and used a drug to temporarily paralyze Kenneth’s body so he wouldn’t fight the ventilator, his family said.

While his parents and siblings rallied around him as much as possible — emotionally if not physically — Anna Mary enlisted the help of a mighty force.

“We started prayer chains,” she said. “There were thousands of people praying for him.”

In the updates posted to social media, too, she asked for prayers for her boy. Hundreds of people responded, with many leaving comments or prayers.

“I’m not big into religion,” Bill Harrison Jr. said, “but I’ve never prayed so hard in my life.”

Meanwhile, Kenneth struggled with high fevers, lung issues and respiratory distress.

On March 1, he was put on a type of life support called ECMO. The abbreviation stands for extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, which means that blood is pumped outside of the body “to a heart-lung machine that removes carbon dioxide and sends oxygen-filled blood back to tissues in the body,” according to the Mayo Clinic’s website.

Kenneth stayed on ECMO until March 7. For those six days, doctors performed medical tests and evaluated his reactions to questions and commands. Only Anna Mary was allowed to sit with him.

On March 5, when she visited and spoke his name, Kenneth opened his eyes. He followed her face with his gaze, squeezed her hand and moved his feet.

“We know he is still in a critical spot, but to hear the news of today seems nothing short of miraculous,” Jeffrey

Harrison wrote on Facebook. “His family has been given so much hope.”

Ten days after Kenneth was put on life support, doctors removed his breathing tube and, a day later, his oxygen feed. He communicated verbally, albeit hoarsely, as well as through gestures, and could swallow, consume some food and drink from a straw. He also was able to put on by himself the helmet he had to wear to protect his healing brain and skull.

“Every medical person that we came into contact with almost always said, ‘He’s a miracle,’” Anna Mary said.

As he continued to improve at the medical center, Kenneth showed signs of boredom and restlessness. On March 18, he found a new outlet for his increasing energy — rehabilitation.

“We loved that facility,” his mom said of UPMC Williamsport.

Kenneth began talking more, progressed from using a walker and shuffling his feet to walking more normally, enhanced his memory skills and practiced focusing on one action at a time.

“For TBI [traumatic brain injury] patients, short-term memory is so hard to reestablish, so they are teaching him the use of memory aids such as keeping a memory book to write down events,” said Kenneth’s aunt, Beth Fisher, who is a registered nurse.

“He honestly doesn’t remember from day to day that he had an accident and hurt his head. Anna Mary asked him if he knows why he is in rehab and he said no. She explained how he had an accident and hurt his head so bad. His response was, ‘Really?’” a Facebook post from March 27 read.

### ‘God has a purpose’

Less than two weeks into his stay, doctors discovered Kenneth’s ankle was fractured in two places, likely due to the fall. The rehab specialists requested that he return to Danville for surgery, but those physicians opted to put a splint on his ankle and his leg into a protective boot.

Again, he returned to Williamsport, but doctors there were “very alarmed” at a shift in the level of fluid in his brain. He was hurried back to Danville.

However, surgeons there were reluctant to rush into action.

“They said, we do not touch the brain when he’s doing so well,” Anna Mary recalled.

This time, Danville sent Kenneth to Encompass Health Rehabilitation hospital on April 3, but his progress stagnated.

“It put him back a little. It was a down moment in his journey,” she said. “So, we brought him home. That was on April 14 — and he turned a new page.”

Back home, with his brothers, Dwayne, Marcus Levi, Josh and Derrick, and his sister, Jennifer, nearby, as well as both his parents and his pit-bull puppy, Capone, Kenneth thrived.

Two weeks later, the swelling in his head had reduced enough that surgeons decided it was time to replace his

skull bones, also called flaps. Two days after the May 5 surgery, Kenneth said he felt more clear-headed than he had since the accident.

As his brain and body healed, Kenneth paid some serious thought to how he had been living his life prior to the accident.

“This accident turned my life around,” he said, “and I became a Christian.”

Their son’s decision was the answer to a long-sought desire his parents had.

“That’s been our prayer for more than five years,” Anna Mary said, noting that he previously had not lived a life for Christ. “It’s been amazing to see the transformation in his life. God has a purpose.”

### ‘Closer as a family’

Another accident befell the already stressed Zook family on June 12. Patriarch Marcus suffered a TBI of his own when he was knocked over by two of his dairy cows.

During milking, when the cows entered the barn, “two came at him, one on either side, and pinched him,” Anna Mary said. “He got walloped in his head on the right side.”

Three of his sons were in the barn at the time and helped ensure he received medical help quickly. Nevertheless, at the hospital, doctors said Marcus had bleeding on his brain, a skull fracture, fractured ribs and memory loss.

Following six days in the hospital, he returned home, buoyed with prayers and well-wishes from some of the same people who had responded online to reports about Kenneth’s journey toward recovery. He had another, shorter stint in the hospital before returning home again June 21.

For the Facebook update on June 28, Anna Mary wrote: “This second accident [Marcus’s] has been more traumatizing to us all, not because Kenneth’s accident wasn’t traumatic but because it had so many similarities between the two. These 2 accidents have brought us closer to God and closer as a family ... for that, I thank God!”

Now, Kenneth is back on duty at the Beale Township fire station, with the goal of driving the tanker and manning the pumps as he once did. He also takes command of calls on the scene of emergencies. At his day job, too, he is a driver, shuttling the construction crew to their worksites.

Mood and personality changes can occur in TBI patients, but through his recovery, no matter how stressful it was, “Kenneth never became aggressive or angry,” Anna Mary said.

Both he and his father continue to improve, though Marcus in particular is feeling the strain.

“We’re trying hard to crawl back to a normal way of life,” Anna Mary wrote in a recent post. “Thank you all for the many ways you have blessed our lives and we would greatly appreciate your prayers for continued healing.”

*Published Aug. 18, 2021.*

# With vaccine clinic, Church World Service continues helping refugees through pandemic

By Tim Stuhldreher  
One United Lancaster

Last Thursday, Church World Service held a Covid-19 vaccination clinic for refugees and immigrants.

Between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., 83 people received their first vaccine shot, provided by staff from Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health. The event was set up in the large garage space at the building Church World Service shares with Tenfold, formerly Tabor Community Services, at 308 E. King St.

Immigrants and refugee from countries including Guatemala, Burma, Nepal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were joined by a handful of Tenfold's clients. They'll all return for their second shots at the beginning of May.

The clinic was the latest example of Church World Service's ongoing efforts to help those it serves cope with the United States' worst public health crisis in a century.

"Since we became aware of the pandemic and of the risk that it brought, we have been constantly reaching out to our clients," said Valentina Ross, director of the immigration and refugee program at Church World Service's Lancaster office.

## Higher risk, more barriers

Refugees, especially new arrivals, are at higher risk than the general population for Covid exposure.

In part, that's because they're more likely to work in low-wage jobs in essential industries where social distancing and other precautions are more difficult to implement.

They're more likely to live in small apartments with multiple generations under the same roof. And language and cultural barriers may make it more difficult to obtain reliable information about



PHOTO: PROVIDED

ABOVE: Members of the Gonzalez family, who hail from El Salvador, attend Church World Service's Covid-19 vaccine clinic. They are, from left, Maria Ventura Gonzalez, Leidy Gonzalez Ventura, Elmer Salmeron Martinez, Elsy Maradiaga de Gonzalez and Gerber Gonzalez Ventura. BELOW: Chris Eyer, left, and Mary LeVasseur of Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health check in patients during a Covid-19 clinic sponsored by Church World Service on Thursday, April 15, 2021.

Covid-19, respond to an emerging health concern, arrange for vaccination or a doctor's appointment, and so on.

Bhim Thapaliya is a leader among Lancaster's Bhutanese refugees and the founder of the Act for Humanity Foundation. As the pandemic spread last year, he organized a group of volunteers to disseminate information on Covid-19 and distribute masks, sanitizer and food in the community.

Just because resources are available doesn't mean immigrants have the means to access them, he said, saying officials must make every effort to reach out.

That's exactly what Church World Service is doing, Ross said.

Church World Service helps hundreds of individuals a year. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the nonprofit has distributed personal protective equipment, thermometers and other necessities to



families. When several clients tested positive and had to quarantine, Church World Service supplied food so they could avoid shopping trips, and helped them arrange telehealth appointments with Lancaster Health Center, now Union Community Care.

"In many cases we provided computers," Ross said. "We taught them how to enter a Zoom meeting, then we would have an

interpreter speak with them through Zoom." All of them recovered, she said.

## Arranging for vaccination

When Covid-19 vaccines first became available, supplies were limited and there was no central registration option. That made finding an appointment a daunting task even for computer-savvy native English speakers.

As Jeanne Martin, Church World Service's case management and navigation supervisor put it, there were "a lot of moving parts." She and two colleagues did their best to help eligible clients make arrangements, including transportation — another potential stumbling block.

"Not everybody is able to take the bus," Ross said.

Problems with scheduling have ebbed with the increase in vaccine supply and the opening of the Vaccinate Lancaster community vaccination center. Church World Service is part of Vaccinate Lancaster's access and equity committee, and is working with refugee leaders to provide information to their communities and overcome any vaccine hesitancy.

Last week, the nonprofit held a forum for members of the Karen community, an ethnic group from South Asia. The goal, Ross said is to "dispel myths," and provide accurate, scientifically grounded information in simple, understandable form — ideally, provided by individuals from the community itself. More information sessions are planned, and possibly another vaccination clinic as well.

The goal is to make sure that everyone understand the benefit of vaccination, and that the process is "absolutely inclusive," so that everyone who wants the vaccine is able to get it, Ross said.

"The more people who get vaccinated, the better," she said.

*Published April 21, 2021.*





## LGBTQ seniors at JCAA get Covid-19 vaccinations

By Jason Villemez

Residents of the John C. Anderson LGBT-friendly Senior Apartments received their first doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine last week, with second doses scheduled for next month. A team of four from Mazzoni Center held a vaccine clinic in the community room of the JCAA building which began at 10:00 a.m. and finished around 6:00 p.m.

Medical Assistant Supervisor Jasmine Santana, Director of Practice Management Devon Taylor, Director of Communications Larry Benjamin, and Executive Medical Officer Nancy Brisbon worked together to sign people in, administer the shots, and observe recipients for fifteen minutes afterwards. Ed Miller, who provides supportive services at JCAA as part of his role at William Way Community Center, handled the scheduling and was on site to help organize the 56 people who received the vaccine.

"It was wonderful to help our elders during a time that has been so very difficult for everyone," Brisbon said. "We look forward to our next day for dose two. The vaccine is part of our path out of the pandemic. We all need to do everything we can to prevent this serious and too often deadly disease."

