

# PAConnections

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Across the commonwealth,  
Pennsylvania newspapers  
tell the stories  
that matter most.



# PAConnections tells a good-news story

*New statewide survey reveals Pennsylvanians trust local newspapers, support public notices in print, and favor Right-to-Know expansion*

Local newspapers are at the heart of communities across the commonwealth because they are trusted sources for news Pennsylvanians cannot get anywhere else.

A new statewide survey of Pennsylvania registered voters found that 85% trust local newspapers in print and online, which is higher than other news media. The survey was conducted in August by Public Opinion Strategies for the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association (PNA), the official trade organization for 300 print, digital and news media-related members statewide.

The survey also found that 87% of Pennsylvania voters believe – 49% strongly -- that local newspapers are a key part of an informed community because of their coverage of local issues including politics and public safety. In addition, 87% of those surveyed believe, 45% strongly, that local newspapers help keep people connected to their communities.

We agree.

The newspaper you are reading, PAConnections: Real News, Real Communities, was created for Pennsylvania state lawmakers and public officials to showcase the work of dozens of newsrooms statewide, including those of 10 universities. Produced by PNA during the month that celebrates National Newspaper Week, the 2022 edition highlights not only what Pennsylvanians have come to expect from local newspapers every day, but also a Pennsylvania newspaper industry whose statewide economic impact was a mighty \$1.3 billion in 2020.

These pages are chock full of local stories unique to the communities where they were reported: a neighborhood garden in Williamsport and Ukrainian refugees in Butler County, an assessment of rural broadband access in Morrisons Cove and Chesapeake Bay watershed cleanup efforts in Lancaster County.

Where else but in local print and digital newspapers – PAConnections is no exception -- do expansive investigative reports on gun violence, lack of affordable housing and the state's deteriorating bridges share space with articles profiling a "ubiquitous" Harrisburg poet, an inspiring Waynesburg University baseball pitcher, and a popular New Florence frog-jumping contest?

Pennsylvanians know the local journalism they need and want is ready for consumption 24/7. They look to local newspapers, in

print and online, as well as locally based digital news outlets, all of which are robust advocates and defenders of First Amendment freedoms. Pennsylvanians entrust journalists to stand in their shoes and ask their questions: why a road is closed, when a special election will be held, how taxpayer dollars funded new school construction.

The PNA survey conducted at the end of the summer found that Pennsylvania voters overwhelmingly support newspapers' long-held role of printing public notices to alert citizens about important local issues like zoning changes, school closures, public meetings, foreclosures, and environmental proposals that impact health and property before government takes action. The survey revealed that 92% of Pennsylvania registered voters favor – 64% strongly -- current state law requiring public notices to be published in print newspapers. In addition:

- 92% of those surveyed favor, 64% strongly, expanding the state Right-to-Know Law, which provides citizens the right of access to public records.
- 68% of the Pennsylvanians surveyed say local newspapers are an important source for news during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pennsylvanians' extraordinary levels of trust in and reliance on local journalism reflect a clear understanding that communities' newspapers and digital news sites not only report on their boroughs, townships and cities, but are also part of them.

Local newspaper publishers pay taxes and hire community residents for their newsrooms, business offices, press rooms and delivery operations. Those employees, in turn, are homeowners and apartment dwellers who patronize local businesses. They are volunteer tutors, baseball coaches, food bank helpers.

In 2020 the combined impact of charitable giving and volunteerism from the Pennsylvania newspaper industry in our commonwealth totaled \$6.4 million. This figure is over and above the industry's statewide economic impact of \$1.3 billion the same year, according to a report released last year by PNA.

Newspapers' commitment to local journalism endures, making a positive difference in the lives of Pennsylvanians from New Castle to Stroudsburg and, ultimately, in the commonwealth we all call home.



**Bradford Simpson**

President

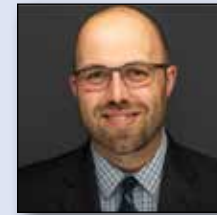
Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association



**Harry Hartman**

Chairman, Board of Directors

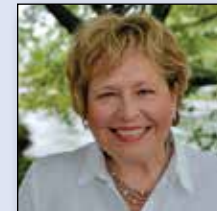
Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association



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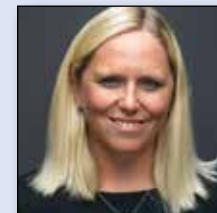
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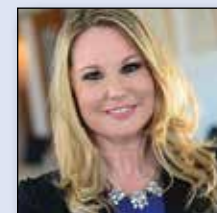
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# The articles on the following pages are provided by news media organizations in Pennsylvania.

**Altoona Mirror**

**Bedford Gazette**

**Bucks County Herald** *Doylestown*

**TheBurg** *Harrisburg*

**Butler Eagle**

**The Centre County Gazette** *State College*

**Centre Daily Times** *State College*

**The Centurion** *Bucks County  
Community College*

**Chesapeake Bay Journal** *Mayo, Md.*

**Chestnut Hill Local** *Philadelphia*

**The Citizens' Voice** *Wilkes-Barre*

**City & State Pennsylvania** *Harrisburg*

**Cranberry Eagle**

**Daily American** *Somerset*

**The Daily Collegian** *Pennsylvania State  
University*

**The Daily Courier** *Connellsville*

**The Daily Item** *Sunbury*

**The Daily News** *Huntingdon*

**The Daily Press** *St. Marys*

**Dillsburg Banner**

**Ephrata Review**

**Gettysburg Times**

**The Gettysburgian** *Gettysburg College*

**Harrisburg Magazine**

**The Herald** *Sharon*

**The Indiana Gazette**

**Juniata Sentinel** *Mifflintown*

**Kane Republican**

**Lancaster Farming** *Ephrata*

**Latrobe Bulletin**

**Lebanon Daily News**

**The Lion's Roar** *Pennsylvania State University  
Bellisario College of Communications*

**Lititz Record Express**

**LNP | LancasterOnline**

**Loquitur** *Cabrini University*

**The Meadville Tribune**

**The Montgazette** *Montgomery County  
Community College*

**The Morning Call** *Allentown*

**Morrisons Cove Herald** *Martinsburg*

**New Castle News**

**NorthcentralPA.com** *Williamsport*

**Northeast Times** *Philadelphia*

**Northwestern Press** *Allentown*

**Observer-Reporter** *Washington*

**One United Lancaster**

**Parkland Press** *Allentown*

**PennLive/The Patriot-News** *Harrisburg*

**Pennsylvania Capital-Star** *Harrisburg*

**Philadelphia Gay News**

**The Philadelphia Inquirer**

**Philadelphia Jewish Exponent**

**Philadelphia Neighborhoods** *Temple  
University*

**The Philadelphia Sunday Sun**

**Pittsburgh City Paper**

**Pittsburgh Independent**

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

**Pocono Record** *Stroudsburg*

**Print.** *Pittsburgh*

**The Progress** *Clearfield*

**PublicSource** *Pittsburgh*

**Reading Eagle**

**Republican Herald** *Pottsville*

**The Rocket** *Slippery Rock University*

**The Sentinel** *Carlisle*

**The Spartan** *York College (in collaboration  
with York Dispatch)*

**The Spectator** *PennWest Edinboro*

**The Spirit** *Glenolden*

**Standard-Speaker** *Hazleton*

**Times Leader** *Wilkes-Barre*

**Times News** *Lehighton*

**The Times-Tribune** *Scranton*

**Town and Country** *Pennsburg*

**The Tribune-Democrat** *Johnstown*

**Tribune-Review** *Greensburg*

**Williamsport Sun-Gazette**

**The Yellow Jacket** *Waynesburg University*

**York Daily Record**

**York Dispatch**

# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

## POST-GAZETTE INVESTIGATION



# HIDDEN ROT

## Pa. hides critical records of deteriorating bridges

By Sean D. Hamill  
and  
Joel Jacobs

Redds Mill Road Bridge is small, just 67 feet long, crossing picturesque Pigeon Creek as it meanders through Fallowfield in Washington County.

Though only about 350 vehicles a day use the span, the severe decay that left a gaping hole in the bridge was enough to alarm inspectors who examined the aging structure in October.

"The 2021 Interim Inspection has identified significant additional deterioration on the underside of the deck," the inspectors wrote in the "Notes" section of their report.

They urged immediate repairs because of what was found. "The placement of a steel plate was required due to severe deterioration on the underside of the deck,"

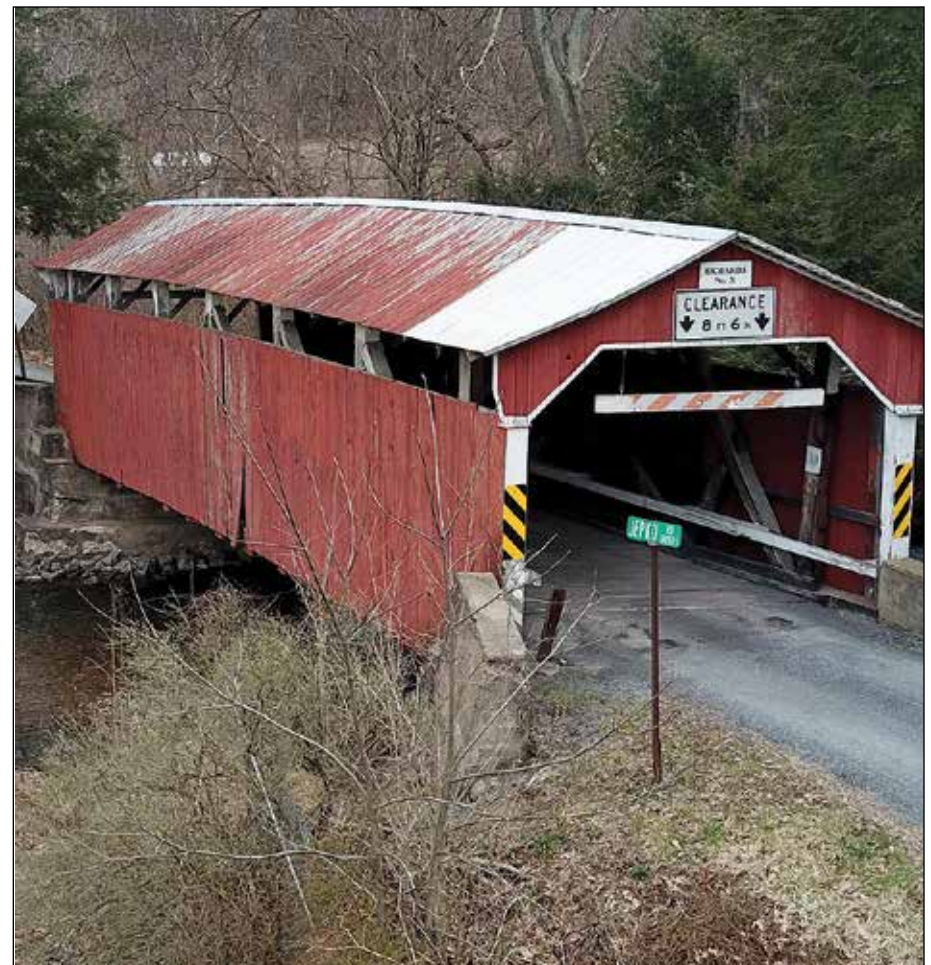
the inspector noted. "The Township subsequently installed the plate on 10/21/21."

Though those details were etched in a report "note" - critical disclosures about the bridge's condition - and sent to the state Department of Transportation, the data is not available to the people who drive across the bridge each day or to the residents of the community who have used the span for generations.

The memos for Redds Mill Road Bridge are among thousands that accompany inspections of more than 20,000 bridges - and once were posted on PennDOT's website. But they have been taken down in the wake of the collapse of Pittsburgh's Fern Hollow Bridge this year that left 10 people injured and six vehicles crushed in the wreckage.

Just before the data was removed, the

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PHOTOS: MATT FREED/THE POST-GAZETTE

Due to decay, the Richards Covered Bridge in Columbia County now has a 3-ton weight limit. Covered bridges are a huge tourist attraction in Pennsylvania and many of them are now closed to vehicular traffic. The Post-Gazette obtained a now secret database of inspection notes that show the details of nearly every bridge in the state.



Post-Gazette obtained the now secret database of inspection notes that show the details of nearly every bridge from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, including the conditions of more than 3,000 spans rated poor.

Now that such information is concealed - including the inspection reports for Fern Hollow - the disclosures offer a rare glimpse into spans that are badly in need of repair or replacement, and in some cases, not getting any help despite cautionary remarks by inspectors.

In Columbia County last year, inspectors found that a bridge was threatened with “critical deficiencies” because of deterioration. In Chester County last October, inspectors responded to a call from a member of the public warning them about “the decaying bridge” following a prior inspection that found “[s]lagging bottom of sidewalk slabs.”

“The public should have a right to see that,” Bruce Smith, chairman of the Fallowfield board of supervisors, said about the assessment of Redds Mill Road Bridge, which will soon be renovated. “I see no reason to hide details like that.”

Mr. Smith said the notes kept by inspectors about the bridge were strikingly accurate and provide a peek into the aging infrastructure of a local landmark. “The hole we repaired there, you could see straight through the [bridge] deck right down to the creek. It was bad.”

The inspectors’ notes, which the Post-Gazette is making available in an online searchable database, were once open to the public through searching on the Department of Transportation website.

But when the Post-Gazette began asking questions in early February about the origins of the notes on the One Map website, PennDOT removed the data, as well as another section that identified people involved in the inspection of each bridge.

In early March, the state confirmed it had stripped the information from the site, claiming the notes were not open to the public under state and federal law. The state has also turned down repeated requests to see full inspection reports.

The lack of disclosure raises questions about what should be available to the public – people who are most at risk in the event of infrastructure disasters – and what should be withheld because of the complexity of the reports.

For PennDOT, the reasoning for



Last May an inspector noted that there were numerous areas of deteriorated concrete along the spans of the Wildwood Road Bridge in Hampton.

PHOTO: MATT FREED/POST-GAZETTE

withholding inspection data is that the public may misinterpret the notes or would not understand them, let alone be able to digest a full report. But the agency also fears that sharing either the notes or a full report would pose potential security risks.

“You wouldn’t believe the folks that want to do harm and try to do things to hurt others, and we’re reluctant to put inspection reports out there that would show there’s a weakness in a structure, for fear that someone might do something at that location,” said Cheryl Moon-Sirianni, executive for PennDOT’s District 11, which includes Allegheny County.

Advocates say there has never been a credible threat on bridges by terrorists in Pennsylvania and that the public is capable of understanding the rudiments of inspection reports.

“They’re the people we answer to,” said Chris Young, a Columbia County commissioner and advocate for the county’s covered bridges that are a major tourist attraction. “If there’s something I should keep from the public, it’s probably something I shouldn’t be doing.”

In the case of Fern Hollow, several people warned the city about severe deterioration in the years prior to the collapse. In one incident, an engineer even tweeted out a picture of the decay, which was later acknowledged by city officials. But the major repairs were never carried out, records show.

In other bridges across the state, the writing by inspectors reveals concerns that were not generally known to the

communities, even if local officials knew a bridge was in need of repairs.

For instance, an inspector wrote last May about the state-owned Wildwood Road Bridge in Hampton: “Numerous shallow spalls [areas of deteriorating concrete] were noted throughout all spans along with reflective cracking of the beams. Continue to monitor this bridge.” Though the bridge is only 40 years old, state officials say its poor design has doomed it, and by next year it will be largely replaced.

Inspectors in 2021 at the Esther Furnace Covered Bridge in Cleveland, Columbia County, wrote that “additional decay [of the bridge’s end posts] could result in high priority or critical deficiencies and/or closure of the bridge.”

Mr. Young said he believed the full inspections - which include the notes - should be a public record. At the Post-Gazette’s request, he provided the most recent inspections for two of the county’s 23 covered bridges: Esther Furnace and Richards Covered Bridge.

He said getting the public’s interest can help, “because the public can drive funding.”

### Security concerns

It’s unclear how long the notes were publicly available on PennDOT’s website before they were taken down, but the records show that some of the observations date to 2010 - not long after PennDOT significantly upgraded what became One Map.

At one time, PennDOT had almost no

information online and turned down requests even for basic data such as ratings unless the bridges were being renovated or replaced.

The agency finally began adding ratings online in 2007 after criticism was raised about the lack of data following the collapse that year of a Minneapolis bridge that killed 13 people and injured more than 100.

“Before that happened, there was little online about bridge inspections” in Pennsylvania, said Melissa Melewsy, media law counsel for the PA NewsMedia Association. “They put this up to provide information to the public.”

Two weeks after the Minneapolis disaster the U.S. Department of Homeland Security warned that revelations about bridge reports could pave the way for terrorists to target vulnerable spans, recommending that governments restrict access to inspection reports.

Ultimately, though, federal investigators and experts concluded the collapse of the Minneapolis span had nothing to do with terrorists, but a crucial design flaw and the sheer weight on the bridge during the breakdown.

Ms. Moon-Sirianni said she recalled instances in Pennsylvania where items like backpacks that were suspicious were removed from bridge sites, but she could not name a credible threat against a bridge in the state.

Alexis Campbell, Penn-DOT’s spokeswoman, said in an email that state

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law “requires that bridge inspection reports remain confidential,” and referred to the state’s vehicle code that allows “safety studies” to remain confidential in legal and other proceedings.

However, the law she cited refers to “traffic accidents,” Ms. Melewsy pointed out, adding, “It seems a leap to apply this provision to routine bridge safety inspections.”

Moreover, Ms. Melewsy said, the state’s Right to Know Law, which covers the release of all state documents, does not require confidentiality for bridge records.

“PennDOT and the city can give you as much information as they feel is appropriate if no other law mandates otherwise,” she said. “They’re choosing not to exercise that discretion.”

Though PennDOT officials view inspection notes and reports as security issues, not all states share that view.

Of the six nearest Pennsylvania, three - New Jersey, Virginia and West Virginia - ban access to inspection reports. But Maryland, New York and Ohio allow the public to see the reports.

“We view our inspection reports as being public information,” said Tim Keller, Ohio’s state bridge engineer and the administrator of the state’s Office of Structural Engineering. “If people ask for them, we give it to them.”

Both PennDOT and Pittsburgh turned down requests to release the Fern Hollow inspection reports that were written before the span collapsed into a 90-foot-deep ravine.

But notes in the state’s secret database show that in light of the poor condition of the span, inspectors as recently as September said they wanted to ensure proper weight limits were posted.

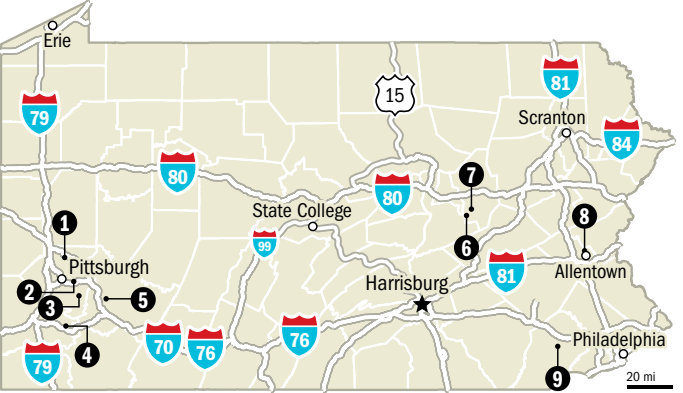
As far back as 2014, the state found enough problems with the bridge that it said inspections should be launched every year instead of every 24 months. But inspectors apparently raised no red flags about a temporary fix to a deteriorating, X-shaped steel support on the west side of the bridge. Experts now say that temporary fix appears to have led to a critical failure.

Changing the law?

State Sen. Jim Brewster, D-McKeesport, who sits on the Senate’s Transportation Committee, said he has been worried since

Locations of selected bridges rated poor

Among the more than 22,000 bridges included in the Post-Gazette’s searchable bridge database are nine bridges in the story where the “notes” from inspectors are highlighted.



BRIDGE	COUNTY	MUNICIPALITY	LENGTH
1. Wildwood Bridge	Allegheny	Hampton	392 ft.
2. Fern Hollow Bridge*	Allegheny	Pittsburgh	447 ft.
3. Versailles Avenue Bridge	Allegheny	McKeesport	284 ft.
4. Redds Mill Road Bridge	Washington	Fallowfield	67 ft.
5. Sixth Street Bridge	Westmoreland	Jeannette	36 ft.
6. Richards Covered Bridge	Northumberland/ Columbia	Raiphoo/ Cleveland	56 ft.
7. Esther Furnace Covered Bridge	Columbia	Cleveland	95 ft.
8. Route 22 over Mickley Run	Lehigh	Whitehall Twp.	100 ft.
9. Lancaster Avenue Bridge	Chester	Downingtown	175 ft.

\*Collapsed Jan. 28

Source: PennDOT

Ed Yozwick/Post-Gazette

the Fern Hollow Bridge collapse, and the emergency closure the following month of Versailles Avenue Bridge in his hometown, that “there’s not enough known about what’s going on with these bridges.”

Still, he is not sure that making inspection reports public would be the solution.

“It could very well be that someone could cause a catastrophic incident by knowing the structure of that bridge,” he said. “But I don’t know if having an inspection report would help them.”

A look at the notes from inspectors for bridges across the state show the vivid details of the deteriorating conditions of other poorly rated spans.

A series of nine separate inspection notes in the database between 2015 and 2021 for the 36-foot-long, city-owned Sixth Street Bridge over Brush Creek in Jeannette show the ongoing deterioration of two of the small bridge’s beams.

The beams deteriorated so badly that in 2020 inspectors wrote: “Beam 1 and 11 section loss advanced from previous

inspection. 1/4” steel plates had been tack welded to webs of Beams 1 and 11. Plates are insufficiently attached to transmit load. Concrete barriers placed on deck to remove live load from Beam 11.”

A state-owned bridge along Route 22 over Mickley Road in Whitehall, Lehigh County, had a litany of problems when inspectors visited in June that made it clear why it is due for renovations later this year: “There was an increase in deterioration of the approach roadways. There are several new spalls with exposed rebar in the approach slabs ... The joint is not watertight. There was an increase in section loss to Beam 12 at the near abutment with web crippling beyond the centerline of bearing.”

Notes from an inspection last year of yet another covered bridge in Columbia County - Richards Covered Bridge near Elysburg - demonstrated why the bridge has a 3-ton weight limit: “There is additional decay to the timber truss member U4L5 right truss, the interior near left low chord and the interior far right low chord. There was a slight increase in the bearing loss below

the steel plate shims below the far left low chord. The displacement of the near left low chord splice increased since the 2020 inspection.”

Mr. Young, the county commissioner and covered-bridge advocate, said he’s perplexed over why the state would not allow the public to see such descriptions.

“We have the second-most covered bridges - 23 - of any county in the state,” he noted proudly. “And they’re a huge tourist attraction for us.

“So why wouldn’t we want people to know their exact condition? I mean, if they need to be closed, we’ll close them. We have six or so that are no longer allowed to have vehicles on them anyway, but we maintain them through a nonprofit.”

He continued, “If the public doesn’t like what they see, they’ll let us know. I just don’t know why you wouldn’t want the public to know. It makes no sense.”

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PHOTO: MATT FREED/POST-GAZETTE

Columbia County Commissioner Chris Young, right, said full bridge inspections, including notes, should be available to the public. He is seen here in front of the Rupert Covered Bridge in Columbia County, along with county Commissioner David Kovach.





PHOTO: ABBY DREY ADREY@CENTREDAILY.COM

Karen McCaffrey and Michele Shawver teach math to their sixth grade class rooms at Penns Valley Intermediate school on Friday, March 4, 2022. There is a moveable wall that splits the classroom, but when one teacher was out sick and there were no substitute teachers available they opened the wall to combine the classrooms.

## ‘No manual on how to deal with this.’ Centre County rural schools struggle amid teacher shortage

By Keely Doll  
Centre Daily Times

Karen McCaffrey and Michele Shawver are sixth-grade Penns Valley Area School District math teachers who work in neighboring classrooms. Since the onset of the pandemic, they’ve opened the accordion-style doors between them to make one large room, so if one of them is sick the other can teach the class of more than 40 students on her own.

It’s one way a Centre County school district has gotten creative with staffing shortages, though McCaffrey and Shawver said they have seen all sorts of other district personnel step up when positions are open or subs aren’t available. Administrators, special education teachers,

tech coaches, math coaches and more are helping fill gaps.

“They would pull specials teachers, they would pull administrators, everybody,” McCaffrey said. “We were all filling in and we still didn’t have enough and we made the decision that specials teachers are such an important part of our school day that we would rather open up and do it ourselves than be pulling people from jobs that are just as important.”

Penns Valley Area School District is not alone. Districts throughout the country are reporting vacancies in positions across the board, attributed to pandemic burnout, early retirement, unequal compensation and falling certification numbers. And leaders of Centre County’s rural school districts say the challenges they’ve long

faced in attracting and retaining staff members have reached unsustainable levels.

“If we can’t change, if we don’t alter what we do, I don’t see how the next generation is going to make it,” Gregg Paladina, superintendent of Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District, said.

### How do rural schools compete?

Larger districts receive more funds in local property tax, meaning they can often afford to pay teachers more.

In Centre County, the largest school district in terms of tax base is the State College Area School District. When it comes to competing for hiring teachers, Penns Valley Area School District Superintendent Brian Griffith said

sometimes they simply can’t.

“Whenever there are one or two districts that are in a particular area that are significant outliers, then those districts can attract and retain employees in those jobs,” Griffith said. “So in our area, State College Area School District outpays the surrounding school districts significantly.”

First-year teachers with a bachelor’s degree in the 2022-2023 school year will earn \$51,788 in SCASD schools compared to \$46,541 in Penns Valley, according to data provided by the districts.

But State College hasn’t remained unscathed. Superintendent Bob O’Donnell has seen the number of student teachers drop significantly.

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"We've been able to fill our positions," O'Donnell said. "However, the pools of candidates have really decreased."

In October, SCASD's board of directors approved an increase to the daily rates for substitute teachers to combat a shortage. P-O's board recently increased substitute nurse pay to help stay competitive with other districts.

Rural schools have always had a harder time finding applicants, especially with new teachers, according to former Bald Eagle Area School District Superintendent Scott Graham. Rural towns have fewer amenities and housing for newcomers, as well as more responsibilities for teachers.

"Especially in smaller districts, you have more preps, you'll have maybe three or four classes that you have to teach," Graham said. "Where in a large district, you might be hired to be the Algebra 1 teacher, so you only have one preparation, whereas in our smaller district you might have three or four and so that is negative."

When Graham recruited candidates, he stressed the many benefits for rural districts, including smaller class sizes and a very tight-knit community. That's what has kept McCaffrey and Shawver at Penns Valley, where they know students and their families for years as they move through the schools.

"A kiddo comes in at kindergarten and you kind of follow them until they're in your classroom and you're like, 'Hey! I've known you since kindergarten,' " Shawver said.

## 'Dealing with things we've never had to deal with before'

This problem has only been exacerbated by teachers struggling with burnout from the pandemic. A National Education Association study shows 55% of educators intend to leave the field sooner than planned due to the pandemic.

"I think for a lot of people it's taken a toll and teaching has become very difficult especially when you're trying to teach kids at home and teach them in the classroom at the same time," said Graham, who announced his April 1 retirement due to chronic migraines made worse by pandemic stress.

Public perception and pushback toward COVID mitigation procedures have also impacted teachers, Paladina said.

"To be a teacher is still a great profession," he said. "But we're losing

## TYPE 1 EMERGENCY PERMITS ISSUED IN PA

These permits are issued to someone who will fill a vacant position and will pursue certification.

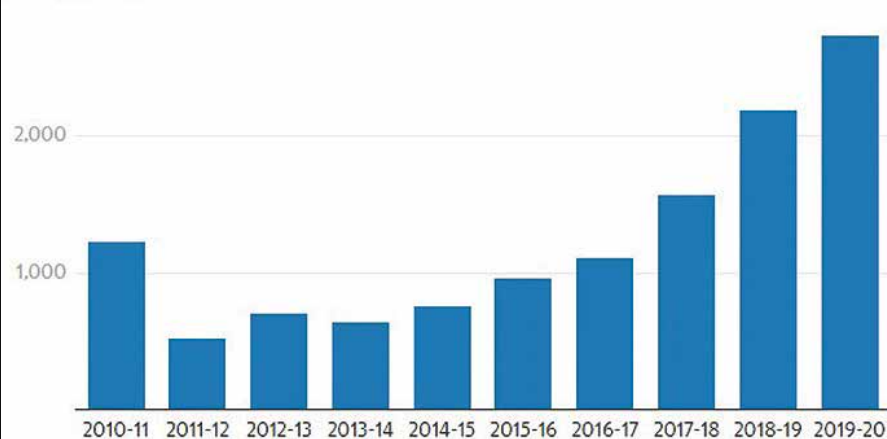


Chart: mhymowtz@centredaily.com • Source: Pa. Department of Education

people and, you know, if you turn on cable TV, the profession is under attack all the time. The public sometimes isn't supportive of it."

Educators are also noticing a spike in student behavioral problems brought on by the pandemic, adding to faculty stress.

"One of the aspects this year that we've seen more than in prior years where we've been in person every day is an increase in student behavior challenges, social-emotional issues with our students and that has created more challenges for our faculty," O'Donnell said.

Teachers are having to help kids relearn social skills they may have neglected during virtual instruction, Shawver said.

"We are dealing with things we've never had to deal with before," McCaffrey said. "I cannot tell you how difficult it was to have kids here in person, plus teach with kids on Zoom."

## Filling in the gaps

As fewer educators are coming in and more and more are retiring early or leaving the profession, remaining teachers and staff are often having to pick up the slack.

The NEA found that 74% of its members have had to fill in or take on more duties to help with staff shortages.

Bellefonte Area School District asked for faculty volunteers in January to help shovel snow when the district experienced weather delays.

According to a post on the BASD website, the grounds crew was

understaffed due to "limited-to-no applicants, nor enough substitutes."

In January, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board found that Penns Valley had violated a code with the Penns Valley Education Association for hiring a school psychologist outside the collective bargaining unit.

Penns Valley had created an administrative position that encompassed the work of a school psychologist, taking the position away from the collective bargaining unit and violating labor laws.

Griffith said the reason is that the district cannot find a school psychologist within the pay scale the bargaining unit has agreed on, creating an administrative position with more responsibilities to fill the role instead.

When positions can't be filled by other staff, districts are turning to the community instead.

Recently, P-O received six applications for an open position, Paladina said. Only one applicant showed up for an interview.

"English teachers, math teachers, science teachers, they're just not around right now. You know, we're lucky to get one or two qualified applicants for the job," he said.

Districts are compensating for the lack of certified teachers by hiring applicants without teaching degrees and having them become certified. Paladina said local people are stepping in as teachers, paraprofessionals, custodians and janitors.

When P-O needed a Spanish teacher, it

turned to a local Puerto Rican resident fluent in the language to teach. She taught students while getting her teaching certification.

"That's not ideal for anybody because she wasn't trained as a teacher, but she did very well," Paladina said. "She had the right personality and some people can flourish like that, but there are others that can't. That's not the ideal way to get a certification. That's what we're forced to do."

For some positions, like career and technical education, hiring industry professionals rather than educators can be a benefit for students.

"We have quite a number of highly educated people in our community who don't have teacher certification," O'Donnell said. "However, we believe we can help them obtain that and engage them in a professional role with us where we think they could be a wonderful fit for young people in our community."

Anyone with a four-year degree can become a teacher through an emergency certification permit, which allows someone to teach for one year while they take classes to get their certification.

In order to receive one, a district can apply for a permit when necessary "to fill a vacant position when it is unable to find a fully qualified and properly certified educator," according to the Department of Education.

In 2015, the state of Pennsylvania issued 962 emergency permits. In 2020, 2,726 were issued.

But teaching is a learned skill and comes with many challenges. Jumping in without professional training or a teaching background can be difficult on instructors and students.

"It's really tough without professional training," McCaffrey said. "We've gone through so much professional training as teachers and things that come very naturally to us may not come naturally to people who are not trained."

## Why is this happening and what will help?

Griffith, who has been Penns Valley's superintendent since 2008, traces the problem to about that time.

"I think the economic decline of the 2008 time frame reduced the number of



employment opportunities in education,” he said. “And then at the same time, over that same time frame, we have seen retirement obligations on behalf of the districts go up significantly.”

Districts now pay 35 cents to the Pennsylvania retirement system for every dollar in salary. This has decreased what districts can offer teachers in terms of salary.

“The retirement costs to school districts have kept compensation at a lower level than it’s been in a comparable industry standard,” Griffith said. “So although school districts have been increasing their budgets, most of those increases have gone to pay for benefits costs or tuition costs to charter schools.”

The cost of an education degree is also impacting how many people want to go into education. Education programs at colleges across the country have been cut due to lack of enrollment, according to Inside Higher Ed.

“They’re coming out with, you know, \$100,000 plus in debt ...” Paladina said. “It takes a while to pay that off when you’re making a teacher salary.”

Those with a passion for teaching will continue to enter the industry, Shawver

said, but those on the fence could be swayed by higher-paying careers.

In the short term, acknowledgment and gratitude for teachers go a long way in preventing burnout, McCaffrey said. Taking the time to show support for co-workers and other district personnel who may be filling in for teaching positions helps foster a positive environment.

But both local districts and the state will need to work to raise salaries to be more comparable with higher costs of living, Griffith said. Flexibility in certifications could help draw in more non-education professionals into schools.

Administrators say charter school and benefits costs have been the main reason schools have not been able to significantly raise salaries. Changes to retirement systems or charter school funding could help districts draw more people into education, Griffith said.

Rural districts and their communities are pulling together to make ends meet but say changes are needed on the state level to make meaningful impact on rural schools’ ability to raise salaries and attract teachers.

“There’s no manual on how to deal with this,” Graham said.

*Published April 4, 2022*



PHOTO: ABBY DREY ADREY@CENTREDAILY.COM

Karen McCaffrey asks some of her sixth grade students a math question at Penns Valley Intermediate school on March 4.

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# Many records for people convicted of murder, rape and more are being hidden from the public in Pa.

A misapplication of the 'Clean Slate' law is causing millions of conviction records to be sealed even though public access is protected under the state and federal constitutions.

**By Joshua Vaughn**  
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If you looked up Jacob Vannaken's criminal record, you would never know the former jail guard had been charged with felony sexual assault of an incarcerated woman in his care.

He admitted sexually touching her in Franklin County court, but struck a deal to plead guilty to the lesser charge of misdemeanor simple assault. That allowed Vannaken, 29, to avoid a felony conviction and the state's sex offender registry.

And, because of an unintended consequence of Pennsylvania's 2018 Clean Slate Law, it also has effectively closed nearly all of his court and conviction records from the public.

In fact, there are millions of other



County court clerks across Pennsylvania are locking away information about criminal convictions because of a misapplication of the state's Clean Slate Law, say experts and a sponsor of the law.

examples across the state where court and conviction records detailing what they were accused of and how the court process played out for people convicted of murder, rape, DUI and more have been hidden from public view.

That's because clerks of courts – the county elected officials in charge of processing and retaining criminal records – have pulled millions of records about convictions that happened in public courtrooms from public view based on

what advocates say is a misapplication of a provision of Pennsylvania's Clean Slate Law.

Rep. Sheryl Delozier, a Republican from Cumberland County, and prime sponsor of the Clean Slate legislation, was made aware of the unintended consequence by a PennLive reporter. She pledged to correct the way the law is being applied, or failing that, propose new legislation.

"When you're dealing with murder, and rape, and those are public cases, they shouldn't be sealed because two charges

were dropped," Delozier said. "That's certainly not the intent [of the law]."

In Vannaken's case, the sealed records included the affidavit of probable cause outlining the accusations against him, the transcript from his plea where he admitted to sexually touching the woman in 2014, the time he was admonished by Judge Jeremiah Zook and all of the records in between.

*Continued on next page*



The story of what happened is only known because reporters covered it at the time, spoke to the woman before her death and saved documents while the case was still ongoing.

The Clean Slate law was touted when it was passed by the Legislature in 2018 as providing people with a second chance by automatically sealing some misdemeanor convictions from public view 10 years after the conviction if the person was not convicted of a new crime. The law also includes a provision to seal records related to charges that are dropped, to protect people from unfounded charges following them and harming their future.

But in practice, the law is closing records for people convicted of serious crimes almost immediately, even though the provision to purge old records isn't supposed to apply to felony convictions, violent offenses or people with past felony convictions. Yet conviction records for many of those offenses are being nearly immediately hidden under the current interpretation of the law.

An estimated 70 million to 100 million people across the United States have a criminal record, which can make it difficult to find work, housing, education and a host of collateral consequences. The point of Clean Slate is to allow people a second chance to clear their record when the government makes a mistake or after they have proven they have changed their lives.

The situation with Vannaken's case illustrates how the law as currently employed can represent the worst of both worlds: it applies to someone who otherwise should have been excluded and it prevents the public from accessing documents that contain important information to understand how the government is operating.

The law does not seal the record that a person was convicted of a crime and convictions still show up on background checks. A search for Vannaken shows that he was convicted of misdemeanor simple assault.

But the law is being used to close access to records like affidavits of probable cause, transcripts, motions to suppress and other court records held by county clerks.

The misapplication of the law prevents the public from finding out what people like Vannaken were accused of doing, and the strength of the cases against them, while not addressing the collateral consequences of the conviction.



Rep. Sheryl DeLozier, right, sits next to Gov. Tom Wolf in 2018 as he signed into law Pennsylvania's automatic Clean Slate Law

An issue is a provision in the law that received little attention while it was being debated. The provision calls for all records related to charges that don't result in a conviction to be sealed within 30 days of a case being closed and restitution being paid.

But this provision is leading clerks to cut off public access to large swaths of all criminal cases because people charged with crimes routinely plead guilty to certain criminal charges and have others dropped by prosecutors. Instead of removing information that pertains to the dropped charges, clerks are closing entire case files.

"It's a big issue," Cumberland County Clerk of Courts Dennis Lebo said. "We can't determine from the affidavit what activity pertains to one charge compared to another charge."

At the advice of the solicitor for the clerk of courts, Lebo's office denies access to many case records if there is a limited access order issued. This can include affidavits of probable cause, motions and other records his office feels are too complicated to parse information about dropped charges versus charges that lead to a conviction. Anyone who wants to view those files has to petition the court to have a judge review and determine what information can be released, which can take a significant amount of time, require legal help and could ultimately be unsuccessful.

To see how many cases could be hidden from the public, PennLive reviewed more than 4,300 criminal cases filed in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas in 2016 and 2018 and found more than 3,050 that resulted in convictions. Only about 625 cases, or 20 percent of all convictions, had any documents available for public view.



Daniel "DJ" Harris

That means court records from nearly 80 percent of the cases — including four murder convictions, roughly 200 assaults, 36 rapes, 150 drug cases and more than 900 DUI convictions — were completely wiped from the public record.

The issue is not contained to Franklin County. PennLive found examples in Dauphin, Cumberland and Centre County, including crimes committed by government officials. Free press and government transparency advocates have found examples in Northumberland, Mifflin, York and other counties.

Melissa Melewsky, media law counsel for the Pennsylvania News Media Association, said she's fielded questions and concerns from reporters across the state.

In Cumberland County, PennLive attempted to access charging and court records on 10 cases — one homicide, five drug delivery resulting in deaths, three sexual assaults and one possession of a

firearm by a prohibited person. All of the cases resulted in criminal convictions. All were closed from view by the clerk of courts because of the Clean Slate law.

Also closed from view were the criminal records from the robbery of a handgun in Carlisle that was later used to kill Daniel "DJ" Harris inside the Haines Stackfield American Legion in 2016.

Dauphin County provided more access to records by releasing affidavits of probable cause with varying degrees of information blacked out, but still denied access to important case documents that would have outlined allegations of police misconduct.

For example, PennLive requested access to two separate cases filed by Susquehanna Township Police involving charges for felony possession of a firearm by a prohibited person. Both cases came about after traffic stops where officers said they smelled the odor of marijuana as a reason to search the vehicle.

Defense attorneys for both drivers filed motions to suppress but withdrew them at their suppression hearings after being offered deals to plead to possession of a handgun without a license, a move that cut two years from the minimum prison sentence.

The Dauphin County Clerk of Courts provided access to partially-redacted charging documents but denied PennLive's request for the motions to suppress, citing the difficulty of removing information about the charges that were dismissed from the rest of the paperwork.

In March, a coalition of news outlets, represented by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and Pennsylvania News Media Association, filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the York County Clerk of Courts for denying access, or providing heavily redacted records, to more than 40 cases involving criminal convictions.

"Without access, there is no accountability," Melewsky said.

The way the process works is: 30 days after a guilty plea to reduced or amended charges and sentencing, or 30 days after a person pays their restitution, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts — the state agency which oversees the Clean Slate law — issues a limited access notification that ends up at the local clerk of courts. This order is only supposed to pertain to records for charges that were

*Continued on next page*

dropped. It is not supposed to seal records pertaining to convictions.

Access to conviction records is protected by the state and federal constitutions, according to Melewsky.

However, some clerks are sealing entire case files or substantial portions of cases, rather than risk releasing records they are not supposed to release.

Between June 28, 2019 and March 15 of this year, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts issued limited-access notifications on nearly 19.4 million cases statewide based on non-convictions. This includes cases with a conviction for some but not all charges, as well as cases that were dropped or in which the defendant was found not guilty.

"This isn't just a media issue," Paula Knudsen Burke, local legal initiative attorney for Pennsylvania for the Reporters Committee, said. "Fundamentally, it's a democracy issue for all of us to ensure that the government in the judicial branch is working well and working to provide equal justice under the law."

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) does not keep data on how many notifications the office has sent to seal information for cases like Vannaken's, where charges were dropped but convictions for similar crimes occurred under plea deals.

But experts say the effect could be widespread because of how pervasive plea bargaining is.

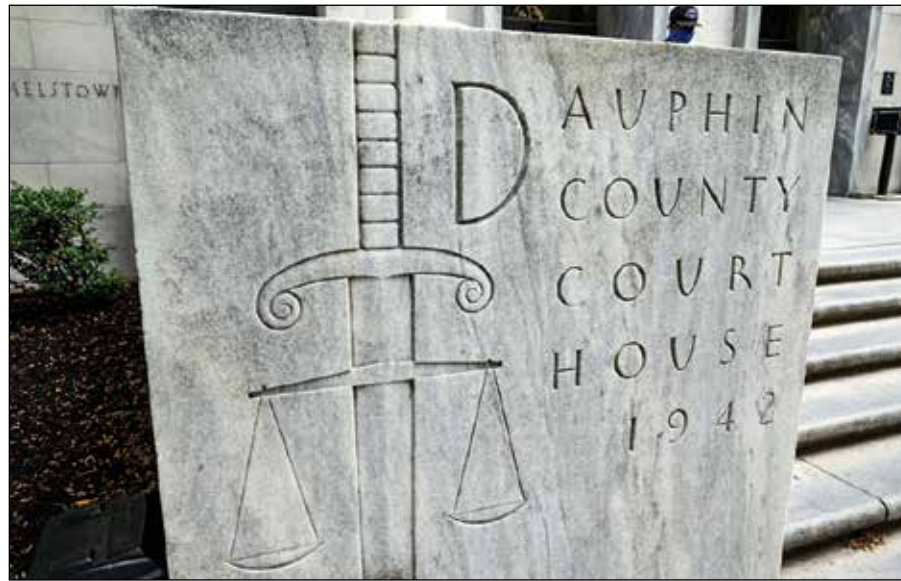


PHOTO: DAN GLEITER | DGLEITER@PENNLIVE.COM

The Dauphin County Courthouse in Harrisburg, May 23, 2022.

Roughly 97 percent of all criminal convictions are the result of plea bargain, according to Carissa Byrne Hessick, professor of law at the University of North Carolina School of Law and author of "Punishment Without Trial: Why Plea Bargaining is a Bad Deal."

These plea bargains generally involve the defendant pleading guilty in exchange for reduced charges or reduced sentencing.

"If you're going to plead guilty, you might as well get something back from the prosecutor," Hessick said.

In 2019, the latest full year of data

available, more than 110,000 convictions in Pennsylvania came from such negotiated plea deals, compared to just 4,000 trials, according to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

Under the current interpretation of the law, charging and court records from every one of those negotiated plea deals could be closed from public view if the negotiation involved dropping charges.

"This sort of charge dropping is something that unless you have a high-profile case, people are unlikely to know much about it at all," Hessick said. "So

being able to go back and look at these things systematically, it's incredibly, incredibly important."

She said that the way the Clean Slate law was operating in Pennsylvania could make understanding what prosecutors do, which is already opaque, even more difficult.

Limiting access for people outside the system to review criminal cases makes it harder for voters to make informed decisions about who they want to be prosecutor, Hessick said.

"Prosecutors have a lot of power," she said. "Sometimes that power is exercised out in the open, and it's pretty clear to people what the prosecutors are doing. But more often, people don't know what sorts of deals are being offered to people in plea bargaining."

Delozier, a sponsor of the original Clean Slate legislation, said she has reached out to AOPC to see if the issue can be solved through new guidance or direction from the office. If that is not possible, she said she would introduce legislation to amend the law to guarantee access to criminal records.

"I'm always willing to kind of take a step back and review," she said. "If there's changes that need to happen in order to be excessively clear as to what needs to be public and what needs to be considered Clean Slate, then I'm open to that."