The day came together after Miller learned that most JCAA residents, all of whom are low-income and elderly, had not been able to get the vaccine. He then reached out to the Mazzoni Center for assistance. Dr. Brisbon, who serves as part of Mazzoni's interim leadership team, promptly said yes, and the team worked on setting a date, securing vaccine doses from the city, and handling the logistics of using an off-site location. Brisbon said that having the experience of administering the vaccine to Mazzoni staff and patients helped the day go smoothly. Miller echoed those sentiments.

"It was a privilege working with the Mazzoni Center," Miller told PGN. "Everyone was so impressive and offered terrific guidance and every kindness."

For his part, Miller, who works at JCAA two days a week, understood the importance of allaying residents' concerns, especially amid all the confusion about vaccine eligibility and availability.

"Most of the residents know and trust me, and I wanted to make sure that everyone was notified and had answers to their questions. There's a lot to be said for meeting people where they are. Scheduling the appointment time for each senior made it start to seem real for us, it was

cool. Throughout the day seniors were expressing the tensions and fear they have been experiencing and the idea that the community had not forgotten about them. There were tears of joy and a palpable sense of relief. It was magnificent to be part of it. Really special."

According to a recent report from the CDC, LGBTQ people have a higher prevalence of illnesses that lead to severe Covid-19 outcomes, including asthma, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney disease and obesity. As many of those same illnesses are also prevalent in older adults, LGBTQ seniors are particularly at risk.

"Because of their sexual orientation," the CDC report states, "sexual minority persons experience stigmatization and discrimination that can increase vulnerabilities to illness and limit the means to achieving optimal health and well-being through meaningful work and economic security, routine and critical health care, and relationships in which sexual orientation and gender identity can be openly expressed."

Older LGBTQ adults, who have often faced a lifetime of discrimination, also face higher disability rates and are less likely to have advocates such as family members or neighbors who can help with health-related matters.

"As we looked around and read stories of the trouble some elderly folks have been having obtaining the vaccine in general," Benjamin said, "we really started thinking about our community. Our elder community members are not only at risk, they are also vulnerable and quite often invisible. We really felt it was important that they feel seen and cared for. We, after all, stand on their shoulders."

JCAA residents Mary Groce and Suz Atlas, who have been together for 26 years, were among the first to receive shots at the vaccine clinic. The two have had to be even more careful during Covid-19 because Atlas has been undergoing treatment for cancer. As they received their first doses, they looked squarely at each other.

"We've been afraid to leave our apartment at all for almost a year now," Groce told PGN, "and we were already almost fully quarantined before that because Suz was going through chemo... in other words, we were looking at each other this morning to share the joy and utter relief of the moment. At least now we're one step closer to the end of the pandemic... Suz says she wanted to get up and dance after she got hers."

The large space of the JCAA community room made it easy to safely conduct the vaccine clinic, with one half of



JCAA resident Mary Groce receives her first Covid-19 vaccine dose.

the room sectioned off for administering the shots and the other half used for observation. Residents waited for their turn in a socially distanced line in the nearby hallway; all were wearing masks.

"It was important to do this vaccine clinic to ensure that members of the LGBTQ community had a safe and affirming space to receive their vaccine," said Taylor, who handled sign-in, gathering insurance information, and filling out vaccination cards. "We made sure to fit the space to follow all safety protocols including occupation limits and observation spacing. To be able to provide this service was not only a joy to myself and the team but was also inspiring and humbling to see how much it meant to all the patients being vaccinated."

Benjamin told PGN that the day went faster than anticipated since the large space allowed for more people to wait in observation than initially anticipated. Also, to ensure no doses were wasted due to no-shows, JCAA residents provided a backup list of people in the community who met city and CDC vaccine guidelines to receive the vaccine.

Santana, who administered the vaccines, was moved by the experience.

"It was my privilege to be able to use Mazzoni's resources to vaccinate seniors and make an impact during this trying time in our community," Santana told PGN. "The gratitude of the residents was felt and we look forward to many more opportunities to serve our community with our holistic approach."

*Published Feb. 10, 2021.*

## Dealing with short-term rentals in our community

Every town has them, and every town is struggling with how to best deal with them: short-term rentals, or STRs - private home vacation rentals.

Of course, this being the Poconos, some form of private vacation rentals have always been here. But with number of STRs doubling in the last three years, they threaten to overrun the capacity of small towns to respond.

To get a handle on the nature and scope of STRs in our community, we reached out to AirDNA, a leading independent short-term rental data provider. AirDNA compiles information on hundreds of thousands of listings through data-sharing arrangements with numerous sources.

Their data is arranged by zip code, so we needed to further refine it by overlaying municipal boundaries on their maps to arrive at estimates of the STRs in each town

The data reveals over 1,300 STRs in our area- a 98% increase over the 659 units in 2018. Nearly all are entire home rentals. Mount Pocono has the lowest percent of entire home rentals at 85%. In the other communities the figures range from 96 to 100%.

Each home offers accommodations for an average of nine to ten guests, generating an average of \$3,088 a month for a Mount Pocono property, up to \$6,276 monthly in Pocono Summit.

Current occupancy rates - the percentage of days the homes are rented - show the popularity of STRs for vacationers. They range from 47% in Mount Pocono to 66% in Pocono Summit. For comparison, with COVID restrictions and reduced travel, hotel occupancy rates hover in the 35-40% range.

The ubiquity and popularity of STRs is a double-edged sword for the Poconos. Vacationers spend millions each year in our local restaurants, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, retail stores, and

Area Short-Term Rentals By The Numbers								
Location	2018	2021	Growth	Guests	Entire Home	Avg Mo. Income	Occ Rate	Avg Daily Rate
<b>MOUNT POCONO TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>-23%</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>\$3,088</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>\$386</b>
Blakeslee	56	109		10.4	96%	\$5,086	52%	\$376
Pocono Lake	193	384		8.8	99%	\$3,736	61%	\$260
Pocono Pines	99	195		9.4	100%	\$4,420	58%	\$349
Long Pond - Tobyhanna Twp	104	203		11.4	98%	\$6,278	63%	\$419
Pocono Summit - Tobyhanna Twp	5	10		10.6	100%	\$6,276	66%	\$394
<b>TOBYHANNA TOWNSHIP TOTAL</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>97%</b>					
Pocono Summit - Coolbaugh Twp	39	54		10.6	100%	\$6,276	66%	\$394
Tobyhanna - Coolbaugh Twp	146	328		9.9	99%	\$4,505	59%	\$306
<b>COOLBAUGH TOWNSHIP TOTAL</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>117%</b>					
<b>TOTAL AREA SHORT TERM RENTALS</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>1303</b>	<b>98%</b>					

Chart (c) The Boro & Towne News, data compiled from AirDNA & other sources

recreational venues - supporting over one-third of all local businesses and employment. But the STRs also can bring with them noisy parties, haphazard over- parking, and excess trash.

Enforcing nuisance laws against transient vacationers is difficult, leaving local governments wrestling with ways of preserving the nature of their residential communities. Mostly, it is left to owners to police their own properties.

Many of the STR owners we spoke with have a connection to the community and feel invested in protecting the neighborhood from nuisance vacationers. Diane (who asked us to withhold her last name), now lives in Florida. But she grew up summering with her grandparents in Pocono Pines and has family not far away in New Jersey. Nearing retirement, they purchased a home in the area last year, which they use as their summer home. They rent it out during the winter to help pay for taxes, and association fees.

Her nephew lives less than an hour away and can respond to any issues that need a physical presence. She carefully screens her guests. "This is our home first," she told us. "We're very careful who we let in to rent." She has cultivated a relationship with neighbors and security in her gated community to make sure she is alerted to any issues.

Amanda Fardella operates Titan Homestays. She assists homeowners in or looking to enter the STR market, provides them with advice on furnishings and amenities, prepares and manages their online listings, screens their guests, and helps makes sure that the property is a 'good neighbor'. Her first rule is that the owner must comply with local laws. "If its not permitted, I don't do it."

That is "a challenge," she admitted. "Every town has different rules and not all of them post them on town websites." And it takes time - in fact, Fardella told us she has as many STRs waiting for the permit process to finish as she does active listings.

Most of her clients are first time STR owners. As with Diane, many buy as a part-time residence, and rent the rest of the time. "They like the Poconos," she said of her clients.

Patrick Best, an attorney with ARM Lawyers in Stroudsburg, specializes in helping STR owners navigate the local permitting process as well as their hotel and excise tax collection.

He agreed with Fardella that "the biggest challenge is compliance - every township has its own rules, and many home owner associations have their own rules. There's no uniformity in the county." Best also will not work with clients unless they operate

in compliance with local rules.

The local regulation landscape is varied. Mount Pocono has the oldest, and the most restrictive regulations. Their ordinance, adopted in 2016, prohibits STRs in almost all areas of the borough. The first court test of the ordinance took several years and thousands of dollars, resulting in a loss for the borough. They are now back in court with that same property owner trying again.

Alexis Wilkinson, the borough zoning officer, estimates there are 15 active STRs in Mount Pocono. Only two have registered in five years. Neither voluntarily, but only in response to a violation notice. She has issued four other violation notices, and they are in court with two of those right now.

Coolbaugh is having decidedly more success with its ordinance, adopted in August 2020. The township estimates there are 350-400 STRs in the township. Tom Rohan, the STR Enforcement Officer for the Township, told us they already have 375 voluntary applications going through the permitting process.

Unlike Mount Pocono, Coolbaugh does not restrict STRs from any residential area. It does limit the number of guests to the rated occupancy of the home and ensures that the home has adequate sewer capacity and basic safety features. It also makes the owner responsible for the conduct of guests, threatening the loss of the permit for multiple violations.

Tobyhanna Township has been trying to come up with an ordinance for a couple of years. Under current rules they are prohibited in the township. Ironically, Tobyhanna has the highest estimated number of STRs. The township estimates 700, AirDNA puts the figure at 901.

At their last meeting, supervisors talked about forming a committee to review the issue.

*Published April 20, 2021.*



# THE CENTRE COUNTY GAZETTE

## Bellefonte retires Red Raiders mascot imagery

### Decision on name to be made later

By Vincent Corso

vcorso@centrecountygazette.com

BELLEFONTE — The Bellefonte Area School District has decided to retire the Red Raiders mascot imagery after months of debate and extensive research by the school district.

The Native American imagery and Red Raiders moniker that is used by the district's sports teams has been hotly debated since last June, when some community members asked for removal, calling it culturally insensitive. This came as many social justice protests took place around the country during the spring and summer of 2020.