*Published May 24, 2022*

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

**Gen Z**

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

**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>

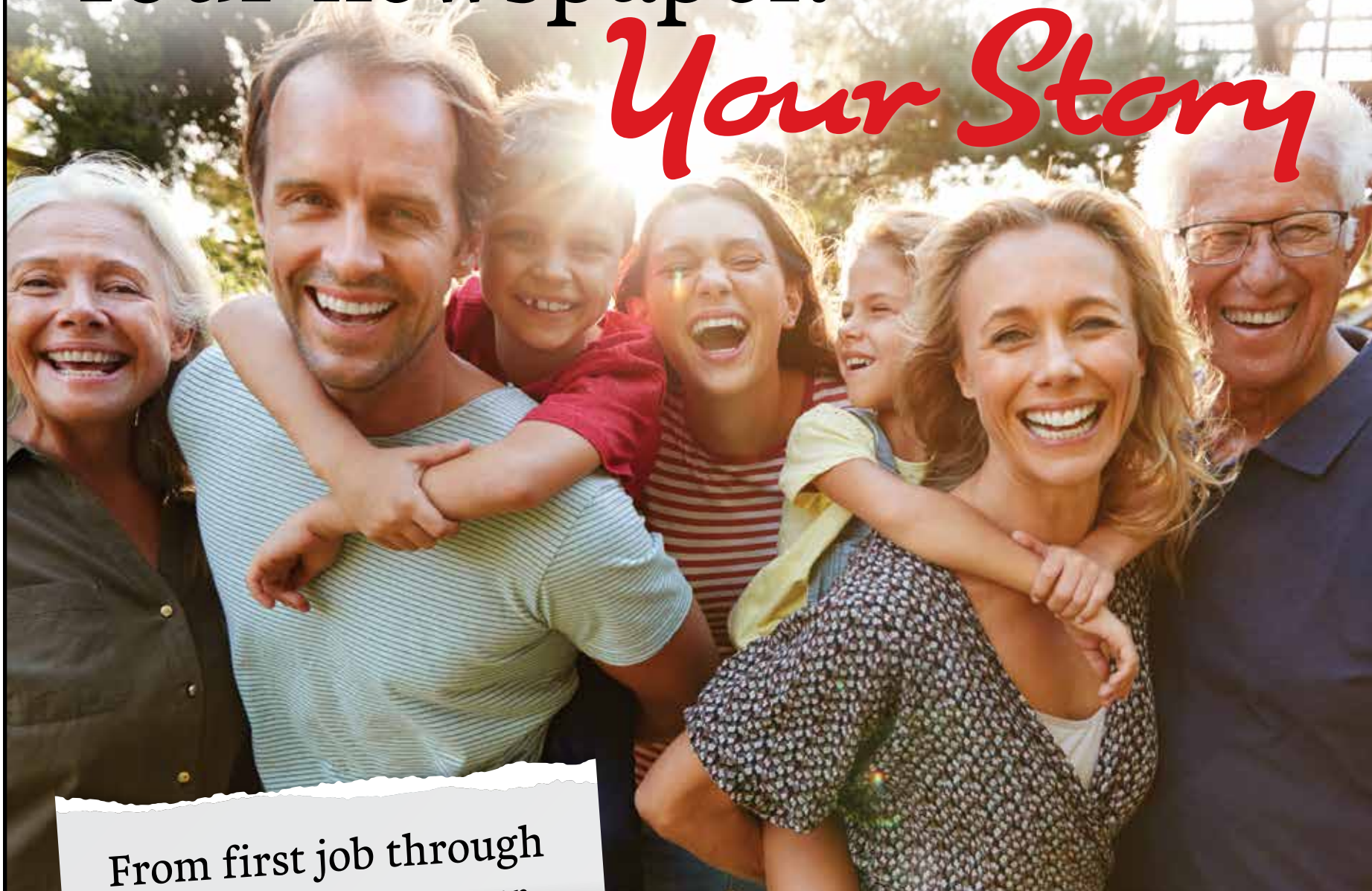


**Nearly 6 in 10 Pa. adults, age 18-24,** each week read a daily, Sunday or non-daily print or digital newspaper, or visit a newspaper website.<sup>4</sup>



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# Fighting to bring hate to justice

Though special laws exist to heighten penalties for ethnic intimidation, making a case that will stick is challenging

*Editor's note: A reference to a racial slur is included in this story to illustrate what constitutes ethnic intimidation, or a hate crime, under Pennsylvania law.*

**Carter Walker**

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When Alicia Glenn-McCowin left her Marietta home one afternoon for a regular shopping run to the Columbia Plaza Dollar General, she couldn't have predicted what would happen after she pulled into the parking lot.

Another driver, Ashley Curry, accused her of tailgating. Words were exchanged, and Curry, who is white, began yelling racial slurs at Glenn-McCowin, who is Black.

"She was screaming at the top of her lungs, '(N-word!)' like really screaming," Glenn-McCowin, who now lives in Lancaster, said in a recent interview. "I was in shock. My eyes were as big as quarters, like, 'Is she serious?'"

Curry kicked and spat on Glenn-McCowin as she yelled the slur. When another Black woman tried to intervene, Curry retrieved a .40-caliber handgun from her car and shot her.

Curry was convicted of assault and ethnic intimidation, commonly described as a hate crime, and is serving a six- to 16-year



CHRIS KNIGHT OF LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

**Alicia Glenn-McCowin is pictured in front of a Dollar General store in Lancaster County where she experienced a hate crime six years ago.**

sentence. Efforts to reach Curry or a representative for this story were unsuccessful; at trial, Curry admitted to using the slur but argued the shooting was in self-defense.

The attack, in February 2015, was one of the worst instances of racial violence in Lancaster County in recent years.

The number of hate crimes documented in the state has only grown since, driven by divisive politics and a heightened awareness of hate crimes among targeted groups. Debate over policing in the wake of the deaths of Michael Brown, an 18-year-

old who was shot in 2014 by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and George Floyd, who died in 2020 after a white officer knelt on his neck for almost 10 minutes, and a rise in the number of extremist groups organized around racist or nativist ideologies only fueled the trend.

Last year, 284 hate crimes were reported in Pennsylvania — more than 2½ times what was reported in 2020 and the highest since the Pennsylvania State Police began keeping track in the late 1990s. Sixty-four hate crimes were reported in the first quarter of 2022.

Curry's conviction for ethnic intimidation was an outlier. Very few cases result in a conviction, data from Pennsylvania courts and the state police's hate crime database shows, and most counties are not reporting their crimes to the state police, highlighting problems with how statistics on the offense are tracked.

"I just never experienced that, nobody coming at me with racial slurs and stuff like that," Glenn-McCowin said. "Everyone has a right to their opinion about stuff, but she took it to a whole other level."

## 'Fundamentally different'

The different level of severity that racial bias brings into a crime is exactly what hate crime laws were intended to address, said Kathleen Blee, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh who has been studying extremism and hate for more than 30 years.

"The idea is that a hate crime is fundamentally different than a different kind of crime," Blee said, though she cautioned she is not an attorney. "If I rob you because I know you to be or think you are Jewish, or I rob you because you're Black, then it's a different kind of crime because I'm not just injuring you by robbing you, but I'm creating a fear among all the people in that community. ... So it's like the message, the overflow of the crime is beyond the victim. It's to the victim's community."

Pennsylvania first passed its "ethnic intimidation" law in 1982, the legal term for what law enforcement and scholars generally refer to as a hate crime.

The law increased the penalty for a crime if it was determined that race, color, religion or national origin played a role in motivating the crime, according to a state

*Continued on next page*



Senate legislative wrap-up from that year. Blee said this process is referred to as “sentence enhancement.”

Securing a conviction is not without its complications.

Heather Adams, Lancaster County’s district attorney, said she couldn’t comment on specific cases but explained that to bring an ethnic intimidation charge, there needs to be an underlying offense, such as damage to property or danger to a person.

And prosecutors need someone to prosecute. Data from the state police’s Uniform Crime Reporting System shows that of the 1,074 incidents recorded by state police from 2013 to 2021, in 43% of them an offender could not be identified.

Adams’ office brought two cases of ethnic intimidation last year. The state police data lists four in Lancaster County, but in two of those, the offending person went unidentified.

Even when a person is identified and charged, convictions are rare. Data provided to LNP | LancasterOnline by the state’s judicial system shows 1,379 charges of ethnic intimidation filed between 2013 and 2021 statewide, but only 154 convictions — or less than 12%.

Adams said securing a conviction requires sufficient evidence that the underlying crime was committed with malicious intent based on race, color, religion or national origin.

“Making the case that the crime was entangled in a racially (biased) motivation is complicated,” Blee said. “Even though there is a lot of news coverage of things that (Tree of Life shooter Robert Bowers said) that is violently antisemitic, it’s still not clear that he can be charged with a hate crime because this is a really contested part of what’s going to be his court hearing, if this goes to court.”

Where things stand

Pennsylvania, and the country overall, is seeing an increase in hate crimes because of a confluence of factors, Blee said, including police and victims being more likely to allege hate crimes today than in the past, a greater public concern about hate crimes and more pressure on jurisdictions to report crimes. There’s also an increase in hateful language.

“I think anybody who is studying hate crime or extremism would agree there is a general increase, but I think people who work in this area are very nervous about pinning that down too closely,” she said. “As

HATE CRIME DATABASE NUMBERS ARE INCONSISTENT

This table displays the inconsistencies within the Uniform Crime Reporting System, which is the Pennsylvania State Police database for tracking hate crimes. The system allows users to search for a statewide total or for a breakdown by county. When searching by the statewide total, the system produces the number in the top row. When searched by county and added up, the total is different than the statewide total; both should match. Not all counties report to the state police, and reporting is not mandatory.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
State total when searching statewide	108	101	119	83	98	88	83	111	284
State total when searching by county, then adding	87	88	110	71	94	84	77	104	264
Difference	21	13	9	8	4	4	6	7	20

general expressions of hatred or ... anger towards racial groups goes up, it’s very likely that violence or acts of crimes connected to that kind of hate also goes up.”

This is the argument made by the Anti-Defamation League, which works to confront hate speech and educate others to recognize it, but also advocates for legislative change. Its “pyramid of hate” model argues that as bias-motivated language increases, so will bias-motivated violence.

“In the last few years, we see that people are more emboldened to talk about their hate,” said Andrew Goretsky, regional director for ADL Philadelphia. “I believe firmly one leads to the other.”

The Anti-Defamation League recently released a report documenting more hateful propaganda in Pennsylvania in 2021 than any other state, and another recent report from the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit that monitors hate groups, showed the state had the fifth-highest amount of active hate groups last year.

Santos Ramos, ADL assistant regional director, said the organization has been working to support a more uniform approach to hate crimes and also to include protections for LGBTQ individuals.

He said the organization favors legislation first introduced by state Rep. Dan Frankel, D-Allegheny County, in 2019 that would increase penalties and extend protections to the LGBTQ community, enhance reporting of incidents in schools and require offenders to participate in community service or educational classes.

The version of that package for the current session is being sponsored by state Senate Minority Leader Jay Costa, D-Allegheny County, and includes another provision to create a hate group database that could be used by law enforcement.

“Why (this rise in hate) is occurring, it’s always a difficult thing to exactly say why. Who knows how we’ll ever understand why someone has hate in their heart and wants to act that hate out,” Costa said. “But what we can do is do more in what I’ll call the preventative space, and that’s what the legislation is designed to do.”

Costa said he is not optimistic about the package’s chances. Nor is Ramos.

“Because of the political climate in Pennsylvania, there is just not a lot that can get pushed and passed,” Ramos said.

Gov. Tom Wolf recently said that while he has not spoken with Costa about the bills, he would “support anything we can do to reduce the number of hate crimes in Pennsylvania.”

Wolf, through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, recently made \$4.5 million in security grants available to religious institutions and nonprofit organizations thought to be likely targets of hate crimes.

Religious institutions in Pennsylvania are the targets of relatively few hate crimes, the state police data shows. Between January 2019 and January 2022, 3% of hate crimes occurred at places of worship or community centers, and 13% were motivated by a bias against a religious group.

With legislation stalled, others are turning to different methods to combat hate.

Chad Lassiter, executive director of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, developed and implemented a “No Hate in Our State” town hall series. He said the commission is preparing to launch a 67-county listening tour to hear from communities about their concerns and let them know about the commission’s resources.

“When we talk about what is being done,

HATE CRIMES REPORTED VERSUS CONVICTIONS

This table shows the number of hate crimes in Lancaster County reported to the Pennsylvania State Police compared with the number of charges filed in Lancaster County according to the Pennsylvania Court System (or the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts). The data reveals most crimes do not result in prosecution and fewer still result in conviction. Not all counties report to the state police, and reporting is not mandatory.

Year	Reported by state police	Charges filed in court
2013	6	2
2014	10	1
2015	5	2
2016	1	1
2017	4	1
2018	2	1
2019	2	0
2020	0	1
2021	4	2
Total	34	11

NOTE: DATA ON CHARGES FILED AS OF MARCH 30.  
SOURCES: PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING SYSTEM AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

as much as we talk about hate in Pennsylvania, there is also a lot of unity,” Lassiter said. “Every day there are allies and accomplices working in the state of Pennsylvania.”

Glenn-McCowin moved away from Marietta because of her experience with a hate crime. And while it took her a while, she was eventually able to forgive Curry.

“I was praying for me not to have anger toward her,” she said. “I’m a Christian, and I can’t hold no grudge. Because if I don’t forgive her, God won’t forgive me.”

This reporter’s work is funded by the Lancaster County Local Journalism Fund. For more information, or to make a contribution, please visit lanc.news/supportlocaljournalism. Published May 15, 2022

# Altoona Mirror



MIRROR PHOTO BY PATRICK WAKSMUNSKI

Law enforcement officers from various state, county and local municipalities serve as honor guard members during the entrance of the casket of slain Blair County Corrections Officer Rhonda Russell as part of her memorial service at the Blair County Convention Center.

## Hundreds salute officer in last call

### Community gathers, recalls fond memories in emotional ceremony

**Kay Stephens**

Staff Writer

kstephens@altoonamirror.com

The voice of a radio dispatcher echoed inside the Blair County Convention Center where family, colleagues and friends gathered Monday to remember county prison corrections officer Rhonda J. Russell.

"Officer Russell?" the dispatcher asked in what was described as a final radio check.

"This is a last call for Officer Rhonda Russell," the dispatcher said.

The lack of response prompted tears

near the beginning of the 90-minute memorial service to recognize the 47-year-old Russell killed on the job two weeks ago Wednesday.

Russell's last shift ended Nov. 17, 2021, when she died at UPMC Altoona where she was taken for treatment of a gunshot wound suffered at Central Court in Altoona. That's where Christopher J. Aiken, an inmate in custody, grabbed Russell's gun and threatened her during a struggle, prompting an Altoona police officer to shoot at Aikens who moved Russell's body into the line of fire, state police at Hollidaysburg reported in criminal charges against Aikens.

"We will never forget Nov. 17, 2021,"

county Senior Judge Jolene G. Kopriva told the estimated 1,100 people who attended the memorial service and who watched via live broadcasts carried by local media outlets.

"On that day and within minutes," Kopriva said, "a despicable act of pure violence erupted to end the life of a beloved mother, fiancée, daughter, sister, colleague and friend Rhonda Russell. Our souls were crushed by the weight of this evil act."

Kopriva and others speaking at the memorial service, including Russell's three sons, thanked the hundreds of law enforcement officers and honor guards who attended and participated in the service with bagpipe music, an outdoor

21-gun salute and the playing of taps.

Out-of-state honor guards included ones from California, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Vermont, Michigan and Colorado.

"What you are witnessing is the brotherhood and sisterhood of corrections," state Rep. Jim Gregory, R-Hollidaysburg, told the attendees.

Russell's sons, Justin, Richard and Aric Reader, spoke of their mother as someone with protective instincts, especially at home.

"Our mother was a true example of a mama bear," Justin Reader said. "She

*Continued on next page*



## Altoona Mirror continued

would go to the end of the earth to protect us, and it didn't matter what was in her path."

"My mother is always going to be right here," son Richard Reader said, placing his hand to his heart.

Aric Reader urged those watching the service to maintain regular contact with loved ones because "you don't know the last time you'll get to talk."

Gregory, who recalled seeing Russell at Tyrone Area High School football games when her sons played, said he spoke to Justin Reader about his mother's gravitation to a career in law enforcement. Russell worked nearly 15 years at the county prison.

"She never judged the inmates as anything other than human beings struggling through life," Gregory recalled Justin Reader telling him.

When President Judge Elizabeth Doyle spoke of Russell, she referenced an online posting by a former inmate who credited Russell for helping her turn her life around.

The judge said: "It's an extraordinary corrections officer who has those words spoken about her as well as these: 'It's pretty quiet and sober here in the prison today. The inmates are mourning her loss just like we are.'" The latter quote came from Deputy Warden James Eckard, as published in the Nov. 19 Altoona Mirror.

Warden Abbie Tate, who had been working for about a year at the prison when Russell was hired in 2007, spoke of the camaraderie the pair developed on the job. Their usual greeting, the warden said, was "Hey Sunshine" and a head nod.

That started, Tate said, after a new inmate criticized both of them for their less-than-sunny dispositions and her annoyance with them.

"Hey Sunshine," Tate said during the service as she glanced at the flag-covered casket and became a little emotional. "Don't worry. We've got it from here."

County Controller A.C. Stickel, who chairs the prison board, told those attending the service that Russell should be remembered.

"While there's nothing we can do to change what happened, I can promise you that we will work together to never forget her sacrifice," Stickel said.

U.S. Rep. John Joyce, R-13th District, described Russell as an officer "who stood guard to protect us."



MIRROR PHOTO BY PATRICK WAKSMUNSKI

**ABOVE:** Blair County Prison personnel give slain Corrections Officer Rhonda Russell final honors, four yellow roses at a time, as part of her memorial service at the Blair County Convention Center on Monday.

**BELOW:** Emergency officials blocked intersections along Plank Road Monday afternoon to allow the procession for Blair County Corrections Officer Rhonda Russell to travel through.



MIRROR PHOTO BY HANNAH POLLOCK

"The debt we owe her is one we cannot repay," Joyce said.

In addition to her sons, Russell is survived by fiancé, Donald LaGessee, a fellow corrections officer at the prison; her parents, Ronald J. and Joyce (Bryan) Russell; two brothers, Chad Russell and Brandon Russell, and the father of her sons, Richard M. Reader.

Following the service, a procession of about 70-plus vehicles exited Convention Center Drive where several flag holders

lined the intersection. From there, the procession moved quickly along Plank Road to the 17th Street entrance of I-99, heading toward Bellwood for a graveside service at Blair Memorial Park.

Along the route, many drivers parked and waited for the procession in the warmth of their vehicles on the cold, windy day with intermittent snow flurries.

David and Cathy Resch of Hollidaysburg, members of the Patriot Guard, however, embraced the weather as they stood at



MIRROR PHOTO BY HOLLY CLAYCOMB

**The procession for Blair County Corrections Officer Rhonda Russell travels down I-99.**

the corner of Orchard Avenue and Plank Road, holding American flags and saluting as the procession passed.

When asked why they came out on Monday, Cathy Resch said it was the patriotic thing to do and the weather doesn't matter.

*Mirror Staff Writer Kay Stephens is at 814-946-7456. Mirror Staff Writer Hannah Pollock contributed to this report.*

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# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## Philly's gun-violence crisis has surpassed a bleak milestone with 10,000 shot since 2015

Even in a city that has long been plagued by violence, the epidemic of gun crime has hit a level unmatched in recent memory — a pace that began last summer and has persisted since.

By Chris Palmer, Dylan Purcell  
and Anna Orso

*Editor's note: One in the Pulitzer Prize finalist series "Under Fire," about Philadelphia's recent unchecked gun violence.*

Philadelphia this past week surpassed another bleak milestone of bloodshed, as 10,000 people have now been killed or wounded in shootings in the city since 2015, the year police began routinely posting gun-violence statistics online.

The mark was eclipsed during a week in which the city's shootings crisis continued at an unrelenting pace. In the first eight days of July, 77 people were struck by gunfire, including a 63-year-old woman injured in a double shooting in Kensington, a 30-year-old man killed in a quintuple shooting in East Mount Airy, and a 16-year-old fatally shot in a North Philadelphia homicide that also left a 15-year-old wounded.

Even in a city that has for decades been plagued by violence, the epidemic of gun crime has hit a new level unmatched in recent memory — a pace that began last summer and has been unsettlingly persistent in the months since.

One example: Just past the midway point of 2021, only one day has passed without someone getting shot. But there have been 30 days in which 10 or more people have been killed or wounded by bullets — an occurrence that was a relative rarity as recently as two years ago.

The sustained surge has overwhelmingly hurt Black and brown communities and is evident by nearly any metric.



PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sircarr Johnson Sr., right, outside of his son's clothing store, *Première Bande*, on 60th Street near Walnut in West Philadelphia, on July 4, 2021. His son, Sircarr Johnson Jr., 23, was killed in a shooting at a July 4th cookout in front of his store. Salahaldin Mahmoud, 21, was shot and killed, and a 16-year-old girl was injured.

The city's midyear homicide total in 2021 — the vast majority of which were gun killings — was the highest in at least 60 years.

City leaders — including Mayor Jim Kenney, Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw, and District Attorney Larry Krasner — have each repeatedly blamed the spike on structural factors exacerbated by the pandemic, including Philadelphia's high levels of poverty, underfunded schools, and joblessness and underemployment. City health officials released data last week showing a "strong relationship" between zip codes with high levels of gun violence and chronic unemployment.

Criminologists also point out that homicides and shootings have surged across the country over the last year, a volatile time marked by COVID-19 lockdowns, an economic crisis, a national racial reckoning, and an accompanying debate over law enforcement's role in society — all as gun sales skyrocketed nationwide. In

Pennsylvania, state police reported an unprecedented volume of background checks for firearms purchases over the last year: nearly 1.5 million in total.

David Abrams, a University of Pennsylvania law professor who tracks crime statistics, said it is "really tough to disentangle" all the possible factors — especially because at the same time other types of offenses, such as robberies and assaults, decreased in many cities, including Philadelphia.

"Shootings and homicides took a different pattern from most other types of crime in mid-2020, and that to me is a big, big challenge here," he said.

Kenney said during a virtual briefing Wednesday that he hoped the city would benefit from a fuller resumption of services as the pandemic wanes. He also has high hopes for non-policing antiviolence initiatives funded in the city's

*Continued on next page*



# The Philadelphia Inquirer continued

new budget, including \$20 million in grants for community organizations, and a strategy called Group Violence Intervention, which aims to engage with potential shooters and victims by offering access to social services. He said that initiative “can interact more freely now that the pandemic is subsiding.”

David Muhammad, executive director of the nonprofit National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, said he believed the sudden shutdown of such intensive, in-person violence interruption efforts in cities last year due to COVID-19 was among the biggest factors contributing to the surge of shootings nationwide.

Still, the mayor said that even though the worst effects of the pandemic may be in the rearview mirror, the trauma and fallout “are still with us, and probably going to be with us for another five, seven, 10 years.”

## Ongoing pain

Oddess Blocker, 47, is familiar with lingering trauma.

Her son, Albert Thomas Lee Jr., 27 — known to his family and friends as Albe — was fatally shot last year in Point Breeze, caught in the crossfire of an ongoing neighborhood conflict she said he had nothing to do with.

A 2016 graduate of Kutztown University, Lee worked at Edible Arrangements for years, his mother said, and had recently joined the local electricians’ union. Despite Lee’s growing up in a neighborhood — like so many in Philadelphia — where generations-old group rivalries have led to retaliatory shootings, Blocker said her son had worked hard to choose a different path.

“He was the kid that went to college, went to work every day,” she said. “He always went left when everybody else went right.”

On July 5, 2020 — two days after a 24-year-old man was fatally shot on the 2400 block of Oakford Street — law enforcement sources believe gunmen seeking revenge went to 17th and Wharton Streets and opened fire. Lee was there and was struck several times. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Another man was struck in the back but survived.

In the year since, Blocker has sought to find ways to remain positive. But the loss of her son is still deeply painful — especially because no one has been charged with his killing.

“I just want justice for my son,” she said. “I don’t want him to be just another Black man that was murdered, because he was so much more than that.”

Even those families who have had some semblance of justice are left with overwhelming grief.

Teharra Tate, 41, lost her 17-year-old son, Tyshiem Chainey, on March 26, 2017, when he was shot several times on a residential block in Cobbs Creek. Days later, police arrested 17-year-old Ma-King Stewart, who had mutual friends with Chainey.

Police said Stewart went on a days-long robbery rampage before killing Chainey. He pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to at least 20 years behind bars.



PHOTO: JESSICA GRIFFIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Teharra Tate, mother of Tyshiem Chainey, at her home in Philadelphia on July 9. She lost her 17-year-old son to gun violence.**

But there’s little satisfaction for Tate and her five children, who find themselves missing their son and brother on holidays and birthdays, or crying together when one of them has a dream about “Shiem.” They’re reminded of him when they go by John Bartram High School, where he attended, or when they see a Five Guys burger joint, where he’d held an after-school job.

For Tate, the relentlessness of gun violence in the city has made it hard to take time to grieve for her son, killed two months before his 18th birthday. In the four years since his death, more loved ones — a nephew, a friend’s son, a neighbor — have been fatally shot.

“It’s ongoing every day,” she said. “When do you have time?”

## Unequal impact

Lee and Chainey were like so many of the city’s gun-violence victims: young Black men from neighborhoods long deprived of services and opportunity.

Nearly 94% of the 10,000 people shot since 2015 were Black or brown, according to the city’s data. Three-quarters of the victims were Black males.

And though those under 18 have generally made up a small share of the victims, the number of youths killed or wounded has risen sharply in the last two years. Through Thursday, 21 of them have been fatally shot in the city in 2021 — more than the annual total in five of the last six years.

The 10,000 incidents were the result of criminal activity — such as homicides, aggravated assaults, and robberies — and generally do not include accidents, suicides, or shootings by police.

The data do not identify victims or say where they’re from. But the locations of the shootings show just how concentrated they’ve been in pockets of Kensington, North Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia — communities that for decades have suffered from a lack of quality schools, job opportunities, and systemic disinvestment.

Erica Atwood, director of the city’s Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for Criminal Justice and Public Safety, said that gun violence is a symptom of those conditions, and that the city must address them both in the immediate and the long term. The Kenney administration has touted what it’s called \$68 million in antiviolence funding for a wide array of initiatives, including jobs programs, libraries, and violence-interruption strategies.

“Until we are willing to play the long and short game around the issue of gun violence,” Atwood said, “we’re going to continue in this cycle.”

Police, meanwhile, have continued to contend that gun violence has spiked because would-be gunmen are not being held accountable, a barely veiled critique of the city’s courts and Krasner, the reform-oriented top prosecutor.

But Krasner has defended his office’s record and said data show many of the types of cases cited routinely by police are gun-possession cases without proven links to shooting incidents.

Accountability for actual gunmen has also been consistently low because of the Police Department’s foundering clearance rate. As The Inquirer reported in 2020, police over the previous five years had charged suspects in only 21% of the city’s shootings.

City Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, whose West Philadelphia district is among the hardest hit by gun violence, said she agrees with Kenney and Atwood that diverting resources toward improving economic conditions is a necessary step in reimagining public safety. But she doesn’t believe the mayor’s administration is taking an “emergency approach” to preventing violence this summer.

Conflict mediators should be “flooding” hard-hit neighborhoods and hospital trauma centers, she said, and recreation centers should be open 24 hours a day and staffed with social support personnel. Instead, some aren’t fully staffed yet, and a third of city pools — disproportionately in poorer neighborhoods — don’t have enough employees and remain closed.

“We need people who have credibility in our community and with young people to mentor young people and to get between some of these conflicts,” said Gauthier. “That is an effective violence-interruption strategy. There are people who can bring calm to our neighborhoods in a way that, frankly, police don’t.”

*Published July 11, 2021*

# THE BURG

## ROAD RAGE

### Harrisburg begins to assess the impact of the I-83 widening project.

By M. Diane McCormick

Eggs over easy. Crispy bacon, as only Bill Katsifis, owner of the East Shore Diner, can make it. English muffin. Randy Baratucci takes the elements of his usual order and makes a bacon and egg sandwich.

"Their breakfasts are the best," said Baratucci from his booth in the cozy diner where, judging by the signage and the jukebox, time stopped somewhere between the Eisenhower years and the Un-cola age.

"Whatever you need, they take care of it," Baratucci said. "They're very personable. They have things so nice for their customers. We're like family."

People around Harrisburg are raging about the possibility of tolls, lurking ogre-like at the ends of a widened South Bridge. But a separate Capital Beltway expansion project is poised to reshape the commercial corridor driving through the heart of Harrisburg.

The East Shore Diner on Cameron Street sits squarely in the path of the plans. Since Katsifis and his late father bought this classic chrome diner in 1985, generations have trooped in for camaraderie and good food.

"You follow the American dream," said Katsifis' wife and diner co-owner, Dorothy Katsifis. "You try to own your own business. You support your family and your kids."

But the PA Department of Transportation, the couple says, can't find a property that would allow them to continue their business uninterrupted.

### The Project

PennDOT began its multi-phase expansion of the Capital Beltway several years ago. The recently widened I-83, around Union Deposit Road, is the tail end



East Shore Diner owners Bill and Dorothy Katsifis

of the first phase of the \$1 billion project to remake the east shore and river sections of the highway.

Several more phases are pending. A plan to add lanes and rework interchanges from the Susquehanna River to 29th Street right through the city of Harrisburg is in final design, with construction bidding anticipated in August 2023, according to PennDOT.

Construction of this stretch, labeled "Section 3," is expected to begin in 2024, with the first contract completed within three years. All components—utilities, right of way and construction—are expected to be done in 10 years, according to PennDOT.

In fact, Section 3 is quietly underway already with land takings. Preliminary plans propose:

- Widening I-83 from six to 10 lanes—three express lanes in each direction, plus two local lanes on each side.

- Reconstruction of the 19th and 17th street interchanges and reworking of the 2nd Street interchange

- A new interchange linking I-83 directly to Cameron Street, replacing the 13th Street interchange. Cameron Street will be widened for bicyclists and pedestrians.

- Rebuilt 13th, 17th, 19th and 29th street bridges, including bicycle lanes.

- Realignment of Paxton Street and, approaching 29th Street, I-83 itself.

Because engineering began, first, for Section 3, and then for the South Bridge, a "small portion" of Section 3 would require redesign to accommodate the South Bridge widening, said PennDOT spokesperson Dave Thompson.

Property acquisitions are "ongoing," he said.

"The department does not rely on condemnation as its first choice, but rather

as a last resort to acquire property," Thompson said in a written response to questions from TheBurg. "Therefore, the department does not forecast which properties it will condemn as a part of a project."

### Takings

Attorney Anthony Corby, of Faherty Law Firm, is constantly surprised by the extent of Harrisburg's businesses—an 80,000-square-foot warehouse here, a used car lot there.

The list of PennDOT's planned takings in Section 3 reveals a business corridor approaching the logistically strategic junction of interstates 83 and 81: auction house, child care, equipment distribution, storage warehouses, vehicle sales and service, dry cleaner, IT services and more. Another 36 residential displacements were cited in preliminary plans.

Corby represents about 13 property owners "just in that section." One has already won a ruling in Dauphin County Common Pleas Court that PennDOT's unveiling of the project, in compliance with federal law, constituted a "de facto" taking of his property—not legally acquired through eminent domain but depriving the owner of fair market value after potential buyers bailed out.

"Obviously, this shows the property wasn't unmarketable generally," said Corby. "Its marketability was affected by eminent domain." PennDOT is appealing the ruling.

At the East Shore Diner, surrounding properties are untouched or partially affected. The diner—and, more importantly, the lot it occupies—is directly in the path of construction. As real estate prices soar, finding a comparable lot, at a price that PennDOT is willing to pay while allowing business to continue and not forcing

*Continued on next page*



# TheBurg continued

Katsifis to take out a mortgage, has become a stumbling block.

PennDOT has offered Katsifis \$221,000 for the real estate value and \$123,078 for “personal property,” including \$48,000 for the portable diner.

The owners were promised “a key for a key,” said Dorothy Katsifis.

“We knew it was coming, but not like this,” she said. “We thought we were going to be taken care of and they would help us. What we have is what we want. That’s the main thing. We have a parking lot. We want a parking lot.”

Katsifis worries about losing her customer base, although the loyal patrons filling the booths on a crisp Tuesday morning swear they would follow the East Shore Diner wherever it goes. It’s the kind of place where the morning crowd has its “assigned” seats and gives grief when buddies take them, said Baratucci, of Paxtonia.

All the customers lament the uncertainty heaped on the owners and the possible loss of their “everybody knows your name” place.

“They’re just kind of hanging there,” Baratucci said of the Katsifises. “Every time you get a little news, it seems more negative. I just think it’s such a shame that PennDOT can’t work something out.”

Daily customer Richard Wright, of New Cumberland, calls the East Shore Diner “the best diner in central Pennsylvania, and I’ve eaten at every one of them.”

“I know things happen and life gives us changes, but I think they’re taking away from Bill and his family the opportunity to still earn money,” Wright said. “This man has to earn a livelihood. He’s not retirement age. If you buy him out, he should be paid potential earnings, or they should buy the business and move it like they said they would to another location.”

Eminent domain “always comes down to money,” said Corby. What’s called “just compensation,” as required by law, is often the difference between the government’s lowball estimate and the counteroffers developed by appraisers who take disruptions to livelihood and lifestyle into account for the property owners.

“Your estimated just compensation might not be adequate to get me moved into a comparable property in this market,” said Corby. “Even if it was, oftentimes, you can’t find a property that was exactly like the one you left.”



SOURCED FROM PA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.

## Proposed expansion of I-83 through Harrisburg.

As cases drag through negotiations and possibly courtrooms, business owners can be pushed into limbo. A PennDOT policy to withhold the full amount of compensation due to liens, instead of holding just the lien amount in escrow, has ensnared Lamont Palmer. He left his used-car business on Paxton Street but hasn’t received any of his \$210,000 compensation due to \$12,000 in liens, including a \$10,000 claim against a long-ago former owner.

While Palmer petitions the court to retrieve the non-encumbered remainder, he is sidelined while the market in used cars sizzles.

“I’m without a building,” Palmer said. “I’m without a business, and I’m suffering. That business was how I fed my family. Without the business and without the building, I’m stuck.”

## On the Greenbelt

The I-83 expansion is expected to touch on two Capital Greenbelt junctures, including the stretch along City Park Drive, that wild, winding lane linking Paxton Street to Derry Street from, say, Faulkner Subaru to the Paxtang Grill.

There’s a pinch point there, at a perfect storm of I-83 overpass, railroad tracks and waterway.

“It’s one of the areas where, as a user, I’m always nervous for people because you’ve got to be careful,” said Capital Area Greenbelt Association President Mike Shaull. “There’s not a whole lot of room to navigate.”

PennDOT had the foresight to reach out to CAGA, said Shaull. Now, that pinch point could be improved with sidewalk

enhancements and a walking bridge more substantial than the sturdy but aging crossway fashioned from railroad ties.

Shaull is especially excited by the prospect for a restroom and parking at the spot where I-83 meets the Greenbelt at Front Street, approaching the PennDOT building.

“Outside of private businesses opening their doors up, there are no public restroom areas on the Greenbelt,” said Shaull. “That’s something that’s often asked for. It would be really nice to see that come to fruition. We’ve got our fingers crossed.”

Harrisburg is “creeping up on lists of great places to live or retire,” and a safer, more easily accessible Greenbelt is one more asset in the city’s favor, said Shaull. As the pandemic showed, the Greenbelt is “a lifeline for people.”

“Some use it for commuting, some use it for recreation and exercise, communing with nature, or meditation from the chaos of the everyday world,” he said.

Local bicyclists see mixed blessings in the bridge plans that include shoulders for bicycles. Bicycling policy advocate Jim Buckheit said that PennDOT has been “receptive” to suggestions for bicycling infrastructure.

“It encourages and supports people using something other than a car to travel,” he said.

Buckheit and others remain concerned, however, that the capital region’s foot and pedal accommodations are behind the times and, when attempted, done in piecemeal fashion. Widening bridges only encourages motorists to drive faster,

diminishing safety for people on foot or pedaling, said Ross Willard, founder and chief mechanical officer for the nonprofit, Recycle Bicycle.

“Why do we keep segregating the south side (of Harrisburg), making the highway wider and wider?” he said. “I-83 is a great wall of cars.”

## Meanwhile . . .

Back at the East Shore Diner, longtime customer Barry Tolby says he bypasses restaurants on the way from his Newberry Township home because “you get your money’s worth.”

“There’s no other restaurant around that serves the type of sausage they have here,” he said. “It’s a foot long. I have to pig out. I get two of them. I’ll be needing some kind of transplant pretty soon.”

As for the circumstances surrounding eminent domain, “I think it sucks,” Tolby said. “I hope they don’t get screwed on the whole thing. It’s hard to find a place to actually move this diner to.”

Yes, the building can move, but a noncomparable relocation would diminish the viability of a historic property—circa 1950s, from the Jerry O’Mahony Diner Company—that houses a functioning business, said Historic Harrisburg Association Executive Director David Morrison.

Historic Harrisburg plans to place the diner on its list of preservation priorities, to be presented in January.

“Until it’s repositioned and back in business somewhere, its future is somewhat in question,” Morrison said. “It’s a wonderful, viable business, and its loss would be of equal concern to many of Historic Harrisburg’s other preservation priorities. I don’t think it would cease to be a priority until it’s at a place where it could continue to operate long-term.”

Dorothy Katsifis and her family remain hopeful but wary about the future and the possibility of finding a comparable property for their diner. Despite the protestations of loyalty from customers, she fears that a move would leave them behind.

“There is hope, if we find something,” she said. “I don’t know what we’re going to do. How do you know? We’re not going to have the same customers. How do you start again? It took 30-some years to do this.”

Learn more at I-83 Capital Beltway Project, [www.i-83beltway.com](http://www.i-83beltway.com).

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# The Times-Tribune



PHOTO: JAKE DANNA STEVENS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Regional Hospital



PHOTO: JAKE DANNA STEVENS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Moses Taylor Hospital in Scranton

## Negotiated insurance rates that hospitals charge vary

**By Terrie Morgan-Besecker**  
Staff Writer

Patients at Commonwealth Health System's four area hospitals could pay hundreds to thousands of dollars more for the same procedure depending on their insurance and which hospital they select.

Negotiated insurance rates the hospitals charge insurers for thousands of procedures reveal staggering disparities, with some insurers paying up to four times more for a procedure than their competitors.

The rates were a closely guarded secret between insurers and hospitals until January, when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) mandated hospitals publicly post their rates charged to all their accepted insurance companies.

Patient rights advocates lauded the mandate as a huge win for patients,

particularly those with deductibles and coinsurance, which is based on a percentage of the rate their insurers pay for procedures.

If an insurer negotiates a bad deal, it hits patients directly in the wallet, said Leon Wisniewski, a health care financial analyst who created a website to track all CMS data that's been reported.

"If you have the wrong insurance company, you can be in medical debt because you are paying more than someone else," Wisniewski said. "Insurers are supposed to use their mass buying power to negotiate low rates. They are not doing that."

The amount insurers pay also affects premiums, so it is essential they negotiate the best rates possible, said Zack Cooper, Ph.D, an associate professor of public health and economics at Yale University.

"The cost of health care comes out of all of our wages," Cooper said. "We've seen over time as the cost of health care has gone up, wages have gone down."

The Sunday Times analyzed data for more than 6,000 procedures at Commonwealth Health's Regional Hospital and Moses Taylor Hospital, both in Scranton, Wilkes-Barre General Hospital in Wilkes-Barre, and roughly 2,500 procedures from Tyler Memorial in Tunkhannock. The newspaper also analyzed 6,300 procedures from Wayne Memorial Hospital in Honesdale. They are the only hospitals in the region to comply with the CMS mandate.

For the Commonwealth Health hospitals, a United Health Care HMO (UHC) plan and the system's self-funded Independence Blue Cross Hospital Employees plan for its staff, pay the highest rates.

A First Priority Health HMO plan routinely

pays the lowest rate, followed by a Geisinger HMO plan.

The starkest disparity is for a tracheostomy - where a tube is inserted through a patient's throat to help breathe. At Moses Taylor, the IBC Hospital Employee plan pays \$452,342 compared to the \$96,509 First Priority Health pays. That same procedure at Regional Hospital costs the United Health Care plan \$198,353 compared to \$90,694 for the Geisinger HMO plan.

Rates paid for hundreds of other procedures also vary greatly. Charges for a hip replacement at General Hospital range from a low of \$17,017 for First Priority Health HMO patients to \$52,114 for United Health Care HMO patients.

That means a UHC patient with a \$2,000

*Continued on next page*



deductible and 20% coinsurance would pay \$12,023 out of pocket for the procedure only compared to \$5,003 for a First Priority Health patient. Patients also may owe fees for other associated services, including doctors and an anesthesiologist.

Charges for the same insurer also vary greatly among Commonwealth Health hospitals. For hernia surgery, UHC pays \$15,808 at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, \$12,620 at Regional and \$9,514 at Moses Taylor.

Wayne Memorial Hospital also charges widely disparate rates, but the differences are much less than those within Commonwealth Health's hospitals.

At Wayne Memorial, a Blue Cross plan pays the lowest rate for all procedures, while UHC and Aetna plans pay the highest rates. The largest disparity is for an automated defibrillator that regulates a patient's heartbeat. The Blue Cross rate is \$88,926, compared to \$166,737 for UHC and Aetna.

The disparities in charged rates illustrate why the CMS transparency rule is so important, said Cynthia Fisher, founder and chairwoman of PatientRightsAdvocate.org, a nonprofit organization that advocates for patients' rights.

"Hospitals and insurance companies are going to have to stop the highway robbery they are committing by keeping consumers in the dark and actually compete," Fisher said. "Price transparency is the first major step."

Commonwealth Health spokeswoman Annmarie Poslock said the rates are based on various factors including the breadth of services, number of members seeking care at the facility and each hospital's unique mix of services and payer relationships.

She, and Wayne Memorial, UHC and Independence Blue Cross officials, declined to provide specific information to explain their large disparities in rates.

Jim Brown, vice president of market and provider analytics for Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, said it's possible some of the disparities reflect differences in how the hospitals reported the data. Some may have reported a bundled fee that includes the cost of associated services with a particular procedure, while others did not.

"An example is an X-ray done as part of a joint replacement or drugs that may be

Hospital charges fluctuate widely						
Insurer/hospital	Knee replacement	Hip Replacment	Hysterectomy	Catatract removal	Spinal fusion	Cardiac valve
Highmark PPO/POS						
Wilkes-Barre General Hospital	\$24,542	\$26,190	\$12,473	NA	\$62,773	\$114,682
Moses Taylor*	\$24,020	NA	\$15,019	\$4,515	\$43,161	NA
Regional Hospital	\$29,446	\$36,737	\$22,561	\$4,953	\$42,139	\$101,497
Tyler Memorial	\$30,415	\$23,431	NA	NA	NA	NA
Geisinger HMO/PPO/POS						
Wilkes-Barre General Hospital	\$20,556	\$21,936	\$10,447	NA	\$52,577	\$96,053
Moses Taylor	\$22,054	\$24,752	\$13,790	\$4,145	\$39,628	NA
Regional Hospital	\$16,051	\$20,025	\$12,298	\$2,700	\$22,970	\$55,326
Tyler Memorial	\$28,694	\$22,104	NA	NA	NA	NA
Aetna HMO/PPO/POS						
Wilkes-Barre General Hospital	\$35,879	\$38,288	\$18,235	NA	\$91,770	\$167,657
Moses Taylor	\$27,813	\$31,216	\$17,391	\$5,227	\$49,976	NA
Regional Hospital	\$25,520	\$31,838	\$19,553	\$4,293	\$36,520	\$87,964
Tyler Memorial	\$27,776	\$21,397	NA	NA	NA	NA

SOURCE: COMMONWEALTH HEALTH SYSTEM; \*The Highmark plan at Moses Taylor is an HMO/PPO/POS

KEVIN O'NEILL / STAFF ARTIST

needed in some cases," Brown said. "The payer may have negotiated to provide all those services as a bundled rate. In other cases, they may have agreed to a piecemeal rate."

Maggie R. Koehler, a professor in the department of healthcare administration at the University of Scranton, faulted CMS for failing to better tailor the mandate to ensure all hospitals are reporting data the same way.

"I don't think it was given enough thought to make sure it's an apples-to-apples comparison," Koehler said. "Every hospital interprets that in their own way and provided the data without the necessary devil in the details."

Hospital and insurance officials also contend the CMS-mandated data does not accurately reflect what patients will owe. The exact figure is virtually impossible to determine beforehand because no one knows if the patient will require additional services, said Patty Dunsinger, chief financial officer for Wayne Memorial.

"I'm all for being transparent but it's very difficult to give a straight answer and say you are going to owe this much for that service," Dunsinger said. "Every hospital has different payment mechanics."

Dunsinger, Poslock and several insurance company officials argue patients would be better served using hospitals' or insurance

Listed below are rates for six common procedures paid to three of the region's biggest insurers. The negotiated rates Commonwealth Health charges insurance plans for medical procedures varies widely between insurers. There are also variations in charges to the same insurer, depending at which hospital the procedure is performed.

companies' online cost estimators, which includes aspects of patients' insurance, such as deductibles and copays.

Patient advocates say the cost estimators have some value, but do not reveal the price disparities between insurance carriers or within healthcare systems' hospitals like the CMS-mandated rates do.

PatientRightsAdvocate.org recently used rates posted by Lehigh Valley Health Network to help an area man reduce a bill for his blood work at Lehigh Valley Hospital - Pocono in East Stroudsburg. The group discovered the Monroe County hospital charged \$1,010 for the test, while the same test at its Hazleton hospital was \$145.

"We were able to use the charges posted to argue he was overcharged," said Linda Bent, president of the organization. "How can you justify charging \$1,010 at one location and \$145 at another?"

Still, the data is not easy for consumers to access or understand, some researchers say. The data will be most valuable for employers, who can use it learn how well their insurance carrier does in negotiating the best price, said Jeffrey Ballou, a senior director with Mathematica, a Princeton, New Jersey-based public policy research firm.

"There is a lot of variation. When you don't have this kind of transparency rule in

place, you don't see that," Ballou said. "Now you can see it."

Tom Durkin, chief financial officer for Lackawanna County, said the information will be immensely helpful to employers in shopping for the best coverage. That's particularly important for the county, which is self-insured. It hires insurance companies to administer its plan, but county funds pay for the cost of procedures.

"We certainly need to know approximately what their range of discount is," Durkin said. "If we pay United Health Care discount rate of \$400,000 as opposed to \$130,000 for First Priority Health, it's going to cost us three times more."

Employees also can use the information to pressure their employers to choose a company that has lower negotiated rates, Fisher said.

"If your insurance plan has agreed to an egregiously overcharged rate ... I'd go to my employer and say, holy heck, what kind of insurance plan do you have for us?" Fisher said. "We would not pay \$10 more for a gallon of milk than the person standing in front of us in the grocery store. You have a fiduciary duty to get us a better price."