Before addressing the matter, school board members worked to educate themselves on the history of the Red Raiders in the district, listening to speakers on Native American history and cultural appropriation, among other relevant topics.

On April 13, the board heard from 28 community members, ranging from current students, to alumni and longtime residents, to people new to the town. Twenty-four of those speakers were in favor of the change, while four wanted the Red Raiders to be left alone.

Taking in everything it heard that night and over the past nine months, the board voted 8-1 in favor of the change, with board member Jeff Steiner voting against the motion.

At issue was the exact language of the motion, which moved "that all current Native American images seen throughout the district be officially retired. The existing images would be removed within one year unless items containing an image need to be replaced or require maintenance prior to that, in which case, removal would be included at that time."

Board President Jon Guizar said he did not want to be locked in against potentially

being able to use a Native American symbol in the future with the support of a tribe. The board agreed the language of the motion referred only to existing images.

The board also discussed the one-year time stipulation to remove and replace certain images, given the potentially costly nature of some replacements. The board agreed it would be able to give approval to extend past the year deadline on a case-by-case basis.

Before discussing the matter, solicitor Scott Etter explained that the matter could not be voted on by a referendum on the upcoming ballot, as some community members had asked, and that it was a matter for the school board to decide.

"Statutorily, that is not something that can be on the ballot," Etter said. "There are certain things that can be on the ballot and this is not one of them."

The first community member who spoke to the board was Andrew Van Buskirk, who was one of the alumni who brought the issue to the board's attention.

"It was never my intention to take a proverbial grenade and detonate it in our community. I know this year has been uncomfortable in our town, with the pandemic and this great racial awakening in our country ... but I do not regret the conversations about this issue that I have had, and I would have them again in a heartbeat," said Van Buskirk.

In explaining his support of the measure, Guizar said that Native American speakers the board had heard from on both sides of the issue agreed the mascot image of a Native American in full headdress was not a culturally appropriate image.

"Even people on that side have been opposed to what we have, which is why I will support getting rid of the current image," said Guizar.

Board member Max Kroell said it was a



GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

**Bellefonte Area School District has decided to retire all Red Raiders mascot imagery from usage in the district because of its culturally insensitive nature. The mascot will now be known as simply the Raiders.**

difficult decision, but he wanted the district to move forward.

"I don't see any benefit in keeping the imagery and that was tough decision to come to because you had people on both sides and you don't know what to do. So, I am going to vote affirmative on this motion. If we don't vote in favor, this will continue and just keep hurting students. We need to put the issue to rest and focus again on what is best for our students," said Kroell.

Board member Rodney Musser said he would like the education that the board has received about the issue to become part of district-wide education.

On April 27, the board took further measures concerning the topic and decided

to also modify the name. The mascot will be now known as simply the Raiders.

This is not the first time the Bellefonte Area School District has discussed the Red Raiders mascot. According to the school website on the history of the Red Raiders, the name was given to the school by a local sports writer in 1930. According to LaBelle yearbook staff, the name Red Raiders was first known to appear in a school document in 1936, when Bellefonte High School sophomore Bob Hoffer wrote an article about the football season.

In 2015, the chief logo was moved to be the secondary symbol of the school; a red and white letter "B" became the primary logo.

*Published April 15, 2021.*

## SV retires Indian mascot, imagery

### School board keeps Raider nickname

By Alex Weidenhof  
Eagle Staff Writer

JACKSON TWP — The “Raider” name remains, but the associated mascot and American Indian-related imagery are gone.

In an 8-0 (not unanimous — one absence) vote Monday night, Seneca Valley School District directors officially retired the depiction of Indigenous peoples from the district’s facade but, they noted, would keep the names “Raider” and “Seneca Valley.”

The board set an Aug. 1 target date for recommendations and proposals for new mascots and imagery, and will seek input from the student body during the 2021-22 school year.

As for the mascot and logos, they are gone immediately.

School board president Eric DiTullio said following the meeting, the district had heard the voices of Native Americans who asked Seneca Valley — among others — to stop using their likeness as logos and mascots. In the face of mixed views from the community about whether to keep or retire the mascot, DiTullio said there was only one option.

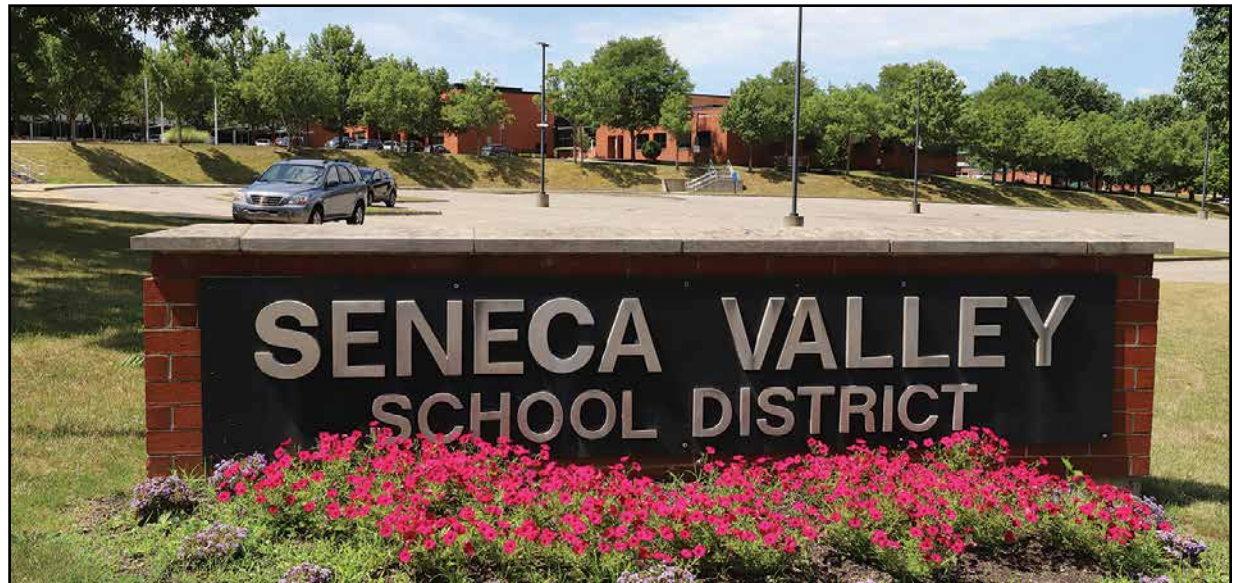
“I just can’t see us being a community that would say, ‘Tough. We’re going to honor you whether you like it or not,’” he said.

#### Four groups

A similar sentiment was echoed by director Fred Peterson, who said he’d heard from four groups about the mascot and logos: Seneca Valley community members and alumni opposed to changing it; those who supported changing it; students who “report that the use of Native American names, references and imagery is blatantly offensive”; and Indigenous peoples themselves.

“In my mind, the only opinions that matter are those of the last category,” Peterson said. “It is their rightful place to say yes or no regarding the use of their native symbols. Their message has been clear: If they had a vote tonight, it would be ‘Yes’ to adopt the resolution” retiring the mascot and imagery.

In fact, Peterson said, he thought about voting ‘no’ on



the resolution because he didn’t feel it went far enough to eradicate derogatory terms and imagery of American Indians from the school.

DiTullio disagreed, and said while the mascot and imagery go against the Indigenous peoples’ wishes, the name “Raider” doesn’t refer to Native Americans and has taken on a meaning of its own in the district.

“At the end of the day, a rendering of a Native American is not what defines this district,” DiTullio said. “The ‘Raider’ name, however, does.”

#### Community input

While both DiTullio and Peterson said they sought to honor the wishes of Native Americans the district depicted, the board faced questions and criticism from members of the public who wrote in or spoke at the meeting regarding the issue.

Of the four speakers and 14 community members who wrote in opposing the retirement of the mascot, chief among their concerns was a worry about “destroying history.”

“Why are we changing history?” Don Rape, of Jackson Township, said. “Why are we eliminating a mascot? That’s what I want to know. What did they do wrong?”

Shawn Negley, of Jackson Township, raised his own concerns. He said he has four sons either in or soon-to-be attending the district and is concerned their school board

focused their energy on the wrong areas.

“I’m really concerned about their future and the culture that we live in,” he said. “Why are we even talking about changing the mascot’s name when there’s so many other issues that we need to be talking about, such as critical race (theory)?”

#### Not all opposed

But not all speakers or email writers were opposed to changing the name. In fact, 15 people who supported changing the name emailed the board in the days leading up to the vote, and another spoke Monday.

“My rule of thumb is that if this mascot is offensive to them, that I need to advocate on their behalf,” said Carlen Blackstone of Cranberry Township. “This seems to definitely be the current reality, so I urge you to vote in favor of a more inclusive respectfulness.”

DiTullio took the opportunity following public comment to discuss an issue discussed online and alluded to Monday. He described the motion as eliminating mascots and logos depicting a people “we were meant to honor who have now asked us not to honor them in that way.

“No, it’s not cancel culture. No, it’s not caving to political pressure,” DiTullio said. “We are answering the request of those that we were intending to honor. In my opinion, we’re obligated to eliminate this imagery.”

*Published June 15, 2021.*



# Community critiques SV mascot decision

## Mixed reactions among residents

By Alex Weidenhof  
Eagle Staff Writer

CRANBERRY TWP — Mike Manipole remembers painting the “Raider” face on the Rowan Elementary School gym floor alongside students when he was first hired at Seneca Valley School District as a physical education teacher.

The face and the act of painting were something he and his students took pride in.

Years later, however, Manipole applauded the district retiring the mascot and other Native American-related imagery.

“Our district stays ahead of time or tries to keep up with the times, so I applaud them for seeing this in a sensitive manner and making changes they see as necessary,” Manipole said. “I know so many students said ‘maybe it is time for a change.’”

Manipole’s shift, in a way, represents the way Seneca Valley community members view the district’s decision Monday to retire its Native American-depicting mascot and imagery.

Many Seneca Valley community members see the Raider mascot as emblematic of the district.

Another faction thinks it’s well past due that the district honor the current wishes of American Indians who view mascots as derogatory.

### Honor history

When the Evans City and Zelienople high schools merged 60 years ago, the students settled on the Seneca Valley High School name to honor the Native American history of the region, and dubbed their mascot the Raider.

Seneca Nation Chief Hanging Feather supported the students’ effort to name the school Seneca Valley, and was

later present at the high school’s groundbreaking ceremony in 1963.

The continued depiction of an American Indian for the school’s mascot, as well as the imagery of Native Americans throughout the district, both grabs onto and respects both the Seneca people and the past, some community members argued.

“I don’t see anything wrong with them using the imagery or mascot,” 2001 alumna Crystal Marburger said. “It just shows that we are honoring them.”

To some, changing the mascot is tantamount to scrubbing from the region’s history the contributions of Native Americans.

“We’re canceling history. We’re canceling tradition,” said Tom Donaldson, a 1970 Seneca Valley alumnus. “These people coming in from other areas, they don’t like our culture so they shove theirs down our throat.”

Other Seneca Valley community members invoked the district’s motto — “Proud of the past, committed to the future” — to critique Seneca Valley school directors’ Monday vote.

### Natives’ wishes

Much has changed since 1963, and that includes many Native Americans’ views of Indigenous peoples being depicted for mascots and related imagery.

The National Congress of American Indians, for example, campaigns against the “derogatory and harmful stereotypes of Native people — including sports mascots — in media and popular culture,” and boasts it began that initiative in 1968.

In fact, the national congress maintains a database of K-12 schools that use “Native ‘themed’ school mascots.” As of June 8, the database shows, more than 1,000 U.S. school districts used such mascots — even after a dozen districts retired theirs thus far in 2021, including three in Pennsylvania.

The Seneca Nation of Indians, too, has come out

against the use of Native American depictions for mascots and imagery.

“Like all Native people, the Seneca people have seen and suffered the indignity of having our language and culture stripped from us, and our spirit and heritage and race assaulted time and again,” Seneca Nation president Rickey L. Armstrong Sr. said. “That is not something that should be celebrated in the name of sportsmanship nor used to identify the character and spirit of a school community.”

For some community members, honoring the wishes of the Seneca people and other Native American groups is something the district should have done.

Jayne Gordon, a 2007 alumna, said while she didn’t think of the potential racial implications of the mascot while she was in school, she thinks the district retiring the imagery at the request of groups representing American Indians is appropriate.

“With the school working with local Native American groups and listening to what they have to say about a mascot depicting them, I don’t see how anyone could be against this,” Gordon said. “If we stop to think about our history with Native Americans and what we have done in the past, listening and honoring them in this way is really the least we could do.”

“I’m a traditionalist, and I like names that have meaning,” Manipole said. “In honor of Native Americans who settled our area, I always thought the Seneca Valley Raider thing was pretty cool. But I’m not Native American, and it’s unfair for me to say that, so I applaud the district” for retiring the mascot at the behest of Native people.

Others, though, think what’s done is done.

“I feel that if the Seneca Indians had a problem using anything of their heritage that it would have never been used, and there is no reason to change things to suit the new students or alumni in any way,” Marburger said.

*Published June 16, 2021.*



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# LOWER BUCKS TIMES

## Birthday Lawn Bandit partners with Alpha Bravo Canine for fundraiser

On April 17, Nicky Christopher is seeking donations for the nonprofit that provides service puppies to veterans

By Samantha Bambino

Lower Bucks Times

In just one year, 12-year-old Nicky Christopher has gained unprecedented notoriety in his Lower Makefield community and beyond.

Belovedly known as the "Birthday Lawn Bandit," the Pennwood middle schooler sneakily "raids" the lawns of locals, intricately decorating the space with balloons, massive cardboard cupcakes and more to help them enjoy their big day. Each person receives a loot bag that's personalized based on their interests.

Nicky, who was diagnosed on the spectrum in first grade, launched the initiative in 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. With so many of his friends' birthday parties canceled, Nicky wanted to do something special for them.

"It started with a raid for a friend, putting up signs," Nicky told The Times in a recent Zoom interview. "And then it became more public to cheer up people."

Since in-person learning has resumed, Nicky's raids are limited to weekends for the most part. To date, the young entrepreneur has raided the lawns of over 300 people, including classmates, graduating high school seniors and a woman celebrating her 100th birthday. He was featured on Action News, and was honored by Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick on the U.S. House floor. Neither he nor his mom/secretary Sara Christopher envisioned the project becoming so popular.

"We were doing it for \$10, just putting balloons out. We were looking to just cheer

up the community. A lot of people were really depressed. They couldn't celebrate birthdays, they couldn't go out," said Sara. "This was a neat way to bring some cheer to the neighborhood. And everything that he was using was donated by the community or recycled."

Currently, a lawn raid costs \$50. Nicky donates half of the proceeds to his favorite charity – Alpha Bravo Canine. The local nonprofit provides service dogs to area veterans suffering from PTSD at no charge. Nicky was introduced to the organization through his best friend, fellow Pennwood student Ben Ruepp, whose mother Tracy Ruepp serves as a puppy raising coordinator.

On Saturday, April 17, which happens to be Nicky's own 13th birthday, he is hosting a fundraiser for Alpha Bravo Canine at the Lower Makefield Township pool parking lot, located at 1100 Edgewood Road in Yardley, from noon to 3 p.m.

Residents can stop by at any time. A slew of area businesses donated raffle baskets, which feature everything from a Glo Derma spa service and Kate Spade goodies, to a free 6-week class at Tail Waggers Academy. For a small fee, guests can receive a puppy kiss from an Alpha Bravo puppy in training. Nicky and Ben will also be making balloon animals.

"What I like about this event is, we've been able to recruit other Pennsbury students," said Sara. "Because Alpha Bravo Canine is a 501(c)(3), they can use these volunteer hours for the National Honor Society."

*Continued on next page*



PHOTO: SARA CHRISTOPHER

Twelve-year-old Nicky Christopher, of Lower Makefield Township, "raids" the lawns of locals, intricately decorating the space with balloons, and massive cardboard cupcakes to help them celebrate birthdays, graduations and other special events.



## Lower Bucks Times continued

The fundraising goal is \$10,000. According to Tracy, this would help Alpha Bravo Canine open its own ADA-compliant facility (it utilizes a shared share at the moment). Funds would also help it train more puppies, a process that costs at least \$30,000.

"That's a huge help for us because, as a small nonprofit, we've been hit hard by COVID. Over the last year, we haven't been able to hold our annual fundraiser," said Tracy.

Alpha Bravo Canine was established in 2015 with the mission of saving veteran lives. Statistics show that 20 veterans commit suicide every day due to PTSD-related issues.

"The dog is trained to pick up on their movements and their breathing. We train the dogs to monitor breathing patterns for anxiety. It goes a long way to getting the veterans their life back. Some of them can't leave the house because of their anxiety and PTSD, and they're able to once they get a dog," Tracy said, adding that many no longer need medication once they acquire a furry friend. "It gives the veterans another purpose with the dog."

All Alpha Bravo animals begin training with a volunteer puppy raiser at around 8 weeks old. Puppy raisers take training classes at a Newtown facility and bring their tiny trainee everywhere with them – the grocery store, doctor's office and even the Philadelphia Zoo.

"They have to have every exposure. Anywhere they'd go with the veteran, they have to be able to work through all the distractions," said Tracy.

Veterans are supplied with a year's worth of food, toys and treats. All they have to worry about is bonding with their puppy, who is typically 15 to 18 months old. Every puppy is named after a veteran who either took his own life or died in service. Tracy was nearly brought to tears while talking



PHOTOS: SARA CHRISTOPHER

about Tristan, named after a puppy-raising family's son who was killed in a roadside bombing in Iraq.

For anyone who would like to donate but is unable to attend the April 17 fundraiser, they can do so from Alpha Bravo Canine's Amazon wish list at [amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/11QJO47CEJU6A](https://amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/11QJO47CEJU6A) or via Venmo @birthdaylawnbandit. Visit [alphabracanine.org](https://alphabracanine.org) for more information. The nonprofit will be accepting applications that day for veterans interested in a puppy, and locals interested in becoming a puppy raiser.

To book a birthday lawn raid from Nicky, text 732-991-1490 or message [facebook.com/birthdaylawnbandit](https://facebook.com/birthdaylawnbandit).

Samantha Bambino can be reached at [sbambino@newspapermediagroup.com](mailto:sbambino@newspapermediagroup.com)

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ABOVE: In one year, Nicky Christopher has raided the lawns of over 300 people, including classmates, graduating high school seniors and a woman celebrating her 100th birthday.

LEFT: A fundraiser on April 17 will benefit the nonprofit Alpha Bravo Canine, which provides service puppies free of charge to area veterans suffering from PTSD and anxiety.



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# NORTHWESTERN PRESS



## A bittersweet last day

### The Hartmans look back over their years in the butcher shop

**By Bernadette Sukley**

Special to The Press

After 40 years, Dennis Hartman closed the door on July 8 to the butcher shop that's been in his family for three generations.

"There's a time for everything to end, I know," he said. "But to be honest, I'll tell you, it doesn't feel so good."

Hartman admits it's hard to let go of a business he and his family built up over the last few decades.

"It was good to see customers come in and talk about their children and then see their grandchildren come into the shop," Hartman said. "It was so good to see them all come in."

He does, however, look at the closing realistically.

"I'll still see them around town," he said.

Carol and Dennis Hartman go out as champions. Like incredible athletes, they leave the field at the top of their game.

Multiple awards, unique products, loyal fans and no one else comes close.

"We are the last USDA inspected open butcher shop in Lehigh County," Dennis Hartman said.

Hartman's was a family-owned, third generation business, founded by William Hartman (Dennis' granddad) who built a butcher shop in 1940.

His dad, Paul, built the current shop in 1957.

"My dad, and most butchers back then, took what they had and stuck with it," he



PRESS PHOTOS BY BERNADETTE SUKLEY

Peter Rezzoali and Hartman's Butcher Shop owners Dennis and Carol Hartman recall past customers and their familial connections.

said. "You never got fancy. You made sausage, ground beef, smoked hams, bolognas and hot dogs."

He said the food trends just weren't there.

"In the Depression, you used all parts of the animals," Hartman said.

"They made scrapple and tripe to be used in soups. You didn't have much," he stated. "And, what little you had, you had to get creative and stretch it out as much as possible."

Slowly but surely, the appetite for different kinds of meat product changed.

Scrapple wasn't just a Depression-era food, but a Sunday morning staple.

"If my dad were here today, I think he'd be proud of us," he said.

"I think my dad's jaw would drop if he saw all the different products."

Under Dennis Hartman's ownership, the shop has diversified its offerings.

"Though I'm sure he'd be proud of all the different products and how hard we've

worked to get the formulas right," he added. "We got to know a lot of regular customers over 40 years.

"Hated to do it, but five years ago, we said we would have to retire in five years."