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## If you have a medical marijuana card, you're always considered DUI in PA

By Dylan Segelbaum

Desiree Gload said she was driving on Interstate 83 southbound to clean an elderly client's home in Upperco, Maryland, when she followed a construction sign to merge into the left lane before the Shrewsbury exit on Oct. 21, 2020.

But Pennsylvania State Police Trooper Michael Graybill reported that he watched her 2002 Subaru Outback touch the fog line several times and drift back into its lane, so he turned on his lights and sirens. He said he observed Gload swerve on the shoulder before coming to a stop.

Next, Graybill said, he saw a green flake that appeared to be marijuana.

Later, Gload stated that she had a medical marijuana card and showed him weed that was in a lunchbox in her car. He asked her to perform a field sobriety test and alleged that she showed signs of impairment.

Police arrested and charged Gload with driving under the influence and related offenses. She maintains, though, that she was not impaired.

In Pennsylvania, people with any detectable amount in their system of marijuana or its metabolites — even ones that do not cause a high — are legally considered to be driving under the influence. The law does not include an exception for those who use medical cannabis.

So while approved physicians can legally recommend medical marijuana for conditions including epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and post-traumatic stress disorder, hundreds of thousands of patients face the risk of arrest, prosecution and conviction every time they drive. That's regardless of whether they're impaired.

"I don't understand how they're fine with me being on these medications, and leaving



PHOTO: PAUL KUEHNEL, YORK DAILY RECORD

Desiree Gload, 37, of Red Lion, still gets emotional when she talks about the day in 2020 when she was arrested on charges including driving under the influence. She has a medical marijuana card and maintains that she was not impaired. Gload spoke during an interview on March 14, 2022, at CBD American Shaman of York in Springettsbury Township.

me in the system, and allowing me to do these medications. But why am I getting in trouble for them in the first place?" said Gload, 37, a self-employed cleaner who lives in Red Lion, in a recent interview.

"I just feel like I'm being set up, basically, by important people," she added.

### 'I am extremely scared to even take my own medicine now'

In 2016, Gload said, a driver rear-ended her for the latest time in front of her mother's home in Chanceford Township, Pennsylvania, a community of about 6,100 in York County. She said she now has

degenerative disc disease.

At first, Gload said, she saw her family physician. Doctors referred her to a spine specialist, who ordered an MRI and determined that she had issues with two discs in her lower back.

Doctors, she said, felt that she was too young for surgery. So Gload said she started a regimen consisting of physical therapy and pain management.

She started talking prescription painkillers, anxiety medication and muscle relaxers.

Eventually, though, medical payment coverage ran out. Gload did not have health insurance.

"I basically was left to figure it out on my own," she said.

Gload bought prescription painkillers off the street but said she felt dirty and like a criminal. So she checked herself into Pyramid Healthcare Inc.'s York Inpatient Treatment Center in Hellam Township and started on methadone.

In 2018, Gload began using medical marijuana to help with conditions including opioid use disorder — she said she's trying to get off methadone. She said she also uses cannabis for post-traumatic stress disorder, extreme anxiety attacks and stomach issues.

Her son, Xavier, suffered a traumatic brain injury at 14. Gload said she decided to store all her prescriptions in a lunchbox with two zippers and a padlock in her car to keep the medication away from him.

Medical marijuana, she said, helps with everything from her breathing to sleeping. She said she was not aware before that she could receive a DUI for using cannabis.

"I know that even to this day, I am extremely scared to even take my own medicine now," Gload said. "I'm barely getting any sleep. It is affecting my life horribly."

Gload pleaded guilty on Feb. 10 to driving under the influence, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia for a sentence of 2 1/2 years' probation, with three days on house arrest, 10 days of drug testing and a \$1,000 fine.

That amount, she noted, does not include court and supervision costs.

The York County District Attorney's Office dropped a felony count of possession with intent to deliver marijuana.

Senior Deputy Prosecutor Mark Monroe

*Continued on next page*



said “the basis for that charge we do not believe would be enough with the evidence we have to prove at trial.”

During the hearing, Gload maintained that she was not impaired and stated that all the medication in her system — which also included methadone and amphetamines — were prescribed.

“Well, do you understand that it is illegal to drive in Pennsylvania with marijuana in your system, whether it is medical or not?” President Judge Maria Musti Cook asked.

“I do now, ma’am,” Gload replied.

She later unsuccessfully tried to withdraw her guilty plea.

Her brother, Nicholas, also uses medical marijuana to help stop seizures and blackouts that he experienced after suffering a head injury at a jobsite in 2016.

He said he was able to get his driver’s license back.

“I wasn’t safe driving for them years until I started on medical marijuana,” said Nicholas Gload, 40, of Dallastown, who is unemployed but does auto body repair work on the side. “To find out I can get a DUI after getting healthy enough to have it — that scares me.”

## Pennsylvania is in the minority with its zero tolerance DUI law

As of 2021, Pennsylvania is one of 12 states that have zero-tolerance laws for marijuana and driving, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, a bipartisan, nongovernmental organization with offices in Denver and Washington, D.C.

Five states set specific limits at and above which people are considered to be impaired.

Meanwhile, Colorado allows law enforcement to reasonably infer that drivers are impaired if they have 5 ng/ml of THC, the principal and most active ingredient in marijuana, or more in their system. But people can argue at trial that they were not impaired.

The presence of these compounds, though, does not consistently indicate recent use or impairment, said Paul Armentano, deputy director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, or NORML, a public interest advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.

People who regularly use marijuana, he noted, also develop a higher tolerance to its effects.



PHOTO: PAUL KUEHNEL, YORK DAILY RECORD

**Nicholas Gload talks about how medical marijuana ended his seizures as a result of a head injury and allowed him to drive again in an interview on March 14, 2022, at CBD American Shaman of York in Springettsbury Township.**

“Look, at the end of the day, everybody wants safe roads, OK?” Armentano said. “The key here is having the ideal tools to be able to differentiate between individuals who are legitimately impaired to the point where they are unsafe drivers, versus individuals who are not impaired.”

Police officers, he said, have access to training programs to help them identify people who are under the influence of substances other than alcohol.

Armentano also pointed to technologies such as DRUID, an app that allows people to evaluate their physical and cognitive impairment. The acronym stands for Driving Under the Influence of Drugs.

In Pennsylvania, there are 406,454 active patients registered in the Medical Marijuana Program, said Mark O’Neill, press secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Health, in an email.

Meredith Buettner, executive director of the Pennsylvania Cannabis Coalition, a trade organization of medical marijuana permit holders in the state, said she believes that it’s critical for people to not be worried about getting a DUI for taking their medicine.

“We certainly don’t advocate that anyone should drive impaired. That is not something we support,” Buettner said. “But we do understand — which I think the law does not contemplate — that having cannabinoids and THC metabolites in your system does not necessarily equal impairment.”

Right now, there is a push to change the law in Pennsylvania.

## ‘It’s akin to someone taking a sip of beer ... and being charged with a DUI’

State Rep. Chris Rabb, D-Philadelphia, is one of those hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians who have legal exposure for taking their medicine.

“There’s no time, realistically, that I don’t have detectable cannabis in my system,” Rabb said. “It’s akin to someone taking a sip of beer, three weeks ago, and having the technology to detect that someone had done so — and being charged with a DUI.”

“Because the technology will confirm that someone has alcohol in their system,” he added. “But it does not determine impairment.”

On April 24, 2016, Rabb witnessed a man get shot and killed in front of him in Philadelphia. The two were having a conversation moments before the murder.

Rabb was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. He said he later started using medical marijuana tinctures to help with chronic sleeplessness.

The cannabis, he said, does not cause impairment or get him high.

The Defender Association of Philadelphia, he believes, brought the issue to his attention before he became a medical cannabis patient. Rabb said he never thought about how he could get a DUI because he does not drink.

“I drive 104 miles from Philadelphia to Harrisburg. So I always had a great amount of trepidation just being a Black driver,” Rabb said. “Now, it’s significantly higher.”

Now, Rabb is a prime co-sponsor of HB 900, which would remove the zero-tolerance provision in the DUI law for medical marijuana patients.

Meanwhile, state Sen. Camera Bartolotta, R-Beaver, Greene and Washington counties, is the prime sponsor of SB 167, which would require law enforcement to have proof of actual impairment for DUI when it comes to medical marijuana patients.

The Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association supports the legislation.

Bartolotta said her proposal would not allow people to drive while they’re impaired. The legislation, she said, would protect those who are not under the influence from facing a criminal charge that will follow them and harm their work, family and reputation.

“No one should be made a criminal because they’re taking something that alleviates anxiety or depression or PTSD or Parkinson’s,” she said.

On Sept. 21, 2021, the Senate Transportation Committee held a hearing on her bill, which featured testimony from those ranging from a medical marijuana patient who was initially prosecuted for DUI as well as law enforcement.

Patrick Nightingale, a defense attorney and executive director of Pittsburgh NORML, testified that he believed the zero-tolerance provision in the DUI law was the “most critical issue” facing medical cannabis patients in Pennsylvania.

Toward the end, Bartolotta asked representatives from the Pennsylvania State Police whether people who have medical marijuana cards should be arrested, charged and prosecuted for DUI if they are not impaired.

“No,” replied Cpl. John Witkowski, supervisor of the Driving Under the Influence and Drug Recognition Expert programs, “if they are not impaired.”

## Pa. Superior Court: The Medical Marijuana Act does not create an affirmative defense to DUI

In an 18-page opinion dated on April 5, the Pennsylvania Superior Court reversed a decision from a Jefferson County judge who ruled that the Medical Marijuana Act creates an affirmative defense for patients charged with driving under the influence.

An affirmative defense is one in which a person admits to committing an act but tries to justify or excuse his or her actions. Prosecutors then have the burden of disproving the defense.

The three-judge panel described the area of the law as “fluid and evolving.” The opinion is not precedential.

The ruling references proposed legislation that would change the DUI law: HB 900 and SB 167.

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# READING EAGLE

## Signs of trouble

### Berks poll workers point to lack of training, communication

By Karen Shuey  
Reading Eagle

The primary election did not go smoothly in Berks County.

The introduction of electronic poll books, which were getting widespread use at all of the county's 202 precincts for the first time, had some hitches that forced the county to switch back to paper poll books shortly after voting began.

The technical difficulties and lapses in communications made the day difficult for those working the polls.

There was confusion about how to get the electronic poll books to work properly and some of the devices were missing voter signatures. And, some poll workers say, there was a lack of clear guidance from county officials on how to handle the problems.

Some poll workers say they weren't even notified when a county judge ordered polling locations to remain open for an extra hour.

It was, very clearly, a problematic day. What's less clear is what caused it all.

County officials have announced they will be investigating the situation, trying to pinpoint the failures that led to the election day problems and figure out how to make sure they don't happen again.

In the meantime, the Reading Eagle spoke to a handful of those poll workers to hear about what it was like to be on the front lines of a difficult and frustrating election day.

#### Early signs of trouble

Lynda Jarsocrak said the election day problems started early. In some ways, the judge of elections at the Olive Leaf Union Chapel precinct in Spring Township said



PHOTO: BILL UHRICH — READING EAGLE

Berks County officials are trying to pinpoint the failures that led to the election day problems and figure out how to make sure they don't happen again.

they began long before the day even began.

Jarsocrak said she feels training for the new poll books could have been more effective.

When she received the letter informing her of the training sessions, she said she was told the county wanted to give priority to the majority and minority inspectors. So, she didn't go to that class.

That left her a bit in the dark when it came time to set up the electronic poll books, a process she and her fellow poll workers needed help with.

Jarsocrak said there were differences in the instructions the inspectors at her poll received during their training sessions and instructions provided when she picked up election equipment on the Saturday before the election.

"There were two different sets of instructions so there was a lot of confusion," she said.

Jim Robbins, a majority inspector at the Rockland Township municipal building precinct, said he also encountered issues with the instructions for the electronic poll books. He claimed instructions provided during training had an error.

"Thanks to a couple of our very intelligent volunteers we were able to figure out the instruction booklet had a major error," he said.

Another judge of elections who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said she, too, found the electronic poll book instructions lacking.

"There were some errors in the training material on how to connect everything," she said.

The judge of elections said she thinks the county needs to do more to make sure training information is correct and to provide pictures in the instructions that show what the workers are seeing on the screens.

The county has defended its training and instructional materials.

Stephanie Weaver, public relations officer for the county, said the county sent a letter to poll workers informing them that training on the electronic poll books was required for all judges of elections, majority inspectors and minority inspectors. The inspectors are the poll workers responsible for signing voters into a precinct to vote.

However, she said the training was also open to those who serve as the clerk and machine inspectors.

The county held 15 training sessions in late April and early May at two locations, and even scheduled a session for the Saturday before the election to meet some last-minute requests, Weaver said.

The training was two hours and led by a county elections worker and a representative from Election Systems & Software, from which the county bought 440 electronic poll books last year for \$1.1 million.

Weaver said she could not comment on how many poll workers took part in the training sessions because it may be part of the county's investigation.

As for the instruction packets, Weaver said there were two changes made to the instructions for the electronic poll books that were handed out when judges of elections picked up their materials on the Saturday before the election.

Those changes were that the precinct number had to be entered when the machine was turned on, and poll workers had to select the voter's party from a drop-down menu when signing them in.

"As far as anything with the setup, that was all the same," she said. "It was reviewed in class and they were given

*Continued on next page*



packets that had all the information.”

Weaver added that the issue that led to moving to paper poll books was not related to training at all.

**Struggling to get information**

The big election day disruption happened shortly after polls opened at 7 a.m.

The county quickly realized that there was a technical programming issue with the electronic poll books. While the county hasn’t commented on the nature of the problem, poll workers have said the books at several precincts didn’t contain the signature on record for voters.

That led the county to decide to switch over to backup paper poll books. Because the paper books weren’t at the precincts, county workers had to rush them to all 202 voting locations across the county.

Poll workers said there was a lack of communication about the problems with the electronic books and the countywide switch to the paper versions.

Robbins said his precinct continued to use the electronic books even after the paper books arrived. He said the person who dropped them off told him that they only needed to switch if there was an emergency.

The electronic poll books were not showing voter’s recorded signatures, but otherwise seemed to be functioning well, Robbins said. So poll workers kept using them.

Robbins said he and the other poll workers at his precinct tried unsuccessfully to reach the county elections office several times that day.

“We could not get a hold of anyone,” he said. “The line was busy all day. We called and called and called.”

Robbins said the elections office was finally reached about 3:30 p.m. It was only then that the poll workers got the instruction to stop using the electronic poll books.

“We had questions about several things and they never got back to us and their excuse was that they were so busy,” Robbins said. “But I said to them that if I didn’t call you right now we wouldn’t have known to turn off the electronic poll books.”

One judge of elections, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said her precinct also didn’t get the message to stop using the electronic poll books. And because they were working perfectly fine, the

precinct stuck with them despite having the paper versions delivered.

“They just dropped off the paper poll books and that was it,” she said. “They didn’t say anything or tell us that we needed to shut down the electronic poll books.”

It was only when a roving election worker arrived around 2:15 p.m. to deliver the workers their pay for the day and noticed they were still using the machines.

Poll workers also said the county didn’t adequately communicate the decision to extend voting.

About 4 p.m., Berks County Judge James L. Lillis issued an order — at the request of the county Republican and Democratic committees — to keep polls open for an extra hour because of the issues with the electronic poll books.

One judge of elections said she never received a call from the county about staying open later. Instead she learned about it through social media.

She said she didn’t understand why the county didn’t use the county-issued cellphones that are distributed to each precinct to share messages about the poll books and the extended voting.

“As soon as they had any problems that they thought were widespread they should have pushed a message out to the judge of elections,” she said. “We were all given cellphones, but they never rang or received a text message.”

Weaver confirmed that every precinct was given a cellphone so the county could communicate with poll workers.

When asked why the county did not send out an automated message informing workers of the problem with the electronic poll books and directions on what to do when the paper poll books were delivered, she said she was unable to comment on that at this time and that will likely be part of the investigation.

“I cannot comment on what communications may have gone out from the office,” Weaver said.

Several poll workers reported other minor issues with the electronic poll books — mostly involving having trouble getting them to print the small receipts they are supposed to produce — but in general said they liked them. They said they weren’t so much frustrated by the machine, but with a lack of support from the county.

Jarsocrak said she began calling the

elections office around 6:30 a.m. but couldn’t get through. It wasn’t until a roving election worker came by around 8 a.m. and gave her a different number to try that she finally reached someone.

Multiple judges of elections said there were also communication issues when it came to provisional ballots. As part of the court order to extend voting, poll workers were supposed to have voters who showed up between 8 and 9 p.m. fill out provisional ballots.

Because that could mean that some precincts might run short on provisional ballots, county workers were sent out to deliver extras to each precinct.

One judge of elections said she was closing the trunk of her car after closing her precinct when someone arrived with extra provisional ballots. It was well after 9 p.m., she said.

“The county should have reached out to the precincts to see who might need more instead of deploying people to each of the 202 precincts,” she said. “This is just another example of the lack of communication.”

**County officials promise answers**

The county commissioners said this week that they have heard similar stories from those who worked the polls on election day. And they vowed to get to the bottom of the issues by launching an investigation to examine what went wrong.

Commissioners Chairman Christian Leinbach said they hope that through the investigation they will find out what happened, why it happened and what needs to be improved so those issues never happen again.

Leinbach said he believes it’s imperative they not predetermine what the issues are.

“We have some ideas, but we need to let the process go forward and look at everything leading up to and including election day so that going forward whatever went wrong, whether it’s a training issue, a procedure problem or testing issue,” he said. “All those things need to be looked at.”

But, Leinbach stressed, this is not about assigning blame.

“This investigation is about correcting process-related issues and we need to know everything,” he said.

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt agreed, noting he thinks of this as not an

investigation but as a process improvement plan.

“The term investigation means that we’re going to figure out who was at fault and do something about that person,” he said. “We’ve got to let everyone open up and be honest. We’ve got to create an environment where we’re learning to improve the process and not one where we are pointing fingers.”

Barnhardt said county solicitor Christine Sadler is gathering information from the commissioners and election workers about what the issues were and compiling that for the review.

The investigation will then be turned over to outside counsel. Barnhardt said the county has already approached attorney Matthew Connell of the MacMain Law Group in West Chester about conducting the review.

There is no timeline on when the investigation might be complete.

“We really need to buckle down and make sure we get everything right as humanly as possible moving forward,” Barnhardt said. “We are going to learn a lot from this. We are going to hear from judges of elections, from voters, from election workers.”

He said the poll workers have a lot to offer in respect to the rollout of the devices.

“I think a lot of it really stems back to training, training, training,” he said. “We need poll workers to get to the point where they feel they know this system as well as they know their home computer.”

Leinbach said historically the training has relied on showing people what to do. He believes that moving forward learning by doing is something the county has to seriously consider.

Leinbach and Barnhardt said the board is serious about addressing the issues and facing the criticism.

“I think that when you look at the broad issue of election integrity, a critical part of that is the ability of the voter to look back at the process and say they are confident in the results,” Leinbach said. “And when there are process issues, which is what happened this time, that impacts the perspective of election integrity. We are aware of that.

“We need to make sure that voters can confidently trust the process. And that’s what our objective is.”

*Published June 3, 2022*

## AMERICA'S GUN CULTURE

### Nation wrestles with individual rights vs. safety measures in cultural, legislative tug-of-war

By Eric Scicchitano  
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There are more civilian firearms in the United States than there are civilians, more licensed gun dealers than grocery stores and McDonald's franchises combined, and more deaths by firearms than by traffic accidents.

Guns are an indelible part of the entirety of American culture, an aspect venerated or vilified depending on who's engaged in the conversation.

Gary Bayne, of Allegheny County, owns dozens of firearms – from handguns to long guns, including AR-15-style rifles. He's a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, medically retired law enforcement and a certified instructor in firearms training and gun safety.

Bayne says he supports legislation intended to reduce gun violence: safe storage requirements, universal background checks, extreme risk protection orders.

"Half the people who own firearms should probably not," Bayne said. "It blows my mind that there's no standards or guidelines for someone to be trained on something that could take a human life in a matter of seconds."

Heidi Otiker, 40, of Kokomo, Indiana, bought a pistol when she became a mother. She says that protecting her children and herself was the priority reason for the purchase.

She carries routinely, and she stresses gun safety as an owner – so much so that she thinks training should be a prerequisite when purchasing a gun.

"I should have the right to protect myself," Otiker said. "Guns don't kill



PHOTO: JOHN RUCOSKY/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Richard Pletcher, owner of Fairfield Avenue Notary Sales and Service, places a gun on a rack on June 29, 2022, inside his store in Johnstown's West End.

people. People kill people. You can't just categorize every gun owner in this country to be a killer."

There were an estimated 393 million civilian-owned guns in the U.S. compared to 326 million citizens in 2017, according to an oft-cited global study by the Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey. That was before the pandemic supercharged a record rush on guns and ammo in 2020 and 2021.

The average gun owner owns five firearms, according to the 2021 National Firearms Survey. A Pew Research Center survey found that seven in 10 gun owners own handguns, the most popular firearm. That's followed by rifles and shotguns.

Ownership is constitutionally backed by the Second Amendment, observed by ardent supporters as an essential tool to protect life and home – and guard against



### This series

In a national project, reporters with CNHI explore guns in America in light of recent mass shootings and efforts by some in federal and state governments to impose tighter restriction on weapons ownership and possession.

Lead reporters were Eric Scicchitano, CNHI's state government reporter for Pennsylvania, and Dave Sutor, political reporter with The Tribune-Democrat in Johnstown.

Also contributing were CNHI reporters in Massachusetts, New York, Indiana, Georgia, Oklahoma and Texas – and also at The (Sunbury) Daily Item, Meadville Tribune, Sharon Herald and New Castle News in Pennsylvania.

government tyranny without having to fire a single shot.

Val Finnell is the Pennsylvania director of Gun Owners of America. He said gun owners are too often pegged as only having concern for their firearms, nothing

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else. The Second Amendment provides a right to the protection of life and property, he said, a right bestowed by God and anterior to government dictates.

"There's certainly a greater interest in going back to the root of what the Second Amendment actually means," Finnell said. "I think the evolution (of gun culture) has been more to return to what the original understanding was of our right to keep and bear arms."

## Sociologists point to culture shift in 2000s

But gun violence increasingly plagues American life.

Daily shootings in cities and rural towns. Suicides committed out of public sight, keeping them out of the public's mind. Devastating instances of mass public shootings such as the May incidents, with 10 Black people murdered while shopping in a grocery store in Buffalo, N.Y., and 19 children and two teachers massacred inside an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

More people died in 2020 of gun-related injuries in the U.S. than in any other year on record, according to a Pew Research Center report citing the most recently available data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

That same year, 22.8 million guns were sold in the U.S., the highest total available per industry estimates, a Forbes report found.

Guns are used in more than half of suicides and in four of every five homicides in the U.S., CDC data show.

The rate of gun homicides jumped 35% from 2019 to 2020, increasing the most among young to middle-aged Black males. Suicide rates were about flat in that same time frame, with middle-aged to older white males most at risk.

There seems no good measure of the political gap separating advocates for gun rights and those for gun violence prevention.

The historic tradition of individualism in the U.S. may give some understanding to how the nation reached this point, suggested Grant Reeher, director of the Campbell Public Affairs Institute at Syracuse University.

"We are fundamentally more individually oriented than people in other nations," Reeher said. "In our thinking, we start with individuals; we don't start with



PHOTO: JOHN RUCOSKY/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Kiersten Allen, 16, of Somerset, prepares to fire her .22 caliber rifle at a target 50 yards downrange on June 28, 2022, at the Jerome Sportsmen's Club.

communities and we don't start with collectives. and it's reflected in a lot of things. We have a Bill of Rights that is baked into our Constitution."

"Those are individual rights – the rights of individuals against the government."

David Yamane, sociology professor at Wake Forest University, shifted his research focus from religion to guns in 2011. He's a gun owner and defines himself as a liberal. He's led studies tracking shifts within America's gun culture.

Hunting and recreation had once been the main factor for gun ownership. In the 2000s, self-defense took precedence.

Yamane calls the shift Gun Culture 2.0.

"Self-defense was always part of the reason people owned guns – it just wasn't the center of the culture," Yamane said.

Yamane likened civil unrest around police brutality and racism in recent years to social movements in the 1960s. Concerns about crime grew beginning in the middle 20th century. It's grown in the decades since, manifesting as the dominant theme of 21st-century gun ownership.

The latest Gallup polling showed 88% of respondents most often cited self-defense as the reason they own a firearm, followed by target shooting and hunting. In 2000, 65% of respondents to Gallup cited self-defense, slotted between target shooting and hunting.

"I think we oftentimes live in two different worlds," Yamane said. "We have a world of gun owners for whom guns are

very normal and most of the outcomes they see with guns are positive. People outside of gun culture largely see negative outcomes with guns. It's easy for those two sides to misunderstand each other."

In the Texas Legislature following the Uvalde shooting, there were calls for reform but also for protection of gun rights.

The older sister of victim Jacklyn "Jackie" Cazares urged lawmakers to honor her sister and other victims and pass restrictive gun legislation.

"I'm here begging for you guys to do something; to change something because the people that were supposed to keep her safe at school, they failed," said 17-year-old Jazmin Cazares.

Immediately afterward, Suzanna Hupp, a gun rights advocate and former Texas legislator, testified that a former law barring concealed carry caused her to leave her firearm in her car parked outside a restaurant in Killeen, Texas, when a mass shooting occurred in 1991. Twenty-three people were killed, including both of her parents, and Hupp urged the lawmakers to consider the potential consequences of gun control.

"I was mad as hell at the time, at my legislators, because they felt they had legislated me and other people in that restaurant out of the right to be able to protect ourselves and our families," Hupp said. "Let's be clear that the gun is just a tool. It's a tool that can be used to kill a family, but it's a tool that can be used to protect a family."

Jennifer Carlson, a sociologist and associate professor at the University of Arizona, cites Yamane's work in her own studies into gun culture.

Carlson said the 1960s were the last time a majority of Americans supported a ban on handguns, the primary weapon for committing crimes and also for self-defense. It dipped below 50% that decade and never recovered, she said.

"I think that right there is the datapoint that told us the story of the shift," Carlson said.

## More back violence against political foes

Data on gun sales back up recent trends of surges in election years. When President Barack Obama was elected, Carlson said there was a sense that Democrats would pursue heavy regulations on guns. That sense remained when presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton sought office in The White House. But Donald Trump won instead, sending gun manufacturing downward the following year. Carlson called it the "Trump slump."

There came a point between 2010 and 2020 when rhetoric around guns became more vitriolic, Carlson said. Political partisanship became more evident among conservatives and liberals.

Carlson referred to an academic study from 2019, titled "Lethal Mass Partisanship" by Nathan Kalmoe, of Louisiana State University, and Lilliana Mason, of the University of Maryland. In it, two surveys were conducted with questions centered around moral disengagement, taking pleasure in a political opponent's misfortune and violence.

The questions range from whether only one particular party wants to improve the country to whether one wished an opponent would get sick and die to whether violence is justified to achieve particular political goals. The study concluded that between 40% and 60% embraced partisan moral disengagement, but just 5% to 15% embraced partisan schadenfreude or endorsed partisan violence.

"Even so, their views represent a level of extreme hostility among millions of American partisans today that has not been documented in modern American politics," the study's authors wrote.

*Continued on next page*

## Fears of gun bans drive up sales in US

Wade Cummings is general manager of Georgia Gun Club, a gun shop and range in Buford, Georgia. Semiautomatic weapons are the most popular type of firearm sold at his store and anywhere else, Cummings said, especially when the 1994 federal “assault weapons” ban expired in 2004.

The pandemic year of 2020 saw gun and ammo sales skyrocket in the U.S. Georgia and Tennessee each had more than 900,000 background checks for first-time gun owners that year; Alabama, more than 1 million.

Inventory was low as domestic manufacturing dipped from a peak of 11.5 million new guns made in 2016. The industry couldn’t meet demand even as manufacturing in 2020 nearly matched the previous high.

“We never saw anything like we saw in 2020, though. It was insane,” Cummings said. “People are coming back and buying the gun that they wanted a year and a half ago, so those numbers, it’s a lot higher than 2021.”

Byron Gentry, 37, owns Infinity Solutions in Portage, Indiana, one of the largest firearms training facilities in Northern Indiana. Gentry is an NRA-certified weapons instructor. The first gun he bought, at age 18, was an AR-15-style rifle. The self-described Second Amendment absolutist preaches safe weapons handling.

“The largest portion of people that I’m noticing that are buying guns are people that are scared they’re going to get banned,” Gentry said, referring to semiautomatic rifles. “I taught a class and probably about 20% of that class had bought an AR-15 either during the Obama scare or during the last couple of months or when we had a lot of the rioting (following the police-involved murder of George Floyd in Minnesota), and they bought it because they were scared, but they were mostly scared that it was going to get banned.”

## Advocate: ‘Gun laws absolutely save lives’

The codification of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act seemed a monumental moment when in late June, Congress adopted the measure and President Joe Biden signed it into law – monumental not so much for the bill’s scope and potential



PHOTO: JOHN RUCOSKY/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Jim Cardamon of Hermitage, Mercer County, sets up his rifle to practice at a local firing range. At 87, Cardamon said he’s been using a rifle since he was 15 for hunting. He said gun owners such as himself are obeying the gun laws, versus “the bad guys” who don’t.

impact but for the fact that it was passed at all.

The bill amends current law to clarify who needs a federal license to sell firearms and enhances background check for those under 21 when purchasing a gun to include juvenile mental health records. It also aims to close the “boyfriend loophole” to prevent a domestic abuser from working around prohibited weapon possession laws.

Total aid carried in the bill is estimated at \$13 billion, largely for mental health and school supports such as crisis intervention, remote consultations through community behavioral health clinics, school mental health counseling and training.

Prior to this bill, it’d been about 30 years since a significant regulation on weapons possession was enacted, the federal ban on “assault weapons” that expired in 2004.

“God willing, it’s going to save a lot of lives,” Biden said after signing the bill.

Gun violence prevention advocates seek greater layers of regulation and accountability for the trade and possession of firearms, such as red flag laws for temporary repossession when credible threats of harm are made, universal background checks and heightened age limits.

There’s also a push for bans on “assault weapons,” a reference to certain semiautomatics such as AR-15-style rifles.

AR-15s are mass-produced and appealing for adaptability and performance, featuring

an array of add-ons that are functional or cosmetic. They’re light and powerful.

They’re the style of rifles used in the Buffalo and Uvalde killings; in the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, that killed 17 in 2018; in the country music festival shooting in Las Vegas that killed 58 in 2017; at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, where 12 were killed in 2012.

It’s important to note that rifles aren’t the most common weapon used in mass shootings.

Semiautomatic handguns were used in 77% of mass shootings studied by The Violence Project, supported by the National Institute of Justice.

That same study found that 77% of weapons used in mass shootings were purchased legally, 13% illegally and 19% of the weapons used were stolen.

Massachusetts boasts some of the toughest laws in the nation regulating firearms. The Bay State first implemented a ban on assault weapons in 1998, when a similar federal law was already in place. In 2004, Republican Gov. Mitt Romney signed a permanent ban into law before the federal policy elapsed. It has survived several legal challenges.

In 2014, lawmakers gave police chiefs the right to go to court to deny firearms ID cards to buy rifles or shotguns to people whom they feel are unsuitable. A red flag law was instituted allowing firearms to be confiscated from gun owners undergoing mental health crises.

Gun control advocates say the strict requirements have given the largely urban state one of the lowest gun death rates in the nation, while not infringing on people’s right to bear arms.

“Gun laws absolutely save lives,” said John Rosenthal, a gun owner and co-founder of Stop Handgun Violence. “Here in Massachusetts, we regulate guns like cars, both of which are inherently dangerous consumer products.”

## NY law scrapped by Supreme Court

New York, too, has some of the strictest state gun control measures in the nation. Further restrictions were added following the Buffalo shooting. The 18-year-old charged in that case had acquired a semi-automatic rifle despite being investigated for alleged threats made against a school he had attended one year earlier. The new age limit for such purchases is 21.

The state’s red flag law for emergency firearms confiscation was strengthened to allow health care providers to ask judges to temporarily remove guns from people deemed to be at risk to themselves or others. Previously, extreme risk protection orders had to be initiated by police, schools or relatives.

Another New York law, however, was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in June. The state’s restriction on concealed carry permits to those with specific demonstrated need was undone by the high court, effectively strengthening an individual’s right to carry in public.

Tom King was introduced to guns when he began using a BB gun and an air rifle as an 11-year-old member of the Boy Scouts. That was 64 years ago, and today he is president of the New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, as well as a board member of the National Rifle Association.

King urged the NRA’s backing of the lawsuit that culminated with the Supreme Court’s 6-3 decision in the concealed-carry case. The advocates who want to impose additional restrictions on law-abiding gun owners are fighting a losing battle, he argued.

“Once you get outside of the cities, you’re never going to get rid of the gun culture,” King said.

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# Tribune-Review

## HIDDEN DANGER

Registered sex offenders often go undetected in care homes, sometimes at an unspeakable cost

By **Deb Erdley**  
and  
**Natasha Lindstrom**

It was just a few days past Christmas 2020 when a 57-year-old woman with advanced dementia and a penchant for wandering the hallways stumbled into Richard Marlin Walter's room at Brighton Rehabilitation and Wellness Center.

Frail, confused and robbed of her ability to speak, she couldn't scream for help when Walter pulled her close and began to sexually assault her, records show.

A nurse making her afternoon rounds saw what was happening and grabbed the patient from Walter, who initially claimed the woman "wanted him to do that" but later confessed to a psychiatrist and was charged with sexual and indecent assault by Brighton Township police, according to a criminal complaint.

For Walter, who died at the state prison in Greene County on Nov. 7, it was not a first. At 63, his checkered criminal past spanned nearly four decades.

In 1985, he was charged with sexually assaulting and threatening to kill a 43-year-old patient while working as an aide at a state hospital for the mentally disabled in Union County, landing him for life on Pennsylvania's Megan's Law registry of sexual offenders, records show.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Later, there were other arrests, including one for stalking a woman in Snyder County, relentlessly following her to and from her workplace, police records in multiple counties show.

When age and illness took its toll, Walter was moved from a halfway house to the Beaver County nursing home, where he lived for three months among patients unaware of his record — a veil of secrecy that continued even after his arrest.

A Tribune-Review investigation showed that in the fall of 2021 Walter was one of seven registered sex offenders ranging in age from 36 to 87 living at Brighton and one of 68 living in nursing, personal care and assisted-living homes in Western Pennsylvania, often unbeknownst to patients, their families and even staff.

Across the nation, many of these offenders have found new victims among the ailing, vulnerable residents of these facilities, a trend experts fear will escalate as more of the roughly 900,000 offenders on U.S. sex registries grow older and require increased medical care.

"You're putting felons into nursing homes and memory care units — the most vulnerable populations," said Wes Bledsoe, a nationally recognized elder care advocate. "There's the church lady, your former kindergarten teacher (and) your veteran that are being physically and sexually assaulted by these offenders, and no one cares."

The Tribune-Review investigation found:

- There are no state laws requiring notification of patients, their families or staff when a convicted sex offender moves to a care facility, a gap that experts contend exposes anyone living or working in the facilities to untold dangers.
- Pennsylvania lags far behind other states, such as California, Illinois, Louisiana, North Dakota, Minnesota and Oklahoma, that have taken the lead in revising laws regarding notification about sex offenders moving to care facilities.
- Keeping tabs on how many of sex offenders are living in these facilities statewide does not appear to be a priority. Officials from the state Department of Health, overseeing Pennsylvania's 688 nursing homes; the Department of Human Services, regulating 1,200 personal care and assisted-living facilities; and the Department of Corrections, supervising the parole of inmates from prisons to halfway houses and other facilities, said they have no idea how many sex offenders are living in these facilities or the locations of the homes where they are residing because no one tracks it.
- In the same vein, no one can offer specifics about how many assaults by sex offenders occur in the facilities because there is no statewide or national monitoring, but

*Continued on next page*

## Tribune-Review continued

news accounts point to cases occurring throughout the nation.

- Some of the facilities accepting the largest number of sex offenders also have the worst health and safety records with the government agencies overseeing them, state and federal records show.

- As part of a pattern playing out across the nation, sexual assaults in these facilities are sometimes not reported, and when they are, information often is not released to the public, experts say. When contacted by the Tribune-Review, even Beaver County District Attorney David Lozier said he had no knowledge of the assault at Brighton Rehabilitation, despite Walter being prosecuted by his staff. He later acknowledged his office was handling the case but would not comment.

- A review of cases across the country shows that families sometimes are the last to know when an assault occurs. Not even the victim's son — her legal guardian — was told the details of the assault on his mother at Brighton or about Walter's arrest, a violation of state law, according to legal experts. He learned that information only after being contacted by a Tribune-Review reporter.

### A heartbroken son

At just 26, Nicholas Cipriano has spent the last nine years watching frontotemporal dementia take all that was precious from his mother.

"She had a good job and a was a good mother" before spiraling into the haze of the disease in her 40s, he said.

She had a master's degree and dedicated her life to working with mentally disabled children while raising Cipriano and his sister, her son said.

Then her behavior changed.

Patients with this type of dementia — the most common for those under 60 — display indifference and inappropriate behavior as the nerve cells in their brains lose the ability to function.

Today, she no longer speaks, and her thoughts and actions are muddled, Cipriano said.

In late 2015, with his mother's finances depleted and the family no longer able to manage her care, there were few options. Cipriano, who holds his mother's power of attorney, said Brighton was one of the few facilities that would accept her.

His primary concerns were about the type of medical care his mother would receive and ensuring her safety as the dementia took control of her thoughts and actions. Checking the Megan's Law registry to determine whether sex offenders lived there never crossed his mind.

And he didn't think much of the vague call he received one day telling him "there was some touching" involving his mother that "had been handled." There were no details, no mention that police were called or that Richard Marlin Walter was arrested.

At first glance, Cipriano said the call was much like others he received from time to time informing him that his mother had fallen or bruised herself in minor incidents at the nursing home, calls that are mandated by state law.



PHOTO: DEB ERDLEY | TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Jodi Gill visits her father, Glenn, a resident of the dementia unit at Brighton Rehab, as often as she can.

After being told the details of the assault by a Tribune-Review reporter, a stunned and shaken Cipriano responded, "I don't know what to make of this."

The Tribune-Review does not identify the victims of sexual assault cases. In this case, the victim has a different last name than her son.

Brighton Rehabilitation administrator David Ferraro declined requests to be interviewed for this story.

### The discovery

It was during a routine review of state reports about health and safety in the state's nursing homes that Tribune-Review reporters noticed citations for Brighton's failure to protect patients from Walter.

Digging further, reporters found reports indicating Brighton had been fined \$186,375 by federal regulators who cited the state's findings regarding Walter.

Revelations about offenders living at Brighton, the regulators' findings and the fine took many with close ties to the facility by surprise.

Even members of the nursing staff, many claiming they were warned by company officials to not speak to the media during the pandemic, said they had no idea Walter and other sex offenders were living at Brighton.

A review of state inspection records showed a parole officer informed Brighton management about Walter's past, but that the information never made it to Walter's clinical record, leaving those treating him in the dark.

### Information about sex offenders in local facilities

To learn if a registered sex offender is living in a longterm care facility in your area, go to the state Megan's Law website. In most cases, you will have to search by the name of the municipality or county and have the address for the facility to complete this search.

One employee, speaking on the condition that her name not be used, said she is angry about not being given this information, an omission she believes left her and her patients at risk.

"I never heard anything about (Walter's record). I know that none of us did," the longtime aide said.

She also was not aware that a half-dozen other residents — four men and two women — at the 589-bed facility had records for crimes ranging from gross sexual misconduct to indecent assault on a minor, facts revealed by a review of their individual case files on the state's Megan's Law registry.

### Patients' families angry

"To me, it's so disgusting," said Jodi Gill, an Ambridge attorney whose father, Glenn Gill, 83, has advanced dementia and has lived at Brighton since September 2019. "I think everybody who was involved should lose their license."

Gill said she was appalled to learn not only that a sexual assault occurred, but also that the victim's son was never given the details.

"You can't protect everyone. However, they (Brighton Rehab's leaders) lie, intentionally misrepresent and refuse to accept responsibility for any of their faults — to the detriment and safety of all residents, and even the workers," said Gill, one of more than 20 patients' family members suing Brighton over the its handling of one of the most deadly outbreaks of covid-19 when 83 patients and staff died and more than 500 were sickened in 2020.

There are no state laws requiring facilities to admit sex offenders, but all are required by law to keep residents and staff safe from abuse, including sexual and physical assaults, according to a review of state statutes.

When a sexually violent predator is admitted to a nursing home, "typically police provide a facility representative (usually an administrator) with a flyer, and the facility would need to post that within the home in a public place," said state health department spokesman Mark O'Neill.

But experts say this is a recommendation, not a law.

O'Neill said the burden of learning this information falls to the patients and their families.

"It is not an expectation that every resident is individually notified as the information regarding the offender is publicly available on the website," O'Neill said.

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But ailing patients seldom have the ability to check websites prior to their admission, and many family members look at ratings and reviews but never think to match the address of the home with the addresses listed on the Megan's Law database.

Even Pittsburgh attorney Bob Daley, who handles neglect and elder abuse cases, said it's only been in recent years that sex offenders being housed in care facilities appeared on his radar.

"I've been doing this for 25 years, and only in the last five or six years that I've even heard about it," Daley said. "I checked my elderly father into a personal care home and didn't even think to check Megan's List."

The same goes for state Rep. Rob Matzie, who has been a caregiver for elderly parents.

Matzie, whose district includes Brighton, was stunned to learn the facility where his late father once lived houses sex offenders.

"If you take on somebody like that, you've got to appropriately care for him or her and you have to make the accommodation to deal with that person so that they're don't pose a danger to others — or just don't take them," Pittsburgh elder law attorney Peter Giglione said.

"If that means you have to keep them in one specific wing and you have three aides watching them constantly, then you do it. (Nursing home management's) comeback is always, 'Well, we can't watch them one-on-one.' Well then, you just don't take them. It's that simple."

Jennifer Storm, a victims' rights activist and former Pennsylvania Victim Advocate, said sex offenders are different from other criminals.

"With some crimes like murder or theft, offenders tend to age out, but not with sexual offenses," she said.

Justice Department statistics show that even after 15 years, 24% of convicted sex offenders will commit another sex crime.

### Costly lesson

The failure to keep residents and staff safe has been costly for some facilities.

In Lancaster County, registered offender Glenn Hershey, 65, was convicted of sexually assaulting an 86-year-old Alzheimer's patient in the middle of the night in her room. Earlier, Hershey was convicted of raping a woman from a Philadelphia escort service whom he tried to pay in Monopoly money, court records show. Today, he remains in the state prison in Somerset County.

The family of the elderly victim filed a lawsuit against the facility and in 2018 was given a record \$7.5 million jury award that eventually was reduced to \$6.75 million, court records show.

During the trial, jurors learned the staff at the nursing home was aware of Hershey's rape conviction and knew of his proclivities and his prior advances on the elderly woman, but failed to protect her from him. At the time of the attack, he was living in the room next to the victim, records show.

During Hershey's sentencing, a judge said Hershey had a "proven inability to control his sexual urges."



**Wes Bledsoe is a longtime advocate for nursing home residents who has helped spur legislation to better protect longterm care patients from harm.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF WES BLEDSOE

Family members in that case did not return calls for comment, but Matthew Stone, the Philadelphia lawyer who represented them, said the case underscored the need for nursing homes to be vigilant when they admit sex offenders.

There probably should be separate facilities to treat such individuals, he said.

"These people on Megan's List have problems, and when they get older, they have to have somewhere to go," Stone said. "I think if there's any lesson to be learned, it's that nursing homes are entitled to mistakes. But when there are red flags and they bury their heads, that's a problem."

### Why they do it

Experts point to huge financial incentives for facilities to admit sex offenders.

Administrators want to maximize income by operating at full capacity, regardless of whether the patients are paying out of pocket, with insurance or through public assistance such as Medicaid, those experts said.

"All they want is a butt in the bed for the buck," Bledsoe said. "It doesn't matter whose butt — as long as they get the bucks."

Although personal care and assisted-living homes do not provide intensive medical care, they do offer help with basic day-to-day tasks such as bathing and taking medications, but aren't supported by Medicaid or insurance.

Some low-income residents pay for their care at these facilities with Supplemental Social Security Income payments, designed to help aged, blind and disabled people with little or no income.

### How they're admitted

Dennis DiBondo, director of the Kane Community Living Centers in Allegheny County, the region's largest publicly operated network of four nursing homes in Glen Hazel, Scott, McKeesport and Ross, said his facilities don't bar sex offenders, but they do review each applicant's circumstances to ensure there is no threat to others.

Not everyone is accepted, he said.

The Kane facility at McKeesport currently houses one sex offender, records show.

Although dozens of facilities not currently housing offenders were contacted for this story, only a few responded.

John Dixon, CEO of Redstone Highlands, a network of facilities offering several levels of care throughout Westmoreland County, said his facility does background checks on anyone requesting admission.

"At one point we were asked to admit a person who had an offense against him, and we denied him admission," he said.

Other organizations follow the same path.

"We evaluate each potential admission based on our ability to provide adequate care and are compliant with all regulatory guidelines and limitations," said Gloria Kreps, spokeswoman for UPMC, which oversees 32 senior communities across Western Pennsylvania.

### The root problem

Zach Shamberg, president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Health Care Association, a trade group representing more than 200 for-profit nursing homes and another 200 assisted-living facilities and continuing-care communities, said the reason that offenders end up in nursing homes is simple.

"We don't have facilities to support those people in other institutional settings, so nursing homes became holding facilities for individuals who didn't fit in other places," Shamberg said.

Shamberg and other experts say that if lawmakers fail to act, the problem will continue to escalate as the Megan's Law registries mandated by a 1994 act of Congress continue to swell and the offenders on those lists continue to age.

"As a society, we need to look better at how we meet the needs of (offenders) without putting staff and residents in the facilities at risk," said Lori Smetanka, executive director of the National Consumer Voice for Longterm Care.

*Published Dec. 30, 2021*

# Billions on the way to attack abandoned mine problems

By Ad Crable

Chesapeake Bay Journal

The \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act recently passed by Congress is sending an unprecedented \$6.4 billion for abandoned mine lands cleanup to Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia over the next 15 years.

The record cleanup money will enable a quantum leap in removing the readily visible scars that still harm the environment in the four states.

People like Ed Wytovich of the Catawissa Creek Restoration Association in Pennsylvania are giddy about the influx of funds.

Catawissa Creek is a 42-mile-long stream that drains into the Susquehanna River in eastern Pennsylvania. It is one of the most picturesque waterways in the state, all but untouched by roads. Its sand and gravel bottom, cobblestones and boulders should make it one of the best wild trout streams in the eastern United States. Sixteen of its tributaries have wild trout.

But it's dead.

The stream suffers from high acidity and aluminum pollution draining from a 3-mile tunnel that dewatered coal mines long ago — poison to any fish and aquatic insects that should be there.

"I personally think it's one of prettiest screwed-up creeks east of the Mississippi," Wytovich said.

His group, as well as local conservation districts, Trout Unlimited and the state want to build a wetlands- and limestone-based treatment facility to bring back the Catawissa and unlock its potential.

Until now, federal funding has been restricted mainly to projects that pose a threat to public health, safety and property in populated areas, or those that boost economic development. Much of the other acid mine drainage, estimated to have contaminated 7,356 miles of streams in Pennsylvania alone, has taken a back seat. That estimate has risen by 1,797 miles in just the last two years.



LEFT: Acid mine drainage flows into a "dead" stream about 40 miles north of Harrisburg, near the town of Centralia, which was abandoned because of coal seams burning beneath it.

PHOTO BY KELLY MICHALS

BELOW: Catawissa Creek, a visually beautiful waterway that drains into the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, suffers from acid mine drainage that kills aquatic life.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDDLE SUSQUEHANNA RIVERKEEPER

But the federal funds from the new infrastructure bill can be spent directly on acid mine drainage, and officials in four Bay watershed states are dusting off plans for hundreds of long-stymied reclamation efforts.

Included is a project to stop the mine drainage into Catawissa Creek.

Biden administration officials say the new money also will be used to reclaim abandoned mine lands, eliminate pollution and spur economic development in those blighted areas, all while creating jobs.

## 'More projects, bigger projects'

To understand the scale of the increase for the four states' 45-year effort to erase the blight from past coal mining, consider that Pennsylvania's estimated share of \$3.8 billion — the most in the country — is more than twice the total amount the state has received since annual



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# Chesapeake Bay Journal continued

federal cleanup aid began in 1977 under the Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Act.

Of the 250,000 acres of abandoned mine lands still polluting and scarring Pennsylvania, almost half are in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Although much of the pollution gets diluted by the time it reaches the Bay, mine lands are an unchecked source of sediment, nutrients and heavy metals washing downstream.

“It’s an unprecedented level of funding,” said Brian Bradley, director of the Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation at the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. “We’re looking at all angles. We’re looking at how we can do more projects, bigger projects, and looking at problems we have set aside previously because they were thought to be too costly. Everything is fair game.”

“Our community was stunned and thrilled at this windfall,” added Andy McAllister, head of the Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, an environmental group that has partnered with both the state and nonprofit organizations to clean up legacy coal problems.

In Maryland, which will receive nearly \$75 million, the Department of the Environment is lining up new projects and adding staff to hit the ground running, said department spokesman Jay Apperson.

Maryland, with an estimated 450 miles of streams impaired by acid mine drainage, has a list of unfunded coal reclamation projects that total \$69.6 million. With nearly \$75 million coming in new federal aid, it would appear that the state could eliminate its legacy coal pollution, but Apperson said it’s not quite that simple.

Each year, he said, the agency also has to fix landslides, mine subsidence and other pop-up problems that aren’t on the official abandoned mine land list. Still, he added, “It’s safe to say the money will be sufficient to reclaim the majority of the sites.”

Maryland’s coal lands are exclusively in the state’s two westernmost counties — Allegheny and Garrett. A majority of high-priority projects are in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Virginia will get \$354 million, and its Department of Energy has prepared for the surge by beefing up staff capacity. But none of its unfunded inventory of \$425 million in projects is in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PA DEP

**A huge pile of coal waste, known as a cob pile, in western Pennsylvania.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF PA DEP

**An acid mine drainage treatment system on Nanticoke Creek in Luzerne County. New federal funding will allow more streams tainted by acid mine drainage to be restored.**

West Virginia, where 14% of the land mass drains into the Bay through the Potomac and James River basins, will get \$2.2 billion.

The new infusion of federal money is in addition to funds the states have been getting since 1977 from fees collected from present-day coal mining companies. The Abandoned Mine Land Trust Fund has distributed nearly \$12 billion to states around the nation. The fund expired last fall, but was renewed in the infrastructure bill with a 20% reduction in the fees, a concession to the struggling coal industry.

## Broader use of funds

Cleanup advocates are not just excited about the record amount of aid about to be spent on legacy coal mining problems. They are also pleased that the funds have fewer strings attached so that a wider array of problems can be addressed.

Most importantly, the money is available for projects aimed solely at bringing impaired streams back to life, not just for

public health and safety issues such as water supply remediation, removal of old coal slag piles or stabilizing abandoned “highwall” mines.

Now, instead of only “chasing landslides,” as one environmental group characterized efforts to date, the federal money can go toward reviving dead or so-called “yellow-boy” streams — dramatically discolored by contaminants — with the sole purpose of restoring their ecosystems. And, in the process, they can bring back fishing and recreational opportunities, too.

Fisheries and game managers from Bay drainage states recently wrote to the U.S. Department of the Interior, which will manage the new funds, urging that uses for the money be liberalized to allow more polluted streams to be restored. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced she was granting that request at a press conference in Pennsylvania on Jan. 24.

“We need to make sure those funds are broadened,” said Mike Nerozzi of the

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. “Oftentimes, these sites extend miles downstream and decimate everything in their path.” He cited Catawissa Creek as a prime example.

The agency estimates that if the tainted streams were again fishable, it could create \$29 million annually in angler-generated revenue.

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania promised, “I will continue pressing for more flexibility to use abandoned mine land funding to ensure Pennsylvania families have access to clean water, a right guaranteed by the Pennsylvania Constitution.”

Another priority for state environmental agencies and advocacy groups is that new aid money be used to support the hundreds of aging acid mine drainage treatment systems that have been built but need rehabilitation or maintenance. Often, they are operated by volunteer watershed groups, conservation districts or municipalities with uncertain funding sources.

“These things don’t last forever,” McAllister said.

In Pennsylvania alone, there are 350 “passive” treatment systems for acid mine drainage that rely on wetlands and settling ponds to filter out harmful metals, in addition to infusing limestone to lower acidity. But larger-scale treatment facilities, similar to wastewater treatment plants, will be needed to fix high-volume mine discharges.

Haaland said the money could be used for such treatment plants, as well as to maintain and refurbish them as they age.

*Ad Crable is a Bay Journal staff writer based in Pennsylvania.*

*Published Feb. 17, 2022*



## ‘We’re going to have some dead children’

### York County CYF is failing, workers say

**Brandon Addeo**  
The York Dispatch

Ongoing short-staffing at York County’s child welfare office led many workers to express fear for the safety of those they’re committed to protecting.

“The concern is we’re going to have some dead children,” one former worker said, “and some issues coming up because we’re not checking in (on children), not spending the time. We don’t have the time.”

This summer, amid a dwindling number of case investigators, the York County Children Youth and Families Office called upon all caseworkers to begin reviewing new allegations of child abuse.

Many staffers don’t have experience in doing that work. That, combined with understaffing, is leading many to leave their jobs amid the fear that children’s cases may fall through the cracks. Agency leadership, however, maintains that the office continues to operate with the “utmost professionalism” and that the changeover, which began Aug. 15, was done “to provide for a more even distribution of intake casework.”

“We believe this will enable us to process all casework in a more efficient manner,” said Tanya Stauffer, the York County office’s director.

Five current and former York County CYF employees in various positions across the

agency — who spoke with The York Dispatch on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation — disagree.

The agency, they argue, is stretched too thin.

“We can’t be silent anymore,” another former staffer said. “Things will be missed and — God forbid — a child dies.”

According to those employees, concerns they’ve raised with local and state officials have been repeatedly ignored. Meanwhile, they noted instances where children may have fallen through the cracks because of lax oversight.

A spokesperson for the state Department of Human Services, which oversees child welfare offices statewide, did not comment on allegations specific to the York County office but said the department was working to address staffing issues statewide.

“In light of the ongoing workforce challenges exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic,” DHS spokesman Brandon Cwalina said, “[the department] is fully engaged with county child and youth agencies, including York, to develop effective retention, recruitment and support strategies to strengthen workforce capacity.”

#### Not effective

Intake work is usually done by a dedicated intake department at CYF. That department, of about seven caseworkers,



PHOTO: DAWN J. SAGERT, YORK DISPATCH

York County Human Services Center at 100 W. Market St. in York City.

still remains, and handles the most serious types of cases, such as child fatalities and sexual abuse.

Now, caseworkers from other departments at CYF have been put on a rotation to handle other types of intake investigations, such as neglect and physical abuse.

#### The issue

Those caseworkers feel they don’t know what they’re doing, one former employee said.

“I worried, ‘Am I making the right

decision? Am I missing something?’” they said.

And those caseworkers still have their regular work — completing adoptions and child placement, among other responsibilities — in addition to the new intake cases.

“There are days where you’re not done at 4:30 p.m., your day can go to 7, 8, 9, 10 p.m. or into the morning,” one former employee said.

The agency is required by law to respond

*Continued on next page*



to each new child protection case within 24 hours of receiving the report.

“There’s no cap on number of cases that each caseworker is servicing,” one former employee said. “So they can’t do effective casework with these kind of numbers.”

Several current and former employees accused management at CYF and county officials of not heeding their complaints and described the workplace as toxic. One former employee likened working at the office to an abusive relationship and another added that there’s a culture within the office that discourages people from speaking out.

“It doesn’t matter how many times you say something,” a current employee said. “No one’s listening.”

### A mass exodus

Former staff said many people are choosing to leave their jobs because they feel inexperienced in their new roles.

“When that happened, that’s when this mass exodus started to happen,” a former staffer said. “People were saying, ‘No, I’m not doing what I’m not trained to do.’”

Added another former employee: “If you don’t do the job every day, you don’t really know what you’re doing.”

It’s not clear exactly how many employees have resigned since the changes; Stauffer said the office has 39 vacant caseworker positions but did not respond when asked how many employees left within the past year.

Firm numbers that could provide an apples-to-apples comparison of staffing were unavailable, and county officials declined to provide them. One former employee, however, said the number of investigators in the intake department alone fell from roughly 35 all the way to seven in a span of several years.

Former employees, who had many years of experience in child welfare, said the vacancy rate was unprecedented for the agency.

Erik Strobl, who represents the agency’s caseworkers through the SEIU 668 union, also said he didn’t know the exact number of recent departures but said the turnover was substantial.

### A ‘death spiral’

Strobl said the caseworkers he represents through the union have told him about the struggling state of the agency.

“It sounds like the worst possible version of ‘all hands on deck,’” Strobl said. “You get into the death spiral of everybody leaving, then everyone else has to pick up the slack.

“All of your standard work in addition to picking up for someone else — it’s not sustainable,” he added.

Strobl suggested the COVID-19 pandemic added to poor morale among office employees. He said that none of the agency’s workers were given hazard pay despite being essential workers.

He said he wants to petition York County’s commissioners to implement a retention bonus for caseworkers in the CYF office.

### Inexperience and added stresses

People working at the office are performing tasks they’re unfamiliar with and are “half-assing them by the seat of their pants,” another former staffer said, adding that CYF leadership wasn’t helpful during the transition.

“It was, ‘Here you go, you’re just going to have to do it,’” the former staffer said. “The attitude of the agency is, ‘If you don’t like it, there’s the door.’”

“We weren’t offered any helpful training when this change was made,” another former caseworker said.

Several of the employees noted that they could recall a number of situations in which they believed corners were cut — largely unintentionally — or that risks to children were not adequately investigated.

One former employee said that when she was completing a risk assessment, she discovered that someone in the home whose history would’ve raised red flags for possible abuse wasn’t noted in the report. However, she had little recourse to try to correct the error.

“We can’t go back and investigate something that’s already done,” the former employee said. “Unless someone calls in [with a new allegation], we can’t add additional information after the fact.”

At least one former employee reported that their job transitioned from largely filing paperwork to suddenly reporting first-hand on abuse cases. They felt ill-equipped for that.

“All of a sudden, because they lost so many caseworkers, they were like, ‘Oh, now you have to do it,’” they said.

The office told people they needed to be

available to work “24/7” at any time of day or night, the former staffer said.

“I don’t have someone available 24/7 to watch my kids,” they said.

That former staffer said they felt relieved after leaving the CYF office.

“I’m glad I got out,” they said. “I feel a lot happier, a lot more at peace.”

### Licensing issues and citations

Struggles at York County’s CYF office are nothing new.

The office’s state-issued license was under threat several years ago as a result of repeat violations of state regulations.

Each year, Pennsylvania’s Department of Human Services inspects the CYF and other similar facilities across the state. The inspectors review a small sample of the agency’s cases to look for compliance with state law in procedures.

They’ve received roughly a dozen violations each year since 2017, according to a York Dispatch review of inspection reports. In the most recent annual report, which covered parts of 2019 and 2020, the DHS review of 30 case files found 21 violations. It’s not clear if any of the cases had multiple violations.

Most of the violations were clerical errors, such as paperwork that was completed late and records that were incomplete or missing. Some violations involved work done late — such as initial investigations not being completed within the required 24 hours and safety assessments not being done within mandated 72-hour windows.

The county received four consecutive provisional licenses — which are issued when the agency fails inspection — between 2014 and 2016, state records show. One more provisional would have meant a state takeover, but the county was granted a full license in 2016 and has kept that status every year since.

The agency’s latest inspection report has a number of unexplained redactions.

The 2021 inspection report, covering the 2020 calendar year, conceals a number of dates associated with agency violations — essentially, making it impossible to tell how late the agency was completing its work.

Prior inspection reports had few to no dates redacted.

When asked about the purpose of the

redactions, Human Services department spokesperson Ali Fogarty said that their agency would review the document to ensure it was redacted properly.

“Under Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law, DHS at the state level as well as county children and youth agencies are obligated to protect confidentiality of children involved in cases of suspected or confirmed child abuse or neglect,” Fogarty said. “Because of this obligation, we have to be mindful about when information released could potentially be used with other available information to identify children.”

Since most records involving children are not deemed public records, the details remain elusive.

### Agency’s response

Stauffer said her agency has taken steps to help caseworkers since the recent transition.

“When the decision was made to evenly distribute intake referrals across all caseworkers, refresher trainings were conducted with all caseworkers, supervisors and managers,” she said. “Additionally, support triangles of staff with experience in different areas were set up to support one another.”

Stauffer said that the employee recruitment and retention are “ongoing strategic priorities” for her agency.

“We are investing in our staff development through mentoring and training,” she said, “And we will continue to identify actions to retain our talent.

Stauffer said that the office’s caseloads have increased since 2015, when new child protection laws were enacted, which broadened the definition of child abuse and expanded the roster of mandated reporters who must bring allegations of abuse to the authorities.

That increase is evident in the county’s child abuse report data, which saw a significant spike in the years following 2015. In 2020, however, with fewer children in schools, there was a marked decrease in new reports being filed.

“It makes sense that, in a year where school was conducted primarily on virtual platforms, that educators would have fewer reasons to report concerns,” said Jon Rubin, deputy secretary at the state’s Office of Children, Youth and Families.

*Published Nov. 18, 2021*

# The learning curveball

Officials at PASSHE have embarked on a groundbreaking – and fraught – quest to redesign the system.

*The State System is hoping lawmakers will approve a historic funding request for the university system this year*

**By Justin Sweitzer**

In the summer of 2021, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education – the governing body of Pennsylvania’s 14 state-owned universities – made a decision that would change the course of six of those schools for years to come.

Buffeted by a perfect storm of declining enrollment and the need to align costs with those lower enrollment numbers, the PASSHE board of governors voted unanimously to combine six individual state schools into two new universities – a move that would allow the institutions to share resources while reining in costs at the same time.

It was a historic action for Pennsylvania’s state-owned universities, one intended to

chart the State System on a new path to financial stability while simultaneously keeping all of the 14 schools open. While monumental for education in the Keystone State, the move isn’t unprecedented elsewhere. Vermont officials have taken similar steps to merge state colleges, and Connecticut has gotten the go-ahead to consolidate all 12 of its community colleges into one overarching entity.

In Pennsylvania, however, the move was part of a larger effort to reimagine the State System – a process that also includes the approval of new degree programs, the consolidation of services and academic courses across universities and an expansion of online degree programs and other non-degree programs at PASSHE schools.

The redesign of the State System is something that PASSHE Chancellor Dan Greenstein and state lawmakers alike view as long overdue – and necessary to keep each of the 14 state-owned universities open while also ensuring that the system remains affordable and financially sound.

Members of the PASSHE board of governors voted 18-0 last July to merge California University of Pennsylvania, Clarion University and Edinboro University into the new Pennsylvania Western University and consolidate Bloomsburg University, Lock Haven University and Mansfield University into the new Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania.

Under the integration plan, each of the six institutions will remain open as part of two larger university structures that share academic programs, faculty and other resources.

During that July 2021 board of governors meeting, Greenstein made an impassioned plea to board members to integrate the six campuses and move the State System forward.

“Building a reimagined university that blends the talent and the exceptional strengths of three partner campuses in each region is not something that happens overnight. That process will take time; it will be deliberate; it will be inclusive. This is the beginning,” he said. “Through it, we

will create two regional powerhouses ... participating campuses maintain their historic names, their identities, their sports teams and clubs, while offering their students, their faculty and staff more opportunity than they could afford if they were on their own.”

He added that the integration plan would help improve access to student supports as well as provide better opportunities to connect with potential transfer students at community colleges.

Greenstein, who took over as chancellor in 2018 after a six-year stint overseeing post-secondary education efforts at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, told City & State that he came to PASSHE with two primary goals: ensuring that the system remains financially stable and addressing student needs.

Consolidating resources at the six institutions at the center of the integration plan is one way to control costs for both students and the State System, he said.

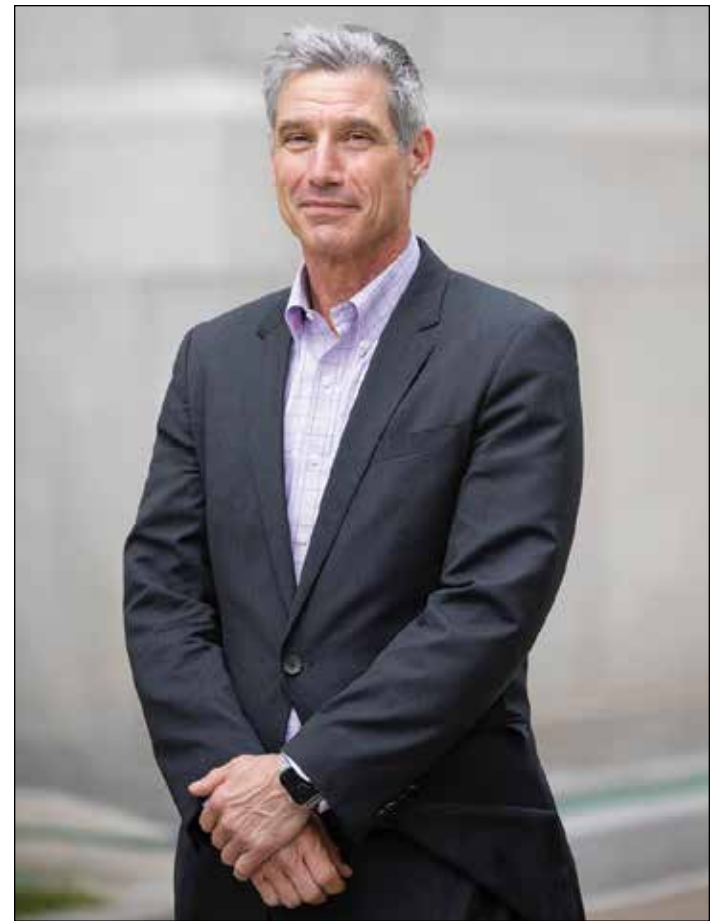


PHOTO: AMANDA BERG

Daniel Greenstein has viewed the State System’s redesign as long overdue, calling it necessary to keep all 12 schools open and cost effective



## City & State continued

Greenstein acknowledged that PASSHE has been grappling with numerous challenges, including underfunding, population decline and price increases. One of his priorities as chancellor has been to ensure students aren't getting priced out of the market – and, in turn, driven to attend schools outside of Pennsylvania.

In the 2004-2005 academic year, the State System's total enrollment was 105,902 students across its 14 universities, according to PASSHE data. Enrollment continued to rise over the next few years, peaking at 119,513 in the 2010-2011 academic year. But since that time, enrollment at PASSHE universities has steadily dropped, with just 93,708 students attending state-owned universities in 2020.

Greenstein said the 22% drop in enrollment over that time can be attributed to a number of factors, with affordability chief among them. He said that while PASSHE schools are still among some of the most affordable in the state, costs are still high enough that low- and middle-income students are being priced out of the market.

"At \$23,000, \$24,000 a year ... it represents about 40-plus percent of low- and middle-income families' household income for one student for one year. I mean, that's a lot of money," Greenstein said.

State Sen. Judy Schwank, a member of the board of governors whose Senate district includes Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, told City & State that changes were needed to address funding challenges and better support students.

"What I appreciate most about the system redesign – everybody thinks it is about right-sizing, but I see it more as the focus on what we should have been talking about from the beginning: student success. Every decision that we make has to be linked to: How do we serve our students better?"

PASSHE's redesign efforts were designed to address a range of issues facing state-owned universities, but the academic overhaul, at times, has faced criticism, particularly from faculty and staff at the universities.

Jamie Martin, president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties, the union that represents PASSHE faculty, told City &



PHOTO: APSCUF

**LEFT: Jamie Martin believes more state funding is needed to keep the State System afloat.**



PHOTO: COMMONWEALTH MEDIA SERVICES

**RIGHT: State Sen. Judy Schwank has been working in Harrisburg on marketing campaigns that make tuition more affordable.**

State that her members at PennWest and Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania have expressed feelings of exhaustion as they try and expand curricula and academic programs to cover three separate campuses.

"They have to take a look at the curricula that exists in that department in each of those three campuses and try to determine: How do we put this together so that it's a meaningful experience for our students on all three campuses, with the awareness that we have students on all three campuses that already started the curriculum that was in place" prior to the integration plan," Martin said.

"I'm just hearing about the level of exhaustion that is there," Martin said, adding that "a lot of faculty are teaching overloads because they're not bringing back adjuncts or rehiring for the positions where retirements have occurred."

Martin also expressed concerns about the potential for the integration plan to increase reliance on online classes, and said that the State System should be transparent about the number of online courses students will have to take at the integrated universities. "To be fair, there are some students who might prefer at least to have some because it gives them some flexibility. But they need to always think of it as truth in advertising. They need to know what they can expect coming in," Martin said.

Greenstein didn't discount the criticisms levied by APSCUF and faculty members,

noting that PASSHE's faculty is critical to educating students. "This is a people business, and so your investment in your people is important," he said, adding that questions, concerns and debate around the system redesign is healthy and necessary. "This is a process where, if everybody was singing merrily along and joining hands, we probably wouldn't be making the kinds of deep changes that are kind of required."

But while there are differences of opinion on how best to reorient the State System, there are also clear areas of agreement, especially when it comes to funding.

The PASSHE board of governors approved a historic \$550 million funding request – and one that exceeds the prior year's state appropriation by \$73 million. Greenstein said the funding would primarily cover operating costs and help the system deal with cost increases driven by inflation.

"It is a number that will offset the inflationary increases. It will enable us to not raise tuition. It will enable us to stop cross-subsidies where universities that are more financially successful are actually giving out money to the universities that are less so – they can't continue to do that," he said. "More importantly though, it will enable us to put on a kind of recurrent basis the kind of innovation ... that is necessary to evolve in ways that we need to evolve to serve the students that we need to serve better."

He added that Gov. Tom Wolf's proposal

to provide tuition scholarships for PASSHE students could be one way to attract more students not just to PASSHE schools, but ultimately to the state's workforce, noting that other incentive programs, like the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, have been "incredibly effective."

Martin concurred that more state funding is crucial to keeping the State System afloat: "A budget will tell you a lot of things – it tells you what you value and what you don't," she said. "You can't cut your way out of these kinds of issues. The only way to do it is to provide adequate funding, and I'm hopeful that that will occur."

Schwank, who sits on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said state officials can take a number of different actions to attract more students, including by more aggressive marketing campaigns and focusing on individual student stories more.

The biggest key to reversing the system's enrollment trend, she said, is to make each of the system's 14 universities more accessible. "If students can't afford us, then they can't come," she said. "We're still a bargain, but when you look at what some private institutions are able to do, in terms of reducing the sticker price for their tuition, we've got to compete and, certainly, as a system that's supposed to serve the state, we have a moral responsibility to make sure that we do that."

*Published April 26, 2022*

## Staffing shortage, COVID-19, politics take toll on Pennsylvania teachers

### What's at stake if educator challenges go unaddressed?

By Marley Parish

When Becky Cibulka retired from the classroom last year, the West Mifflin Area School District lost more than a teacher.

The district lost a Spanish/ESL teacher, department head, social media manager, club advisor, and school-to-work program coordinator.

Education wasn't the same as when the 41-year-old started teaching almost 20 years ago.

Still, her decision to leave didn't come easy or without guilt.

It was a slow burn that started with voluntarily taking on additional roles, helping as a marching band assistant, planning service projects, and overseeing the Spanish club. Being involved in the community — where Cibulka grew up and still lives — was a chance to build relationships with students, parents, and alumni.

Eventually, her responsibilities expanded.

"I like being busy. I like always having things to do. That was never a problem for me," Cibulka told the Capital-Star. "But I think what ended up happening was that I was very involved. And as time went on, there was no reward for it, not that I was looking for some reward. A thank you would be nice, but the more that I did, the more I felt they started to pile on to me."

When the coronavirus shut down schools nationwide in March 2020, districts scrambled to adjust teaching methods to ensure students could continue learning safely. Some schools continued to offer meal services and provided technology resources to fill the gaps that traditional school operations addressed naturally.



PHOTO: JOHN ALTENDORFER FOR THE CAPITAL-STAR

Becky Cibulka, a former West Mifflin Area schoolteacher, poses for a portrait on March 14, 2022.

Although buildings are currently open, a national staffing crisis has presented new challenges. Teachers have sacrificed their preparation periods and lunch breaks to cover for their colleagues, often in spaces consolidated to accommodate limited resources and larger classes.

"With the staffing crisis at the level that it is right now, our folks in the schools just can't perform all those duties, and the students are not getting the one-on-one attention they need," Pennsylvania State Education Association President Rich Askey told the Capital-Star.

And during a year when everyone had hoped for somewhat of a return to normalcy, students are acting out and

dealing with learning gaps. Ahead of the 2021-22 academic year, community members lashed out at school boards about health and safety plans. And parents, motivated by misconceptions about what's taught — or not — in the classroom, have left teachers feeling like they're under fire from every angle.

For years, Pennsylvania has seen a decline in graduates entering the education field. Now, some teachers are considering leaving the profession sooner than they initially planned.

"People are just overwhelmed," said Sen. Lindsey Williams, D-Allegheny, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Education Committee. "I can see the frustration."

### 'Customer service has no place in education'

Fewer students were taking Spanish last year, so Cibulka, who earned a master's degree in human resources, was put in charge of the school-to-work program, an opportunity for kids to work while also receiving a grade.

Because she managed social media for the Spanish club, the district had her teach a course on it. Cibulka's role later expanded to include running the high school's Facebook, Instagram, and eventually, TikTok accounts, a responsibility she called a "24/7 job."

"I was teaching different levels of Spanish, doing the school-to-work program, running social media accounts, teaching a class, which was brand new, never done before, so it was a lot," she said.

Cibulka found herself driving to school earlier and earlier. When the district shifted its schedule during the COVID-19 pandemic, she was usually at work by 6 a.m. to use copiers, print papers, and prepare.

"I found that the earlier I got there, the less people came to me to get information," she said, adding that she would usually go home around 4:30 p.m. but continued to answer emails from students with questions or parents with concerns.

The first indication where "things started to take a downturn" was in 2015 when Cibulka resigned as a marching band assistant and applied to graduate school. She stepped down not because of problems with students but with parents "causing silly issues."

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"Teaching was not the way it was when I first started teaching. There was more of a customer service aspect to teaching than there ever was," Cibulka — who previously worked summers at an amusement park in customer service — said. "Customer service has no place in education. We're professionals. The parents should not dictate what the teachers can and can't do. And I was starting to get the feeling that that's the direction education was heading."

When the district hired a new superintendent the summer of 2020 before the first full pandemic academic year, it was a turning point for Cibulka. She had an opportunity for a new job at a hospitality company, and teachers with at least 16 years of experience had an early retirement option.

Cibulka, who had taught in the district for 15 years as of last year, asked her union, without naming her, to see if the school would grant the retirement incentive despite being one year short of the requirement.

West Mifflin administrators agreed.

"I was happy they were going to let me take it, but at the same time, that really showed me that they weren't thinking about how much I would contribute or who it was," Cibulka said, explaining that the more years teachers worked in the district, the more they made. "With everything extra that I did, a lot of it I didn't get paid for, but that's all that really mattered in the grand scheme of things, how much money they would save."

She doesn't want to discourage anyone from going into education. But Cibulka said anyone considering becoming a teacher needs to know the realities of the job.

"Things aren't getting better. If anything, they are getting worse," said Cibulka, who still keeps in touch with her former colleagues predicting more teachers will end up leaving and taking retirement incentives. "And a lot of them probably won't be replaced."

### 'An unprecedented level of strain'

The educator shortage is at an "unprecedented level of strain," Askey said, with teachers and support staff stretched for time and resources.

In a recent survey by the National Education Association, which represents nearly 3 million educators, 99 percent of respondents reported burnout — an



PHOTO: DANIELLA HEMINGHAUS FOR THE CAPITAL-STAR

Adam McCormick, a high school English teacher in the Scranton School District, poses for a portrait March 15, 2022.



PHOTO: SCREENSHOT

The Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Committee holds a virtual hearing on the school staff shortage Feb. 1, 2022.

occupational phenomenon caused by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy, as defined by the World Health Organization — as a "serious problem."

Fifty-five percent said they are ready to leave the profession earlier than planned.

"Stop and think about that," Askey told the Capital-Star. "What would we do if half our teachers left the profession at the end of this school year?"

Since 2010, Pennsylvania has seen a 66 percent decline in Instructional I teaching certificates, the state's most basic teaching accreditation awarded to graduates who pass their certification tests, issued to

in-state graduates. Data from the Department of Education also reflect a 58 percent decline in certificates issued to those planning to work out-of-state.

"This is not sustainable," Askey said during a February Senate Democratic Policy Committee meeting on school staff shortages.

Williams said the General Assembly should focus on recruitment and retention efforts to start addressing the "multi-faceted problem."

Ahead of this year's budget negotiations, legislative Democrats formally launched a push for the most significant funding

allocation for Pennsylvania's public schools in state history. Their blueprint would allocate \$3.75 billion for education, staffing, and classroom resources.

In his final budget proposal, Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf — who campaigned on education reform — again called for raising the minimum teacher salary to \$45,000 per year. The term-limited governor also proposed measures to keep and retain quality school staff.

"We are not graduating enough educators, especially diverse educators," Williams told the Capital-Star. "We're talking about teachers of color and teachers that look like our students. We're not graduating near what we need to fill retirements and other people who leave the profession."

Late last year, the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania Legislature passed a bill that provided temporary relief with added flexibility to requirements for substitute teachers. Wolf signed the legislation, which expires after the 2022-23 academic year.

At the time, Askey praised the bill and called it a step toward solving the shortage by expanding the eligibility pool. But it's not a permanent solution, he said.

Data from the Department of State show that the average annual salary for a classroom teacher in Pennsylvania is \$71,478, with salaries ranging from \$39,000 to \$104,000. Numbers from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association show that daily substitute teachers were paid on average \$105 per day during the 2020-21 school year.

The most frequent pay rate for substitutes was \$100, and the minimum reported rate was \$78 per day. The maximum pay rate was \$160, according to a PSBA survey of Pennsylvania public school districts, with 462 respondents reporting a daily rate.

Askey added that teacher and substitute salaries need to be increased. He also urged lawmakers to find ways to address educators' student debt by making tuition more affordable and by cutting costs associated with certification tests and fees for additional credits and professional development.

Left unaddressed, Askey predicted larger class sizes and course cuts, with the students ultimately being the ones "short-changed."

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## Pennsylvania Capital-Star continued

"You're not going to have the wide array of subjects available to our students," Askey said of what's at stake. "Our students are not going to have the opportunities that they need."

Recounting a conversation with a school-based therapist in her district, Williams said the federal pause on student loan payments was the only reason a constituent could stay in the profession.

"If that hadn't happened, she wouldn't have been able to afford to stay in," Williams said.

Williams has announced plans for two bills that would forgive student debt for school-based mental health professionals and provide internship stipends to school nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists.

### 'Those little things build up'

Adam McCormick, a 39-year-old high school English teacher in the Scranton School District, loves his job, but "the profession weighs a little more these days," he told the Capital-Star.

"I definitely feel more exhausted day-to-day than I have in the past," McCormick said.

The problems existed before the pandemic, but the health crisis compounded challenges as districts had to adjust and address issues at a faster pace, he said.

When McCormick outlined challenges caused by the staffing shortage to the Senate Democratic Policy Committee last month, he asked administrators to coordinate a schedule, so he could still teach and not "tax the already tight schedules of my colleagues and students."

Under "normal circumstances," he would have taken a professional day to appear before lawmakers.

"You can always go to them if you need additional help," McCormick said of building-level administrators. "But even they're limited in their ability to provide some of that additional help."

From meeting statewide standardized testing requirements to taking on responsibilities outside their daily job — such as holding breakfast in homeroom like Scranton middle school teachers do — McCormick said teachers have "been expected to do more with less."

"And that has become a burden," he said. "Those little things build up. Instead of taking that time to get your day together



PHOTO: AMANDA BERG FOR THE CAPITALSTAR

Shanna Danielson, a middle school band director in Adams County, poses for a portrait March 15, 2022.

and do any last-minute things you need to do, you're looking out to make sure that everybody gets what they need as far as their breakfast. When I was growing up, that just wasn't the case."

McCormick said working with kids is the easiest and best part of the job, especially after more than a year of digital instruction and limited contact with students.

Erin, a 43-year-old special education teacher in Blair County, hasn't left the profession yet. But she's feeling the impacts of the staffing shortage and an increased caseload.

"It's not that I hate my job. I don't hate my job. It's just that my job is very stressful, and our job duties just keep increasing," Erin, who asked to be identified by her first name so she could speak candidly, told the Capital-Star. "I also try to serve as a role model for our new teachers, so we don't leave them."

With students and teachers returning to the classroom, Erin hoped for a sense of normalcy. However, student behavior and their attitudes are worse, she said, guessing time away from in-person learning contributed to the shift.

In a 53-page report released by U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy last year, the nation's top physician warned that young people were facing "devastating" mental health effects tied to the pandemic, which uprooted their lives and isolated them from peers.

Symptoms of anxiety and depression doubled among young people, Murthy wrote. He added that negative emotions,

impulsivity, and irritability increased among adolescents.

Last year, Erin provided services for almost 290 students. Although this year's demand has declined to 71 students, her department has seen special education teachers pulled to cover other classes. She recognizes that the school has to work with available resources but added that "it takes away from the students who need a specialist or when their co-teachers aren't in the classroom."

Even when work is "chaotic," and she feels like she has nothing left to give, Erin said the kids have ultimately kept her in the classroom.

"You have those moments," she said. "They say this thing or that thing, and you're like, 'Wow. That's awesome.' You have these warm and heartwarming moments."

Both educators said they consider themselves burned out, and while they still think teaching is an admirable profession, they recognize that it's not for everyone.

"It's a fairly thankless job," McCormick said. "You have to intrinsically feel that motivation and reward because you're not going to get it from many people outside ... if they're looking to make money, this may not be the right thing to do. But if they're looking to make a difference in somebody's life, I don't think there's any job better."

### 'We're being burned'

Ask Shanna Danielson, a 35-year-old middle school band director in Adams

County, about teacher burnout, and she'll say: "We're not burning out; we're being burned."

Danielson, who is in her 10th year of teaching and her first at a new school, said she has "never had to endure a climate like this." She's witnessed a group of "rowdy" parents shout at new teachers to take their masks off — and booing them when they declined — during a meet-and-greet with new staff members.

"You feel like every single thing you do is being watched," she said.

Educators have faced criticism for enforcing COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. They've also been at the center of a culture war, with false claims about the college concept Critical Race Theory, all while just trying to do their jobs.

Last fall, the Republican-controlled Legislature passed a GOP-penned bill that would require Pennsylvania schools to make all instructional materials, techniques, and syllabi publicly available. Wolf vetoed the legislation, calling it a "thinly veiled attempt to restrict instruction and censor content reflecting various cultures, identities, and experiences."

Legislative Democrats argued the bill would fuel debates over Critical Race Theory, which is not taught in K-12 schools. Williams described the legislation as a "distraction from actually addressing the real issues that are happening in schools."

She added: "Every time I talk to students, every time I talk to educators, they talk about mental health. How can we get more mental health staff in the classroom? How do we get services that are more responsive to what students need? How do we get those services to educators?"

Danielson admits that she sometimes wonders why she continues to go to work each day.

But she has never questioned why she went into teaching — "because there's nothing like the moment when you help somebody figure something out that they couldn't do before, and they get that spark in their eyes."

And she will never discourage someone interested from becoming a teacher. If she did, the current crisis would only get worse.

"I just want to get to a point where we don't have to keep trying to make it better," Danielson said. "It's just better."

*Published March 20, 2022*



# Has Yeadon hired a ‘ghost’ consultant?

## At \$4,500 a month, many say ‘yes’

**By Ashley Caldwell**  
acaldwell@myspiritnews.com

A public relations consultant hired by Yeadon Borough has many residents and some councilors asking questions because, after nearly seven months, no one has publicly seen him. They also question his \$4,500 per month compensation. They ask what he’s doing for the money does not equate to the quality of his work.

Philadelphia-based Joel Avery has raised red flags for being paid so much money for work that many say they “have not seen.” One among them is Councilor LaToya Monroe, the former Council president who often publicly opposes decisions made by current Council leaders.

“I don’t know who this man is, I have never seen him, I’ve never been provided any contact information for him,” Monroe said last week. “(We’re) consistently paying him \$4,500 of our taxpayer dollars per month for absolutely nothing. It is offensive, and I want it to stop.”

Avery did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

Avery also cannot be found online or on social media, except for a vague LinkedIn post that only lists him as “Owner, Media Consultant.”

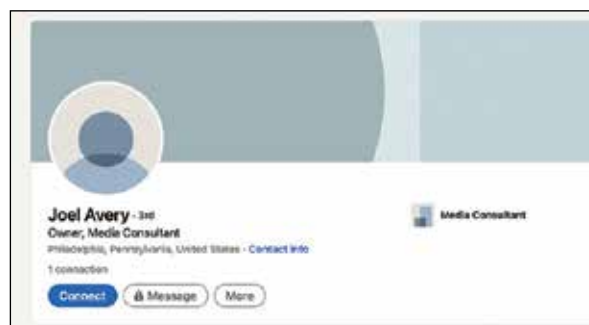
A check of business registrations in Harrisburg through the state department’s Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations also failed to turn up information about him and the contract he signed with borough officials also does not disclose any address –physical or mailing.

Resident Clara Johnson, also a former Council member, often wonders why Avery is absent for public regular and special Council meetings. She called him a “ghost.”

“He must be a friend of Sharon’s,” Johnson said, alleging that many of the borough contracts awarded to vendors are friends of current Council President Sharon Council-Harris or referred to her by her friends. “I’ve never seen him. I’m starting to wonder if he’s even real.”

Another resident, self-identified as Liz A., wrote on social media that residents haven’t even received “reports about what he has done” which drew a response from Councilor Liana Roadcloud, another outspoken critic of current Council leaders and of Avery.

“Yeadon Borough is the laughingstock of the entire



The LinkedIn screen shot shows nothing about Joel Avery or his public relations business.

county,” the former code enforcement liaison said. “Councilors are supposed to mitigate the risk of exposure to the borough, not intensify exposure with false information. The actions of the current leadership lead me to believe that they are intentionally driving this borough into the ground.”

Council-Harris thinks otherwise.

Following a recent contentious special meeting – reconvened to handle unaddressed agenda items due to an abrupt adjournment at its regular meeting on July 21 – Council-Harris called Avery “the best thing that’s happened to Yeadon” since being hired. As for his lack of visibility, she said the borough doesn’t “have any control over that” because “those people (independent consultants) set their own schedule.”

“We are satisfied (with Avery),” Council-Harris said. “That man is the best thing that has happened to us. We have gotten so much negative publicity and he has been right there to help us.”

Avery’s appointment was first called into question on Jan. 3 when councilors received his contract at their initial meeting – the same day new and returning councilors – Council-Harris, Nicole Beaty, Carlette Brooks, and Learnin Johnson – were sworn-in following last November’s election.

At issue was Avery’s contract, set to begin on Jan. 3 and end Dec. 31, 2023, when councilors had no prior access to review his contract, had no information about him or his business, and no chance to meet with him prior to his hiring or even before nor after that meeting.

Council-Harris offered no explanation at that time.

In 2010, a published Philadelphia Inquirer report said a Philadelphia Common Pleas Court judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by Avery against an African-American Museum official, claiming she “slandered” him in a termination letter that “ended his career in the hospitality industry.”

While the official admitted during the eight-day trial that

the assertion Avery violated “professional ethics” by “widely distributing internal emails” was “incorrect,” the judge ruled that those statements were not libelous or slanderous, according to the report.

According to the Yeadon contract, obtained by The SPIRIT through a Right to Know (RTK) request, his duties include “advancing the borough’s agenda, increasing positive visibility for the borough, ensuring his work is provided with clarity and impact.”

By residents’ and councilors’ accounts, Avery has fallen short of that since the borough has been embroiled in controversy, gaining local and national attention, since March when Council-Harris, who is Black, fired former popular police Chief Anthony “Chachi” Paparo for alleged police department mismanagement.

Paparo, who is white, has filed a federal lawsuit against the borough charging racial discrimination.

Yeadon continues being in the spotlight with other controversies.

The owners of marijuana dispensary company, Restore, have filed a lawsuit seeking at least \$10 million because the borough’s Zoning Board rescinded its approval to operate. And the family of a 22-year-old male who committed suicide last week while in a holding cell in Yeadon police custody are considering legal options in that case.

Avery’s contract describes other duties as proactively engaging media outlets to cover work and legislative matters of Borough Council, positively pitching story ideas to media to generate positive press coverage, develop and implement crisis communications and damage control strategies, and to “mitigate damages to the reputation and public image of Yeadon and work to prevent negative stories from publishing or airing.”

However, on several occasions The SPIRIT requested comment from Avery for various reasons, often being told, “I’m not sure what’s going on,” and that he would “speak with (Council) President Council-Harris and get back to you.” Other times, Avery would just decline to comment.

Monroe said other media outlets experienced the same thing, saying, “Several media outlets have told me that they are unable to get in touch with him when there are issues about Yeadon they need to speak about.”

When asked about Avery’s lack of communication with media outlets, Council-Harris said, “I don’t know anything about that.”

Though most aren’t happy with Avery or his work, there are no signs that his contract will be affected.

*Published Aug. 3, 2022*

## Philly LGBTQ realtors provide safe spaces for their queer clients

**Michele Zipkin**  
michele@epgn.com

The real estate industry, like many other professions, has not been as diverse in the past as it is today, and it still has plenty of room for improvement. But despite elitism, nepotism, and other potential barriers like high costs of classes and the need to hustle and build connections, the real estate field has seen an increase in LGBTQ realtors over the years.

"There's a strong push for diversity right now across industries," said Julian Domanico, who is licensed with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Fox & Roach at The Harper: Rittenhouse, and also practices real estate as an independent contractor. "There's a lot of opportunities for real estate agents to make mistakes when it comes to the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission], where the language we use is important. It can make people feel like they belong, like they're comfortable, and it can also make people feel like they're ostracized and uncomfortable. They put a lot of emphasis in real estate school for new agents to treat people exactly the same, not steward them in one direction or neighborhood or make assumptions about their life or their price points."

Similar to having a queer therapist or doctor who's familiar with their patients' life experiences, LGBTQ realtors are often a culturally competent fit for LGBTQ home buyers and sellers. Queer realtors may be more attuned to using gender-neutral language, or avoiding terms that may lead to assumptions about a client or colleague's sexual orientation or gender identity.

"We are therapists to a large degree, we help guide our clients, educate them and

really be a trusted resource for them," said Brad Button, who runs the Button Team at Compass Real Estate. "It's a very personal journey, purchasing or selling real estate. So much comes up in terms of life situation, personal goals, where you want to be, whether you're making some kind of life transition. Having someone that really understands what you may be going through really helps."