#### Ups and Downs

Dennis Hartman began helping his dad as soon as he was old enough to safely hold a knife. He began butchering in earnest after high school.

*Continued on next page*



## Northwestern Press continued

"He did look around to see if there were any jobs he liked, but he came back to help his dad with the business and that was that," Carol recalled. "It's hard for him to let this go."

The couple married in 1984. She worked part time at the business. After they married, they worked side-by-side in the store.

"We only have one daughter, Heather, who has a wonderful job at Lehigh Valley Health Network," Carol said.

"She helps when she can, but she is not interested in taking over the business."

COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 shut down many businesses.

In May of that year, when many businesses were closing temporarily or for good, Hartman's Butcher Shop began new hours and was busier than ever.

"We had our store hours and, then when they were over, we would packaged other orders," Dennis Hartman explained. "We never needed to close down.

"To top it all off, Weis and Giant were calling us to see if we had 20- to 30 pounds of meat products.

"They were panicked because they were worried about running out of food."

Meat processing plants were shutting down because employees were getting sick or were afraid of getting sick.

"No employees, no meat," Dennis Hartman explained. "There was never a lull in action,"

Dennis Hartman said he never really had regular, long-term help.

"It's just so hard to find good hardworking employees.

"We're lucky to find a few, but they're getting on in age as well."

Retirement was inevitable.

"Butchering meat is a dying art," he said.

"Penn State has a butchering and meat processing program but all those kids go to the big meat companies. No one wants to open their own business."

### Products and Awards

On the last day, customers wished Carol and Dennis well. So many people loved the store.

"Our customers love our products," Dennis Hartman said proudly.

These included country sausage, kielbasa, smoked ham and bacon, Beef Stix, Pineapple Stix, homemade hot dogs and Hillbilly Jerky.



**Dennis Hartman loads up Taylor and Isaac Haydt's car for the last time. The order included 60 pounds of kielbasa, 40 pounds of bratwurst and 5 pounds of Beef Stix.**

Hillbilly Jerky is ground, seasoned and reformed jerky.

"Some people have said, 'I wish I could just bottle the smell,'" Dennis Hartman said.

"It's the smoker. All the meats in there smoking. It's such a great smell."

Dennis Hartman took pride in all his products.

"I'm proud of our awards and honors," he said. "We won in 2018 as champions for our Meat Snack Sticks (Beef Stix) and for the Hillbilly Jerky (restructured) at the Pennsylvania's Meat Processors trade show."

At the 79th annual PAMP Convention 2018 Product Competition, Hartman's Butcher Shop competed against more than 337 entries from 30 different processors.

One big award came in 2019 at a large and international competition featuring some of the most sophisticated meat butchering and processing companies.

The German Butchers' Association, in partnership with the American Association of Meat Processors, reviewed 460 entries from 42 companies.

"We won two gold medals; one for Landjäger, and one for Restructured Hillbilly Jerky," Dennis Hartman said. "We also won a silver medal for skinless, shankless smoked cooked ham."

Landjäger, Dennis Hartman explained, came from German hunters who would go in to the mountains and needed a protein snack.

"It wasn't like they could bring anything that was perishable," he said. "Landjäger is cured, smoked meat. It's a very long process to make, taking about 4 to 5 days to smoke."

For some products, Hartman's kept to Old World traditions but the shop also tried new things.

One fan favorite was Pineapple Stix. Like their tasty counterpart, Beef Stix, Pineapple Stix are made with ham and pineapple.

"Pineapple Stix were one of the most challenging products," Dennis Hartman said "We tried so many different combinations and formulas to get the taste just right.

"We tried crushed pineapples, pineapple juice, fresh pineapple and dried," he said. "Finally, we had luck with dried diced pineapple and it quickly became one of our most asked-for snacks."

Hartman's also made nonmeat foods, such as Hillbilly Jerky Dip — a favorite dip for chips when snacking at home or parties.

The store shelves were filled with other Pennsylvania Dutch favorites including horseradish, chow chow, sauerkraut and apple butter.

### What's Next?

For now, Dennis and Carol Hartman will do a little traveling. They had a planned trip to Oklahoma for the American Association of Meat Processors convention.

"Due to COVID, it was canceled last year," Dennis Hartman said. "So, we made plans

for this year and then we decided to retire.

"But we're going anyway. We'll get a chance to say goodbye."

The convention is both a trade show and competition. He plans on entering some of his products one more time.

"Just to see if I'm still good enough," he said.

Then they are going to tackle the immediate tasks and fulfill any outstanding preorders.

"I put a note on Facebook [Hartman Butcher Shop social media page] and things went crazy," Carol said.

By the time July 8 rolled around, there was no bacon or kielbasa for the walk-in customer.

"But it takes a while to smoke some hams and bacon, so those have to be done and packaged," she explained.

After that, it's pack up, clean up and get the place ready for another set of hands.

"There's really no one else in the family," Dennis Hartman said. "But I'd be willing to train anyone who's willing to take on this business.

"It's a lot of hard work and no one wants to work seven days a week. I know, it's tough but there are so many new trends, technologies, different equipment that have helped us become more efficient."

Dennis Hartman used the example of the refrigerators.

"You don't always have to be here [at the store] to check on them. You can set the temps with an app on your phone."

Both Dennis and Carol are in good health. Although there are some aches and pains.

"Well, that's what happens when you walk on hard concrete for eight hours a day," Dennis Hartman said. "I've been doing this since 1972, so it's time to move along."

"I'll miss all the people," Carol said. "But I won't miss all the work."

The Hartmans are selling the business as is — with the storefront, smoker, buildings and all the equipment.

"Hope to sell as a turn-key business," Dennis Hartman said. "It comes with everything and 1.2 acres."

"As for us, we're not going anywhere," Carol added.

"I have no regrets," Dennis Hartman said. "It was a good business."

*Published July 15, 2021.*

# Speedy's deliveries come to an end

## Point Breeze mailman retires

By Ann Belser

Point Breeze poured out the love for "Speedy," the neighborhood's longtime mailman, who retired Dec. 30.

Speedy is Henry Lockley, a United States Postal Service carrier, who has been delivering mail to Point Breeze homes for more than three decades.

And, while a mailman named Speedy may conjure images of Mr. McFeely, the delivery man played by David Newell on "Mister Rogers Neighborhood," the fictional mailman had nothing to do with Lockley's name.

He was named "Speedy" eight years before Fred Rogers hit the airwaves.

"I was born fast," Lockley explained. His mother did not make it out of the parking lot before little Henry was born. His aunt Lila called the baby "Speedy" and the name stuck.

Even in school, as a runner, he was a sprinter.

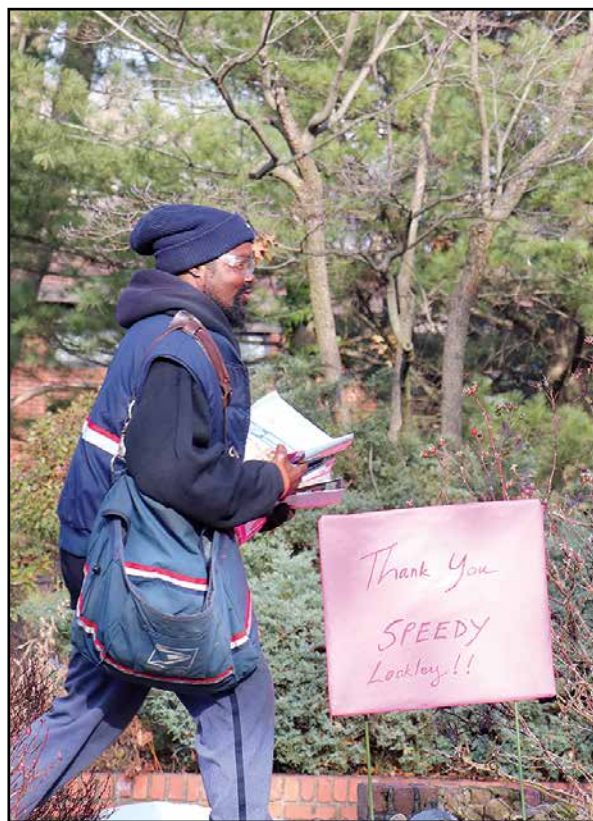
Lockley spent three years in the U.S. Army as a mortarman in the infantry and after his discharge, served in the Army Reserves for three years. It was 39 years ago that he got his start in the U.S. Postal Service after applying for every job in the post office. He had other routes first, but 31 years ago he started delivering to Point Breeze and he never left.

Though he is a resident of Garfield, Point Breeze also became his neighborhood as he walked 13 to 15 miles a day up and down the streets.

He has delivered lots of bills and lots of checks. Before college admissions went online, prospective students learned their fates through the envelopes he delivered.

One young woman, who is now a nursing student, spent days waiting for the notice to come in the mail about her student loan. When he handed her the envelope she looked inside, then hugged and kissed him.

Through the years he kept his eyes on the community and got to know the people on the route.



ANN BELSER PHOTO

Henry "Speedy" Lockley may live in Garfield, but for the last 31 years he has been a fixture in Point Breeze, delivering mail and getting to know the community. The neighborhood responded to his retirement by posting "Thank you, Speedy" signs all along his route. Here he walks past one to deliver mail just before his retirement.

One afternoon, while delivering to a home, he saw that the resident was unconscious on the floor. He knocked, she did not stir, so he went inside and was able to revive her with a wet rag, then he saw another woman across the room who was also unconscious. At first he thought they must have been overcome by carbon monoxide, but then he realized it was worse. The two women had suffered from a drug overdose.

He called 911 and performed CPR on the second woman until the emergency medical technicians arrived. They revived her with Narcan and she thanked them.

"Don't thank us, thank the mailman," Lockley said they told her.

"That was the most exciting thing that happened during my time here," he said, "But I don't want anyone to know who they were."

"No day is ever the same," he said. Sometimes he helped his customers carry in groceries. Other days he helped move furniture.

His three children, Chen'ree, 31, J.D., 30, and Dwayne, 29, have all grown up while he has walked his route in Point Breeze, watching the children grow up there, as well.

He also made sure residents received the forms they needed to put in changes of address if they left town.

In the last year his route expanded and as so much commerce went online, his truck filled with more and more packages.

At 59, he decided it was time to retire before he got hurt.

During his last week on the route, the signs started to appear saying "Thank you Speedy."

Signs congratulating Lockley and wishing him well were posted on mailboxes, doors and utility poles. At the end of Kirtland Street a large sign hung from Homewood Cemetery's fence that said "Speedy! Best Mailman Ever. Happy retirement we will miss you!!!!"