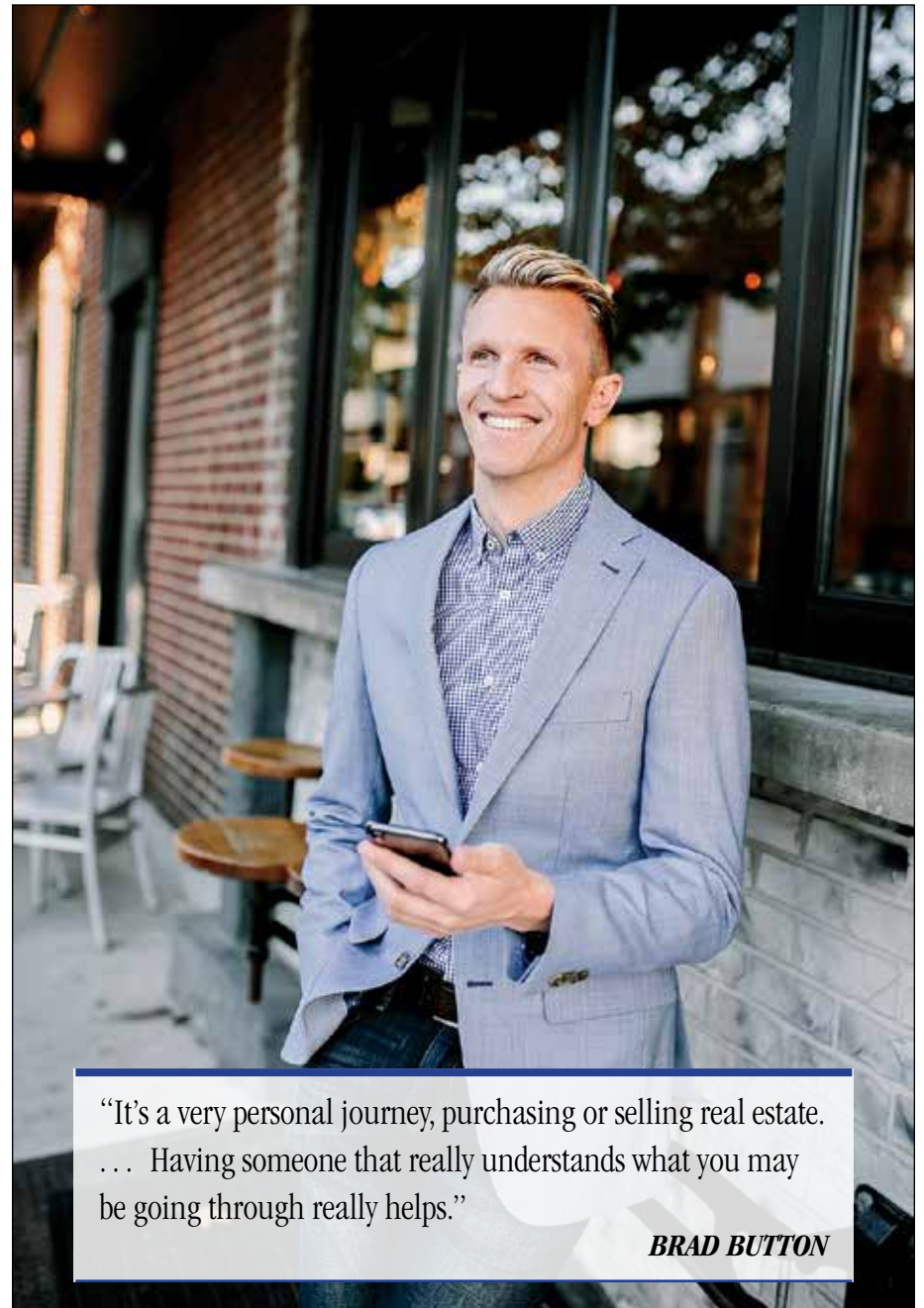
"I think [LGBTQ realtors] are really important to help understand the dynamics of an LGBTQ person," said Tom Englett, sales manager at the same brokerage as Domanico. "I think as a gay person you're more open minded, you kind of have a better understanding of lifestyle."

Omosi Anabui is a licensed real estate agent with Keller Williams Realty. Like Domanico, she's at the start of her career, working to build her network and forge connections with people in the community. For her, LGBTQ realtors are important because it speaks to the fact that the people in her life fostered opportunities that opened doors for an LGBTQ person of color like herself, she said.

"I think my getting into the industry will hopefully open up a vehicle for more folks like me to have that access," she said. "Especially somebody who also identifies as Black, African American, you see the disparities in even something as simple as being approved for a mortgage loan, [to have to] figure out ways to still make this attainable and accessible. Being able to have that inside information to create a vehicle for my people."

All four realtors agreed that buying a home may be difficult right now because it is a seller's market, and houses sometimes

*Continued on next page*



"It's a very personal journey, purchasing or selling real estate. . . . Having someone that really understands what you may be going through really helps."

**BRAD BUTTON**



## Philadelphia Gay News continued

sell for substantially higher than the asking price.

"Home prices have gone up, and when there's competition, people with deeper pockets are digging deep to pay more money for the home that might not be worth what they're paying at this point," Englett said. "If someone sells their home, they're selling at a much higher price but they're also having to pay a much higher price to get back into the market. Because of that, people have decided that maybe it's not a good time to sell."

As such, it may be doubly important for a buyer or seller who's part of a minority community to navigate the housing market with a realtor of a similar background.

Anabui said one challenge for LGBTQ and QTBIPOC buyers and sellers is "being able to work with someone who understands your lived experiences when it comes to something as simple as having to work twice as hard to get you approved for a mortgage. Or maybe you don't have the finances compared to somebody else, so we want to make your office more appealing but we don't have the option to be able to drop \$30,000 in the event that there's something weird with the numbers on closing day. How do we still make your offer wanting to be accepted, especially in this market where it's crazy out there."

Domanico observed that an influx of developers in Philadelphia are attracting people from all over the country, specifically from Boston, New York and Washington D.C., who consider Philly relatively affordable.

"That is a huge issue for long term Philadelphians and LGBTQ Philadelphians who oftentimes don't live in the more expensive places in Philly," he said. "Those people are being priced out as well just like Philadelphians have been priced out for decades at this point."

Anabui, Button, Domanico and Englett all said that they think there is a paucity of LGBTQ of color realtors in the industry, at least in the Philadelphia area.

"I work for a brokerage that has a pretty diverse group of people you see on the main lines who are hitting those hard sells," Anabui said. "But I'm not seeing a lot of diversity on the ground, I'm not seeing a lot of folks doing the work, even the folks buying and selling. I one hundred percent see a huge disparity in folks who



**OMOSI ANABUI**



**TOM ENGLETT**

are queer people of color doing the work."

Button and Domanico communicated that from their experiences, even though Philadelphia is home to a fair few LGBTQ realtors, little LGBTQ diversity exists in the local real estate industry.

"There seem to be a lot of white gay male cisgender realtors in the industry, but definitely a lack of LGBTQ female, transgender, and LGBTQ realtors of color," Button said. "I'm not sure why that is, but it brings up a very important issue that needs to be addressed, and I'd love to see progress in that regard."

Domanico framed the shortage of Black and Brown queer realtors as an issue of accessibility related to having resources. He said that paying for real estate classes, credentials, licensure, insurance and brokerage fees can get very expensive.



"I want to attract people who see me as a full person. I'm really leaning into my Blackness, my queerness and not shying away from it."

**JULIAN DOMANICO**

"It's just a tough process for an LGBTQ realtor of color who most likely is coming from a marginalized background or limited resources," he said.

Even though Domanico doesn't see many queer people of color working high level real estate jobs, he does not plan to sacrifice his authenticity to find success.

"I show up to places with a huge afro, with my hair in dreadlocks, in braids, in

topknots," he said. "I'm doing all types of natural hair styles every week almost because I'm trying to maintain a certain authenticity of who I am, and I'm not willing to worry over what business I might lose. Instead I want to attract people who see me as a full person. I'm really leaning into my Blackness, my queerness and not shying away from it."

Published March 25, 2022

# The Herald

## A legend revisited

### Former player urges school board to take McCluskey's name off gym

By **Melissa Klaric**  
Herald Staff Writer

FARRELL – Legendary.

That one word describes, as well as any, the legacy of Coach Edward McCluskey, who died in 1987. One of the most revered high school basketball coaches in Pennsylvania and, arguably, the nation, McCluskey led Farrell High School basketball teams to seven state titles between 1948 and 1977.

He compiled a 698-185 career record at Farrell, Burgettstown, and Kennedy Catholic – then known as Kennedy Christian. He racked up 11 WPIAL championships.

One of his teams even beat Philadelphia Overbrook High School — with Wilt Chamberlain at center.

Even today, more than three decades after McCluskey's death, few would dispute his greatness and genius as a high school coach.

But there was another, darker side to McCluskey that tarnishes his legacy, some of his former players say. They allege the coach physically and mentally abused some of his players.

He kicked, punched, and slapped them, they said, and whacked them on the head with a clipboard. They also said McCluskey would use the N-word, or variations of it.

"He was a great coach, but he was not a great human being," said one of McCluskey's players, Brian K. Sanders Sr., 63, a former police officer and karate instructor. A 1977 graduate of Farrell High School, he was inducted into the Mercer County Basketball Hall of Fame.

Sanders has submitted a letter to the Farrell Area School Board, asking the district to remove McCluskey's name from the high school gymnasium, which is named after him. Sanders also opposes efforts to induct McCluskey into the prestigious Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

In the letter to the board, Sanders cites eight cases of McCluskey "assaulting players – punching, kicking, slapping; and his weapon of choice was a clipboard." In an interview with The Herald, Sanders, who now lives in Las



Brian K. Sanders



Edward McCluskey

Vegas, acknowledged the standards of conduct for coaches and teachers were different during McCluskey's era. But he argued McCluskey's abuse was extreme and exceptional, even for the times.

The Herald was unable to identify or reach any family member of McCluskey's.

Asked why he waited decades to publicly express his views on McCluskey, Sanders acknowledged that, until this year, he didn't push to have McCluskey's name removed from the gymnasium. That changed, Sanders said, after he learned of local efforts to get McCluskey inducted into the Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.

"I was willing to let it slide before," Sanders said. "But that was just too much."

School board President Terry Harrison told The Herald the board will discuss Sanders' letter Monday. Sanders plans to attend that meeting.

"At this point I don't have all the information," Harrison said. "The next board meeting is when we will address the issue."

In interviews with The Herald, other former players defended McCluskey, citing his positive influence on them.

Former Herald Editor Jim Raykie, a Farrell graduate, also revered McCluskey. On the 20th anniversary of McCluskey's 1987 death, he wrote an editorial expressing his reverence for the man who "meant so much to a town,

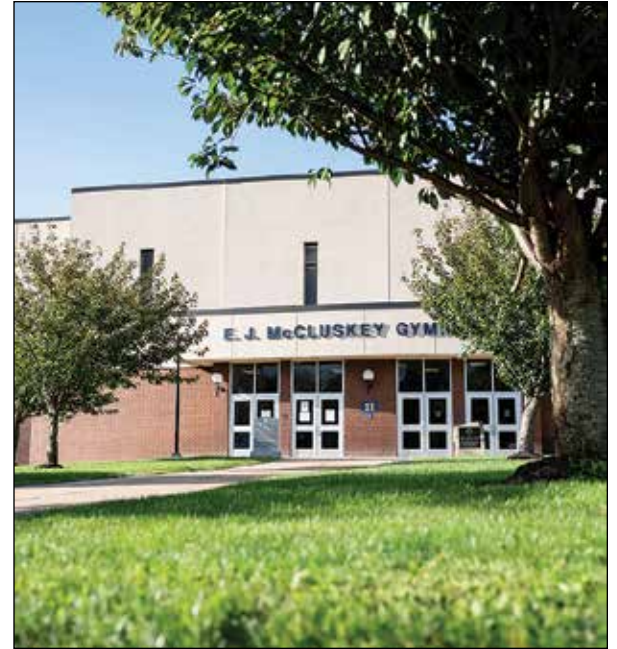


PHOTO: TANNER MONDOK | HERALD

players, fans, and in general, the game."

Raykie told The Herald that McCluskey's nomination to the Hall of Fame will come up again after Thanksgiving, when the board picks a new class.

Some of McCluskey's players said their former coach shouldn't receive that honor.

The Herald talked to four former players – one of whom declined to be named – about the abuse.

Richard Chambers, 73, of Wheatland, played on McCluskey's Farrell team in 1966, '67, and '68.

After an on-court mistake, he said, McCluskey yanked him from the game and slapped him four or five times.

"He was furious," Chambers said.

A few days later, Chambers went to McCluskey's office. As Chambers sat in his office, his legs stretched, McCluskey, then dean of students, kicked him, he said.

Chambers quit the basketball team after his junior year.

More than 50 years later, Chambers still dislikes seeing McCluskey's name on the Farrell gymnasium. Like Sanders, Chambers wants McCluskey's name removed.

In a notarized note, Verne Wright, who played basketball at Farrell from 1975 to 1977, cited two incidents during the 1975 basketball season: In a pre-season practice, McCluskey struck him in the face and head. In the other incident, he said, McCluskey hit him in the head with a

*Continued on next page*



## The Herald continued

clipboard in front of his teammate at half-time.

Another player, Clarence Gilchrist, backed up Wright, stating in a letter he saw McCluskey hit Wright with a clipboard.

Vincent L. Short, who played for Farrell from 1975 to 1977, cited "blatant, demeaning, rude and selfish actions of Coach Eddie McCluskey directed at his players and others."

"McCluskey chastised one player in front of the team, then struck him in the head with a clipboard," Short said. "I was astonished."

Bill Dungee, 68, of Aliquippa, Pa., who played basketball for McCluskey in a state championship team in 1971 and 1972, said the coach slapped and verbally abused him.

"He ... would say nasty things about (players), making everyone laugh,"

Dungee said. "I took it because I loved basketball so much."

Other players, including Sanders, said McCluskey used racist epithets.

"In particular, the 'N' word," one former player, now 68, said. "We were playing a PIAA semi-finals and he said, 'Go out and get them; they ain't nothing but a bunch of N's.'"

Other former players, however, supported McCluskey.

Unlike his twin brother, Richard Chambers, Art Chambers, 73, of Sharon, wants McCluskey's name to stay on the gymnasium.

"He slapped and hit other people over the head with a clipboard," Art Chambers said. "I witnessed that. He slapped me twice. He had a very forceful, very aggressive manner."

But Chambers, whose family was poor, said he could go to his coach for anything. "He made sure we had anything we needed," Chambers said.

"The coach made sure I had a lunch."

Other former players said they never witnessed abusive behavior by McCluskey.

Dr. Brian Generalovich played for McCluskey for three years, including state championship teams in 1959 and 1960.

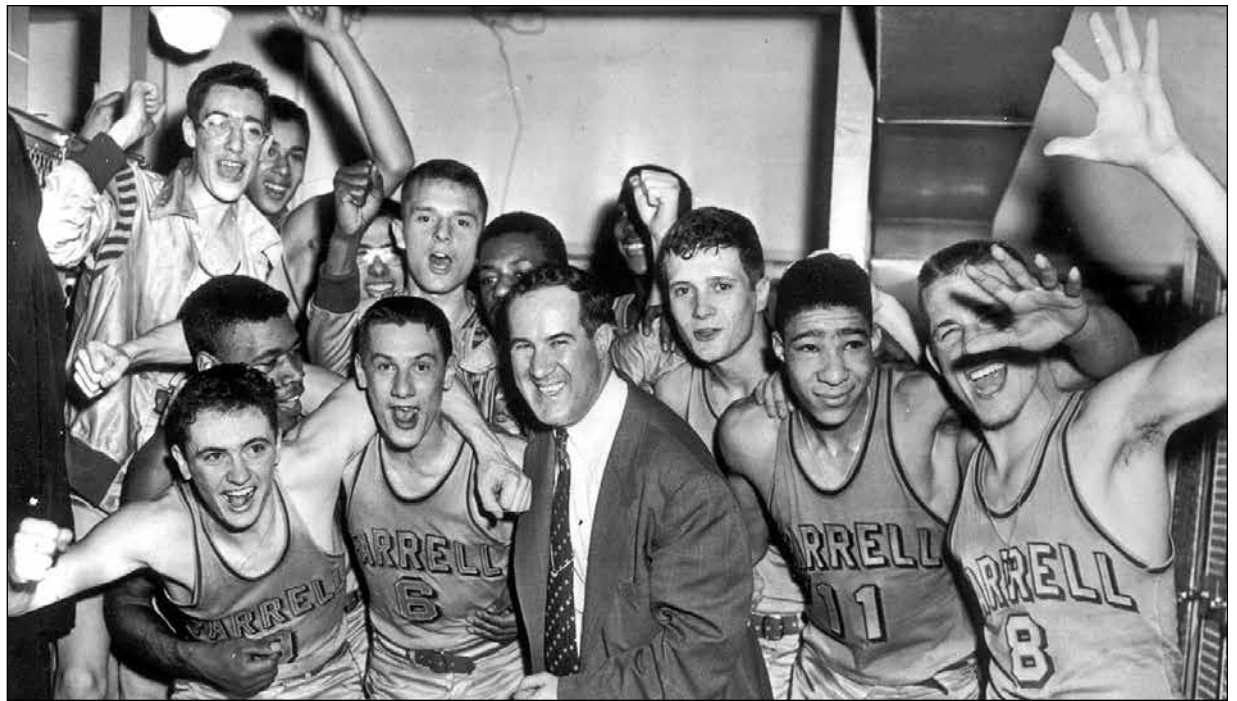


PHOTO: HERALD FILE

The 1954 Farrell Steelers and Coach Edward J. McCluskey celebrate another state championship.

"He was an inspiring figure," Generalovich said. "For the life of me, I can't understand where these allegations came from."

Frank Sincek, 80, played for McCluskey and coached with him for 20 years. He called the allegations "crazy."

"I never heard anybody complain," Sincek said.

Col. Donald H. Jones, 82, of Florida, played for McCluskey at Farrell from 1953 to 1957. He said McCluskey mentored him.

"He put his heart, soul, and all of his energy into coaching," Jones said. "The allegation must be from a disgruntled individual, and would have to have happened after my time."

"I attribute my success to him. He was the greatest influence during my high school years."

"He was not our friend but you can't necessarily be

friends with the people you're in charge of."

Mark Petrillo, a 1971 graduate, played on Farrell's 1969 state championship team.

"There wasn't physical abuse that I had seen," he said. Not with me, anyway."

"That man did a lot for the school system. He built young men into good adults. There's a lot of leaders in the community because of him."

Sanders, however, said McCluskey's personal failures, like those of former Penn State coach Joe Paterno, eclipsed his greatness as a coach.

"His victims have suffered," Sanders said. "It's time to address it."

Follow Melissa Klaric on twitter @HeraldKlaric or email her at [mklaric@sharonherald.com](mailto:mklaric@sharonherald.com)

Published Sept. 9, 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

## Cold case cleared

25 years ago a grisly homicide took place that stumped investigators; today the case is 'cleared' but few people were aware

By Keith Gushard  
Meadville Tribune

The mysterious and grisly details surrounding the death of a 76-year-old woman shook a small community along French Creek more than 25 years ago.

Clara Kenvin's decomposing body was found under debris in the basement of her home north of Saegertown in May 1997.

In the weeks and months that followed, the gruesome news of the case had residents on edge and gained national attention. Some news accounts indicated Kenvin's internal organs were missing from the neck and waist, perhaps at the hands of her killer.

Noted Erie-based forensic pathologist Dr. Eric Vey even called Kenvin's death one of "several fascinating cases he investigated," according to an Associated Press story about a year after Kenvin's body was discovered.

Theories on the cause of death came and went, but Kenvin's death was — and still remains — a homicide of an undetermined cause by the Crawford County Coroner's Office.

Pennsylvania State Police today, however, say the Kenvin case is closed and was "exceptionally cleared" more than five years ago — in October 2016. They even say they know who did it and how it was done.

The case's 2016 closure became news to Kenvin's family just last fall by happenstance when a family member contacted police.

The closure of one of the county's cold cases also is news to some other Crawford County agencies since state police have yet to notify them formally of the status.



Cpl. Phillip Shaffer of the Pennsylvania State Police at Meadville is shown with the seven case-file binders associated with the Clara Kenvin homicide investigation. State police say the cold case from 1997 has been cleared.

PHOTO: KEITH GUSHARD/  
MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

### Family reaction

Kenvin, a U.S. Army nurse during World War II, was reclusive and eccentric, according to her family.

She lived alone, had no children and had an unkempt home. She had cats and dogs and would take in multiple strays.

Her family didn't learn the case was cleared and closed until about nine months ago when a great-niece contacted police to get an update.

"No one ever called anyone about the thing being resolved in 2016," Barry Williams, a nephew of Kenvin's who lives in Latrobe, told The Meadville Tribune. "Never heard a thing about it. The only way

we found out was my daughter (Deborah) inquired at the state police in Meadville."

That family inquiry was made in September 2021, Williams said. The family was told by police they didn't know if any of Kenvin's relatives still were alive.

"There are five relatives — myself, two brothers and two (of our) cousins," Williams said.

Following Kenvin's death in 1997, one of Williams' brothers called police every few weeks to learn of any progress.

"Finally, it got to the point where no headway was being made," Williams said. "I think he just stopped inquiring — just resigned to the fact they're never going to

find the perpetrator. It laid that way until my daughter, just out of curiosity, tried to find out if there was any more news on it."

### What police believe happened

So why and how was Clara Kenvin killed, and, most importantly, by whom?

"It was all over money owed," said Cpl. Phillip Shaffer, who now heads the criminal investigation unit at the Meadville barracks.

The Kenvin death was considered "exceptionally cleared" by Pennsylvania State Police on Oct. 7, 2016, because their lead suspect — John Metro Krenisky Jr. — had died, Shaffer said.

*Continued on next page*



# The Meadville Tribune continued

Krenisky was among three area men who had been seen together at Kenvin's home days before her remains were discovered by authorities. The men were doing carpentry work for her.

"According to the two associates, they did some work for Kenvin on a dog house and she owed them money — it was a few hundred dollars," Shaffer said.

Shaffer said he isn't authorized by state police command to release the names of the other two men who were with Krenisky.

"According to the associates, Krenisky was going to collect (the money) as he was having a hard time with the money. She didn't have the money, so he (Krenisky) strangled her just inside the door (of the home)," Shaffer said. "Krenisky and one of the associates then carried the body into the house."

Shaffer said Kenvin's death occurred about one to two weeks prior to her body being discovered by authorities on May 5, 1997.

Kenvin's deteriorated remains were found by authorities hidden under debris and beneath the basement stairs. Authorities had gone to the home after the Saegertown postmaster reported to police Kenvin had failed to pick her mail for multiple days.

For nearly two decades, fear is what kept the case from coming to a conclusion, according to Shaffer.

"Both of them were deathly afraid of Krenisky," Shaffer said of the two other men. "That's what kept the second associate from fully coming forward."

Investigators kept talking to the two associated men over the years, but it wasn't until Krenisky's death that the case could be resolved, said Shaffer. The two other men had been apart from each other, Shaffer said.

"We had a good statement from one, but the other wasn't assisting us fully," Shaffer said. "Every time we'd interview him, he kept taking a closer step and we'd get a little bit more and little bit more."

Things broke when police spoke with the second associate on Oct. 7, 2016, just days after Krenisky's death, Shaffer said. The man's words put the Kenvin case to rest since there were now two witnesses willing to talk fully.

"Once we told him Krenisky passed away, that's what opened him up into telling us everything," Shaffer said.



MEADVILLE TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Investigators remove evidence from the home of Clara Kenvin in this 1997 photo. Kenvin was murdered at her home and Pennsylvania State Police say the case has been cleared.

"It became 'exceptionally cleared — death of actor,' which means we had enough evidence that we could have — if he (Krenisky) were alive — arrested him at that point since we had the two corroborating statements," Shaffer said.

## Why the police are convinced

How can police be certain it wasn't one of the two men, or even both, who killed Kenvin and were just pointing a finger at Krenisky?

"There were certain things both associates said that corroborated with the scene photographs, what was in her vehicle and the scene inside the house," Shaffer said. "Everything matched up with what they were saying — as far as things that weren't released to the public."

"And, what the cause of death was — most likely it would be one person causing the death," Shaffer continued. "The cause of death was strangulation."

Milt Sipple, who lives near the former Kenvin home, remembers seeing a strange sight outside the Kenvin residence in the spring of 1997 involving three people — the person who turned out to be Kernisky, one of the two other men and Kenvin.

Sipple told the Tribune he was on his way to the post office to pick up his mail when he noticed a pickup truck in Kenvin's driveway.

"One guy is standing by the pickup truck and there's this other guy standing way

over to the side and she (Kenvin) is hiding behind a bush," Sipple said. "I thought to myself, 'What the hell is going on now?' When I came back, they were gone. I found out several days later she was murdered."

Sipple said he picked what turned out to be Krenisky's picture from a police photo array of suspects, though he didn't know the man's name.

"I identified the guy, I pointed to his picture — I said, 'That's the guy who was in the yard chasing after the woman,'" Sipple said. "In my mind I still have a picture of his face."

## A crime sensationalized

In the weeks that followed Kenvin's death, theories about the case played out in the media.

On May 22, 1997, another area newspaper ran a story quoting an unnamed source as saying Kenvin's organs and bones had been removed from her abdomen and chest cavity. The story claimed the organs and bones weren't found and there were no blood stains, suggesting Kenvin could have died and been eviscerated elsewhere.

Erie's television stations reported the matter that same day, with one station citing an unnamed source saying it was a Jeffrey Dahmer-type case. Dahmer, of Milwaukee, was a serial killer of 17 people between 1978 and 1991 who dismembered his victims.

Those reports drew the ire of Mark Waitlevortch, who was Crawford County District Attorney when Kenvin was killed. He later defended the pace of the investigation.

"But this is an investigation — the investigation is ongoing," Waitlevortch said in a Tribune story published May 30, 1997. "It's very important for the police to investigate this thing without misinformation — that kind of craziness going on — and also they need to be able to conduct their investigation in a calm matter without all this speculation."

## What the file says

A recent Tribune review of the Crawford County coroner's files found Kenvin's remains were incomplete when discovered by authorities.

"There were multiple body parts missing from the upper torso and face," Crawford County Coroner Scott Schell recently told the Tribune. "There was decay and (animal) scavenging. She had been deceased five to 10 days prior to being discovered."

Authorities had found Kenvin's body in the basement of the home with the nearby garage door open, Shaffer said.

Like Schell, Shaffer said the amount of animal scavenging meant significant portions of the body were not there.

"Sections of the body that could not be

*Continued on next page*

## The Meadville Tribune continued

examined for strangulation,” Shaffer said.

Subsequent examinations of Kenvin’s remains by Dr. Dennis Dirkmaat, a forensic anthropologist at Mercyhurst University in Erie, in 1998, and Dr. Anthony Falsetti, lab director of the University of Florida’s Human Identification Laboratory, in 2008, both concluded while there was animal scavenging, that was not the cause of her death.

Dirkmaat’s report found a bluntly-pointed, hand-held object had created damage to Kenvin’s bones.

Falsetti’s report found, “None of the defects found on remains can be directly attributed to any item, tool or other man-made device, and are most parsimonious related to animal scavenging from the time of death to time of discovery.”

Shaffer initially got involved in the case in 2008 when he became a criminal investigation unit trooper at Meadville in 2008.

He worked the cold case for eight years, building on the efforts of the initial investigators, as well as subsequent officers who had handled the case.

Ironically, when the case was closed out on Oct. 7, 2016, it was Shaffer’s last day in the Meadville barracks’ crime unit as a trooper. Shaffer moved on to work in the state police computer crime unit before returning last year as the Meadville crime section supervisor. He says he was not aware of what became of attempts to contact the family after the case was considered closed.



SHANNON ROAE/MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

This is how the former Clara Kenvin residence north of Saegertown appears today.

### Other investigators’ reactions

Schell was surprised when told by the Tribune that state police had cleared the case.

“There’s nothing in our files that indicate we were notified that the state police had cleared this case,” he said.

Schell has been the county’s coroner since being elected in 2011. He’s been with the coroner’s office since 2001 when he served as a deputy coroner until his election.

“Our paperwork still stands listing this as a homicide,” Schell said. “No cause listed — that is still pending, according to all the paperwork we have. We received no notification or informal notification.”

Vey, the forensic pathologist who performed the autopsy, also said the case was still open.

Even the Crawford County District Attorney’s Office has no formal indication from state police that the case is closed, District Attorney Paula DiGiacomo said.

Crawford County Judge Francis Schultz, who previously was the county’s district attorney prior to his election as judge last fall, had discussions with state police whether there was evidence to charge someone with Kenvin’s killing.

“I did not believe that we had sufficient evidence to successfully prosecute someone,” Schultz said in an email. “I do not recall when those discussions occurred.”

Schultz said he doesn’t remember when state police notified him that they had decided the case was “exceptionally cleared” and was told police would handle a press conference announcing the decision.

There is no standard procedure when it comes to making public pronouncements on resolution of a case, according to Myles Snyder, communications director for state police.

A press conference could be done by a state police barracks or area troop commander or the local district attorney’s office or in combination, Snyder said. Such was the case last month in Mercer County when the Mercer County District Attorney’s Office and Pennsylvania State Police at Mercer and the Troop D headquarters in Butler held a news conference on resolution of a 1980 case in Mercer County.

### Closure for the family

While chance led Kenvin’s family to contact state police last year only to find authorities actually solved the case in 2016, her family has closure on what Williams termed “an evil act.”

The police explaining what they feel happened has made a made a difference to the family, Williams said.

“I talked to my brothers and my cousins and everyone is somewhat relieved that there was an end to the thing,” he said.

“We’re over it, but it was very troubling at the beginning not to have any information coming for the longest time,” Williams said. “Time heals all wounds and it’s been a long time.”

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*Published June 11, 2022*

## Life is full of emotion.



# TRIUMPH

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# THE MORNING CALL

## Through three deaths, this Lehigh Valley family has helped 52 lives through organ donations

By Leif Greiss  
The Morning Call

Thirty years later, it's still not easy for Elizabeth Kennedy knowing that her son is gone.

Her son David Michael Kennedy Jr. died in January 1992 at 19 years old. He was a student at what was then Penn State-Fogelsville and died in a car crash during bad weather. Kennedy, of South Whitehall Township, said the holidays and birthdays are especially hard without David.

"My husband, our family and I, we talk about him and say 'Oh, if he was here, he would be doing this' or 'if he were here, you'd be saying this.' Mother's Day and Father's Day are coming up — those are really two tough days for us," Kennedy said.

She said it's also hard being without her nephew, Jonathan Kennedy, who died in 2015, and her brother-in-law, Greg Kennedy, who died in 2019. Jonathan Kennedy died at 26 after being hit by a drunken driver while spending Memorial Day weekend with his girlfriend. She said Jonathan was an electrician and played Santa Claus at Christmas. Greg Kennedy, Jonathan's father, died at 69 from lung cancer. Both father and son were very involved in their church, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish in Pen Argyl.

But she takes comfort knowing their deaths have significantly helped other people. All three are posthumous donors of body tissue and organs. David Kennedy Jr. gave skin tissue, Jonathan Kennedy gave his organs and Greg Kennedy, despite having cancer throughout his body, was able to give his corneas.

"We know the great good that [David] did for other people," Kennedy said. "We have that in our hearts, they helped these 45 people from our son, five people from Jonathan and two people from Greg. They are alive in other people and making their lives better, that is really heartwarming to us."

April is National Donate Life Month, a designation meant

to emphasize the importance of organ donation. Rick Hasz, president and CEO of Gift of Life Donor Program, said the Kennedy family is a testament to the region's generosity.

The area Gift of Life serves, which includes eastern Pennsylvania, south New Jersey and Delaware, leads the nation in total organ donations and donations per capita, he said. In 2021, 705 people donated organs to Gift of Life, leading to 1,732 organ transplants.

However, he said, even with the large number of donors in the region, the number of people waiting for a transplant outpaces the number of available organs. There is always a need for organ and tissue donations, with more than 5,000 people waiting on transplants in the region Gift of Life serves.

Fortunately, one person can help multiple people with a single donation. Organ donors can donate their heart, intestines, kidneys, liver, lungs and the pancreas for a total of eight organs. However, Hasz said, organs generally can only be harvested if the donor dies while on life support, which he said occurs with about 2% of deaths in the U.S.

Skin tissue, on the other hand, can be collected anytime within 24 hours after death and can be stored for a long period of time. Some skin tissue donations can be large enough for nearly 100 people, Hasz said.

Cornea donation has the benefit of being safe for cancer patients like Greg Kennedy to donate because blood doesn't flow to the corneas.

Hasz said the need for a new cornea isn't as pressing as the need for a new heart, but it leads to a huge improvement in the quality of life for those who receive them.

"It restores sight 99% of the time," Hasz said. "People go from being blind one day to being able to see again the next."

There are other body parts that can be donated and are needed. These include the middle ear, the face, hands,



PHOTO: DAVID GARRETT / SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

**Elizabeth Kennedy of South Whitehall Township lost her son, nephew and brother-in-law to untimely deaths but all three were able to help others through organ/tissue donation.**

veins, tendons, ligaments and bones. Signing up to become a donor isn't hard, Hasz said, and there are multiple ways to do it. Many people know they can become a donor when they get or renew their driver's license but Hasz said another way in the Lehigh Valley is by going to Gift of Life's website.

Family members can also make the posthumous choice to donate, which is what Kennedy and her husband, David Kennedy Sr., did with their son, but Hasz said it's better if people make the choice for themselves.

"We want people to sign up and register as a donor," Hasz said. "If you do that, it takes that responsibility off your family because they know what your wishes are."

Kennedy said choosing to be a donor can have a ripple effect, too. She said both she and her husband were registered donors before their son's death but their younger son Scott chose to register after what happened to his brother. She said she hopes more people will choose to register as donors.

"[Gift of Life] used to have a bumper sticker that said something like, 'Don't take your organs to Heaven, because Heaven knows we need them here,' " Kennedy said. "You know what? There's nothing I'm leaving with that I need in the next world and if somebody else needs it here on Earth, I'm happy to do that, I'm happy to donate."

*Published April 27, 2022*

# Study proves Black loans matter

By Ann Belser

In 1937 the George F. Cram Co., working with the Home Owners Loan Corp., produced a map to show banks where it was safe to lend money in Pittsburgh.

The lowest grade areas, which were at a high risk of loan defaults, were marked in red and were all African American communities. It came to be known as redlining — marking the communities in red where banks refused to lend.

Today there may not be a published map, but banks have not changed their lending habits, according to research conducted by Carnegie Mellon University with Lower Marshall Shadeland Development Initiative and Parents Against Violence.

The results, contained in the report “Inherited Inequality: The State of Financing for Affordable Housing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania” were released to City Council during a post-agenda session sponsored by Councilmen R. Daniel Lavelle and the Rev. Ricky Burgess, who, together, represent 16 minority neighborhoods.

The study took more than a year and a half. Although banks are required to report neighborhoods where loans are made and the race of the people to whom they are lending, the information is kept by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. in Washington, D.C., and recorded by census tract and thus had to be converted back to neighborhoods, according to Stanley Lowe, chief development officer of the Lower Marshall-Shadeland Development Initiative and a former director of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority.

The result was a 129-page report containing table after table on where banks are making loans and which banks are making loans to African American borrowers. It also details where homeowners received loans from banks and where they didn't.

“I really love this city, but when the



PHOTO: ANN BELSER

Stanley Lowe, the former head of the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, now chief development officer of Lower Marshall Shadeland Development Initiative, talks about the findings of a study of 14 years of the patterns of lending in the city's neighborhoods. Lowe attended a post-agenda session of City Council that was held in-person with some members attending virtually on a screen behind him.

report was done, I had to ask myself, 'Why am I still living here?' ” Lowe said.

The results of the study show a stark contrast in lending. For instance, in 2020, Shadyside residents received \$234 million in loans from banks, while residents of all 25 of the city's predominantly minority neighborhoods received less than half that amount: \$109 million, or 5% of the total amount loaned in the city.

That year was not an anomaly because of the pandemic. From 2007 through 2019, banks issued more than \$1 billion in mortgages in Shadyside while all of the Black neighborhoods combined received \$807 million in loans.

Lending to African Americans in Pittsburgh is so low that while African

Americans made up nearly a quarter of the population, in the 13 years from 2007 to 2019, just 3.5% of the value of loans from banks were issued to African American borrowers. During that time White borrowers made up 66.2% of the population while receiving 64.8% of the money distributed. Loans to Black families averaged \$81,553. The average loan to White families was \$142,818.

The category of “race missing” received 28.2% percent of the money loaned at an average of \$320,000 a loan. Asian Americans, who comprise 5.3 percent of the population, received 3.5% of the loans averaging \$197,356 per loan.

Banks were also more willing to make loans to White applicants. In 2020, 68,661

mortgages were given to White borrowers; White applicants had a 19.5% rate of denied applications. That same year just 1,872 mortgages were issued to Black borrowers and Black applicants had a 48.6% denial rate.

The ability to obtain a mortgage gives the borrower the ability to build wealth that can be passed down to subsequent generations. In Pittsburgh, of the 64,669 homes that are owner-occupied, 81.2% are owned by White families while 14.6% are owned by Black families. African Americans have a home-ownership rate of 30% while 52% of Whites own their own homes.

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## Print. continued

Asian Americans have a lower home ownership rate of just 18% with only 2% of owner-occupied homes in Pittsburgh belonging to Asian Americans.

Dr. Gregory Squires, a professor of sociology, public policy, and public administration at George Washington University called the results of the study “striking, but not surprising.”

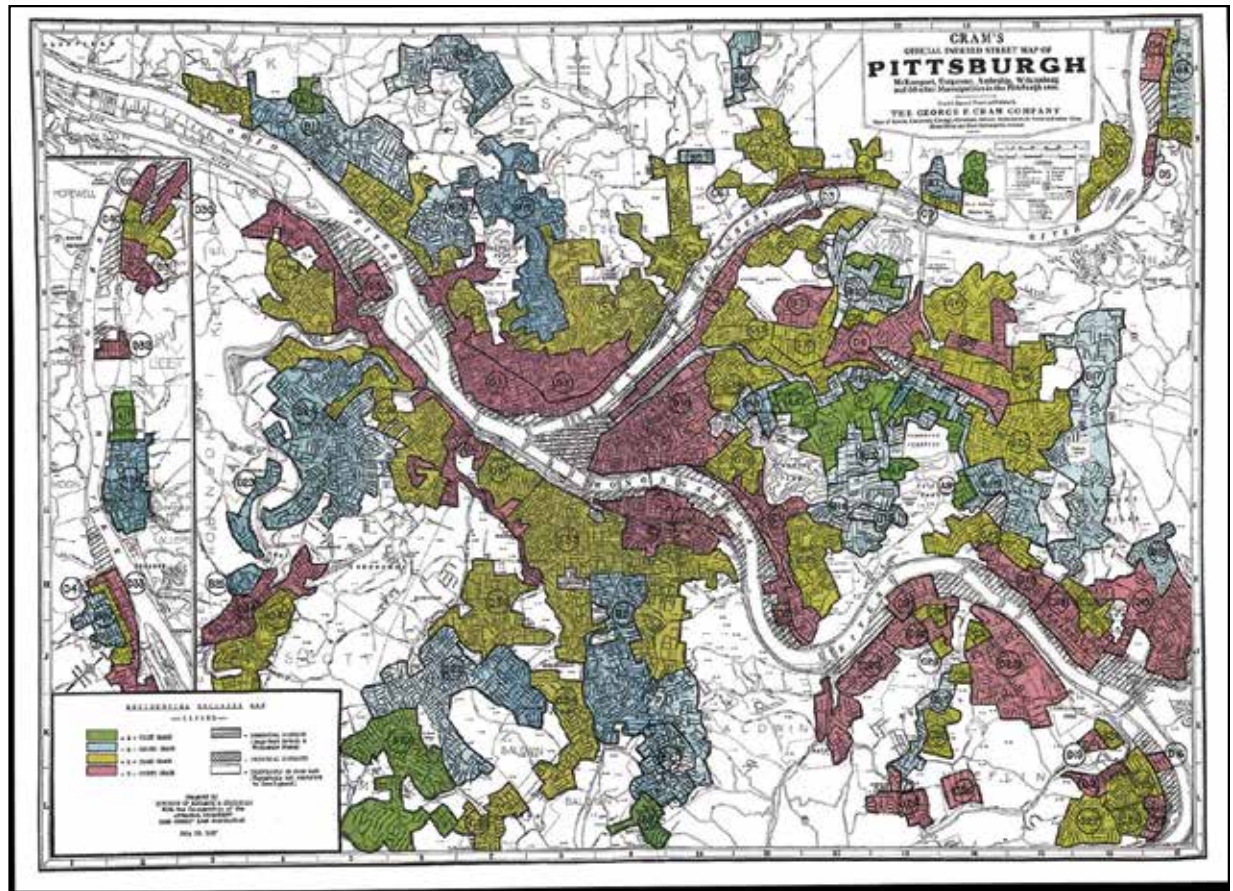
He said the same pattern of racial disparities have been seen in other studies.

“Our analysis shows that between 2007 and 2019, 906 financial institutions operating in Pittsburgh provided just 3.5% of loan dollars to African Americans and less than 7% of loan dollars to the city’s minority communities,” Dr. Dan Holland, the lead analyst for Lower Marshall-Shadeland Development Initiative, said. “This is why we call this report ‘Inherited Inequality’: because a whole generation of African Americans have been left behind by banks. Public funds alone will not rebuild minority neighborhoods. Private capital is essential to rebuild communities and build generational wealth, especially for African Americans.

“Some banks, such as Dollar and PNC, are doing outstanding jobs meeting the needs of Pittsburgh’s African American communities. But for 551 banks which have made no loans to African Americans in 13 years, among other institutions, perhaps it is time that they step up and make a commitment. After all, there are thousands of opportunities to build wealth within Pittsburgh’s African American communities.”

Lower Marshall-Shadeland Development Initiative also developed a website where residents can see which neighborhoods are receiving public and private investment at [www.pghlending.com](http://www.pghlending.com).

*Published Sept. 16, 2021*



MAP COURTESY OF COUNCILMAN THE REV. RICKY BURGESS' OFFICE

This 1937 map illustrates the early redlining in the city, with African American communities colored in red and yellow showing bankers where not to loan money. Neighborhoods around the city that were designated as less risky for loans were colored in blue and green. Many of the areas in red still have not recovered economically from the historical lack of investment.

**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>

Nearly 8 in 10 Pennsylvania adults, over age 55, read a daily, Sunday or non-daily print or digital newspaper or visit a newspaper website each week.<sup>3</sup>



Sources: <sup>1</sup>Coda Ventures; <sup>2</sup>NAA; <sup>3</sup>2022 Release 1 Nielsen Scarborough Report. Copyright 2022 Scarborough Research. All rights reserved.





## MORRISONS COVE HERALD

# Changing Cove

## Slow Advance of Rural Area Broadband

**By George Berkhimer**  
For the Herald

The Information Age that began in the middle of the 20th century has delivered incredible benefits. Business efficiency has improved, students have access to more learning resources than ever before, and global communication is instantaneous and inexpensive.

Unfortunately, rural areas like Morrisons Cove still lag behind the rest of the country in terms of the infrastructure that makes it possible.

Residents in urban areas have been accessing the internet via wireless and fiber-based broadband connections since the early 2000s, but many Cove residents still rely on slow, unreliable, decades-old dial-up service that limits what they can do online, while others have no access at all.

The good news is that the Cove's broadband infrastructure is expanding, but it will take several more years until it's available everywhere.

In October 2020, the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission formed Alleghenies Broadband Inc. (ABI), a new nonprofit organization, to support the development of this infrastructure.

ABI is working through public-private partnerships to bring high-speed internet to underserved rural areas in a six-county region that includes Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Somerset Counties. Projects are being completed as funding is available.

Brandon Carson, executive director of ABI, said plans to build out rural broadband infrastructure focus on expanding fixed wireless internet service through existing providers; constructing new telecommunications towers in areas that lack them; and planning for the deployment of fiber connectivity to communities in the future.

### Pursuing opportunity

The switch to virtual schooling during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how disadvantaged local students are when it comes to internet-supported learning.



PHOTO: DWAYNE ZIMMERMAN, CROWSNEST IT SUPPORT, WOODBURY

Workers install new wireless equipment on towers in Bedford County that will help expand broadband access to 95 percent of the county's businesses and residents by 2023.

"It's important for students to have an understanding of how to function [online], so we do provide instruction through learning platforms requiring students to use technology," said Todd Beatty, superintendent for the Northern Bedford County School District. "Approximately 10 percent of our students have no access at home, and many families have limited internet and/or slow speeds.

This problem is exacerbated when several family members attempt to use the internet at the same time."

Darren McLaurin, superintendent for the Claysburg-Kimmel School District, said Claysburg's teachers work with students with slow or limited access to provide the

*Continued on next page*



# Morrisons Cove Herald continued

same educational experience that all other students are receiving.

From a workforce perspective, broadband will have a huge impact for rural communities.

"A lot of jobs are posted online now, so anyone who's searching for a job or needs to work on a resume or upload one needs broadband access for that," said Gwen Fisher, site administrator for PA CareerLink in Bedford and Blair Counties. "A lot of companies have moved recruiting online as well. The days of paper applications are numbered."

People who lack broadband access to apply for jobs are going to libraries, coming to CareerLink, or looking for other places in their community to get it, she said, which is an inconvenience for them.

But beyond simply changing the way people find and do work, broadband can also open up new avenues to start and run a new business, and serve customers anywhere in the world.

In his book "The Third Wave," Steve Case, the founder of AOL, argues that broadband will eventually level the playing field for technology entrepreneurs from rural communities who have had to move to Silicon Valley and other technology centers to be taken seriously by investors.

## Speed Zone

Bedford County has taken an aggressive approach, establishing its Speed Zone initiative to make broadband available to 95 percent of county businesses and residents by 2023.

In August, the county selected Crowsnest Broadband of Woodbury as the provider for the first phase of its wireless expansion initiative, which called for the purchase and installation of wireless equipment on 21 existing towers.

According to Bette Slayton, president and CEO of the Bedford County Development Association, broadband was designated one of the top five priorities in the Alleghenies Ahead: Comprehensive Plan for the Southern Alleghenies Region adopted in 2018.

"It was already top of mind when CARES Act monies were released, which gave the Bedford County Commissioners a chance to move quickly into an implementation phase," she said. "High speed internet is no longer a want, it is a must-have for employers, employees, the self-employed, students, and residents. It is of critical importance as we seek to reverse stagnant and declining population trends in our county."

The other five member counties haven't taken such a bullish stance, but Bruce Erb, chair of the Blair County Board of Commissioners, said his county is now working with ABI to develop its own broadband expansion plans and find ways to make broadband more affordable for residents.

To date, Blair County has worked with Crowsnest Broadband to help fund eight separate projects that provided new or upgraded services in eight different areas of the county that were underserved.

"When schools went remote ... we

learned of families driving to the nearest Sheetz or fast food establishment so their children could take advantage of the free internet offered to do their school assignments," Erb said. "This should never have to happen, and our goal is to provide every home we possibly can with dependable access. As the use of telehealth increases, having that access can also mean the difference between early intervention for medical conditions rather than hospitalization or worse."

## Increasing demand

Dwayne Zimmerman, owner and founder of Crowsnest Broadband, said CARES Act and American Rescue Plan projects have enabled his company to expand service in Blair and Bedford Counties faster than expected.

"We went from a small company with two towers and a small budget to a company with 30 towers in a year's time," Zimmerman said.

Crowsnest now has decent coverage in Morrisons Cove, he said, although there are still weak coverage areas in Clover Creek and Henrietta, along the mountain in Fredericksburg, and in New Enterprise and Loysburg.

"Demand is big and the Cove is years behind technology wise," Zimmerman said. "The cable company sends its old equipment from places like Altoona to the Cove, so even the cable that's in the Cove isn't that great."

Crowsnest will be partnering with ABI as it works on a comprehensive master plan

for continuing to expand broadband in the six-county region.

"I think the next three years are going to be a lot of fixed wireless, but I think we'll see a lot of fiber happen at a big scale in the three to 10 year window," Zimmerman said. "We envision transitioning from a fixed wireless provider to a fiber provider in the next five to 15 years."

According to Carson, proposals submitted for other counties, including Blair, are currently under review and ABI is engaged in discussions with the counties about potential funding options.

"Access is critical to growth and prosperity in our rural communities," Carson said. "Many agricultural operations require connections that far exceed DSL [capabilities], and bandwidth requirements are going to increase as technology continues to advance and operations become more automated."

Both the public and private sectors acknowledge there is a lack of reliable broadband access in rural communities like Morrisons Cove, he added, but there is an appetite to address it, and ABI is working to help each of the counties develop master plans similar to Bedford County's Speed Zone initiative.

"I think the need for broadband is only going to increase, and it's going to happen rapidly," Zimmerman said. "We plan to do what we can to help out our rural area."

*Published Oct. 21, 2021*



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## State lawmakers join Pittsburgh restaurant owners in revolt against food delivery apps

By Kimberly Rooney

kimrooney@pghcitypaper.com

Finn and her husband work every day of the week. Their day often starts by 8 a.m., and it doesn't end until 1 a.m. They prepare and cook food, manage their restaurant, and wash dishes by themselves because they can no longer afford to hire other people. They spend the one day their restaurant is closed shopping for ingredients because they can no longer afford to get them delivered. Finn says these hardships are caused by what she calls the "bloodsuckers": delivery apps.

Finn requested anonymity for this story out of fear of retaliation from delivery apps. She and her husband use Grubhub, DoorDash, and Uber Eats for their Asian cuisine restaurant in Pittsburgh, and they worry that delivery apps will lower their listing on searches if they openly speak out against them. Finn says her restaurant also is paying up to 30% in delivery fees per order, cutting into their margins and, many times, hurting her small business.

And they aren't alone. Pittsburgh City Paper also spoke to Station in Bloomfield and Carson Street Deli in South Side about their experiences with third-party delivery apps, and both said they have used delivery apps for accessibility to customers. But when the pandemic shifted most of their business onto the apps, the margins lost to delivery fees became unsustainable.

"It's kind of like commenting anonymously on the internet," says Curtis Gamble, chef and owner of Station. "I think you could tell people until you're blue in the face, like, 'Hey, this actually costs



CP PHOTO: JARED WICKERHAM

Mike Murphy, owner of Carson Street Deli in South Side

me money.' But because of the anonymous nature of it, the average consumer, and I don't mean this to be rude, but the average consumer just doesn't care. They want convenience."

However, a new piece of state legislation could reduce the weight of responsibility on consumers to save restaurants by limiting the fees third-party apps could charge. While delivery app companies believe regulations will hurt restaurants and drivers, many restaurant owners don't want to, or can't, sustain the lost margins from high delivery fees. Some restaurants have

found alternatives to national third-party apps, but not all restaurants have been able to accomplish this. That leaves scores of Pittsburgh restaurants somewhat reliant on these delivery apps, even though they might want to escape from their influence.

Both Mike Murphy, owner of Carson Street Deli, and Finn say delivery apps will change the placement of an establishment's listing on the app, depending on the percentage of delivery fees the establishment is willing to pay. High fees are placed higher up, while lower fees can fall to second or third pages.

Murphy doesn't mind where Carson Street Deli is placed in search results, since he says customers will seek out his restaurant specifically on third-party apps. But Finn says she depends on the visibility to stay afloat, even though higher rates eat into her profit margins. For Gamble, however, simply figuring out the exact percentage the apps take is difficult.

"Information and clarity from them that is not easily accessible in any shape or form," Gamble says. "It's not in their interest to make it easy for you to know."

Delivery apps also run promotions that, if restaurants choose to opt in, can push their listing to the top of search results. The establishment, however, has to pick up the lost revenue. For Finn, buy one get one promotions leave her covering the cost of ingredients for two meals with only 70% of the purchase price of one meal.

"If you cover, I can do that, if you not cover, no," Finn says, referring to her communications with delivery app representatives. "And they still take 30% from our bill, and you give to the customer special offer, buy one get one free, that means you want to kill the restaurant, and all the restaurants, nobody can survive from this pandemic."

Murphy says his restaurant uses Grubhub and Uber Eats. Borrowing from his experience as an investment banker, Murphy has been able to negotiate his rates to the 22-30% range, and while he believes that the market will eventually force delivery apps to reduce their fees, he also supports legislation to formalize and

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# Pittsburgh City Paper continued

expedite that process.

"I don't believe the government should regulate fees," says Murphy. "Having said that, I'm making an exception. Regulate the hell out of it, because they've hurt some people."

Throughout the pandemic, local bars and restaurants have struggled with shutdowns for indoor dining. Some, such as Brugge on North on the North Side and Brillobox in Bloomfield, say they closed their doors permanently because of the pandemic. Gamble and Finn also point to the overwhelming shift to delivery rather than dine-in service as giving delivery apps disproportionate power over restaurants' access to customers. Many restaurants and bars did not previously have delivery options set up, seemingly leaving them more dependent on third-party delivery apps than before.

The major national delivery apps — Grubhub, DoorDash, and Uber Eats, which acquired Postmates in July 2020 — face little competition from each other, with different apps dominating different metropolitan centers. According to data firm Bloomberg Second Measure, these four apps represent 99% of the food delivery app market, even as U.S. consumers increased usage rates in 2021. A class-action lawsuit filed in 2020 against DoorDash, Postmates, and Uber Eats alleges a lack of competition allows apps to keep fees for restaurants high and wages for drivers low.

Some restaurants, including Carson Street Deli, raise their prices on delivery apps to help offset some of the lost margins. Gamble also noted that, after additional service fees on the app, items become more expensive than he feels comfortable with.

Pennsylvania House Bill 1617 was recently introduced into the state legislature and, if passed, would limit the fees that third-party delivery apps can charge many eating and drinking establishments. It would limit delivery fees to 10% and any other non-delivery fees to 5% of the purchase price of a customer's order. It would also make it illegal for delivery apps to list a public eating or drinking establishment without express permission from that establishment.

While it can be difficult to get enough support for any bill to pass, especially ones introduced by Democrats in the Republican-controlled chambers, state Rep. Sara Innamorato (D-Lawrenceville)



CP PHOTO: KAYCEE ORWIG

Curtis Gamble, chef and owner of Station in Bloomfield

believes in the importance of introducing such legislation.

"The political reality in Harrisburg is that, as rank and file members of the minority party, it's highly unlikely that our bills come up for consideration even in committee," says Innamorato, who is the primary sponsor of the bill. "Oftentimes, we make bills because it's the right thing to do, and it can signal a direction that we'd like our party to go in."

Other major cities, including Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago, and Seattle have placed similar limits on third-party delivery apps, with many of them setting the cap at 15%. Currently, most delivery apps charge fees that range from 20-40% of what restaurants make in app-based revenue.

"Colleagues on both sides of the aisle have recognized over the past year how difficult life has been for our restaurant industry," says Nick Pisciotto (D-West Mifflin), who introduced the bill with Innamorato. "And our small businesses and, locally, our mom and pop restaurants especially, have a lot of different structural barriers to success."

Pisciotto says national chains have more bargaining power with delivery apps and are able to drive down delivery fees, meaning they get to keep more money per customer's order. Smaller businesses, however, are often unable to negotiate the same low fees, making it more difficult for them to afford basic costs of running a

restaurant, such as rent, ingredients, utilities, insurance, and, for some, a liquor license.

City Paper reached out to Uber Eats, GrubHub, and DoorDash to ask about the recently introduced legislation that would limit their usage fees. Uber Eats and GrubHub did not respond to requests for comments, but DoorDash said the legislation would hurt restaurant owners and their delivery drivers.

"DoorDash has always supported Pennsylvania restaurants. Price controls lead to fewer orders for restaurants and lost earnings for Dashers. ... We're always eager to engage with policymakers on solutions that truly support restaurants," says a DoorDash spokesperson, although they declined to comment on whether DoorDash supports HB 1617 specifically.

It should also be noted that hundreds of Pittsburgh-area restaurants are listed on national food delivery apps, and apparently use the apps without incident or complaint. But there is also a growing contingency of local restaurants willing to speak out against these apps. As City Paper reported in May 2020, Pittsburgh restaurants The Warren, Iron Born Pizza, and My Big Fat Greek Gyro all criticized GrubHub for what they felt were unfair fees.

Both Murphy and Gamble expressed concern about the quality of their food when it's delivered via delivery app drivers, since it can take longer to reach customers

because delivery drivers often have multiple orders in their car at once. "If something goes bump in the night, it's wrong, or it's cold, or it takes too long, [customers] don't care," says Murphy. "But they're not looking at Uber, they're not looking at Grubhub. It's the Carson Street Deli."

Some establishments don't want to wait for legislation to curtail delivery apps' control over eating and drinking establishments. Gamble and Murphy both consider the loss of revenue to delivery apps as marketing expenses, but they're developing their own delivery services through their websites to avoid the third-party fees. When establishments create their own systems, their workers also get to keep any tips that customers give, since tips on third-party delivery apps go to the apps' drivers.

But for less established Pittsburgh restaurants, and those who face language and cultural barriers, setting up delivery through a website can be difficult, leaving them more reliant on third-party apps.

"The first generation of immigrants, they are not good at technology," says Finn's sister, who helped with translations. "They do not know how to deal with all this stuff, especially in pandemic. I try to help them find somebody, maybe do their own website. ... But it's very, very difficult."

All three restaurant owners who spoke to City Paper encouraged people to order directly from their restaurants, whether via phone or through their websites. While each recognizes the convenience of delivery apps for customers, the money restaurant owners save from avoiding delivery fees helps keep their establishments open and allows them to hire service workers.

Innamorato says the bill will prevent any reduction in fees from coming out of delivery drivers' earnings. While Innamorato says "there's not going to be one bill that's going to be the silver bullet" to fix the problems third-party delivery apps cause for restaurant owners and workers, she is hopeful future legislation and worker cooperatives might help to protect the restaurant industry and workers.

"The more people that can have access to the things that they want without a third party taking a huge dig out of it, I think it's just, it's good for everybody," Gamble says. "It's good for business, and it's good for consumers as well."

*Published June 30, 2021*

# REPUBLICAN HERALD

## Death toll from I-81 pileup rises

By Frank Andruscavage  
Staff Writer

MOUNT PLEASANT - The death toll from Monday's horrific chain-reaction crash on Interstate 81 in Foster Twp. rose Tuesday morning after a Schuylkill County deputy coroner was called back to the scene.

A fast-moving snow squall with whiteout conditions around 10:35a.m. Monday caused between 50 and 60 vehicles to pile up in the northbound lanes, a stone's throw from the exit onto Route 901 at mile marker 116.

Fire officials at the scene Monday said five people were confirmed dead and that all the deaths appeared to be in the initial crashes, which caused a huge fire. The blaze left charred debris scattered on both northbound lanes.

Tuesday morning, as towing companies continued removing vehicles, another victim was apparently located.

Schuylkill County Coroner Dr. David J. Moylan III said that Deputy Coroner Albert Barnes returned to the scene early Tuesday.

Barnes was also called back just after 9a.m. and pronounced another person dead before removing the victim.

"He spent 17 hours up there," Moylan said of Barnes.

Moylan said state police, who are investigating the incident, will release information on the number of people killed.

State police Trooper David Boehm, public information officer for Reading-based Troop L, said at the scene Tuesday that no official announcement on fatalities will be made until the final count has been determined.

"We wait for a definite number," he said. "We're not going to say three and then change it to four or five."

Boehm, around noon Tuesday, said he expected the road to be closed for another six or eight hours while the remaining



Damaged vehicles are strewn about northbound Interstate 81 in Foster Twp. Cleanup continued the day after the deadly pileup of dozens of vehicles during a snow squall.

PHOTO: LINDSEY SHUEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

vehicles, including tractor-trailers, were removed. It was still closed at 9:30 p.m.

State police Cpl. Aaron Sidella of the Frackville station said 24 people were injured and transported to four hospitals by EMS units.

At least one person was flown to a trauma center by a helicopter that landed nearby at the Schuylkill County Joe Zerbey Airport, emergency personnel said Monday.

Those who were able to exit their vehicles without help and walk out were taken by Schuylkill Transportation System buses to the nearby Wegman's Distribution Center to be evaluated by EMS. From there, they were taken to a reunification center opened at the Goodwill Fire Company in Minersville.

### Probe 'weeks, months'

Boehm said the cause of the crash is ongoing and complicated since it involves patrol troopers, members of the accident reconstruction team, the motor carrier division and forensic services unit.

"We had a whole swarm of troopers out here," he said while standing in the windy

20 degree conditions. "There are a lot of people involved in this, so it will take some time to sort things out. It could take weeks, even months; there's a lot of information to piece together."

Although police will try to determine how the crash began, Boehm said, "The snow squall was definitely a contributing factor, absolutely." He added, "We may never find out exactly what happened."

Schuylkill County Emergency Management Agency Coordinator John M. Matz said the state Department of Environmental Protection and PennDOT will assess the damage to the highway.

"They will look at the integrity of the road before opening it," Matz said.

He said that as soon as all the vehicles are removed, PennDOT will mill the road and make any repairs needed to safely reopen both northbound lanes.

"There is work needed; one of the trucks melted right into the highway," Matz said.

Two debriefing sessions conducted by members of the Eastern Pennsylvania EMS County's Critical Incident Stress Management Team were arranged to help

first responders cope with the death and carnage they saw Monday. They were held at the Tremont EMS building at 3 and 7p.m. Tuesday.

Similar sessions are scheduled for Friday at the Goodwill Fire Company.

Matz said the sessions are to let those who responded talk about what they saw and how it affects them.

"It's something that is certainly needed," he said.

Matz said the sessions begin in a group setting and then participants have the option to speak with stress team members one on one.

"You saw a lot of horrible stuff," Matz said. "It's something people need to get out and not hold in."

### Commissioners issue statement

The Schuylkill County commissioners released the following statement Tuesday about the deadly pileup Monday on Interstate 81:

"The Schuylkill County Commissioners

*Continued on next page*



would like to extend our prayers and condolences to all the victims of the tragic traffic incident that occurred on Northbound I-81 on Monday morning. We also wish to acknowledge and praise all the individuals and organizations that rose up to the occasion when asked to respond.

"We would like to recognize the response of our county 911 and EMA staff along with so many volunteer First Responders, Schuylkill Transportation System, local law enforcement, Penn DOT and PA State Police. In addition we would like to recognize the help and generous support of Minersville Goodwill Fire and Ambulance Company and Wegmans for providing shelter to the victims. As always, the Schuylkill County United Way and the Red Cross were on the scene helping and arranged for lodging for those victims who were from out of the area.

"We are proud of all who helped and responded and once again give our heartfelt thanks to everyone involved."

*Published March 30, 2022*



PHOTO: LINDSEY SHUEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Crews work to clear the scene of the pileup in the northbound lanes of Interstate 81 in FosterTwp.

# Longtime fire chief praises responders

**By Ron Devlin**  
Staff Writer

A veteran Schuylkill County first responder said the chain-reaction pileup Monday on Interstate 81 is among the worst disasters he's seen in more than 40 years of responding to fires, accidents and other disasters.

"This is the largest accident I've ever seen in the time that I have been in the fire service," said Frank Zangari Jr., Girardville's fire chief. "It was like a bomb went off in the middle of a snow squall."

Zangari, who is president of the Schuylkill County Fire Chiefs Association, was on-scene for nearly 24 hours. He was part of a crew from the Schuylkill County Emergency Management agency trained to respond to disasters.

Blinded by whiteout conditions, motorists and tractor-trailers piled up about 10:35a.m. just south of Exit 116 for Minersville. Dozens of vehicles were involved.

The twisted and mangled wreckage included entrapments and fire in one or more of the vehicles.

Zangari praised the small army of Schuylkill County first responders who turned out on a moment's notice to assist in the crash that claimed at least five people.

They went, he said, above and beyond the call of duty.

Responders encountered icy roads when hauling water to the accident scene, a dangerous section of the interstate that's among the highest elevations in Schuylkill County.

In addition to the bitter cold, Zangari said, responders had to contend with limited visibility and dense smoke coming from the burning vehicles.

Zangari singled out Fire Chief Eric Eichenberg of Minersville Fire Rescue, incident commander, and Frackville Chief William Lindenmuth for special praise.

Minersville had 30 responders at the scene for more than 12 hours, according to a Facebook post.

"It was a truly coordinated effort, which is still ongoing to clean up after the tragic accident," the post said. "Multiple agencies from across Schuylkill and surrounding counties worked together on this large scale incident."

Minersville gave a specific shout out to the Schuylkill County 9-1-1 Center for its assistance in coordinating the resources needed to handle the incident.

Minersville also opened Good Will Fire Company as a temporary shelter for victims in need of housing, vehicles and medications in what was ruled a mass casualty incident.

The American Red Cross issued a written statement late Tuesday.

"In partnership with local and county emergency officials, the Red Cross is supporting impacted motorists and their families with shelter, meals, transportation and mental health services," it read. "The Red Cross is also providing family reunification services for those seeking the status of loved ones who may be involved in the crash."

Jeremy Smallwood, assistant fire chief in Lavelle and a Church of the Nazarene pastor, spent five hours at the I-81 site Monday night.

Overlooking the scene, he was taken by the size and scope of the wreckage and the smoke billowing fumes from burning diesel fuel.

"I have deep concern for the horrific sights my colleagues have seen and experienced," he said. "The gravity of this incident is something that most first responders will never see in their lifetimes."

Smallwood, who is also an emergency medical technician, has since counseled first responders.

"It's important to allow them to say what they saw, experienced and felt," he said. "They need to know it's a normal reaction to an abnormal situation."

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*Published March 30, 2022*

# Even with empty lots and homes, Philadelphia's struggling to make housing affordable

**By Amelia Winger**

Nicole Westerman can't help but feel that new real estate projects have torn Kensington's identity in two: half a developer's paradise, half a neighborhood struggling for survival amid intersecting crises of gun violence, housing and substance abuse.

"It is incredibly ironic to me that we have living conditions that are unthinkable and would never occur in any other part of the city, and yet the residents who are having to literally clean human waste from their doorsteps and who have been stabbed by needles are then having to worry about a new development a few blocks away," said Westerman, the director of real estate and economic development for the New Kensington Community Development Corporation.

With vacant lots checkering the neighborhood, Kensington is one of the areas most impacted by Philadelphia's housing crisis.

Philadelphia home sale prices have increased by 21% since 2020 — reaching a towering median value of \$223,055 — and with incomes remaining relatively flat in the same period, housing affordability has suffered. A majority of Philadelphians spend at least 30% of their income on housing costs, making them "cost-burdened" according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



For decades, policymakers have suggested harnessing vacant parcels as a solution to the city's affordable housing crisis — why leave properties empty in a city struggling to afford housing? Their efforts have included everything from repairing recently abandoned homes to offering incentives for building entirely new units on empty lots.

But progress has been slower than envisioned. While some vacant lots have collected dust for decades, others are being snatched up by developers who turn them into homes that current residents can't afford yet inflate their property taxes.

As gentrification prices longtime

residents out of their own neighborhoods, what's holding back affordable redevelopment efforts?

## MOVING PAST THE 'CREAM OF THE CROP'

There's a winding history behind Philadelphia's abundance of vacant parcels.

In the 1950s, Philadelphia's population declined as the automation of manufacturing jobs and rise of suburbia lured people out of the city, leaving thousands of abandoned properties in their wake. These buildings were either demolished into grass patches or left to decay.

City programs throughout the 1990s provided subsidies for community groups to acquire and rehabilitate vacant houses. The program often targeted houses that were recently vacated because they were the easiest to fix up — they had intact rooms and typically only needed minor repairs like new roofing and new heaters.

However, those efforts lost steam by the mid-2000s.

"The cream of the crop, at that point, was picked," said David Feldman, executive director of the Development Workshop, a statewide nonprofit promoting development in the Philadelphia region. "There's actually very few city-owned standing houses. The [Philadelphia Housing Authority] has a bunch, but the City of Philadelphia has probably no more than 40."

What's left today? Thousands of vacant homes under private ownership and even greater swathes of dilapidated structures and empty lots, all of which are more expensive and time-intensive to repurpose than the homes of decades past.

Philadelphia is a city of small landlords, with most owning just one or two units. They hold onto vacant parcels — the collective term for vacant lots and vacant properties — for a grab-bag of reasons: some are waiting for the right time to sell; some are tracking down old owners; others simply don't want to deal with the

*Continued on next page*



hassle of caring for or selling the property.

For-profit developers have long purchased privately owned vacant parcels to create housing. They primarily focus on vacant properties in high-income — “desirable” — neighborhoods because there is a greater potential to yield major profits from tenants.

“Everyone’s going to concentrate in Center City because that is where you can get revenue,” said Mo Rushdy, the vice president of the Building Industry Alliance of Philadelphia.

Over time, profit-driven redevelopment strategies have left vacant properties largely untouched in low-income neighborhoods across North, South and West Philadelphia — the areas where developers would generate the least revenue. And the longer the properties sit vacant, the more expensive they become to rehabilitate.

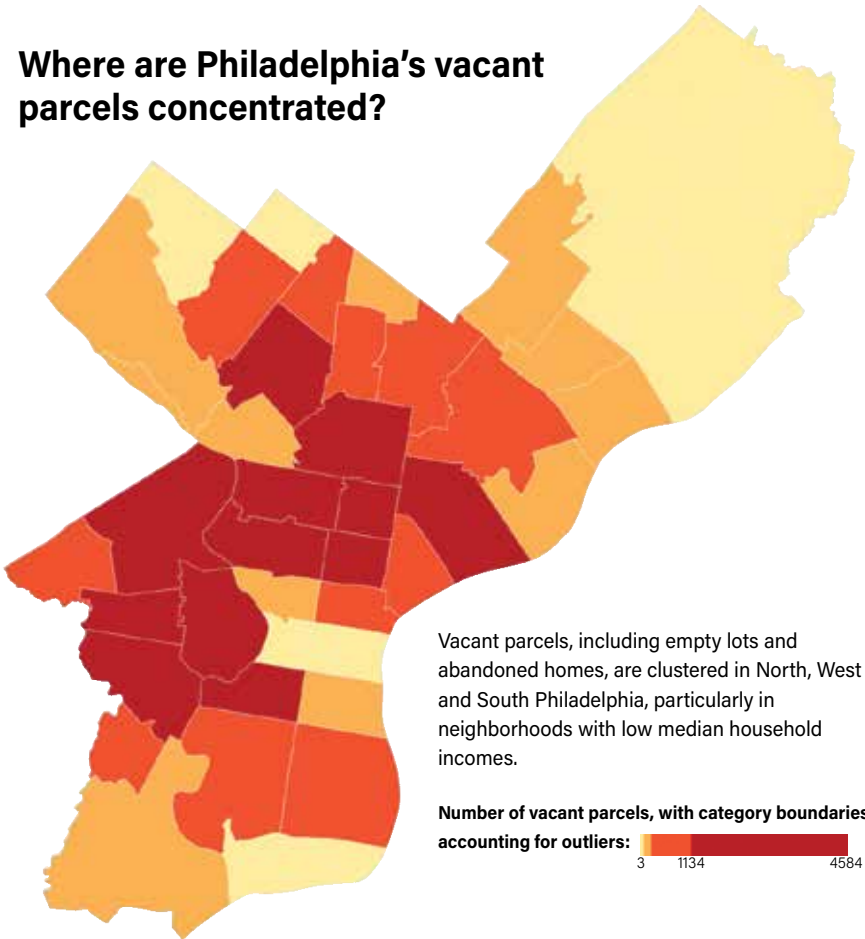
“You’re really just running against the clock with the value of the land,” said Christina Rosan, a geography and urban studies professor at Temple University. “Now it’s more expensive and the cost of building affordable housing has gone up, along with the competition for what else you could build with it.”

This is an inescapable cycle. Developers don’t want to build in low-income neighborhoods until more affluent residents move in, which won’t happen until the neighborhoods become more attractive, which requires redevelopment. Or even worse, developers are creating market-price housing in low-income areas to attract wealthier residents, which displaces longtime residents as their once-familiar neighborhoods become unaffordable and unrecognizable, as the state of development in Kensington shows.

High vacancy rates reduce property values, and the lost tax revenue harms local schools, creating fewer opportunities for youth and more reason to move away for those who can afford to, perpetuating the cycle. Vacancies are also linked to high crime rates, with gun violence concentrated in high-vacancy neighborhoods, further depressing property values.

The need for repurposing vacant parcels is dire. Housing activists recognize it, developers recognize it, city officials recognize it. So what’s delaying action?

Where are Philadelphia’s vacant parcels concentrated?



REDEVELOPMENT IN A CITY OF ‘FIEFDOMS’

Community groups are spearheading hyperlocal efforts to repurpose vacant parcels, but they can only move so fast.

The process for repairing vacant houses is relatively straightforward because they’re likely to be in decent shape — still livable, just in need of minor fixes like updated appliances and window replacements. Feldman estimates they take about six months to repair, costing a base price of \$45,000 with up to \$75,000 in additional fees if it’s in particularly poor condition.

But vacant structures can have outstanding mortgage or tax liens, so acquiring them is a riskier endeavor than vacant lots. This is why some groups opt to construct new units on empty lots, even though new construction is a more arduous process than rehabilitating vacant properties.

The New Kensington Community Development Corporation created two market-price homes in the past year, and are using the sale proceeds to build

affordable homes. New construction is a long process — designs can take four months, plus an additional few months for permitting and at least nine more for construction. It’s also expensive, with the construction alone costing about \$250,000 to \$300,000 per project.

The biggest challenge NKCDC experiences when rehabilitating vacant parcels is difficulty securing the necessary capital. As a community organization, their funding primarily comes from highly competitive grants, rather than the loans that private developers have access to. Even the process of applying for grants is expensive and labor-intensive — some applications are so complicated that they have to hire consultants for help filling it out.

“The work that we are doing won’t allow any bank to give us money. We simply can’t access that capital,” Westerman said.

Even though for-profit developers have greater access to the capital necessary for rehabilitation, they may shy away from affordable development because little profit means little motivation.

Still, Rushdy was quick to point out that a few for-profit groups have pursued affordable development, including his own luxury development company, the Riverwards Group.

“What I’m telling you, you’re probably going to say ‘No way, there are applications [from for-profit developers] out there to build affordable housing?’ And the answer is yes, absolutely yes,” Rushdy said.

So if there are efforts — albeit, vastly disparate — from both community groups and developers to repurpose vacant parcels into affordable homes, what’s slowing the process?

One answer lies with policy.

The City of Philadelphia opened a land bank in 2015 to take public ownership of the thousands of vacant, tax-delinquent parcels across the city and distribute them to entities — private developers, community groups, even individuals — with “productive” redevelopment plans, pending approval from City Council.

However, the process for transferring privately owned vacant parcels to the Land Bank can get expensive. The Land Bank most often acquires properties through sheriff’s sales, which are public property auctions. This means a buyer has to outbid their competitors to get a vacant property.

According to Feldman, state law gives the Land Bank a “superpower” — it can purchase properties from a sheriff’s sale before they’re auctioned off, saving it from costly bidding wars. But the Land Bank still struggles with its limited funding, and Feldman estimates it may only be able to acquire as few as 20 parcels a year.

For properties the Land Bank has managed to acquire, for-profit and nonprofit developers both run into the same issue when trying to make purchases: councilmanic prerogative.

Councilmanic prerogative is an unspoken rule where City Council allows each of the 10 district representatives to determine how land is used in their jurisdiction.

At its best, councilmanic prerogative helps average individuals — through their elected officials — prevent unwanted development in their neighborhoods. But because council members aren’t required to disclose why they make decisions, prerogative has become a tool for them to advance their personal agendas.

“It gives the City Councilpeople a lot of

## Philadelphia Neighborhoods continued

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power over land use in their area and prevents the more comprehensive approach to land use planning that you would need,” Rosan said. “You can’t have the city run as a bunch of fiefdoms.”

When asked about councilmanic prerogative, a spokesperson for Council President Darrell Clarke referenced his decision to delay plans for seven affordable units on Page Street near 16th in North Philly in October 2021 — a case where he said prerogative was used to uplift residents’ concerns about how the development would impact parking. He later reintroduced a resolution to permit the project after it was reduced to six units, keeping one lot for parking.

For Westerman, councilmanic prerogative has “absolutely” affected NKCDC’s affordable development efforts. She recalled a time in October 2021 where NKCDC was only given 11 days’ notice that the Philadelphia Land Bank was conveying 49 parcels in their service area, including a mix of affordable and market-rate single-family homes. Although the Land Bank ultimately delayed the conveyance, Westerman doesn’t think NKCDC was given enough time to prepare applications for the properties.

“We would have loved to have been told by anyone — Land Bank, Council district office, anyone — that those parcels were going to be in play,” she said.

Failing to provide community groups with enough time to prepare applications for Land Bank properties is a way for City Council to control who gets ownership of vacant properties, essentially excluding them from the scramble to acquire properties.

And prerogative isn’t just affecting community groups. Rushdy’s found that City Council has ignored or denied every application he’s submitted to acquire Land Bank properties and to turn them into affordable homes.

“It’s for-profit companies that are coming to the table with the solution, and today, Council is picking and choosing who’s to do affordable housing,” Rushdy said.

City Council has approved multiple pieces of legislation in the past year intended to incentivize affordable development in neighborhoods with high vacancy rates, like one bill requiring new developments in certain neighborhoods to provide affordable units and another allowing developers to bypass zoning regulations if

they provide affordable units or contribute to the city’s Housing Trust Fund.

But because of councilmanic prerogative, private developers, housing activists and researchers do not believe the city’s new bills will be effective.

“Say your City Councilmember is not interested in affordable housing, what do you do?” Rosan said. “We don’t necessarily have the right structures in the city’s government to pull this off.”

As affordability concerns escalate, pressure is mounting to redevelop and repurpose vacant parcels. What happens if councilmanic prerogative, among other obstacles, continues stalling the process?

### THE ‘FRONTLINE’ OF GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification is a process where high-income populations rapidly move into predominantly low-income neighborhoods, bringing with them development campaigns to expand the area’s business and housing options. Consequently, it inflates the cost of living in a neighborhood, which displaces longtime residents.

Some, like Rushdy, believe the consequences of gentrification are a myth.

“How people get lifted from poverty is when you bring in money to their area, people with high-paying jobs, who bring in commerce. All of a sudden, your property value goes up, you’re building equity in the neighborhood,” Rushdy said.

But when developers turn vacant properties into market-rate houses, it can increase the property value of adjacent buildings until the neighborhood’s original residents can no longer afford their own homes.

Developers can also become predatory when they enter low-income neighborhoods. They want to purchase as many nearby properties as possible, and may buy out longtime residents when the neighborhood’s stockpile of available properties, especially easily repairable vacant properties, runs dry or becomes too expensive to repurpose.

“There’s a lot of pressure on you to sell, and you’re probably going to sell it,” Rosan said.

Those who don’t sell are still at risk of losing their homes because some developers in gentrifying neighborhoods fail to take proper construction precautions,

which can severely damage the houses neighboring their projects. Michelle Carrera Morales, the executive director of the Norris Square Community Alliance, has seen gentrifying projects harm multiple properties within her organization’s service area, resulting in everything from cracked walls to damage so extreme that homes become uninhabitable.

“Obviously people are devastated because of the damage that they cause,” Morales said.

Morales said community groups are sometimes able to step in to help tenants confront reckless construction, but developers are often left unchecked because tenants cannot afford the legal fees necessary to challenge them.

Westerman is already seeing gentrification encroach on Kensington, pointing to more than 2,000 new residential units going up in the area — a majority of which are not marked as affordable.

But Westerman doesn’t think Kensington’s destined to be the new Fishtown or Northern Liberties — she thinks the city’s given up. She believes officials have taken a “containment” strategy, preventing development in certain segments of the neighborhood to sequester, rather than improve, issues like crime and substance abuse.

“Where we are right now is the absolute front line of gentrification,” Westerman said. “The city has kind of thrown up their hands to say, ‘We’re not going to try to fix the problem, we’re just going to try to limit it here.’”

And beyond displacement, gentrification can pose another problem for neighborhoods: exacerbating violence.

Zach Porreca, a graduate student at West Virginia University, studies the relationship between gun violence and gentrification in Philadelphia. His research has shown that, after a block gentrifies, violence in the surrounding neighborhood increases. One explanation for this, he said, is that gentrification results in some locals becoming unable to afford their longtime houses, forcing them to move to unfamiliar areas surrounded by similarly displaced neighbors. The unfamiliar environment can cause excessive tension, spurring conflicts that become physical and sometimes lethal.

“Say you’re forced to move into the small

remaining non-gentrified section of a neighborhood, you might be living on top of the people that you were warring with as teenagers,” Porreca said. “You’re going to see increases of violence as you concentrate a lot of people that didn’t need to be concentrated.”

Porreca found that the link between gentrification and gun violence is particularly high in areas with entrenched drug markets, including Kensington. Gentrification encroaches on the market’s operations, so its leaders typically try to secure new territory in an adjacent area, which can get violent.

“Nothing’s gone on in Kensington to try to make things better for the people, it’s been a heroin market since the 80s,” Porreca said. “The city’s taking this approach where it’s just let it stay there, stop it from spreading. And as development begins to push up against Kensington, I think we’re seeing the area shrink, which is a disappointing thing because now you’re just displacing what was a vibrant neighborhood.”

Part of the problem, Rosan said, is the city has divided up responsibilities for urban planning among too many departments and offices, which makes it incredibly difficult to establish a cohesive vision for neighborhood development. As the city considers proposals for repurposing vacant parcels, she hopes officials prioritize communities’ visions for their own neighborhoods, taking into consideration the need for green spaces and improvements to existing housing options.

“What I worry about is Philly’s going to really just miss this opportunity,” Rosan said. “And I think they already missed a lot of opportunities. They knew gentrification was going to happen.”

Morales hopes everyone — the city, developers, community organizations and communities themselves — recognize the dire need for affordable housing and take action before gentrification makes neighborhoods unrecognizable.

“The reality is that if we don’t develop enough affordable housing, entire communities are going to be displaced, and the city is not going to reflect the diversity it has right now,” Morales said. “It comes to erasing human rights.”

*Published May 13, 2022*



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# Cranberry Eagle

## 2 young families flee war-torn Ukraine, staying in Cranberry

By Paula Grubbs

Two young Ukrainian families are relieved to be watching the deer and chipmunks frolic on their hosts' Cranberry Township lawn, and not wondering where the next bomb will fall.

Anna Kisel and her sons Matvey, 12, and Illia, 10, and Irena Tkachenko and her sons Ivan, 14, and Yegor, 9, arrived in the U.S. two weeks ago to stay at the home of their friend, Yana, and her husband, Maksym Yarmatsevyh, who moved from Ukraine to Butler County 11 years ago.

The two grateful mothers on Thursday talked about their harrowing ordeal when Russian bombs began raining down on their hometown of Kharkov at 4 a.m. Feb. 24.

"It happened at night," Kisel said through Maksym's mother, Lyudmyla Martin, who translated for the families. "Everywhere we heard explosions and everyone was very afraid and don't know what to do. Should we run or stay in our home?"

Kisel recalled her thoughts as she helped her sons climb down a ladder into their building's unfinished basement.

"Instead of waking up and sending the kids to school, we woke up to a war," she said.

### Fleeing from their home

Matvey recalls feeling terrified at the first explosion.

"I never imagined it would happen in my country," the boy said through Martin.

Tkachenko recalled listening to newscasters on radio and TV reporting that the invasion could happen that night.

The reports said Ukrainian officials were urging residents to get an emergency pack



PHOTO: JOSEPH RESSLER/BUTLER EAGLE

Ivan, Irena, and Yegor Tkachenko, along with Illia, Anna, and Matvey Kisel, pose for a portrait at the Butler Eagle office.

together containing their passports, birth certificates, medicines and other essentials in case they needed to flee.

"We were sleeping with the windows open when we heard explosions," she said. "We understood that war had started."

She said because her family's apartment building had no basement, the family members hid between the walls at first to avoid the shooting going on outside.

As soon as they felt it was safe, the family rushed to the building of a family member, which had a basement.

After seven days in the basement and with bombs falling day and night, the family drove to an uncle's house in a small village away from Kharkov.

For two months, 14 people lived in the two-room house. The family then fled to Poland to a friend's two-room apartment,

where six people were already staying.

"The kids went to school in Poland," Tkachenko said.

As for Kisel, she packed the boys into the family car at 6 a.m., two hours after the first bomb fell, to head for her husband's employer, where there was a basement.

"It was so cold," Kisel recalled. "The car was freezing."

For eight days, 16 people lived together in the basement. The boys did not go outside.

"The planes that were bombing were flying so low, and all day it was bombs and alarms ringing," Kisel said.

At first, food was still available at a nearby supermarket, but lines were long and prices were high.

In addition, all shop owners accepted only cash, as debit and credit cards could not be used because banks were closed.

As food became more scarce, a strict schedule was created determining how much food each person received at mealtimes.

Meals were prepared on a small electric stove in the basement.

Kisel said during their subterranean confinement, she and her husband tried to keep their boys' spirits up by telling them that the situation was temporary and to stay positive.

"We said, 'Don't worry, we're all together, and we'll protect you,'" she said.

If the adults had a moment of doubt, fear or worry, they kept their emotions from the youngsters, Kisel said.

The family then spent four days driving in slow, heavy traffic and with limited options

*Continued on next page*



## Cranberry Eagle continued

for gasoline to a region in western Ukraine.

"The Russian planes were always bombing," Kisel said. "We have no place to hide. It was very difficult to get out."

When they arrived in the Volyn Oblast region in northwest Ukraine, they realized the people there were accustomed to arrivals from the war-torn east because the families were given clothes and food.

"People gave them for free a little house, and they stayed there three months," Martin said.

While the two families fought to feed and protect their children, Yana and Maksym were checking the "Uniting for Ukraine" website to see if they had been accepted to host their friends.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' "U for U" program provides a pathway for Ukrainian families to come to the U.S. for two months and stay with a family who agrees to take financial responsibility for them.

Yana said she was thrilled to find she and Maksym were deemed eligible, and began working to get the families of Anna, a childhood friend, and Irena, a college friend, to their home.

### Arriving in the U.S.

The families arrived in New York City two weeks ago, and Yana and Maksym, who paid for the party's plane tickets, took two cars to pick them up and bring them back to Cranberry Township.

The entire party needed immediate tuberculosis tests at \$115 for the three adults and \$95 for the four boys.

The families have been enjoying the U.S., but the boys are suffering the effects of their memories during the war.

Fireworks held in Cranberry Township terrified them, and fireflies sent them running to their parents to report helicopters were in the sky.

"During the fireworks, everyone was scared," Kisel said. "The kids said, 'Mom, they're bombing!'"

The medical helicopter stationed at UPMC Passavant North in Cranberry Township frightens the boys every time it takes to the skies, their mothers said.

But the boys are enjoying America and will take a trip to Kennywood next week.

"Everything is beautiful here," Matvey said. "The people are all busy. It's very different from the Ukrainian style of life."



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Clockwise from above: Irena Tkachenko and her sons Ivan and Yegor lived in a basement with family members and others trying to escape the bombing that began in February in their hometown of Kharkov, Ukraine.

Illia Kisel talks about new life in Cranberry Township after fleeing the violence in Kharkov.

Lyudmyla Martin translates for two families who fled the violence in Kharkov. Martin's son and daughter-in-law are hosting the families at their home in Cranberry Township.

Irena Tkachenko laughs while talking to a reporter through a translator. Tkachenko and her two sons arrived in Cranberry Township two weeks ago after escaping the violence in Kharkov.

The young mothers are more than relieved to see their boys safe from the invasion.

"Ukrainian people are more serious, but in the U.S., everybody is so nice and smiling," said Kisel, who hopes to be joined by her husband in a few weeks. "We appreciate Maks and Yana, because there are not too many people who have such great souls. It's a lot of responsibility."

The huge financial burden taken on by the Yarmatsevych family in welcoming the two other families is challenging, but the couple are thrilled to host them.

"They just feel like 'How can I not do anything?'" Martin said of her son and daughter-in-law. "The families and kids have such a terrible life in Ukraine. They are still bombing every day."

She said Putin's troops are leaving incendiary devices shaped like cylinders or balls lying around populated areas. The objects explode when curious children pick them.



PHOTO: JOSEPH RESSLER/BUTLER EAGLE



PHOTO: JOSEPH RESSLER/BUTLER EAGLE



PHOTO: JOSEPH RESSLER/BUTLER EAGLE

"He is evil," Martin said as she wiped away a tear.

Yana said she and Maks are happy to help the two families and will continue to do so until they return to Ukraine.

"People should help each other, and nobody knows what could happen tomorrow," she said. "War could happen to anybody."

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"Ukrainian people are more serious, but in the U.S., everybody is so nice and smiling. We appreciate Maks and Yana, because there are not too many people who have such great souls. It's a lot of responsibility."

**ANNA KISEL**

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# Lebanon Daily News

MAX SCHOLLENBERGER:

## Criminal negligence of dead 12-year-old boy ignites community outrage

By Matthew Toth

Sitting on the witness stand in the Lebanon County Courthouse on March 16, Stacey Miller described how her great-nephew Maxwell Schollenberger wanted to play whiffle ball with her children.

"There was no temper tantrums if he didn't hit the ball, or if he got out," she said. "He was just having fun."

Describing Max as a "little pudgy ball," Miller said he loved to eat chicken nuggets, french fries and ice cream. Miller's children treated him like a little brother, and they would go out to trips to meet Santa and visit the Pennsylvania Farm Show. Miller was talking with Max's father about starting kindergarten in a few months.

"Maxwell was a smart, cute, funny, just happy go lucky boy," she said about Max up to age 5. "He was a very happy child."

In May 2020, local law enforcement found 12-year-old Max dead in his feces-covered room. Officials said for years he was hidden from the outside world, with little food or water, by the very people who were expected to take care of him.

"He had a name, he had a face," Lebanon County District Attorney Pier Hess Graf said. "That little boy was someone. And at the time he died, to the people who should have loved him most, he was no one."

Police filed homicide charges against the victim's father, Scott Fremont Schollenberger Jr., and his live-in fiancée, Kimberly Marie Maurer, in September 2020.

In the weeks and months after the charges were filed, an outcry from residents called for reforms to deal with child abuse and get justice for Max. Demonstrations on the Lebanon County Courthouse had people shouting "Max Schollenberger deserves justice. No child should be afraid."

In 2020, A memorial stood at the boy's Annville Township home - balloons of hand-drawn cards, stuffed animals and posters that said "Never forget" and "Fly High Max!"

But in May 2022, the Schollenberger house stands vacant and abandoned like a mausoleum. The only sign of life is a simple memorial of hand-painted rocks sitting near the front door to honor the boy found dead in his South White Oak Street home two years ago.



PHOTO BY KIM STRONG

In 2020, candles, flowers, signs, balloons and teddy bears fill the front porch of Maxwell Schollenberger's home.

### What happened to Max Schollenberger?

On May 26, 2020, Annville Township police and members of the Lebanon County Detective Bureau found Max's 12-year-old naked body in his second-floor room. The room was almost vacant, containing no clothes or toys.

Max's arms and legs had shriveled almost to the bone. Officers said he had suffered from various conditions, including a distended stomach that made it impossible for him to process food.

The room was caked with feces and urine, and the door leading into the room contained three metal hooks to lock the child in his room. There was a plate of french fries and chicken tenders, along with a cup containing a little water.

"It was overwhelming, pungent. Something I'll never forget," Annville Township Officer Jason Cleck said.

The cause of death was prolonged starvation, malnutrition and blunt force trauma, according to officials.

*Continued on next page*



## Lebanon Daily News continued

Max was found with a broken eye socket, and multiple signs of blunt force trauma.

"He'd look incredibly thin, (and) had no fat on his bones," Dr. Lori Fraiser, the medical director for the Center for the Protection of Children at Penn State Health, said in March. "He wasn't moving, wasn't able to stand, wasn't able to do any bodily functions ... no doubt in the last few weeks of Max's life that he was very, very impaired."

Max weighed 47.5 pounds and measured 50 inches tall at the time of death, significantly under what a child that age should be, according to officials. This showed that he was provided insufficient nutrition for physical growth, bone muscle or fat, according to Fraiser.

"Children have to grow or they die," she said. "There is no middle ground."

### The Boy Who Didn't Exist

Schollenberger and Maurer lived with Max and several other children in their Annville home in 2020.

Most of the other children shared a bedroom filled with toys, clothes and a flat-screen television. Kitchen cabinets and a refrigerator were filled with food, Pop-Tarts and snacks for the children to enjoy.

Yet officials reported Max's family failed to enroll the 12-year-old in school, give him proper medical care, or give him proper treatment for possible physical and psychological problems he might have developed for over a decade.

Between 2013 and 2019, Maurer applied for welfare benefits, food stamps and subsidized heating listing Maxwell as a dependent. Prosecutors said the family received state-funded health care on Maxwell's behalf, with a medical insurance policy in Maurer's name.

Yet officials reported Max had not seen a doctor since 2011.

During Maurer's trial in March, prosecutors focused on Maurer's Facebook posts, along with text messages and video recovered from her cellphone. Authorities recovered more than 32,000 text messages, 7,000 pictures and video, and more than 102,000 pages of Facebook messages and posts.