Along his route customers wished him well when they caught him at the door, telling a trailing reporter that Lockley is a gem who cannot be replaced.

One side of a sandwich board at the corner of South Lange Avenue and Reynolds Street read "Thank you Speedy" and on the other side: "Speedy, Your feet never stopped, your hands always shuffling, Always a Wave, a happy hello a constant in our days, now a wave and goodbye. Enjoy!"

On his last day there was even a big sign hanging from the fence at the East Liberty Post Office as he drove his truck into the lot for the last time.

What are Lockley's plans? He isn't planning any travel yet, because of the pandemic, but he will be working on his house and possibly expanding his collection of fish tanks.

He will also start working out, to make up for the daily 15 miles of walking he won't have to do anymore.

*Published Jan. 14, 2021.*



# PA Newspapers impact PA Communities

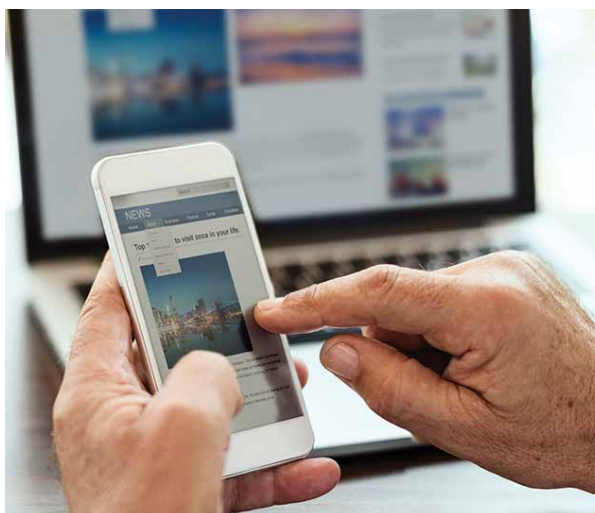


The impact of Pennsylvania's newspaper industry in 2020 was \$1.3 billion, supporting 9,862 jobs, and generating \$51.8 million in state and local tax revenue.

## The newspaper industry contributes to the state and local economies

The direct, day-to-day expenditures of the newspaper industry cause a ripple effect throughout the state.

In 2020, Pennsylvania newspapers' economic contribution to local and state economies totaled \$1.3 billion, this point-in-time snapshot depicting how the industry and their employees make an impact. **The industry contributed \$528.8 million in labor income to the economy in 2020.**



## Creating and sustaining jobs throughout Pennsylvania

The newspaper industry supports a combined total of 9,862 full-time and part-time jobs throughout the state; 6,483 employees are supported on a direct basis. Based on analysis by industry sectors, other jobs supported in the Pennsylvania economy include those in information services, computer programming services, employment services, hospitals and health care, real estate, retail and hospitality services (e.g., restaurants, child care centers and entertainment).

## Generating local and state tax revenues

The newspaper industry, its employees, its suppliers and its related constituencies contribute significantly to the local and statewide tax bases. **In 2020, the newspaper industry contributed an estimated \$51.8 million** through local spending as well as direct and indirect support of jobs.

## The newspaper industry gives back

Communities throughout Pennsylvania benefit from services provided by nearly 6,500 direct employees in the newspaper industry. Based upon assumptions derived from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Points of Light Foundation regarding donation amounts and volunteerism, income level and employment status, **it is estimated that staff give nearly \$3.9 million annually in charitable donations and volunteer for over 100,000 hours, valued at \$2.5 million.** In 2020, the combined impact of charitable giving and volunteerism totaled \$6.4 million. These benefits were in addition to the \$1.3 billion annual economic impact.

## How does your garden grow?

### Master Gardeners plant seeds of knowledge for novices and pros alike

By Christina Heintzelman

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Spring is in the air, buds are beginning to pop, crocuses and snowdrops are peeking their tiny heads out of the dark earth eager to pay homage to the returning warmth of the sun. Here in Pennsylvania, gardeners are also beginning to plan their gardens of flowers, herbs, fruits, and vegetables with an eye toward a new year of outdoor gardening activity, which is great for the wallet, health, and happiness.

Whether someone is brand new to gardening or has several cultivating years under the belt, Dauphin County Master Gardeners Program can help with gardening plans. This program is part of the Outreach Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which funds State Departments of Agriculture throughout the country. The Pennsylvania State Department of Agriculture then funds the Pennsylvania Land Grant University, which is Penn State University.

Catherine Scott, Extension Educator/Horticulture Master Gardener Coordinator, is the head of the program for Dauphin County through the Penn State Extension Program. "This is a way for home gardeners to get expert advice," she said, adding she's had questions ranging from "why are there weevils in my bathroom?" to "why are my spruce trees dying?" to "why are there no goldfinches in my backyard? I guess you could say we handle everything from bathtubs to birds."

This crew of experienced master gardeners is equipped to make recommendations for garden design, provide conifer identification to home gardeners, and assist with seasonal garden tips. They also can aid community gardens and other community gardening projects. In addition to their in-person assistance,



PHOTO BY SHAWNA RAYMOND

#### Office Gardens

they offer a garden question hotline, and an email site to assist with plants and insect samples for identification and diagnosis.

The Dauphin County Master Gardeners Program is peripherally involved with many local projects. One is The Five Senses Gardens, located on the Capital Area Green Belt in Harrisburg, designed to enhance all of the senses. A personal connection to nature and a sense of tranquility is fostered by visiting this garden with its many different types of flowers, trees, sculptures, and butterflies. Visitors can sit on one of the many benches and take in nature while relaxing. Master Gardeners have been maintaining the garden with the help of many volunteers from surrounding communities. During this time of social

distancing, working in this beautiful garden has been both safe and therapeutic for the volunteers.

In addition, the Master Gardener Program has aided The Harrisburg Cemetery, the oldest and largest in the city and the final resting place of noted individuals of national, state, and local importance, such as war dead from all American wars including the Revolutionary War and Civil War. The Master Gardeners joined with Mayor Eric Papenfuse and volunteers from the board and staff of Harrisburg Cemetery to plant tree seedlings to begin the creation of a beautiful arboretum during the 2015 Earth Day celebration. The plans for this started more than five years earlier while the gardeners were volunteering with a clean-up of the cemetery and

noticed that many of the trees and various plants were not healthy. They began thinking about new plantings emphasizing native species. Now the cemetery is a beautiful historic place with an astonishing variety of plantings and the feel of a lovely suburban park.

The Master Gardener Program has also assisted with the Hershey Community Garden on the campus of Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, which offers a venue for community networking on 234 plots, 220 for community residents to garden, and 14 to raise produce to donate to organizations that distribute it to those in need. In 2020, more than 3,000 pounds of produce were donated to local groups like Hershey Food Bank, Palmyra Food Bank, Middletown Food Bank, and CocoaPacks, benefiting more than 1,000 families. The garden was completed in 2014 with 123 plots, but expanded in 2018. Generally, about 50 community members are on a waitlist for plots. Gardeners do not have to live in Derry Township to be eligible for a plot.

Other features of the Hershey garden are sections allocated for children with hands-on educational programs and several raised garden plots that are designed for those who cannot bend to ground level.

Hershey Community Garden is also taking part in a study sponsored by Penn State Health with collaboration from Dauphin County and two adjoining counties, Lebanon and Lancaster. The study is being conducted by dietitian Susan Veldheer, DEd, RD, who is an assistant professor for Family and Community Medicine and Public Health Sciences, Penn State College of Medicine. The goal of the study is to introduce new gardeners to starting and tending a garden throughout

*Continued on next page*





Harrisburg Cemetery

the season while realizing another goal by introducing them to the link between healthy eating and gardening, which can result in improved health.

“Gardening is the fourth most common physical activity in the country, so the idea is to go with that momentum and link it to a great way to access fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables while improving one’s physical and mental health, and helping the environment,” Veldheer said. She also noted that gardening has increased in popularity during COVID.

The study will be done online because of potential health uncertainties this spring due to COVID. There will be links to videos and online materials timed to what should be happening in the garden in real time. Also, Zoom meetings will be held with a Master Gardener presenting information on a gardening topic. Participants will have homework to do in their garden and will be able to present their questions or concerns to the Master Gardener at the end of the Zoom presentations.

In addition to the Hershey Garden project, the Dauphin County Master Gardener Program has aided the Capitol Hunger Garden in Harrisburg. This 1,000-square-foot garden first broke ground in an area between the Main Capitol Building and the Ryan Office Building in 2008 with the goals of creating a garden that would provide healthy food for those in need and serving as a valuable tool to raise awareness of hunger issues in Pennsylvania.

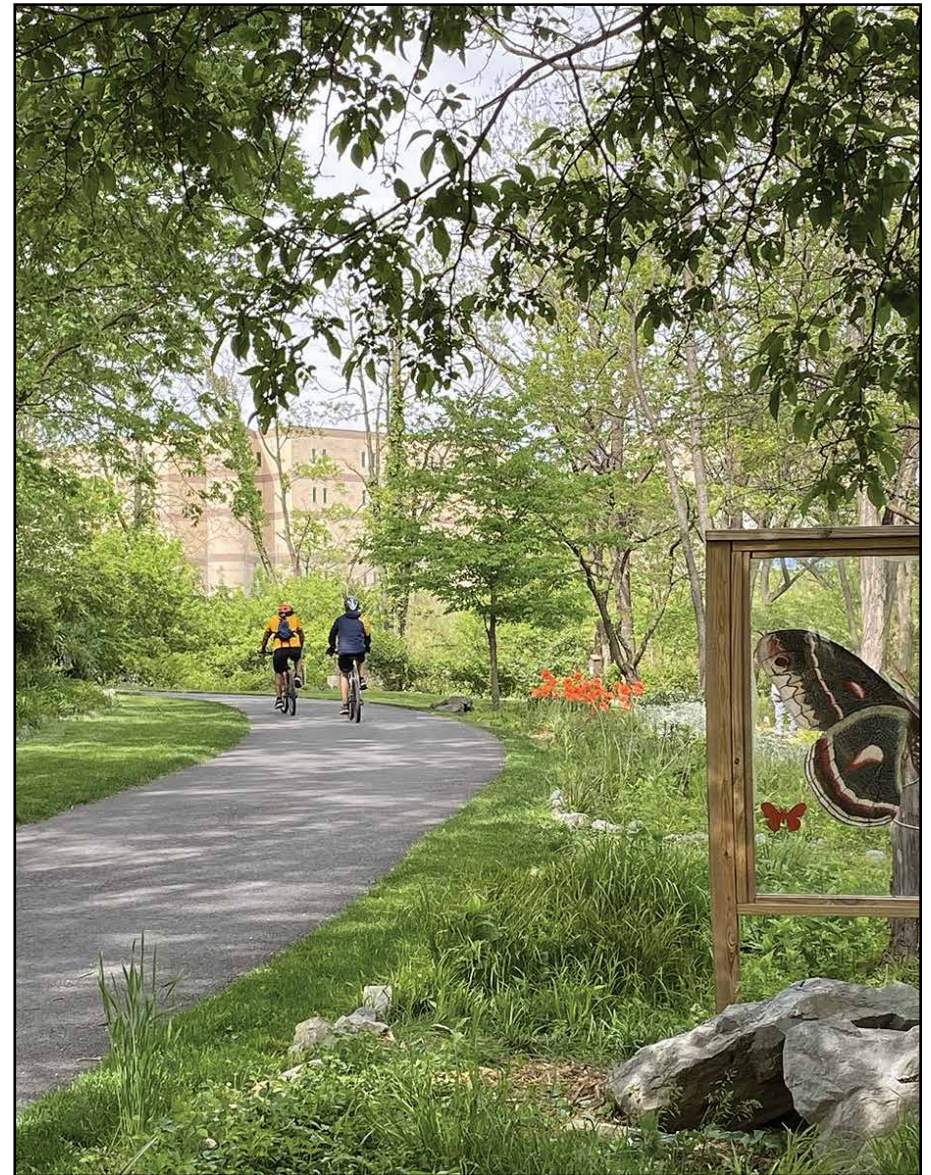
Since its inception, the garden annually

yields nearly 800 pounds of produce for local food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens. It is maintained by volunteer master gardeners – and sometimes lawmakers.

“Since 2008 the Legislative Hunger Garden has served as an ever-present reminder of the struggle many face each day just to put fresh food on the table,” Senate President Pro Tempore, Jake Corman (R-34) said. “In the midst of a global pandemic that caused all-time highs in unemployment, it is even more important to highlight the importance of working together to ensure that not one Pennsylvania resident goes without food. I am pleased Senator Vogel [Senate Deputy President Pro Tempore Elder Vogel (R-47)] has agreed to spearhead this effort for us this year.”

A fourth-generation dairy farmer, Vogel agreed that “[i]t is important that we carry on the mission of the Hunger Garden because of the fresh, nutritious foods it provides to Pennsylvanians. At the same time, the garden serves as a tangible reminder to those who walk by it to do business in the Capitol that some of our neighbors experience food insecurity every day.”

For those who already are comfortable with their gardening skills, studying to become a Master Gardener volunteer is an option. Scott recommends it as a pastime for people who love dealing with new people and enjoy learning new things. “And while we are learning, we realize just how much more we have to learn,” she said.



Five Senses Garden bike trail

The Penn State Extension Master Gardener basic training program is open to individuals interested in becoming volunteers and sharing gardening knowledge with the public through community outreach. The horticultural training is taught by Penn State Extension educators and university professors. Master Gardener trainees are required to participate in a minimum of 40 hours of classroom training, score 80 percent on the final exam, and fulfill 50 hours of volunteer service. The training class schedules are varied based on location within the state and include the following topics: botany, plant propagation, soil health and fertilizer management, composting, controlling pests safely, entomology, plant diseases, indoor plants,

vegetables, lawn care, pruning, woody ornamentals, herbaceous plants, native plants, weeds, and invasive plants.

Those interested in studying to become a Master Gardener can contact the county Extension office in their area for an updated schedule of classes and program cost. Financial aid may be available through the local Extension office. Basic training for Master Gardeners is not offered annually in every county. You can also visit the website: <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/join>.

For assistance or questions regarding a home garden, or assistance with a community project, call the extension helpline at 717-921-8803, or send an email to [dauphinmg@psu.edu](mailto:dauphinmg@psu.edu).

*Published March 30, 2021.*





# Floodplain restoration earns PA town its dream park

**By Ad Crable**

Chesapeake Bay Journal

Lori Yeich, who works at the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, remembers the day she got an anxious phone call from the public works director for Dover Township in southcentral Pennsylvania.

"We've got to move our playground, it keeps getting flooded," Chalet Harris told Yeich.

Yeich, the agency's manager of conservation and recreation — and a grants manager — was soon sitting down with Harris, sketching out dream ideas for what would become Eagle View Park: a new 49-acre park across the street from the floodprone site that would be built on a former golf course and driving range.

But it would take nearly 10 years of pitfalls, disappointments and creative thinking for local officials to get funding. The park, where work is still in progress, is large enough for hiking and many other quality-of-life uses, from stream restoration and safe walking for students to a sledding hill and warming hut.

Officials in the farming and residential community of 22,000 in York County persevered despite facing several funding strikeouts and being second-guessed by a new slate of township supervisors who asked why a commercial property had been purchased for nearly \$1.8 million with taxpayer funds. But now they are in solid support of the \$1.6 million park creation.

The local officials' dogged pursuit of funding and their success in packing so many uses into the park has led the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to highlight the project as a case study in the use of multiple strategies



PHOTO: LAND STUDIES

This drone photo shows the deeply eroding streams on a former golf course in Dover Township, Pennsylvania. Officials got grants for stream restoration as a way to achieve the larger goal of building a 49-acre multi-use park.

to secure money for recreation and conservation projects.

To cite one example, Dover officials were able to parlay an ambitious stream and floodplain restoration effort into obtaining funds for their main goal of recreation.

Here's how they did it.

## A park is born

Eagle View Park is on a former farm on the edge of Dover. Two days before the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart positioned cannons

on rises there and trained them on the town, a show of potential devastation if supplies weren't turned over to his army.

The undulating property's last use was a small nine-hole golf course and driving range. Then it closed and went up for sale.

Township officials saw it as a perfect location for the growing community's first sizable multi-use park. There were a few small parks in the township but even the largest, at 14 acres, was crammed with a senior center, library, fire company and community center.

There was nowhere residents could walk in nature. "A lot of the elements that are going into this park we don't have in any of our other park locales," Harris said. "And the township is growing. We needed a more regional-based park to cover people coming in as we grow."

So, through a bond issue, the township purchased the golf course in 2011 and hired consultants to design a park that could serve the area's many recreational

*Continued on next page*



# Chesapeake Bay Journal continued

needs. There will be a baseball field, ADA-certified paved trail and nearly 2 miles of scenic trails cut through meadows and along two restored streams.

There also will be an open-air amphitheater, splash pad and a place where teachers can hold environmental classes, then let students wade into the stream to sample water quality and look for bugs.

The park will be tied to the adjacent middle school campus via pedestrian bridges. It was designed with lighting and trails to encourage students to use the park as a safe shortcut between surrounding neighborhoods and several schools.

When the new high school was built across the road, it wiped out a hill where generations of township residents had sledded. Eagle View Park will not only have a sledding hill but a pavilion where sledders and their shivering parents can warm themselves by an open fire.

When a regional disc golf club approached the township, they were rewarded with an 18-hole, par three amateur course. Club members will help design and install the course.

Yeich praises the plan for its inclusion of uses. "The more you can connect people to a place, the more people will appreciate it and preserve it," she said.

The park's elements came together with the input of a committee that included the school district and residents.

A paved road will be built around the edge of the park to connect two major roads and encourage the commercial development of land beyond the park. And the floodplain restoration will handle stormwater needs from the area when developed.

"It's really impressive to see a project of this scale come together where there are so many benefits for the township," said Reid Garner, a water resource engineer for LandStudies, the firm that designed and partially built the stream and floodplain restoration.

Yeich lauds Dover Township officials for looking at the property holistically — not just to provide recreation but to heal it environmentally as well.

## Flood plain makeover

The single biggest element of the park project both in terms of money and earthmoving has nothing to do with recreation.



PHOTO: AD CRABLE

Reid Garner, left, of LandStudies, and Dover Township Manager Laurel Oswalt look over a stream restoration where 27,000 cubic yards of "legacy" sediment was removed to reveal the original footprint and wetlands of two streams. Borough officials creatively used the floodplain restoration to get grants to form a multi-use park from a former golf course.

It's about digging up 27,000 cubic yards of "legacy" sediment that backed up behind an old dam that powered a lumber mill and grist mill. Between 4 and 6 feet of soil were excavated to unearth the Colonial-era wetland soil that will restore the area as a working floodplain. That new ecosystem will capture and absorb floodwaters and improve water quality in two small streams that merge in the park.

Restoring almost 1 mile of waterways helps both the township and York County meet state stormwater runoff regulations and reduce erosion. It's estimated that allowing the streams to return to their original footprint will stop 150,000 pounds of sediment, along with 1,500 pounds of nitrogen and 225 pounds of phosphorus — two nutrients largely to blame for poor water quality in the region — from ending up in the Chesapeake Bay each year.

The excavation is complete, along with the planting of native trees and grasses as a streamside buffer. The riparian buffer extends from 60 to 200 feet on each side of the meandering streams to filter soil and harmful nutrients. The edges, where walkers will stroll along the streams, will be heavy with wildflowers.

Recreation enhancements to the park will begin later in 2021. The excavated soil was

used to fill in low spots where the ballfield and other features will go, saving on soil disposal fees.

Combining those kinds of recreational features and environmental benefits is being pushed hard by Yeich's agency and its parent regulatory agency, the state Department of Environmental Protection, because the state is struggling to meet goals to reduce harmful sediment and nutrients flowing into the Chesapeake Bay.

## Funding hits and misses

The township seized on the many uses of the park to try to get state funding for its project.

First, it sought an alternative transportation grant from the state Department of Transportation but was denied. Another state agency turned down a grant for the waterway improvements and greenways.

The township invested its own money for a park feasibility study and design plans even though it was uncertain if funding would follow.

The project's potential to help meet countywide goals for controlling stormwater runoff, coupled with the township's advance work to get the project

"shovel-ready," played a big part in hitting the jackpot.

In 2018, the township received a nearly \$1.5 million grant from the state's Growing Greener fund, a large pool of money set aside to restore watersheds, protect open space and preserve farms.

But the grant could be used only for restoring the floodplain, though the relocation of the sediment helped the park's recreational footprint. No matter, the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, impressed with the floodplain and stormwater runoff work, followed with a matching \$250,000 recreation, park and conservation grant.

Other grant decisions are still pending, along with a request to use a portion of York County's hotel tax because the park may host an amateur disc golf national championship in the future.

"When it's done, it's going to be phenomenal," Yeich said. "There are just certain projects that stand out, and it all stands out with a holistic vision of what the community wants to do in that landscape."

And maybe it's karma that a pair of bald eagles has turned up recently at Eagle View Park.