Selected portions of these messages by Graf's team showed Maurer describing an inability to control Max's behavior, along with instances of Max peeing and defecating in the family's home.

"You should see Max's dinner plate, maybe I should start taking pictures to prove I feed the asshole," officials read from Maurer's texts.

Prosecutors also read messages from Schollenberger to Maurer, which included Max's father saying he is a problem and that "If I have to come home, I will beat his ass."

Maurer's 17-year-old daughter testified in March that one time she saw Schollenberger pick Max up by his shoulders and scream in his face.

"He would just yell at us (kids)," she said, adding that she was afraid of Schollenberger.

Starting in 2019, no one outside of the immediate family ever saw Max. Officials report that people who regularly



PHOTO BY KIM STRONG

ABOVE: Nichole Harner, 25, organized the 2020 demonstration at the Lebanon County Courthouse, focused on justice for 12-year-old Maxwell Schollenberger. She led the group on a walk through the city, planning later to lay their signs on the porch of the Annville home where the boy died in May.

LEFT: Max Schollenberger, 5



PHOTO SUBMITTED

interact with the family never knew this Annville boy existed.

The day before police found Max's body, his family was having a Memorial Day cookout for family and friends. According to witnesses, those who actually asked where Max was were told he was "staying with his aunt."

"(Maurer's) kid was essentially tortured, jailed (and) basically his existence was erased while he was still alive," said Edward McCann, a seasoned attorney from Montgomery County working with Graf.

### 'I was going to join him'

After finding the lifeless body of his son that May 26 morning, Schollenberger took his gun and headed to Berks County.

Lebanon County detectives found him at St. Joseph Medical Center, and asked him in a recorded interview what he was planning to do.

"I was gonna join him," he responded, clarifying seconds later by saying: "No, listen, I don't want to be alive."

Several witnesses during Maurer's trial described Schollenberger as "mean and off-putting" and said that Max was scared of his father.

After losing his job at Pennsy Supply in 2020, Schollenberger said he was stressed out and having trouble applying for unemployment compensation during the COVID-19 pandemic. He felt "like a man without a country."

"I didn't know what to do," he said in court Friday. "Stress was on me. I should have done more for him."

Schollenberger pleaded guilty in February to charges that included criminal homicide, endangering the welfare of children and criminal conspiracy to endanger the welfare of children.

*Continued on next page*



# Lebanon Daily News continued

He was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole.

## 'What pure evil personified looks like'

During her trial, Maurer's attorneys argued that Schollenberger was the orchestrator of his 12-year-old son's abuse and death.

"Scott basically told me that I wasn't allowed to be Max's mom," she said, "that I was overstepping my boundaries every time I tried to help ... so I felt hopeless."

Schollenberger would pick on Max and scream and hit him, according to Maurer. If Schollenberger was home, she said, Max would hide, talk differently and would act like he was afraid all of the time.

She added that she was abused by Schollenberger and not allowed to see friends and family while they were together. Maurer also alleged that there were physical altercations between the couple as well.

"There was a lot of fighting, hitting, slamming against walls, my hair got pulled out (and) my head got hit," she said.

Maurer's defense team presented three photos to the jury, saying they were bruises on her leg, back and neck she received from Schollenberger. They said that Maurer took the photos in 2012 and between 2018 and 2019.

Detective David Shaffer, as a rebuttal witness for the prosecution, testified that Maurer received all three photos in text messages Jan. 15, 2019 from one of her friends.

In July 2020, Maurer received a protection from abuse order against Scott Schollenberger. Officials said it was in an interview they had with Maurer in July that for the first time she told them she was being abused.

Maurer said she wanted Lebanon County Children and Youth to come to her house and help Max, saying she wasn't worried that officials would take her other children away after seeing Max's condition.

"They wouldn't have taken my babies away," she said.

Maurer's attorney, Andrew Race, said she should be convicted guilty of endangering the welfare of a child, but it was Schollenberger who controlled the family "with an iron fist."

"The only thing Kim is guilty of is letting Scott control her, not doing more and not calling the police," he said in his closing arguments.

After almost a week and a half of testimony, it took a jury less than one hour to find Maurer guilty on multiple counts of criminal homicide, endangering the welfare of children, involuntary manslaughter and criminal conspiracy to endanger the welfare of children.

Graf said she was proud of this verdict, saying that this trial showed the jurors "what pure evil personified looks like."

"It shows how a child could be tortured, starved and punished in every way for existing," she said. "And those 12 people stood up, looked (Maurer) in the face today and did right by that child."



PHOTO BY MATTHEW TOTH

In 2022, only a small memorial sits outside the house of Max Schollenberger, a child who died in a second-floor room of a house along South White Oak Street. He was found by police May 26, 2020.

## Has Max's case changed anything?

Days after the verdict was reached, Annville-Cleona School District officials announced plans for a new playground in Max's name to open in the fall.

"The late (state) Sen. Dave Arnold had approached the district with an idea to help the community have some healing and closure," said Krista Antonis, Annville-Cleona superintendent. "He had recommended a playground, and because we had a need for a new playground at Annville Elementary ... That all seemed to kind of come together nicely for a dedication for (Max)."

Plans for the inclusive playground include a rubberized surface, ramps and some sensory panels. The site planned is only minutes away from Maxwell's former home.

Lebanon County Children and Youth services received 2,328 total reports of child abuse and neglect in 2020, according to officials.

The City of Lebanon, Annville Township, Myerstown and Palmyra have been identified in the United Way's Alice Report as being at the highest risk of child abuse, based on poverty and survivor-level income households, according to officials.

"If we can build a more supportive and trauma-informed community that knows what to do, that isn't afraid to act on behalf of the safety of children and supportive families,

we are all going to be in a better place and feel like we can do something," Alissa Perrotto, Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center of Lebanon president and CEO said in 2021.

In 2020, residents were on the steps of the Lebanon County Courthouse demanding life sentences for Scott Schollenberger and Maurer. They talked about taking up funds to demolish Max's Annville home.

"I don't think it deserves to be there anymore," Nicole Harner told the Lebanon Daily News at the protest.

Yet in 2022, standing in the Sunoco gas station across from the White Oak house, Claire Smith, an Annville resident, didn't know who Max was or what happened at his home.

"How have I never heard about this?" she said after being informed by a Lebanon Daily News reporter.

The Department of Human Services operates a 24/7 hotline to report suspected child abuse or concerns about the welfare of a child. ChildLine can be reached at 800-932-0313.

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## ‘Something clearly isn’t working’

### Penn State Timely Warning data shows increase in reported sexual violence compared to past

By Kate Irwin

The Daily Collegian (Penn State)

Penn State sent University Park-issued Timely Warnings regarding forcible sex offenses on campus to Penn State students’ inboxes more than a dozen times in the first six weeks of classes.

As of Oct. 13, Penn State has reported 13 known forcible sex offenses since Aug. 21. Reports were especially concentrated the week of Sept. 10, when five reports were made in the span of five days — including two on Sept. 13.

Compared to past semesters, 13 reports in the first six weeks of school is substantial. The following numbers show the total number of reported forcible sex offenses issued as Timely Warnings in the last six fall semesters at Penn State: Fall 2021, 13; 2020, eight; 2019, two; 2018, seven; 2017, eight; and 2016, 19.

According to the data, 13 reported forcible sex offenses for half of this fall is greater than four previous fall semesters’ reports for the full semester.

The following numbers show the total number of reported forcible sex offenses issued as Timely Warnings for full academic years: 2020-21 academic year, 16; 2019-20, 10; 2018-19, 12; 2017-18, 16; 2016-17, 28; and 2015-16, 19.

Timely Warnings were first reported to students in spring 2015, in which there were 11 forcible sex offenses reported, according to the Penn State University Park and Public Safety Police database.

Here is a breakdown of campus locations where forcible sex offenses have reportedly occurred so far this fall: approximately 23% reported in Beaver Stadium; approximately 31% in East Halls; and approximately 31% in Pollock Halls.

The most recent forcible sex offense, reported on Oct. 3, was said to have occurred in an unknown fraternity house. Though incidents of sexual violence in downtown State College aren’t reported through Timely Warnings — which



solely report on-campus incidents — the individual decided to report this incident through the university, according to the State College Police Department.

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act is “a federal consumer protection law that requires institutions of higher education participating in the federal student financial aid program to disclose information about certain crime on campus, on buildings/property owned or controlled by the university and on publicly owned property within or immediately adjacent to the campus.”

Timely Warnings are “Clery Act required notifications that go out to the entire university community to alert of a potential or ongoing threat of a Clery Reportable Offense,” according to Penn State.

“Timely Warnings are issued under a set of particular circumstances as outlined in a federal law called the Clery Act,” according to Jennifer Cruden, public information officer at Penn State University Police and Public Safety.

However, Timely Warnings issued to Penn State students do not reflect all reported sexual assaults on campus, Cruden said.

Damon Sims, vice president of student affairs at Penn State, said in an Oct. 3 blog post that “through September, there have been 44 reported rapes and sexual assaults at University Park in 2021.”

Nine reports of sexual assault and rape on campus were reported in the first six weeks of the fall 2020 semester, according to data from the recently published Penn State police Annual Security Report. These numbers, pulled from internal campus police records, are not yet published for the entirety of 2021, according to Cruden.

Compared to the 13 Timely Warnings in the first six weeks of this fall semester, six Timely Warnings were issued in the first six weeks last fall.

The 2018 and 2019 Annual Security Reports show the

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# Daily Collegian continued

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number of sexual assaults and rapes in the first six weeks of fall semester classes were 15 in 2018 and 20 in 2019, compared to two and one forcible sex offenses reported through Timely Warnings in the first six weeks of the 2018 and 2019 fall semesters, respectively.

Sims said while the rates of sexual assaults reported through Timely Warnings have been “largely consistent” with those in pre-coronavirus times, Penn State “must expect the number of reported offenses to decline.”

“For too long, these offenses have been underreported, and we must continue to encourage those harmed in these ways to report these offenses,” Sims said in a statement.

“Our many efforts to mitigate and prevent sexual misconduct in our community should result in a decline in the number of reported incidents and Timely Warnings, and anything short of that outcome must remain unacceptable to us.”

With assaults occurring early in Penn State’s academic year, conversations have surrounded the “red zone” — the period of time from the beginning of the semester to Thanksgiving that traditionally sees the greatest amount of sexual assaults reported.

Detective Craig Ripka of the State College Police Department, who handles about “85 to 90% of sexual assault reports” in downtown State College, said he is adamant the red zone issue is an incredibly prevalent part of each academic school year. He defined Penn State’s red zone as an even more concentrated period of time within the fall semester.

“From the moment students come back to campus to about the second or third week of October — that’s usually when... the majority of... sexual assaults [are reported to us],” Ripka said.

Ripka pointed to data from the State College Police Department, which accounts for the borough of State College, College Township and Harris Township. The reported red zone numbers for the past four years are: Aug. 15-Sept. 30, 2021, nine sexual assaults; Aug. 15-Sept. 30, 2020, eight; Aug. 15-Sept. 30, 2019, 23; and Aug. 15-Sept. 30, 2018, four.)

“First of all, there’s a massive influx of people that come back to campus,” Ripka said. “Second, you have people from out of town coming in to visit a lot on weekends due to football games.”

Ripka also said he believes two other major factors affecting the red zone are the age of students and alcohol-related situations.

“You have a lot of college kids who are still teenagers, trying to create a social network while their brains are still developing,” he said. “And alcohol, of course, is one of the biggest things that plays a role.”

Ripka also explained how the specifics of the football schedule impact the data rates of crime — including sexual assault.

“When it’s a Saturday night game, we know we’ll see a lot on the Friday night before when people go out,” he said. “It even depends on the opponent — when we play Michigan or Ohio State, those are big weekends, and we’ll see that reflected in crime.”

This fall semester is the first time many sophomores, as well as freshmen, are experiencing campus life, which some professors said may be contributing to what is now being deemed a “double red zone” — such as Rosa Eberly, associate professor of rhetoric in the department of Communication Arts and Sciences and department of English at Penn State.

Eberly was a panelist at the Penn State Schreyer Gender Equity Coalition’s “Sexual Violence on Campus” virtual discussion panel, which included nine panelists in the Penn State community who spoke about sexual violence at the university and institutional transparency on Oct. 5.

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“Our many efforts to mitigate and prevent sexual misconduct in our community should result in a decline in the number of reported incidents and Timely Warnings, and anything short of that outcome must remain unacceptable to us.”

**DAMON SIMS**

*VICE PRESIDENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS AT PENN STATE*

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“The idea of a double red zone is really clear,” Eberly said. “We have a lot of people who have never been to campus before. It’s easy for me to say in hindsight that we should have thought of that, but here we are.”

Eberly said the knowledge of the double red zone is an opportunity for Penn State to grasp control of the rise in reports for the first half of fall semesters moving forward.

“Let’s let the university show that [it] learned something from this and show what it will do differently in the coming fall semesters to make sure that not even a single red zone is a thing anymore,” Eberly said.

As a former Penn State undergraduate in the 1980s, Eberly said she has been following the patterns of sexual assault on campus for many years and pointed out the cycle of behavior that repeatedly occurs.

“If you’ve been observing this for long enough, students have enough time to make progress throughout the academic year, and then April comes, and there’s some culmination of progress,” Eberly said. “And in May, everyone goes away. So the real challenge is sustaining the change through those transitions of students in and out.”

That challenge is one not addressed by universities in general, according to Eberly.

“Higher education depends on students cycling out every four years,” Eberly said. “That way, people forget things. Universities, in general, hope that things will just go away.”

Eberly said she hopes the momentum around this issue will continue, and she addressed the university directly in her concern.

“Can you show that you learned anything from the [Jerry] Sandusky [sex abuse case]? If so, then directly

address the problem of sexual assault and sexual violence on your campus and in your community,” Eberly said.

“The university is deeply committed to creating and sustaining a safe and supportive campus climate that leaves no room for sexual assault or harassment and holds accountable those who violate this fundamental expectation,” Sims said in a statement. “We are determined to establish and maintain a safe and supportive environment in concert with the students, faculty and staff of Penn State.”

Penn State said it intends to hold a town hall meeting and focus groups later this semester to discuss progress on and commitment to issues relating to sexual violence, and it will conduct its next university-wide sexual misconduct climate survey in spring 2022.

Despite the prevalence of the red zone on campuses throughout the country, some members of the Penn State community argued the increased Timely Warnings are not reflective of the whole picture, according to Eberly and other scholars.

“FBI statistics in the late ‘80s were that four in 10 assaults were reported. According to the 2020 Department of Justice statistics, more than [roughly] two out of three assaults don’t get reported,” Eberly said. “Every time I get a Timely Warning, I multiply it by three — at least.”

Eberly described Timely Warnings as “just the tip of the iceberg of sexual assaults” in the Penn State community.

“Anyone with a shred of empathy is concerned when one of those Timely Warnings arrives, but that’s hardly the whole picture — it’s a fraction of the problem that we have in our culture,” Eberly said. “It is a particular problem on college campuses in the United States.”

Jill Wood, a professor of women’s, gender and sexuality studies at Penn State, said she believes the rise in Timely Warnings reflects an increase in reporting — not necessarily in sexual assaults.

“Because we’re in a rape culture and we consider it normative and we’re getting alerts often about forcible offenses, it makes people think that they’re happening more often, but they’re not,” Wood said. “They’re being reported more often, which is great.”

Wood said she believes Penn State has a “rape culture” because there are “imbalances of power” on campus that lead to more sexual assaults.

“Sexual violence is this imbalance of power in which certain people feel entitled to use other people’s bodies for their own interest without their permission,” Wood said. “Just because it’s happening often, just because it’s assumed to be normative — that doesn’t mean that it’s OK.”

While Wood said she emphasizes the “major issue” of the prevalence of sexual assault, she said the increase in reporting this semester is “to the university’s credit.”

“I think the university did an especially good job over COVID-19 in sending out mass emails with all sorts of resources,” Wood said. “I think students started to get more of a sense of what sort of resources we have at Penn State.”

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# Daily Collegian continued

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Penn State's Gender Equity Center is hiring a full-time survivor advocate to back students who have experienced any form of sexual violence and a full-time education and outreach coordinator. A student advisory committee was formed to work with the university's Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response, Title IX office and Student Affairs Research and Assessment office as well, Sims said.

The alleged increase of students reporting on-campus sexual assaults is encouraging to Wood, who said this shows a sense of "awareness" from students.

Despite the promising nature of students feeling comfortable to report, Wood said she believes there is a large overall issue with sexual violence cases being unreported and unresolved.

"Often, people aren't even able to see what happened to them as an assault if it was by someone they knew and trusted if they were drinking — so it's really a complicated issue," Wood said.

Hannah Nelson, president of Survivors and Allies United at Penn State, a group that "focuses on support for survivors of gender discrimination and sexual violence at Penn State," agreed these issues bring up a "mix of emotions."

Nelson (senior-print and digital journalism and history) joined the organization in January 2019 — after she experienced sexual assault at Penn State. She estimated about half of the approximately 40 members of Survivors and Allies United are also survivors of sexual assault at Penn State, which she said can make receiving Timely Warnings especially jarring.

"You know that there's a story behind every Timely Warning that we get," Nelson said. "A lot of us have gone through that experience, so a lot of our members felt very emotionally drained and helpless when we would get two warnings in a day, or three warnings in a week. You just think, 'When is it going to stop?'"

Survivors and Allies United has an "active" GroupMe that serves as a place of "support and resources" for those who have experienced sexual assault at Penn State, according to Nelson. She said the organization "tries to figure out if anyone knows who [the survivor in correlation with the Timely Warning] may be or how we can provide support for people" upon receiving each Timely Warning.

"It can be a very triggering situation for a lot of our members. As a victim, when I get all those notifications, I feel hopeless and terrible and really sad," Nelson said. "This is a person who's had their life effectively changed because of the actions of another person."

As a survivor of sexual assault, Nelson referenced the "strong feeling" she had when she found a support system within Survivors and Allies United and emphasized how harmful the long-term effects of sexual assault are.

"It impacts how you form relationships, your mental health, what you do in your free time, how you do in school," Nelson said. "It has a large, large impact on people."

According to Penn State students, professors and community law enforcement, the most important step in seeing a change in these numbers can be summed up in one word — education.

"[Survivors and Allies United thinks] that by educating incoming students and continually educating students at Penn State, the problem of sexual assault will become much less than it is," Nelson said

Incoming freshmen are required to complete a sexual violence and alcohol awareness online module before coming to campus — Penn State Safe and Aware — through Penn State Student Affairs.

Sexual assault has also typically been a topic of discussion at New Student Orientation sessions, which occur in the summer before each fall semester. However, Nelson said this overview for incoming freshmen is not enough.

"It should be a requirement every year that you're a student, not just something you do two months before you step foot on campus," Nelson said.

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According to Penn State students, professors and community law enforcement, the most important step in seeing a change in these numbers can be summed up in one word — education.

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Nelson also noted how having New Student Orientation online the past two years due to the coronavirus may have played a role in the increased Timely Warnings.

"It's different from learning in person," Nelson said. "If you're learning all of this important material virtually, maybe students don't take it as seriously as they would if it were in person. Something clearly isn't working."

The Penn State Safe and Aware module includes videos and short quizzes regarding Relationship and Sexual Violence, which Eberly said is not an effective form of education.

"I've heard consistently, from undergraduate students, that both when it comes to alcohol and sexual assault, the trainings are perfunctory," Eberly said. "Students can complete them without really engaging with the material."

According to Katie Motycki, interim director of Student Orientation and Transition Programs, NSO has implemented "engaging and interactive programming" related to sexual violence education, including a live musical titled "Results May Vary."

"NSO Orientation Leaders worked to use this effective musical theatre tool in new ways, including sharing video clips via a Canvas course," Motycki said via email. "NSO, like other aspects of student engagement, is committed to doing everything possible to safely return to an in-person format moving forward as the University knows these are critical aspects to address."

Being transparent about what sexual assault and consent looks like is an important step in improving education, according to Wood.

"Sexual assault is typically not a stranger hiding in a bush, waiting to jump out to rape someone," Wood said.

"Typically, sexual assault is someone that the victim knows and trusts, and when we're told to lock our door, we're locking that person in with us."

Wood cited two issues with sexual assault education in general — one being its correlation with alcohol. She said she believes "it's not true that drinking causes sexual assault," but rather, she said alcohol is used as a "date rape drug" to purposefully lower people's inhibitions.

She also said general prevention and education surrounding sexual assault targets messaging toward potential survivors too much instead of targeting perpetrators.

"One of my biggest concerns with how we talk about sexual assault is that we've put most of the focus on the [survivors]... in terms of their ability to prevent the violence first," Wood said. "We're shifting the burden onto potential [survivors], which is very different from teaching potential perpetrators to not rape."

Sexual education should be approached by ensuring students are aware of "how to get consent," Wood said.

"We're not talking in a more honest and transparent way about how whoever is initiating that sexual activity needs to know that they have consent and that no one is entitled to use someone else's body for their own enjoyment," Wood said.

Ripka agreed.

"If we want to decrease these occurrences, it's all about education," he said. "There should be more awareness, and I think that education needs to trickle back down into high school since that's where these issues start."

Ripka cited Allegheny County in southwestern Pennsylvania as the "cream of the crop" when it comes to sexual assault awareness and education and said he is trying to implement as much of its tactics into his role as possible at the police department.

The momentum from students such as those in Survivors and Allies United and those who gathered on Oct. 1 to protest "sexist violence" at Penn State is what Eberly said she hopes will propel the university toward approaching sexual assault education differently.

"We should use this energy from students and maybe even pay students to do peer education on this topic going forward," Eberly said. "Maybe there's a place for a research institute or some other type of support through the university to help students educate each other."

However, the main shift in attitude to lessen the impact sexual violence is having on college students must arise from Penn State itself, Eberly said.

"The time when [survivors] are treated as mere collateral damage by the university needs to end," Eberly said. "These are hard things to talk about on university campuses, which are places people want to be because of the energy of young people. Not one person can be collateral damage."

Editor's Note: Hannah Nelson was a reporter for The Daily Collegian in spring 2018.

*Published Oct. 14, 2021*

## ‘This is Spiritual Work’ Religious leaders lay blueprint for reparations

By Sasha Rogelberg

When the Israelites fled Egypt, they were demanded by God to take reparations, Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein argues.

After generations of enslavement in Mitzrayim, before their long trek to the land of milk and honey, the Israelites were instructed to take back gold and their wealth; the Torah states, “Afterward shall they come out with significant property.”

To Bernstein, the story of God demanding that Israelites take back wealth from the ancient Egyptians is a central part of the story of Exodus.

Though a midrash from centuries ago, Jewish conversations about reparations — compensation for past harm, loss or damages — have bubbled to the surface in the modern-day reckoning many predominantly white institutions and individuals are having about racism in the United States.

For the Jewish leaders in Philadelphia that are starting conversations about reparations in their communities, beginning the process of giving reparations to Black Americans is urgent.

“My people are dying; my community [of Jews of color in Philadelphia] is struggling,” said Jared Jackson, founder and executive director of Jews of color advocacy organization Jews In ALL Hues. “So while you’re waiting to feel benevolent, our lives are diminished until you feel the need to say whatever words you need to say to yourself and others to get the ball rolling.”

On Juneteenth, Jackson, as well as Reconstructing Judaism’s Director of the Center for Jewish Ethics Rabbi Mira Wasserman represented the Jewish community at the Mayor’s Commission for Faith-based and Interfaith Affairs, in partnership with POWER Interfaith, the Truth Telling Project and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Jewish, Christian and Muslim faith leaders met as a call to action for religious groups to give reparations to Black descendants of enslaved people. Religious spaces offer the opportunity to talk about the underlying values that drive the practice of reparations.

“You don’t have faith traditions without people,” Jackson said.

In Philadelphia, there’s a push among reparations

proponents to resolve tangled titles — which makes home ownership unclear by not guaranteeing the deed to one’s home is passed down to their intended heir if they do not have a will — an issue by which Black and brown Philadelphians are disproportionately affected, Jackson said.

Reparations can take the form of funding legal aid for those looking to protect their home ownership.

But persistent racism can be identified even within Jewish spaces, Jackson said. He uses the example of Jews In ALL Hues to show the past complacency of the predominantly white Jewish community to address monetary inequity.

Jews In ALL Hues relies on private donors and grant money to continue business, Jackson outlined. Other organizations hire Jews In ALL Hues to conduct diversity, equity and inclusion workshops, which also help support programming. Though Jackson calls the nonprofit the oldest organization of its kind serving Jews of color, Jews In ALL Hues does not receive funding from the Jewish Federation, he said.

Instead, many Jewish organizations hold workshops about race and racism or invest in initiatives and task forces to conduct research on racism in the Jewish community, Jackson said. These growing efforts, even in multiracial groups, are often helmed by white people and do not fully take into consideration the needs of the people of color they intend to help. In some other cases, even when Jews of color lead anti-racism efforts, they have to balance their own emotional needs with the work in which they lead their white counterparts.

“We need more than just people, mostly white people, studying us,” he said.

Though Jackson advocated for better funding of efforts led by Jews of color to address racism and build community, he’s quick to differentiate between funding and reparations.

“It’s beyond the dollar you put in your JNF box,” he said.

When organizations fund Jews of color-led efforts, similar to philanthropy, they receive a return on their investment in the form of a tax deduction of community programming



PHOTO: COURTESY OF JARED JACKSON

Jared Jackson is the founder and executive director of Jews In ALL Hues.

*Continued on next page*



# Philadelphia Jewish Exponent continued

the organization can hold with increased funding.

With reparations, white institutions and individuals must give back to people of color with the trust that the recipients will use the money for what they need it most, which may be invisible to the reparations giver, or it may not align with the giver's values or agenda.

"If you're giving reparations to Jews of color, the people to decide where the money is going, the people to decide the process, the distribution, all have to be Jews of color," Jackson said. "There needs to be that trust that we will make the right choices for us, in a way that will look different than what white supremacy tells us is professionalism or philanthropic excellence."

Before monetary reparations are given, there must first be teshuvah, Wasserman said.

Within the Jewish community, there must be an understanding of the harm inflicted on a group of people to know how to address it.

For the white Jewish community, this process is hard, Wasserman said. To begin with, many Jews don't know about reparation efforts in the larger political climate. Others may not fully grasp the breadth and depth of anti-Black racism or don't see addressing it as a Jewish issue.

Being a group that also experiences discrimination adds to the challenges of recognizing and addressing racism, Wasserman said.

"We have lots of concerns about antisemitism that take up a lot of our attention and energy," she said.

In white Jews' efforts to combat antisemitism, they can forget that anti-Jewish hatred comes from the same white supremacist roots as anti-Black hatred, Wasserman argues.

"In a sense, anti-Black racism and antisemitism are just sort of two faces of white supremacy and white nationalism in this country," she said.

Before the recent Jewish interest in reparations for Black Americans, Jews tackled the topic of reparations after the Holocaust. Even then it was met with mixed opinions.

In 1952, Israeli and German officials signed the Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany, in which West Germany was to give money and resources to the budding state of Israel. Germany would also give payments to Holocaust survivors and direct descendants of survivors through the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

While German officials and citizens were either in favor of or indifferent to reparations, Israel had some of the most significant opposition to reparations, according to Thomas Craemer, a University of Connecticut professor of public policy who studies reparations.

Jews worried that accepting reparations from Germany would mean that the trauma and pain from the Holocaust would be "fixed" — addressed enough for Germany's hands to be wiped clean of the genocide.

Wasserman uses the example of the Holocaust to point out that reparations go beyond just the individual receiving compensation.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF GREEN STREET FRIENDS FACEBOOK PAGE

**Green Street Friends Reparations Committee created a 10-year plan to give reparations to the Black residents in their Germantown neighborhood.**



PHOTO: COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS VIA THE NATIONAL PHOTO COLLECTION OF ISRAEL

**Menachem Begin, who became Israel's prime minister in 1977, protests the 1952 agreement giving reparations to the budding state of Israel.**

"The reparations aren't only for victims but for the whole society to recognize the wrongs and the society's complicitness in wrongs," Wasserman said.

"I get the feeling that reparations probably do have the power to change perspectives and repair relationships," Craemer added.

Even after overcoming ideological barriers to address reparations, Americans have become paralyzed with how to practically approach reparations.

Members of Green Street Friends, a Quaker meeting, shared their blueprint for giving reparations in the Philadelphia area at the Juneteenth interfaith event.

"Our meeting house is located in Germantown, which is a predominantly Black neighborhood where the average

household income is below the poverty line, but most of our members are upper-middle class white," said Afroza Hossain, a founding member of the Green Street Reparations Committee. "So it felt like a very personal thing for our meeting to make reparations and repair some of the wounds of racial injustice that have been done in this country historically."

Quakers draw on a similar value as teshuvah, using the value of "repair" to guide their reparations movement. They have had to undergo their own reckoning with racism as a predominantly white institution; William Penn, a Quaker who founded Quakerism in the commonwealth, owned enslaved people.

The meeting made a 10-year plan to give \$500,000 in reparations over the next 10 years. For the past six months, the meeting held six legal clinics at the meeting house, partnering with Philadelphia VIP and providing pro bono legal counsel for Black residents. They give money to residents who need home repairs.

The goal is to keep Black residents who have lived in the neighborhood for generations from being displaced. The Black members of the meeting decided on the effort to invest in this past year and will be the only meeting members to decide where reparations go, Hossain said.

Hossain believes that reparations is an active process. While larger bodies like corporations can give money, their ability to invest time and emotions into the practice of repair is limited. The "holy" nature of reparations — its foundation on community, trust and repair — is what makes it an obligation for faith-based organizations.

"This is spiritual work," she said.

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# ROCK TO THE FUTURE

## Helping students shine on and off stage

By Mac Johnson

For two weeks, in two separate locations, dozens of Philly's youths embark on a journey meant for Jimi Hendrix himself. Students pick up instruments with no prior knowledge or training, start bands with no prior history or connections, and form bonds with others in a safe space they wouldn't otherwise know existed. This journey may not lead to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, but it is designed to give each student the confidence to perform on the world stage.

Rock To the Future is a program that was founded in 2010 as a volunteer organization to support positive youth development. Over the last 12 years, the program went from serving 13 students in the MusiCore After School program to serving more than 500 students between the MusiCore after school, mobile music and summer programs in 2020 and 2021. The program even sustained growth through the worst parts of the pandemic.

The two-week summer program takes place at Roosevelt Elementary School in Germantown, and in Kensington at Kensington High School. Students from 6th grade through 12th come from all across the city for this safe and constructive experience.

"We are making sure that we foster the community that we're trying to promote here," said Kaamilah Moore, the Germantown site director. She joined Rock To The Future in 2016, starting out as a volunteer. Moore says she was looking for an opportunity to serve the community she lived in and found the organization to be not just a creative outlet, but one that was welcoming to her and the students that benefit from it.

Ironically, the very program that serves as a young rockstar's paradise is the same place they visit to block out the noise.

"We have students that come from all walks of life," Moore said. "I've heard from our students directly that the environment that they're coming from is often a place of aggression, where you fight first and ask questions later. We want to make sure that our students know that we



"We don't necessarily want to create the next Prince or Jimi Hendrix, but it's to have someone who can stand on their own two feet and shine in any environment."

**KAAMILAH MOORE**



*Continued on next page*



# The Philadelphia Sunday Sun continued

might be in that environment, but not of that environment.”

Teachers, volunteers and organizers work hard to create an atmosphere of acceptance that is set from the moment you walk in. They want children to feel that the program is a safe space in more than just lip service. I felt the warmth when I observed a room full of “bass players in training” working to strum the bassline of “My Girl”.

In another room nearly a dozen of tomorrow’s drummers worked to understand time signatures. They were learning how to read music and fully engaged while doing so. They were young, but this was no child’s play.

Rock to the Future focuses on zip codes within Philadelphia that are underserved in terms of after school programs and opportunities to learn music in school.

On a child’s very first day in the program, they choose an instrument (drums, piano, guitar and bass) and begin molding both their band and their brand for a major showcase toward the end of the summer. Not only do students learn how to play the instruments, but they learn marketing strategies and graphic design skills to promote their show as well. The value of the program has it trending upward in engagement and enrollment. In fact, this was the first year that the summer program had a waiting list. Organizers are excited about its growth year over year and remain committed to continuing their progress.

“We want to focus on retention and engagement strategies,” said Juliana Cala, Rock to the Future’s program director. “The goal is always to make sure children are satisfied and continue coming.”

When you’re serving hundreds of students, support must come in a variety of different methods in order to meet each child’s needs. That’s why “Rock” not only teaches music and life skills, but the program offers free breakfast and lunch, as well as transportation vouchers. Students even have the opportunity to take the instruments home to practice on their own.

Saij Williams, a 13-year-old student in the program, plays the guitar in her band, but has much bigger dreams.

“I like the program, and I like the music, but I want to be a lawyer when I grow up,” Williams said.

She’s not the only one with aspirations beyond the main stage. 12-year-old Amiyah Johnson wants to be a lawyer as well. In fact, a quick poll of many of the students at the Roosevelt Elementary location yielded results that showed a desire for higher education. When students assimilate through the program and graduate high school, they are awarded laptops and scholarships to ease the cost of their continued learning. However, Rock to the Future does not just push students to obtain four-year degrees. All routes of betterment including attending a trade school are celebrated. The program exists to help a young person focus on their future to achieve the best outcome.

Site director Kaamilah Moore says the goal is much bigger than a baseline.

“We don’t necessarily want to create the next Prince or Jimi Hendrix, but it’s to have someone who can stand on their own two feet and shine in any environment,” she said.



**Juliana Cala**  
*Rock to the Future  
Program director*



**Kaamilah Moore**  
*Rock to the Future  
Germantown site director*

Moore says there are people that have come through the program and are now operating on major tours with artists. Some students have even come back to serve as teachers in the program. Moore says even if students are drawn to a musical profession, for every superstar you see on stage, there are thousands of careers behind the scenes that are still music adjacent.

Massai Walker is a 14-year-old in the program. He started playing guitar, then switched to the bass after he picked it up. Not only does he have his sights set on playing the piano next, but he also wants to take music to the next level. But he’s not hoping for a hit record.

“I want to be a video game animator,” said Walker, “but I



want to make soundtracks for the video games as well.”

Kaamilah Moore says the music is just the starting point.

“Our students would say they love the opportunity to learn the instruments and take them home,” said Moore, “but it really just motivates kids to be in our presence so we can motivate them and lift them to greatness.”

Rock to the Future plans to expand into West Philadelphia in the coming years, as well as create their own full-time operational space. The program is also accepting of both volunteers and donations. If you would like to get involved, visit their website at: <https://rocktothefuture.org>.

*Published July 22, 2022*



# Observer-Reporter

## Study offers ‘blueprint’ for broadband connection

By Mike Jones  
Staff Writer

The notion that many people living in rural areas of Western Pennsylvania have poor access to high-speed broadband internet service isn't a surprise to local leaders. What is more important to them right now is finding a comprehensive solution to fix the problem.

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission released a report Tuesday showing that rural communities in Fayette, Greene and Washington counties are among the most underserved areas in the 10-county region, and the study outlined an action plan to extend broadband in the future.

Announced as the Connectivity Roadmap, the initiative offers a multi-prong plan on how to improve broadband services in ways that wouldn't soon become obsolete as new technology is developed. The "roadmap" was created through more than 3,400 surveys of people across the 10-county region, along with community forums with the public and phone interviews with various leaders.

Locally, the Washington County Authority has conducted nearly 1,100 surveys in the county on its own since March 10 to look at areas that are lacking high-speed internet service. That broadband internet survey is still available for Washington County residents to take by visiting the county's official website at [www.co.washington.pa.us](http://www.co.washington.pa.us).

Authority Director John Timney said they have been working "hand in glove" with SPC and the other entities involved to have the most comprehensive look of the situation and how to make improvements. But he added that the SPC study bore down deep into many other technological issues such as digital literacy for seniors

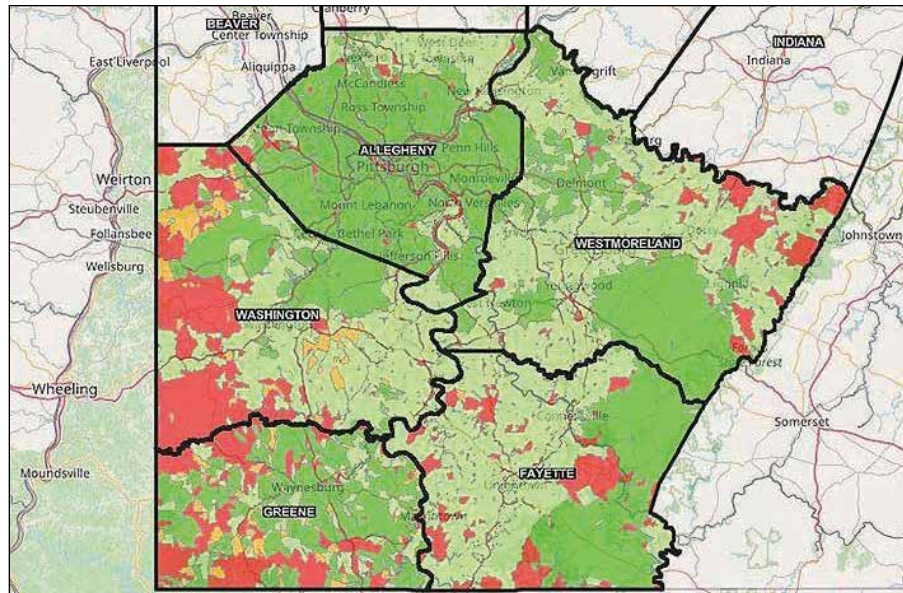


IMAGE: COURTESY OF SPC

This map by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's Connectivity Roadmap initiative shows where high-speed broadband internet is available and which communities are underserved or unserved.

and internet access to minorities and people with disabilities.

"They're doing a little more than we are. We have a machete and we're going through the jungle. They have a scalpel and they're going through surgery," Timney said of the two sets of surveys. "We're like a light switch. Do they have (broadband) or not? The information they have we're leveraging."

Washington County has earmarked \$30 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act stimulus money to partner with internet providers to expand service. But when that money runs out, many counties will be vying for additional federal infrastructure funding that will be disbursed by the recently formed Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority.

"Everyone is doing everything for the

right reasons," Timney said. "Inclusive to that, the more we're organized as a consortium as counties ... you can get down to funding and we can hold each other accountable."

State Rep. Pam Snyder, D-Jefferson, is one of the members of the PBDA board that will administer the state and federal funds for broadband projects in unserved and underserved areas.

"The Connectivity Roadmap is a wonderful example of what we have been striving for, not only from a regional level but from a statewide perspective," Snyder said in a written statement. "Initiatives like this are exactly what the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority aims to highlight and encourage as collaboration, and partnership between government, public and private parties is essential to

advancing connectivity in our communities."

Fayette County Commissioner Vince Vicites, who also serves as secretary and treasurer for the SPC board, called the plan a "regional blueprint" on how to improve services and mobilize counties to receive state and federal funding for broadband expansion projects.

"They did a pretty comprehensive look at every county," Vicites said. "This segues with counties performing their own studies to hone in our own broadband needs."

The roadmap will allow counties like Fayette to build on the projects they've already completed in recent years. Vicites pointed to \$5.3 million spent on its VITALink initiative to install 29 internet "hot spots" across the county using federal CARES Act stimulus money in late 2020. Vicites called that project the "middle mile" of broadband expansion that will help them to go farther into underserved areas after the county recently received a \$1.1 million grant from the state earlier this year.

"Doing a plan on a regional basis and individually in Fayette County will position us for funding opportunities in the future," Vicites said. "We want to be aggressive. Our goal is for 100% of the county to be broadband, but we have to take it step-by-step."

The SPC study was funded by the Hillman Foundation and brought together various entities such as Allies for Children and Carnegie Mellon University's Metro21: Smart Cities Institute. Pittsburgh-based engineering firm Michael Baker International Inc. conducted the survey analysis.

For more information on the Connectivity Roadmap and the study's findings, go online to [www.spcregion.org/connected/](http://www.spcregion.org/connected/).

*Published April 27, 2022; updated June 3, 2022*



# THE PROGRESS

## Clearfield man brings challenge to marijuana law to state Supreme Court

By Jeff Corcino  
The Progress

CLEARFIELD — Attorney Joshua Maines and defendant River Stone, 21, of Clearfield are asking the state Supreme Court to consider overturning the state's marijuana DUI law.

Maines represents Stone, who was arrested for DUI in May of 2019. Maines has filed a petition of "allocatur" asking the state Supreme Court to hear his appeal.

When Stone was arrested he had a medical marijuana card. But when the state changed the law several years ago allowing for medical marijuana use, it did not change the DUI laws, and marijuana continues to be classified as a Schedule I substance, which are substances that have no known medical use.

On this basis, Stone was charged by the state police with DUI-3rd offense and Clearfield County District Attorney Ryan Sayers was bringing the cases to trial.

Because marijuana is still listed as a Schedule I controlled substance under state and federal law, Sayers said marijuana has strict liability and if any amount of marijuana is found in a defendant's bloodstream, the defendant

would be guilty of DUI if they drive a vehicle.

This is in contrast to Schedule II or Schedule III controlled substances like prescription medications where the commonwealth would have to prove the driver was impaired by the controlled substance for the driver to be DUI.

On July 24, on the day of the trial, President Judge Fredric J. Ammerman ruled that the jury would be given an instruction stating that marijuana is not a Schedule I controlled substance and to convict Stone the commonwealth must prove the marijuana in Stone's bloodstream came from non-medical marijuana.

Sayers appealed the case and last month, the state Superior Court ruled in Sayers' favor and Maines is now seeking relief from the state Supreme Court.

In his petition to the Supreme Court, Maines argues that the Superior Court was incorrect in its ruling because the Medical Marijuana Act carves out a "functional exception" to the Controlled Substance Act's Schedule 1 delineation of marijuana and this functional exception exempts medical marijuana from prosecution as a Schedule 1 substance.

Maines argued that in its ruling Superior

Court abused its discretion and reached an "unreasonable and absurd result."

Maines said those using medical marijuana would have it present in their system whether or not they were impaired. Maines argued that law abiding medical marijuana patients effectively have had their driving privileges "swept away" by the Superior Court's ruling.

"Their (Superior Court's) ruling denies hundreds of thousands of medical marijuana patients in Pennsylvania the privilege of driving solely for their legal use of medical marijuana under the MMA," Maines wrote.

The case is already having an impact on another DUI case in the county. Austin Rubly, 21, of Clearfield was arrested for DUI on July 5, 2019 and on March 5, 2021 he was arrested again for DUI-2nd offense.

Jury selection for the second case was scheduled for Thursday, but on Tuesday Rubly's attorney Joe Ryan asked Ammerman for a continuance pending the result of Stone's appeal.

The jury trial was for the DUI 2nd offense case. Defendants charged with 1st offense DUI are entitled to a bench trial but are not entitled to have a jury trial.

Ryan argued that if the Supreme Court

rules in Stone's favor, Rubly would also be not guilty of these charges and going to trial would be a waste of the court's time.

Assistant District Attorney Steven Johnston argued that as it stands now, the DUI is a good law until it is found not to be, and the court should proceed as scheduled.

Ammerman said it could take a year or longer before the Supreme Court resolves the Stone appeal. But he also said a month from now the state Supreme Court could refuse to hear Stone's appeal and the case could be ready for Jury Selection in October. Ammerman asked Johnston if delaying the trial would prejudice the commonwealth's case against Rubly.

Johnston said he doesn't believe delaying this case would prejudice the commonwealth's case, but he said he is concerned that if a continuance is granted, it would set a precedence in other cases where a delay would prejudice the commonwealth.

Ammerman said he doesn't believe this would happen and said he would consider each on a case by case basis. He agreed to continue Rubly's case pending action by the state Supreme Court on Stone's appeal.

*Published May 26, 2022*



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# Behind the mask, college is a lonely place for students during COVID

*Editor's note: The York Dispatch is running a series of stories written by student journalists as part of a mentoring program with York College. In this story, sophomore Alyson Hatfield writes about the experience of starting college during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**By Alyson Hatfield**  
York College

My freshman year of college was supposed to be spent with other students attending basketball games, joining clubs and, most importantly, making friends.

Instead, my days were spent in classrooms with 15 other students — all spread out 6 feet apart — listening to guest speakers tell us, via Zoom, how amazing the next four years would be. My nights involved sitting in my room, waiting for my roommate to get home from dinner with their mother.

When you see movies about adults living their dream life, most of their best friends were made in college, so of course that was what I expected: I would meet a group of people my first week of college and we would be friends for the rest of our lives.

What I got was completely different.

College has been lonelier than I expected.

I went to classes eager to talk to new classmates until confronted by the harsh reality of trying to carry on a conversation with someone when you're being forced to sit over 6 feet away from everyone.

It was extremely tiring to follow the same cycle of "I'm going to meet someone new today" and continuously being let down, so I gave up. For the entirety of my freshman year, my best and only friend



PHOTO: BILL KALINA, THE YORK DISPATCH

York College sophomore Alyson Hatfield stands near a sign outside the cafeteria in the Josue Student Union at the campus Sunday, March 6, 2022. She is a political science major.

was my roommate. Luckily, as of the fall 2021 semester, I made new friends in my classes and joined more clubs, where I've made new friends.

Yet even now, as a sophomore in college, I've never sat in a classroom without a mask on. Despite attending classes with the same people for four semesters, I have no idea what most of them look like behind their masks.

Although COVID restrictions seem to be loosening, the challenges of the past two years may have caused irreversible effects on students like me.

## 'School has been lonely'

College is stressful when there isn't a pandemic — but, according to the director of York College counseling services, Darrell Welt, "since COVID-19 started, students have been experiencing increased stress."

An increase in stress causes people to self-isolate, and when you are trying to branch out and meet new people, additional stress can get in the way of that.

When asked how COVID affected socializing with peers, sophomore Alex Merritt said the pandemic made meeting new people particularly difficult.

A survey conducted last November by Best Colleges found that 9 out of 10 college students said they had some sort of mental health impact as a result of COVID-19. Additionally, 46% of those surveyed said they felt socially isolated and lonely.