*Published March 23, 2021.*

## On Juneteenth, joy and grief mingle for Black Jews

By Sasha Rogelberg

JE staff

When Koach Baruch Frazier prepares their seder plate, they nestle beets next to okra, blackeyed peas, eggs boiled in hibiscus tea, hot red peppers, baked sweet potato and cornbread, all arranged in a plate set next to a kiddush cup fizzing with red soda.

Frazier puts away their Passover seder plate on the 22nd of Nisan, like many Jews, and, on June 19, instead favors another seder plate, heaped with foods tinted crimson, representing “ingenuity and resilience and bondage,” in observance of Juneteenth.

Juneteenth is the national recognition and celebration of Union Army Gen. Gordon Granger announcing the emancipation of enslaved people in Texas, the most isolated of the southern states and therefore slowest to emancipate enslaved peoples.

This declaration, which took place on June 19, 1865, came almost 2½ years after Abraham Lincoln gave the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring the end of slavery in the south. The first Juneteenth celebration took place in 1866.

Frazier wears many hats. They are a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and rabbinic intern at Kol Tzedek synagogue in West Philadelphia, and as a member of the Black Jewish Liberation Collective, have worked alongside Jews for Racial and Economic Justice for the past three years to create a Juneteenth seder for Black Jews around the country.

The Juneteenth seder Frazier organizes is similar to a Passover one: There are blessings, candle-lightings and the telling of the story of liberation from oppression.

Among the familiar rituals, Frazier incorporates new ones, such as the telling of ancestral stories, starting with the attendee with the oldest story.

“It’s not just the telling of the story of Juneteenth, but the telling of family and ancestral story, which is really powerful, particularly for a group of people who have had our stories stolen,” Frazier said.

For other Jews, Juneteenth rituals look different.

Jared Jackson, founder and executive director of Jews in All Hues, an advocacy group for Jews of color, has spent



PHOTO BY KOACH BARUCH FRAZIER

Koach Baruch Frazier's Juneteenth seder plate in 2020.

the past five Juneteenths spending time with his child, finding intentional time to go to the park, toss a Frisbee around and find joyful moments.

Ideally, Jackson said, June should be a month of “continuous celebration,” as it’s not just the month for observing Juneteenth, but also for celebrating LGBT Pride Month and Black Music Appreciation month.

The intersection of these holidays also serves as a reminder that oftentimes the intersection of holidays also provides opportunities to highlight intersections in identities.

“There’s no such thing as a Jew who’s only a Jew,” said Lewis Gordon, a professor and head of the philosophy department at the University of Connecticut, where he also holds an appointment in Jewish studies. “Jews are always Jews plus.”

To Jackson, his identity as a Black person and a Jew are inseparable: “So as long as I’ve lived as a Jew, I’ve lived as a Black person.”

In the case of Juneteenth celebrations, Frazier is able to synthesize the meaning of Juneteenth with their Jewish practice of marking time.

“The rabbis gave us such great spiritual technology,” Frazier said.

While Jews mark the passage of time weekly on Shabbat, the changing of the seasons with Sukkot and Passover, Frazier uses the rituals they have cultivated for Juneteenth as a way of denoting not only the efforts of ancestors to pursue liberation, but also in reflecting on the devastation of slavery: why it took so long for enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, to hear of their emancipation, why anti-Black racism is still so pervasive today.

Current racism is one of the reasons why Jackson's Juneteenth practices, though a time for ritual and joy, are subdued.

“There’s a thought process, you know, like if we celebrate this too hard or too soft, will it disappear? Or will there be another ‘whitelash’ or something like that?” Jackson said, referencing the portmanteau of “white” and “backlash,” coined by CNN commentator Van Jones.

Moreover, Black Americans have celebrated Juneteenth for more than 150 years.

Many white Americans (and many white Jewish Americans) are only now learning about the holiday. As Juneteenth makes its way into broader popular culture, it runs the risk of being commercialized or diluted.

In the face of this, Gordon suggested that his celebrations remain for him and his community.

“There’s no such thing as something that cannot be co-opted,” Gordon said. “It’s what the rest of us who see these historical markers, these events, these commemorations, it’s what we bring to them.”

Like many Jewish holidays, Juneteenth is the mingling of joy and grief, past and present, ancestors and those around this year’s table.

It’s an opportunity to reflect and grow, for those who observe Juneteenth and those just now educating themselves about it.

“I hope that as people either learn about Juneteenth, or they start celebrating Juneteenth, that they become more aware of just how ... we actually don’t have genuine and real liberation,” Frazier said. “And I hope that people are able to, through this holiday, to see that.”

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*Published June 17, 2021.*



# Philly hoops community mourns passing of GA legend Jim Fenerty

By Josh Verlin

To meet Jim Fenerty was to know Jim Fenerty, and to know Jim Fenerty.... well, if you didn't love Jim Fenerty, you sure as heck really liked the guy.

There wasn't a time he wasn't in the mood to talk, to share a joke, to ask how you were doing, whether it was the middle of the offseason or minutes after suffering a major defeat (though there weren't many of those). Whether you were one of his star players or a random kid wandering through his gym — or a local sports reporter looking for a story — you were fair game to get sucked into the Fenerty vortex, and came out better for it on the other side.

The affable, successful, and widely-beloved longtime Germantown Academy coach, Fenerty, 71, passed away suddenly earlier this week. The Philadelphia basketball community — this writer included — will miss him greatly.

"He always saw the best in people," his son, Jimmy Fenerty, said Thursday by phone. "No matter what happened, he was one of those people when you were doing well, you wouldn't hear from him, he was watching you and he was proud of you, but when you needed him most he would pop up for you and be right there."

More than just GA's head boys hoops coach for 30 years, Fenerty served as the school's athletics director for his final 22 years there, and as a college counselor after his coaching time had ended.

He also taught an elective history class, Civil Liberties, to a couple lucky classrooms full of students each year.

"There was a line out the door of people begging to get into it," said his youngest daughter, Erin Fenerty. "I was lucky enough to get in and I had him as a teacher — that was the best experience I could ever have imagined."

Jim Fenerty and his wife, Mary, were married for more than 32 years, raising three children and one grandchild. (Photo courtesy the Fenerty family)

Married for 32 years to his wife, Mary, Jim Fenerty was a father to three children: their oldest daughter, Jessica Peterson, is married with a husband, Jawan, and their two-year-old son, Jalen; middle child Jimmy, engaged to be married to his fiancée Emily in October, is an assistant coach at Temple; Erin, the youngest, is a nurse at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

He battled health issues throughout the years: there was the diagnosis of a rare blood cancer in 2012, which eventually led to the heart attack that forced his retirement two years ago.

On Tuesday, Jimmy Fenerty said, his dad spent the day blowing up and then playing in an outdoor pool for his



PHOTO COURTESY THE FENERTY FAMILY

From left, Jessica Peterson, Jim Fenerty, Erin Fenerty, Jimmy Fenerty, Emily Kellett, Mary Fenerty, with Jalen in front, celebrate Father's Day in 2020.

grandson, enjoyed time with his family, had a long talk with his wife, and then went to sleep. He never woke up.

"There's no better person on this Earth, I swear, and they don't make them like him anymore, he really was one of a kind," Erin Fenerty said. "He loved us more than anything, but he also loved his players, and he treated them as though they were his own, and he really felt that they were his own. And as much as he loved them, they loved him back, and that's what kept him in the game for so long.

"We are beyond heartbroken, but so unbelievably thankful for the community that we have, because of all he's done."

There will be a viewing on Monday, May 24 from 6-8 PM at Joseph A. Fluehr III Funeral Home (241 E. Butler Ave., New Britain, Pa.) and then on Tuesday, May 25 from 10-11:30 AM at St. Robert Bellarmine Church (856 Euclid Ave., Warrington, Pa., 18976), with a funeral mass at 11:30 AM and lunch to follow at Magerks in Horsham.

In lieu of flowers, the family recommends a donation in his memory be made to Coaches vs. Cancer.

Jim Fenerty was born March 24, 1950, the son of Bud and Mary Fenerty. The oldest of four siblings, he's survived by his brother Jerry and sisters Peggy and Maureen. They were raised in the Olney section of Philadelphia; Fenerty went to Cardinal Dougherty, the now-closed Catholic school in East Oak Lane. From an early age, he learned to become the person who had such an impact on so many others during his lifetime.

"From birth his parents instilled that in him and in his three siblings: there's no one better than you, no one below you, no one above you, you can take on whatever but you've still got to remember where you came from," Erin



said. "And that's exactly what he did and that's exactly how they raised him."

It wasn't just the basketball players who benefitted from Fenerty's kindness. One GA student recalled how she was once summoned to Fenerty's office during her senior year, when she was having trouble deciding on a school; one of her top choices was her eventual alma mater, Penn State.

Upon arrival at Fenerty's office, she found him seated there along with PSU's football coach James Franklin. "This guy's going to tell you why to go there," Fenerty said.

"There's a lot of coaches, and I'm guilty of this, who just focus on athletics," Jimmy Fenerty said. "He was pumped, he would call me about kids who I didn't know who they are, he'd be 'hey, so-and-so just got into Tulane,' or 'hey, this guy is a really great kid,' it was always 'great kid,' he never said anything bad about any kid. He was just so happy for everybody."

And then, oh yeah, there was the success he found as a coach.

The Patriots' hardwood boss from 1989-2019, Fenerty won 17 Inter-Academic League championships, more league titles than anyone in the history of the Inter-Ac — maybe the most successful coach in area high school history, considering those league titles were more than any coach from the Philadelphia Catholic League or Philadelphia Public League.

According to Philly hoops historian Ted Silary, Fenerty was 565-240 (.701) in his GA career, including 208-82 (.717) in the Inter-Ac. He won another 61 games at Egan, bringing his career total to 626 wins, rarified air in Philadelphia high school hoops. He also led GA to a Pennsylvania State Independent School (PAISAA) championship, in 2013.

Always humble, Fenerty loved to say that it was his players who made him a good coach, and not the other way around. "I might have to coach this year," he joked in 2015, with his team coming off three straight Inter-Ac championships but graduating two all-league seniors in Tim Guers and Sam Lindgren; the Patriots won it again the following year anyways, then split the title in 2017, Fenerty's last championship.

More than just pile up wins, he also produced collegiate players. There were more than a handful of Division I products, including Alvin Williams (Villanova), Matt Walsh (Florida), Nick Lindner (Lafayette), Cameron Ayers (Bucknell), Devon Goodman (Penn) and more; plenty others played at the D-II and D-III level.

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