"As I am someone who doesn't frequently leave my comfort zone," Merritt said, "it became isolating at times when I was unable to easily connect with the people in my classes or through clubs."

Sophomore Juneau Sykes added, "Since I started out college on Zoom, people just haven't been interested in branching out to meet new people. School has been lonely!"

Now that classes have started transitioning back to being held in person, it has been easier to connect with peers.

"It helps because, in virtual classes, the breakout rooms are relatively awkward. I think in-person (learning) feels more organic compared to virtual classes," sophomore Reginald Sullivan said.

The effect has been noted by more than just the students.

"Since being back on campus and offering in-person sessions again, we experienced an increase in the number of

*Continued on next page*



## The Spartan continued

students requesting services,” Welt said.

A survey conducted last November by Best Colleges found that 9 out of 10 college students said they had some sort of mental health impact as a result of COVID-19. Additionally, 46% of those surveyed said they felt socially isolated and lonely.

Similarly, a September 2021 survey by the Harvard Crimson found that 91% of the students who said COVID-19 affected their mental health believed that was due to social isolation.

### Performance has suffered

For some, not being able to socialize with their peers has caused them to struggle in their classes.

“I feel like I haven’t been able to perform as well due to the decreased ability in collaborating with my peers,” Sykes said.

Some people said they need that extra socialization to thrive academically and that not having a connection with those in their classes made it harder to reach out for help.

The Best Colleges survey found that 44% of students struggle with laziness and a lack of focus, 37% had a hard time with the school-life balance and 35% experienced self-doubt.

From my experience with two semesters of hybrid classes and one full semester in person, I can confidently say that in-person classes make it so much easier to learn.

My first two semesters were extremely difficult, and I felt as though I barely learned anything. But after just one semester of in-person classes, my academic performance improved, and I felt that I learned more during that semester than in the other two combined.

One possible reason?

There are numerous distractions when attending class via Zoom, from loud floor-mates to your roommate attending their own class. There is also no sense of accountability because students can turn off their cameras and play on their phones, leaving the Zoom class as background noise. Online, there’s little motivation to maintain focus.

With COVID-19 guidelines changing daily, it seems likely that we will soon return to “normal” and underclassmen will start to discover what a typical college experience is like.

*Published in The York Dispatch March 10, 2022*



The York Dispatch Managing Editor Wallace McKelvey, standing, speaks to York College journalism students as part of a mentoring program between the news organization and the college Monday, Feb. 21, 2022.

PHOTO: BILL KALINA, THE YORK DISPATCH

# The Spartan collaboration with York Dispatch gives student writers’ talents a much bigger audience

I recently got the opportunity to work with Wallace McKelvey, an editor from the York Dispatch, to take a story I had written for the Spartan Newspaper and turn it into an article to be published in The York Dispatch.

McKelvey has been a journalist, focusing on investigative reporting, for over a decade.

But last year, he moved to working as an editor for the York Dispatch.

When I asked McKelvey why he wanted to do this collaboration he said: “One of the best parts of my job is getting to show young journalists the tools of the trade — not simply editing their work but working with them to uncover the truth about their world.”

This was an extremely exciting and rewarding experience. As someone who has never thought of working in journalism, I first expected it would be a tedious process and that I wouldn’t gain anything valuable from it.

But I was fortunately proven wrong. I had an initial meeting with McKelvey where he

reviewed what he liked and disliked about my article and then went over what he wanted me to add to help with clarity.

He gave me a new deadline and sent me on my way. When I was done with my second draft, I sent it back to him and thought that was the end of the process, but there was more.

I met with Bill Kalina, a photographer for the York Dispatch, who took headshots to be used for the published version of my article.

I met with McKelvey one last time to go over the final changes he wanted to make. He also asked for clarity regarding terminology regularly used by YCP students that community members would not have understood. I found it interesting that we touched on spots I would have never thought to revise or change.

It was also during our last meeting when McKelvey informed me that my article would be printed in the newspaper. The news was not what I was expecting. At first, I thought writing the article was simply going to be an extension of my

class, at most, it would be published on the York Dispatch website, so I am very excited to see my work get printed in a paper.

What McKelvey did not inform me of was that my article would be on the front page of the paper. I will probably never forget walking up to the newspaper section and seeing my face on the top. I am immensely grateful for this experience as well as towards McKelvey and the Dispatch for allowing my article to be published in their paper.

McKelvey additionally added his perspective on how opportunities similar to this one are beneficial to young writers: “This collaboration with Paul Vigna at York College is an extension of [my] work. We’re helping teach the next generation of journalists and providing a venue in their local newspaper to share their perspectives with their community.”

*Alyson Hatfield is a sophomore majoring in political science and minoring in public relations.*

*Published in The Spartan on March 19, 2022*

# Standard-Speaker

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## Building for the future

**By Sam Galski**  
Staff Writer

Wilson D. Luna considers himself fortunate to have found the right home in Hazleton for his family.

Luna had been searching for nearly two months before buying half of a double home from a friend on West Maple Street for \$130,000.

Early efforts to find the right home appeared bleak, as the few available homes that fit within his \$150,000 budget needed major renovations.

"You can find houses, but they are pretty much destroyed," Luna said of his price range. "It wasn't too easy."

Most of the homes he looked at in Hazleton cost at least \$200,000, he said. In his experience, anything below that amount was "usually in bad shape."

His search ended when a friend stepped up and offered to sell a home on West Maple Street that had everything Luna was looking for - with the right number of bedrooms and bathrooms, a kitchen and a backyard.

Luna spent another \$15,000 upgrading the home in a neighborhood that he describes as quiet and peaceful.

Although the 40-year-old Luna closed on the home in late April, he's not new to Hazleton.

He moved to the area 11 years ago from San Jose de Ocoa, a city in the Dominican Republic. He followed his sister to Hazleton and said he arrived with virtually nothing. He began working at a local grocery store and now owns Ocoa Grocery on Alter Street.

He also owns a home that he makes available for rent on West Seventh Street. The West Maple Street property is his primary residence, where he lives with his wife and young daughter.

Renovations continue at his family home, where Luna is in the process of painting and installing new flooring on the third story.



PHOTO: SAM GALSKI

**Wilson D. Luna stands near the front door of the home he recently purchased on West Maple Street in Hazleton. He considers himself fortunate to have found housing in the area.**

Luna found what he was looking for in the housing market but the search continues for many others.

### A 'hot' market

The City of Hazleton saw the highest population growth in Luzerne County in the last census, an 18.2% increase over the last decade from 25,340 to 29,963.

Job opportunities, low interest rates and proximity to major highways are fueling housing demand in Greater Hazleton, officials in the real estate industry say.

Homes are in such high demand that

sellers often receive offers within 24 hours from when a property is listed, according to Tara Siegel, vice president of marketing for Lewith & Freeman Real Estate.

"The houses aren't sitting," Siegel said. "We used to say, 'You'll move your home if it's priced right in six weeks. Now we say, 'Six hours.'"

Don Elko, owner and president of Covenant Abstract in Hazleton, marvels at the demand for all types of properties.

"I don't think I've ever been in a market where everything is hot," Elko said. "In the past, it could be single-family homes and that's it (or) it could be refinancing and that's basically it. Now, it's single-family, re-fi, commercial (and) apartment buildings. I've heard of houses selling in days. If you put it up by Friday, it's gone by Sunday."

Realtors have adapted to keep pace, with some face-timing with prospective buyers, Siegel said. With homes moving so quickly, a wife could travel to the area to look at a property while the husband stays behind to work in their home community.

In some cases, buyers are moving to the region for employment opportunities or simply moving from one local community to another, according to Siegel.

Lewith & Freeman has a relocation department that works with human resources directors at larger corporations to assist with relocating employees, Siegel said.

Buyers are also trying to stay a step ahead, as in-laws have been touring homes on behalf of other family members, she said.

"Because the market is so aggressive and competitive, you will lose the house if you don't put an offer on it," Siegel said. "There's also the phenomenon where one family member moves to the area and they're so happy with it, they tell their family and (interest) spreads like that."

More renters are becoming buyers and are taking advantage of favorable interest rates, she said.

"The rates are so low, people for the last two years are saving and they are able to put down money," Siegel said. "They may be renting (now) but want the flexibility of a backyard and to have a pet. That's a big draw as well."

Others simply buy homes sight unseen, she said.

Elko said the last two years have been the busiest in his 28 years in the field.

Low interest rates and employment opportunities are driving demand which, in turn, drives up sales prices, he said.

"The prices are the highest they've ever been," Elko said.

Abstractors generally perform title searches, handle closings, issue title insurance and disburse money at closing to the sellers and real estate agents.

The process became a bit bogged down when shutdowns and safety protocols were in place at county courthouses at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the industry has been running smoothly since they've been lifted, he said.

### Challenges

A limited inventory and high demand for apartments has created challenges for code and zoning personnel in Hazleton, city Zoning Officer Charles Pedri said.

Some property owners have attempted to take advantage of people who are looking for a place to live by charging excessive rent or illegally converting single homes into apartments or expanding existing apartment buildings without approvals, he said.

"We've always had the problem of people putting the apartments in basements or attics just to make a couple of bucks," Pedri said.

City council members and Mayor Jeff Cusat publicly addressed the issue last November, when they asked the public to report anyone suspected of illegally renting rooms.

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*Continued on next page*



## Standard-Speaker continued

The practice, they said, puts lives at risk and places a strain on fire, police and other city services.

City officials have been scanning social media and classified ads for property owners who are renting rooms in violation of city ordinance.

Demand not only drives up sale prices, but also rent.

"We have one person who just put in, like, five apartments," Pedri said. "They are charging \$1,800 for a two-bed apartment. It's getting kind of expensive. The fact is, nothing is really available. With everything coming in, with all of the industries, it's going to get progressively worse."

Pedri referred to numerous industrial and warehousing projects that are either under construction or planned throughout Greater Hazleton.

Multiple industrial projects have been in the planning stages for the past few years and several other developers pitched warehousing projects this year in Hazleton Area communities.

Those developments have caught the attention of local community leaders, who have discussed a need for housing potentially thousands of employees.

"We're looking at over 30 million square feet (of industrial development) in the next five to seven years," Hazleton City Council President Jim Perry said. "It's a number that's hard to comprehend. It's going to be very hectic here very shortly."

Housing was in demand even before those projects came to light.

Code enforcement continues responding to complaints about illegal conversions. Police also file reports with zoning and code officials if they observe issues when responding to households.

"If they got into a place and it's supposed to be a half-double and all of a sudden it's three apartments, they'll give me a report and I check and see if there's any rental registration," Pedri said.

He believes many of the people who move to the city come from New York because it costs less to live in Hazleton and there are more jobs available.

In those cases, people often sell a home in New York for \$400,000 to \$500,000 and buy a similar-sized house in Hazleton for about half that amount, Pedri said. They'll use the remaining money to purchase rental properties.

Officials have put some procedures in



PHOTO: JOHN HAEGER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

### Broad and Church streets in Hazleton.

place in an attempt to keep pace with demand, Pedri said.

City ordinances have been updated to establish a minimum of 750 square feet for multi-family units. A minimum of three parking spaces is required for each apartment.

The city is also coordinating with the local water authority to ensure that zoning applicants have water and other public utility accounts up to date. Developers of larger apartment projects have also been directed to check with the water authority to ensure they have adequate service lines, he said.

Zoning regulations have been updated to require property owners who are converting buildings into three or more properties to get zoning board approval.

"They can make sure everything is in place (and) up to code," he said.

Public housing is also in high demand. Hazleton Housing Authority had 125 people on its waiting list for efficiency and one-bedroom apartments at its facilities as of early May, according to Carol Weston, who handles tenant selection for the authority.

"They are waiting anywhere from six months to two years," Weston said of the applicants.

Another 90 people were on the waiting list as of early May for the authority's Section 8 Voucher Assistance Program, which helps pay rent for approved private-sector units in Hazleton, West Hazleton and Hazle Twp., she said.

Weston said more elderly residents are approaching the authority for housing as out-of-town property owners buy up properties and increase rents.

"There is such a need for housing in the area," she said.

### Meeting the need

Hazleton Mayor Jeff Cusat said housing is vital to the city, particularly as a number of industrial and manufacturing projects are planned.

"We as a city need development to occur and to create jobs," Cusat said. "We also need the earned income tax that would come from (people) living in the city. Housing is important."

At least four privately operated housing projects could create as many as 134 apartments in Hazleton. The city, meanwhile, is investing part of its American Rescue Plan Act Allocation into infrastructure improvements and construction of David Avenue in the Terrace, which would make two large

parcels available for private residential development, the mayor said.

"I have met with the soon-to-be owners of those properties and expressed my concerns for the need for housing," Cusat said. "They appeared receptive to that."

Even if those projects come to fruition, Cusat said they won't satisfy demand.

"It's still nowhere near what we need," he said.

In the past few months, a handful of developers have secured zoning approval for converting existing buildings in Hazleton into apartments.

DHD LLC, Hazleton, is developing 18 apartments for single tenants or couples at the Trader's Bank building on East Broad Street while Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress secured zoning approval for building 15 apartments in the former St. Paul's United Methodist Church on West Green Street. The alliance could build as many as 22 apartments at the former St. Paul's property, but so far has zoning approval for the initial 15 units.

A few blocks north, the New Jersey-based Viamare LLC is expanding and renovating the former St. John's Greek Catholic School on North Wyoming Street into 27 one- and two-bedroom apartments. Commercial space will also be available as part of the project.

At Broad and Church streets in downtown Hazleton, Post Road Construction, of Bethlehem, is developing 67 market rate apartments at the former Hotel Altamont. Post Road's project will also make eight storefronts available for commercial tenants and includes plans for reconditioning the ballroom at the former hotel.

The Altamont project is around 50% complete and will yield "self-sustaining" apartments that will each have a kitchen, laundry area and bathroom. Amenities such as a gym and library will also be available for tenants, he said.

Developers are tentatively eyeing completion by July or August, but Kratz said that estimate could change.

"We're moving along fairly well," he said.

Kratz considers multiple upcoming industrial and manufacturing projects planned for the Hazleton Area a "positive" for the market.

Most of the work completed so far is on the inside of the building, he said.

*Continued on next page*



More opportunities

In neighboring Hazle Twp., A&J Zelenack Development is developing nearly 40 single-family lots in Ridgewood.

The project will be completed in phases and span approximately 22 acres, according to A&J President Joe Zelenack.

The developers propose extending Sunburst Drive from Christine Road to connect with the existing East Venisa Drive, according to township planning department Secretary Lee Ann Kasha. Two streets that have not yet been named would be built off the Sunburst extension, she said.

Nineteen lots are proposed for the first phase, nine more in another phase and eight others in a final phase, Zelenack said.

The project has been in the works since last spring and the developers kicked around a number of ideas before opting for the single-family lots, he said.

A number of people in the market for homes have inquired about the project, he said.

“A lot of people in Ridgewood - family members who want to get something new or (people looking) to stay local,” he said. “There’s already quite a bit interested. There’s a good mix of people who are just moving or getting out of school and looking to start their own lives or people changing, upgrading.”

One other developer filed an application with the township planning department for apartments on Hollywood Boulevard, Kasha said. Richard Angelo is proposing a 16-unit apartment complex in that area, she said.

Aside from the federally funded David Avenue project, the city of Hazleton is not



PHOTOS: JOHN HAEGER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ABOVE: The former St. John’s Greek Catholic School on Wyoming Street in Hazleton.

RIGHT: The former Holy Trinity School on Church Street in Hazleton.



funding housing projects, Cusat said.

The mayor, however, said he spoke with city land bank board members about creating relationships with developers who could possibly convert properties that are available through tax sale into housing.

The land bank board acquired the former American Legion Building, 328 W. Broad St., from tax sale in late April for \$4,427.38. It will look to sell the property with the possibility of having it rehabilitated for residential use.

City officials said several parties have expressed interest in developing the building for residential purposes.

Birch Knoll Estates, a manufactured

housing community in the city, is also looking to expand.

Birch Knoll representatives sought approval last week from the city planning commission for subdividing a parcel and creating 21 lots.

The commission tabled the application to give Birch Knoll officials time to accomplish tasks identified by the commission’s engineer, Pedri said.

A Birch Knoll official also inquired about expanding the scope and requesting a subdivision for 31 total lots, he said.

Pedri said Thursday that the application will be extended through Sept. 28.

Birch Knoll is the only community in the

city where manufactured homes are permitted under Hazleton’s revised zoning ordinance, Pedri noted.

If those homes are built, they must be inspected by the city building inspector to ensure they are installed properly, Pedri said.

Like others in the industry, Zelenack said demand for housing is at its highest in years.

“Demand is more than ever, looking back to the way it was 15 to 20 years ago,” he said. “We saw this as an opportunity to diversify and grow.”

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# **‘Astronomical’ pay raises for Fitz’s inner circle elicit calls of favoritism, new salary disclosure legislation in Allegheny County**

**By Brian Conway**

Prominent members of the Allegheny County executive branch received major salary increases during County Executive Rich Fitzgerald’s third and final term in office.

According to documents obtained by a Right-to-Know request, County Manager Willy McKain saw his salary jump 47% between 2019 and 2022, from over \$160,000 to more than \$235,000, including one single-year increase of over \$58,000.

“We’re talking huge increases to people where there were no changes in responsibilities or job titles, and they were in the same roles that they [held] previously,” said County Council president and ordinance sponsor, Patrick Catena. “Sure, the excuse can be made that they did really fantastic jobs. I call BS on that.”

Unlike the City of Pittsburgh, whose budget spells out individual salaries as a line item, Allegheny County’s budget assigns an overall amount for personnel but leaves individual salaries to the discretion of department heads.

A new ordinance would require offices to submit salary reports to the council two weeks before the budget is submitted. Sponsored by Catena and Councilperson Bethany Hallam, the legislation will be voted on June 22 in the Committee on Government Reform before being sent to the full county council for a vote.

In addition to McKain, Jennifer Liptak, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald’s Chief of Staff, saw her salary rise by \$56,000 during

the same period. Senior Deputy County Manager Stephen Pilarski received a salary increase of \$44,000 between 2019 and 2022, a 38% raise. M. Joanne Foerster, the Director of Performance and Analytics, received a 40% pay increase of over \$36,000.

“The average raise [for county employees] during this time was much less,” Hallam said. “These are astronomical raises, and we don’t know how they were set.”

County spokesperson Amie Downs did not respond to questions asking what specific benchmarks or rationale were used to determine the raises in the county executive and manager’s offices.

On March 1, Hallam, chair of the county council’s government reform committee, brought in representatives from the district attorney, sheriff, controller, and county manager’s office about their process for salary increases. County Manager McKain received the bulk of the questioning.

At that March hearing, Catena and Hallam inquired about the process for determining pay increases and why some executives received disproportionately larger raises when all county workers were faced with the same pandemic challenges, and some county workers, including people making \$15 an hour, threatened to strike for better wages and work conditions.

McKain said raises are determined on a case-by-case basis with input from department directors. He also stated that competition from the private sector — he called it a “talent war” — necessitated

such competitive raises.

“I’m very fortunate to have the position I have, and proud to lead the team that we have here,” McKain said. “And I have no problem with you asking those questions. I’m very proud of what I do and I try to repay the taxpayers and the people I report to — council, the public — by working every day, very hard in delivering services and being a good safeguard of the assets entrusted in our care.”

“I think if you ask the people that report to me, either union or non-union,” he continued, “you’ll find out that I’m very fair.”

McKain said the decision for cost-of-living increases for employees in the executive branch resides with him, and that he talks with directors for any raises beyond that.

When Hallam asked McKain who approves raises for himself, McKain replied “the county executive.”

Fitzgerald appointed McKain, a certified public accountant, Allegheny County manager in August 2012. McKain functions as the county’s chief administrative officer and oversees a budget of some \$3 billion. Among his many duties are supervising the executive branch, administering the county’s personnel system, and negotiating labor and other contracts on behalf of the county.

Catena first learned of the executive raises in early 2020. He introduced legislation that July which would require department managers and independently elected county officials to submit an annual salary, along with justifications for merit-

based raises and other information. The bill languished in the budget committee before ultimately expiring at the end of 2021. It was reintroduced in Hallam’s government reform committee this January and referred back to the committee by the county council again in May.

The pay increases and proposed ordinance were first reported by WPXI in March. The coverage referred to “hefty pay raises among top county officials,” but did not say specifically who received them.

Acting Allegheny County Controller Tracy Royston said she heard “some grumbling” about the raises but there’s no going back once the budget is approved. She does not support the proposed ordinance in its present form.

“It should not be up to the governing power of council to have that much oversight of salaries,” says Royston. She feels that if individuals believe there should be more scrutiny over raises, a salary board with representation from various offices, similar to one in effect until 2000, would be a more balanced solution.

Both Catena and Hallam note that county pensions are determined by a person’s highest three years of salary. The raises mean that taxpayers will be saddled with higher pension payments long after this administration is gone at the end of 2023.

“You have a chief executive in the final term, giving huge raises to people that probably aren’t going to be with the administration after next year,” says Catena. “I find that very odd and perplexing.”

*Published June 14, 2022*



# Revived Plain Communities Task Force targets sexual abuse

By Tim Stuhldreher

Amish and Old Order Mennonite women want their communities to stop covering up child sexual abuse and start treating it as the serious crime it is, Linda Crockett said.

"They're tired of the amount of sexual abuse that is going on," she said. "They're tired of victims being silenced."

Crockett is executive director of Safe Communities, a Lancaster County nonprofit that works to prevent child sexual abuse and assist survivors.

Over the past several years, regional and national publications have reported on what journalist Sarah McClure described in *Cosmopolitan* magazine as the "open secret" of widespread sexual abuse in Plain communities and its "widespread, decentralized cover-up" by church leaders.

Last month, Safe Communities partnered with Zanesville, Ohio-based nonprofit A Better Way on a child sexual abuse prevention forum, largely focused on dealing with the issue in Plain Sect settings. It was the first such collaboration between the two organizations.

About 80 to 90 people attended, including current and former Plain community members as well as counselors and other professionals. Over two days at Forest Hills Mennonite Church, they talked about school and church safety, the challenges of pursuing legal redress and pathways to psychological healing.

## Plain Communities Task Force

County court Judge Dennis Reinaker said



PHOTO: TIM STUHLBREHER

Lizzie Hershberger, left, moderates a panel on the Plain Communities Task Force featuring, from left, Scott MacDermert, Mary Boll, Pamela Craddock, Judge Dennis Reinaker and Linda Crockett, at Forest Hills Mennonite Church on April 29, 2022.

he used to think sexual abuse was no more or less prevalent in Plain communities than anywhere else. He no longer thinks so.

"Without question, the members of the Plain community believe this is a bigger problem in the Plain community than it is in the rest of society," he said.

Two years ago, Reinaker and Crockett revived the Plain Communities Task Force, which targets sexual abuse. At the forum, they joined other task force members to explain the initiative.

The task force originally was set up in 2011 but was disbanded after a couple of years. That was due to concerns that its Amish

partners were not making good-faith efforts to combat sexual abuse, instead seeking to downplay and dismiss the problem.

Reinaker said it was reconstituted in the wake of a high-profile local case over which he presided, that of David Stoltzfus Smucker, who pleaded no contest in late 2019 to sexually assaulting four girls aged 4 to 9.

A decade ago, the community had sided overwhelmingly with accused abusers, Reinaker said. In the Smucker case, however, about half of the Amish in his courtroom were there in support of the victims.

Meanwhile, the Jerry Sandusky case had raised public awareness around sexual abuse and had led to new laws being passed. All in all, it seemed the task force had a fresh opportunity and might be able to gain more traction this time, he said.

Amish culture is indeed changing, Crockett said. Cell phone usage is widespread; it's much harder to keep a sexual abuse case from coming out.

The task force has three objectives: Keep children safe, stop abusers and help victims to heal. Besides Safe

*Continued on next page*



## One United Lancaster continued

Communities, it includes representatives from Lancaster County's probation and parole office; local law firm Gibbel Kraybill & Hess; Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health, which oversees the Lancaster County Children's Alliance; and YWCA Lancaster's Sexual Assault Prevention & Counseling Center.

It is taking a grassroots approach, meeting with women one-on-one or in small groups and building relationships.

"People are beginning to trust us," task force member Mary Boll said.

Among other things, members are working to make Amish aware of Pennsylvania's, mandatory reporting law, which is binding on all schools, including Amish ones, and includes a strict requirement for training by certified instructors.

Lancaster's Amish and Old Order Mennonites have an organization, Conservative Crisis Intervention, tasked with responding to sexual abuse cases and working with law enforcement and child protective services. Critics inside and outside the Amish say CCI works to discourage victims from pressing charges and to keep outside agencies from being informed or taking action.

Part of the task force's credibility this time around comes from not working with CCI, said task force member Scott MacDerment, a retired county officer who worked 20 years in the sexual offender unit.

For decades, outside agencies have tended to defer to Amish leaders and to the Amish commitment to live apart from mainstream society. That has deprived victims from the equal protection of the law, Crockett said, citing an Amish man who told her: "We want to be treated like citizens."

Lizzie Hershberger, a former Swarzenrubers Amish community member who was ostracized for pursuing charges against her rapist, moderated the forum. She now lives in Filmer County, Minnesota, where she leads a nonprofit, Voices of Hope, for abused women.

The local sheriff has approached her about starting a sexual abuse task force. She said it was inspiring to hear about Lancaster County's efforts: "I got so many ideas that I want to take home to my community."

Task force members stressed that the goal isn't to impose change on Plain Sect communities, but to support organic reform efforts. Solutions imposed from the outside would be superficial and wouldn't take root, MacDerment said.

It doesn't really matter what I think they need," he said. "It's what they think they need. ... It's going to be their solutions to their ongoing issues and problems. They have to decide."

*Published May 9, 2022*



PHOTOS: TIM STUHLREHER

ABOVE AND RIGHT: The Plain Dressing People's "What Were They Wearing?" Project is exhibited at Forest Hills Mennonite Church.



Hope Ann Dueck, left, and Mary Byler

# 'It was never about the clothes'

## Display puts spotlight on Plain Sect sexual abuse

By Tim Stuhldreher

Look carefully, Mary Byler said, and you'll notice something about the Plain Dressing People's "What Were They Wearing?" Project.

All but one of the outfits are children's clothes.

"What Were They Wearing?" was on display at Safe Communities' and A Better Way's joint forum last month on preventing child sexual abuse. Modeled on other "What Were They Wearing?" displays, it is a visual rebuttal of the notion that victims of sexual assault can be blamed for enticing their attackers with their attire.

The exhibit consists of clothing showing what victims were wearing when they were attacked. Some are actual items donated by survivors, others are replicas based on their detailed descriptions.

The idea came about early this past winter, said Hope Ann Dueck, co-founder of A Better Way. She, Byler and a third

colleague, Ruth Ann Brubaker, reached out to friends and colleagues in Plain communities to assemble the collection.

The items are, in a word, plain: long-sleeved dresses with high necklines, sewn at home. Nothing about them is the least bit provocative.

"It was never about the clothes," Byler said.

Labels indicate the assault victim's age and church affiliation. Some include a first-person quote.

Toward one end is a onesie, representing a victim who was 3 months old.

As the women compiled the items, they dealt with intense feelings of sorrow and rage, Dueck said.

The project "is something that was deeply personal for all three of us," Byler, an ex-Amish assault survivor, said. "We were trying to honor the stories that were told to us."

*Published May 9, 2022*

# WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

## Tioga special meeting brings nearly 100 citizens, irregularities

By Garrett Carr  
Sun-Gazette Correspondent

TIOGA BOROUGH — A contentious and controversial meeting ended with the acceptance of multiple resignations from Tioga Borough, following a week that cast the small town into the national spotlight following the hiring of Timothy Loehmann, the police officer who shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2014.

With an audience of nearly 100 concerned citizens and about a dozen members of the media, officials were forced to move the meeting from the borough building's meeting room outdoors to the front porch.

Just before the meeting started, council member Al Brooks requested that Bob Wheeler, council vice president, give up control of the meeting to council pro tempore Holly Irwin. Wheeler, who was expected to be in charge due to the pending resignation of embattled council President Steve Hazlett, agreed. Brooks claimed this was to make the meeting move faster.

Shortly thereafter, the fireworks began.

After the formalities, Irwin read the letter of resignation provided by Loehmann, which stated:

"Good morning, Mr. Hazlett. Since I have yet to officially start working for the borough, I am withdrawing my application at this time. Thank you for the opportunity, Timothy Loehmann."

Before the council could move to accept the resignation, it was Brooks once again who spoke up, asking to change the agenda of the meeting to accept all resignations presented to council simultaneously, not just Loehmann's. The



additional resignations he wanted to consider were those of council members Steve and Marybess Hazlett, borough Solicitor Jeffrey Loomis and codes Officer Andre Reed.

The request was met by stiff resistance from Wheeler, who claimed changing the agenda during the meeting would be illegal. Brooks disagreed, and a brief, but heated, argument broke out between the two members.

Brooks cited PA Senate Bill 554, an amendment to the Sunshine Act that passed unanimously in both chambers last year and was signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf, claiming it allows an entity such as a borough council to change the agenda during a meeting as long as the change is made before any official actions by the council at said meeting.

Brooks made a motion to amend the agenda to include the consideration of all resignations, seconded by council member

Bill Preston. Irwin and Wheeler opposed, and mayor David Wilcox broke the tie in Brooks' favor to put all resignations on the table.

Brooks made a motion to accept all of the resignations presented to the borough, but Irwin objected because the physical copies of the resignation letters were not on the table and available to council members.

Mayor Wilcox replied, "Do you guys (Irwin and Wheeler) want these people to stay in their position after what they've done?" to which Irwin replied, "I want to do it the correct way."

Preston seconded the motion, to which Wheeler said, "I apologize to the borough, I'm out of here." Wheeler walked off the porch and through the crowd, which cheered as he left. A man in the crowd shouted, "You risked the public safety by allowing that officer to be hired!"

With Wheeler's absence, whether council had the requisite quorum to continue became an issue. Quorum is supposed to be a majority of council members, which was had by the four out of seven members who initially attended.

The question became whether the two submitted, but not-yet-officially accepted, resignations brought three out of seven council members down to three out of five.

Brooks thought yes, Irwin said she would stay at the meeting to ensure a quorum of three out of five, and the meeting continued. Brooks made a motion to accept all resignations, Preston seconded. Brooks and Preston voted "yes." Irwin voted "no," stating she could only vote to accept Loehmann's because his was the letter in front of her. Her "no" vote was not based on the merits of the resignation, she said.

After the vote, the meeting was formally adjourned and Brooks stood on the porch to take questions from concerned residents. He vowed to keep looking into the hiring process, adding he did not know who would be the next borough president.

Brooks also asked community members to step up and become new members of council, especially if they have financial experience.

After the meeting, Brooks told the Sun-Gazette he would support Preston as the new council president, with Preston telling the Sun-Gazette he would step up if asked.

Mayor Wilcox also spoke to the crowd, stating he believes things in the borough will finally start heading in the right direction, adding that he is asking for the resignations of Wheeler and Burnside from council.

*Published July 15, 2022*



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**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.

# All the good that grows on Park Avenue

By Carrie Pauling

Williamsport, Pa. — Neighborhood pride is something that Williamsport resident JoJo Potts feels deep to his core. Community success is a driving motivation that keeps him going.

Potts voiced his pleasure over the abounding success he sees growing in his neighborhood, celebrated on Wednesday evening at the Red Shield Community Garden Party in the Park Avenue neighborhood, across the street from Potts' meticulous home.

The Garden Party was held to honor the community garden's past, present, and future. And the future is exciting, with plans of expansion that were announced during the party and groundbreaking ceremony.

"I get to look at this beautiful garden every day," Potts said, acknowledging the hard work and love that volunteers have put into making it thrive.

Neighborhood residents, garden volunteers, representatives from UPMC, the City of Williamsport, and Salvation Army gathered for music, food, garden tours, and the unveiling of new plans.

Salvation Army's Major Sheryl Hershey noted the garden's "seven seasons of success." In 2015, the UPMC Hospital System, at the time known as the Williamsport Hospital, and then

Susquehanna Health, entered into "an unusual partnership with the Salvation Army, where UPMC leases the land to the Salvation Army for \$1 each year, trusting us to oversee its development and daily operations," Major Hershey said.

The experiment started with 5,000 square feet. To date, through gifts of materials and plants from generous donors and the labor of dedicated volunteers, the garden has produced more than 15,000 pounds of free, healthy food for thousands of households in Williamsport and Lycoming County.

## UPMC to the rescue

Laura Templeton, Public Relations and Resource Development director for the Salvation Army, addressed the crowd gathered on Green Street Wednesday night. "Before the end of 2021, we knew, because we were bursting at the seams, that we needed to prepare to meet more needs of the community," she said.

"People, after the pandemic, wanted more outdoor activities. People are facing runaway grocery prices, and there's further food insecurity in the area. But we had a significant problem: we were out of land," Templeton said.

UPMC is once again coming to the rescue." The community garden is expanding across Green Street, where the health system has donated more property



PHOTO: C. PAULING / NCPA

**Sue and JoJo Potts stand out front of their home on Park Avenue. The couple has been married for 46 years.**

for more growing lanes. "And we're bringing 'Park' back to Park Avenue," she announced.

Tebbs Landscaping has completed the first phase of what is going to be a "pocket park" called Sanctuary Park. It will be a sanctuary for birds, butterflies, Pennsylvania native plants, and for people in the Park Avenue neighborhood.

## JoJo Potts: The Mayor of Park Ave

"This is a beautiful and safe community that's had, over the years, a bad rap. But it was never a bad community," he said. Potts, who is 71 years old, has lived in Williamsport since he was two. He chose to raise his family in the community, and stay on Park Ave.

"There's twelve gutters that I clean—street gutters—that goes from First Avenue to Maple Street on both sides. I make sure they're cleared out."

Ask anyone in the neighborhood and they know JoJo Potts. Ask around in the greater community, and people know JoJo Potts. He's so well known, he's earned the title of "Mayor of Park Ave."

Potts has been using a wheelchair for at least five years because of complications from multiple back surgeries, according to Sue Potts, JoJo's wife. The couple has been married for 46 years and have three boys of their own and a foster son.

Potts is often cruising around the community in his motorized wheelchair. He is rarely without his blue bucket and grabber, which he uses to pick up trash. Keeping his streets clean is Potts' mission.

"We have a beautiful city, but for some reason, in this area, things sometimes move slow." Potts nodded toward a

*Continued on next page*





LEFT: JoJo Potts talks about the Red Shield Community Garden at a recent event held there on the corner of Green Street and Park Avenue. Potts is known to many as the “Mayor of Park Avenue.”

BELOW: The Red Shield Community Garden along Green Street and Park Avenue in Williamsport.

PHOTOS: C. PAULING / NCPA

blighted house a block down the street. “That’s been like that for years,” he said.

Potts thinks if a house like the one along Park Ave, abandoned and in dangerous disrepair, was in other neighborhoods, it wouldn’t have stayed 10 years like that. He said he called the city about the property and was told there weren’t funds to take the house down.

“They got pandemic money, I think \$26 million,” Potts said. “Money’s there. If that house catches on fire, the money is there. So get rid of that house. Get it off our block.”

For the neighbors who keep their properties neat, looking at an eyesore like that is “an insult,” Potts said. “It just hurts me to look at that.”

Williamsport City Councilman Vincent Pulizzi is on the blighted homes committee and attended the garden party on Wednesday. He acknowledged that the house is on the city’s blighted property list. “Often houses fall into disrepair like that because the homeowners move away without designating anyone to care for the property. Out of sight, out of mind,” he said.

The process to get a house taken down is long, but it’s not impossible. Potts hopes the house near the garden does not escape the city’s attention for much longer.

### ‘They don’t need a fence’

For all the hurt it causes Potts to see the blighted home on the block, the Red Shield Community Garden is the balance. “It’s just a beautiful thing to see.”

“When this garden was first getting ready to happen, people said, ‘why would you put a garden there? Are they gonna put a fence up?’ And I said, ‘I don’t think so, they don’t need a fence.’

Naysayers asked how they’d keep people out.

“I said, look. I’m telling you, they don’t need a fence. Just watch, it won’t be a problem. And lo and behold, no fence and it’s been going on for six years,” he said.

“We love the garden,” said Sue. “We just love to watch it go from an empty field and empty raised boxes, to plants growing, and people harvesting. It’s a good place to meet people, talk, get vegetables. It helps people, it brings them together.”

The garden expansion will bring an art



installation and water feature to Sanctuary Park, as well as the ability to grow more food to share among the community in the coming seasons.

“It’s block by block that we take cities that are old, and that in some ways are tired and have been through a lot, and we revitalize them,” said Lycoming County Commissioner Rick Mirabito. With the addition of art into the space, the garden

becomes more than a place to grow food, it becomes a destination for people in our community, Mirabito said.

“And that’s so important because as JoJo said, neighborhoods get targeted and they get tagged, and you have to work so hard to get the tags off,” Mirabito continued. “Well, this neighborhood is alive, and it’s growing.”

*Published July 28, 2022*



# NEW CASTLE NEWS

## Son gives mom longer life with liver donation

By Debbie Wachter  
New Castle News

Tami Shaffer gave life to her son, Nicholas Suders, 42 years ago. It was only fitting that when she needed life, he selflessly gave it back to her.

The mother and son won't spend Mother's Day together, but they'll see each other within a few days.

Nicholas, who lives in North Beaver Township, is celebrating the special day with his wife and children, knowing his mother, who was near death five months ago, is recovering from a liver transplant. The father of three donated 65 percent of his liver for the Jan. 10 procedure that saved her life.

Both mother and son are faring well now in their aftermath of healing.

Tami, 62, formerly of Bessemer, who lives in Winter Haven, Florida, with her husband and caregiver, Tom Shaffer, learned in 2012 that she had NASH Cirrhosis or non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. The diagnosis came by surprise, she said, because until that time, she hadn't been sick.

There was a death in the family that year, then a wedding, and she had flown to New Castle twice. After her return home from the second trip, she coughed up a blood clot, she said.

"I was thinking lung cancer," she said. A lung specialist ordered a CT scan and diagnosed her with a bullae or air blister in her lung. But the scan also caught an image of her liver, showing the cirrhosis.

"There were no other signs, so it was lucky," she said.

She started seeing a hepatologist in



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tami Shaffer and her son, Nicholas Suders, have a closer bond now that they share one of his vital organs.

Winter Haven. Her doctor bluntly told her that "some people live a long time, and some people die," and that she would need a liver transplant someday.

### TELLTALE SIGNS

Signs of liver failure started manifesting themselves around 2019. She suffered hepatic metabolic encephalopathy, a nervous system disorder brought on by severe liver disease. When the liver doesn't

work properly, toxins build up in the blood and can travel to the brain and affect brain function.

"You're totally in a fog, and I didn't know what was going on or who I was," she said.

Whenever she'd go into one of those spells, she would go to the hospital and would be loaded up with a diuretic that helps eliminate poisons in the system and reduce edema.

She was waiting to be called for a transplant from a deceased donor, and was on the United Network Organ Sharing list, Tami said.

Meanwhile, at home, her children all were meeting and discussing the option of a live donor transplant, with one of them stepping up to the plate.

Her stepson, Clinton Shaffer, visited New Castle in the fall of 2021, "and we all talked on my brother's porch that day," Nicholas said.

"We said we can't let her keep telling us no, we have to do something. We didn't want her to die waiting for a deceased donor, so we took matters into our own hands and didn't give her a chance to say no."

Of Tami's three biological sons, the oldest, Rick, was not eligible, and Keith and Nicholas were determined to be tested. Keith, the youngest, was later disqualified for health reasons and Nicholas, her middle son, was the closest match.

"I look upon my younger brother, Keith, as stepping up to being first tested as if he did it himself," Nicholas said. "He was devastated that he couldn't do it."

Nicholas was tested the week after Keith was ruled out and was informed within that week he was a good match.

Despite his mother's protests, Nicholas told her, "You're the grandmother of my kids, and you have grandchildren and they need you to be around for them."

"It wasn't until near the end of 2021 did we talk her into letting one of us be her donor," he said.

The holidays were approaching then, so

*Continued on next page*



# New Castle News continued

the transplant date was set for January.

“I was prepared for the possibility that I would die,” Nicholas said. “People have passed away. It was very hard on my family. I had advance directives and living wills, and there were a lot of nights when my wife and I had difficult conversations. It was a very emotional time, especially when I had a conversation with my three kids about this.”

His mother, meanwhile, was fearful of his donating.

## A MOTHER’S WORRY

“I didn’t want it to be Nick,” Tami said. “He has three little ones (ages 4, 5 and 7). If anything happened to him, I wouldn’t have been able to live with myself. But he said he couldn’t live with himself if I wasn’t here. We talked to the specialists at UPMC, and they were very reassuring that they never lost a donor. I was worried about him, and he was worried about me.”

Tami’s condition had severely worsened within the past two years.

“The nurse in Tampa said it could take five years for me to get a liver (from a deceased person),” she said. Then one day, Tami was called as a possible stand-in, in case a 36-year-old man waiting for a liver was unable to have the surgery, but he went through with it.

“You don’t want to have somebody else die so you can live,” she said. “I ended up praying for him to be healthy enough to last through the surgery.”

When Nicholas had gotten together with his brothers here and they decided to force the living donor idea, they also resolved that she would travel to Pennsylvania when she was healthy enough, he said.

Her stepson, Clinton, was involved in “bullying” Tami into agreeing to it, she said. “They were all in cahoots to get me to go up there (to UPMC).”

“But the longer I was in Florida, the worse I was getting,” Tami said, so she had resolved to go to a hospital in Emery, Atlanta, where Clinton lives, and Nicholas would fly to Atlanta for the transplant.

The hospital in the South cemented that reasoning, telling Tami that her children are in Pennsylvania, and UPMC has one of the best liver transplant facilities in the country. The arrangements were made through the UPMC Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute in Pittsburgh.

She first went to UPMC in January 2021,

but on her way back from Florida to New Castle started retaining fluids and her kidneys were shutting down, prompting a trip to the Winter Haven hospital for 34 days.

She was put on dialysis, but as her kidney function returned, she was still too sick to make it back to Pennsylvania. The bullae in her lung prevented her from

“I can barely put into words how I feel now. We’re just very blessed to have my mom still in our lives. She has a lot of living left to do, and she gets to see her grandchildren grow up and give them her lessons.”

## TAMI’S SON NICHOLAS

flying. Then everything turned around, and she was finally able to make the trip. She stayed with Keith and his family in Mahoningtown until the transplant took place at UPMC Montefiore Hospital.

## TRANSPLANT DAY

On Jan. 9, they stayed overnight at a Ronald McDonald House room at UPMC.

Tami was emotional the day of the surgery, Nicholas recalled. “She was very proud and happy, but very scared.”

“I was very aware,” Tami said. “They took us to a waiting area and I was talking to my anesthesiologist, and my back was to Nick. I felt something hit me in the head, and he was throwing a pillow at me, joking around. He was a nervous wreck and didn’t want me to know, but I was very calm.”

“There were a lot of people involved, and a lot of prayers going on,” she said.

Nicholas’ surgery took about seven to eight hours as surgeons removed 65 percent of his liver and also his gall bladder.

Her operation lasted 10 to 12 hours, a lot longer because surgeons had to connect the new liver to surrounding organs.

Having seen her liver after it was removed, Nicholas described it as looking “like someone had grabbed it and thrown it into a bonfire. It was black. It was so scary.”

The doctor told him she would have had only weeks left, had the transplant not taken place.

“Looking back, it almost fit too perfectly with the timing,” he reflected. “There was no way either one of us could have done it

sooner, because of her health and what was going on in our lives.”

Tami remembers waking up in intensive care an hour after her surgery and not having any pain.

“All I wanted was to see my son,” she said.

Nicholas went to her room to visit her the

next day. When he first saw her after the transplant, he noticed the results almost instantly.

“Her color had changed. She wasn’t jaundiced and yellow. When I walked with my IV on a pole into her room, I saw her and I was just shocked, like she was almost brand new.”

She was still in a state of shock and under latent effects of anesthetic, but she was so happy to see him.

“He looked really good,” she said. “He kept running his hands up and down me and saying, ‘Mom, you look beautiful.’”

## AFTERMATH

Tami stayed in New Castle until March, then she and Tom returned to Florida.

“My doctor said I’d never have another encephalopathy episode again,” she said.

For Nicholas, the hospital stay was tough. He developed a fungal yeast infection and had severe, uncontrollable pains, bloating and swelling in his stomach.

“We got a big snowstorm that weekend, and my mom was doing better than I was. She was discharged and I started getting up to walk around,” he said.

Post-surgery for Nicholas has involved regaining his strength, healing and the regrowth of his liver.

He works at UPMC Jameson Hospital as a social worker, and the hospital gave him four weeks of paid time off for the transplant and recovery, and he had his own days off coming to add to those.

The liver regenerates within a few months afterward, he said, and the last he

heard, his had regrown about 90 to 95 percent. He said he feels like he did pre-surgery.

During his home recovery, his wife, Leah, carried the load of teaching school and taking care of their children and home. He’s had to learn to eat different foods and follow a different diet without the gall bladder.

“I can barely put into words how I feel now,” Nicholas continued. “We’re just very blessed to have my mom still in our lives. She has a lot of living left to do, and she gets to see her grandchildren grow up and give them her lessons.”

Tami said her prognosis is good now.

“I have good days and bad days, and I get winded and tired easily,” she said. “They told me the first six months would be healing, and it would take a full year to be back to where I need to be.”

Her immediate plans are to be on the road to New Castle on Mother’s Day and while she will miss being with her children on that special day, she reasoned, “It’s always Mother’s Day, Christmas, birthday, you name it, for the rest of my life.”

She plans to arrive in town for her next doctor’s appointment Wednesday at UPMC.

“I love all of my children, and they all played an important role in this, but Nick is special,” she said, adding she told him jokingly, “I made you. All I did was take back what was mine.”

Tami is the proud mother of three sons, a stepson, Shaffer and a stepdaughter, Karin DuBois, and she has 12 grandchildren.

“They’re all awesome,” she said of her children. “They’ve all got good jobs and loving families and I’m going to be around to watch my grandkids grow up. The most important thing is that I’m going to be here for them.”

“I tell everybody they need to consider live liver donations, because some people don’t last through the waiting list, and there are 7,000 people in Pennsylvania waiting for liver transplants,” Tami said, adding some donors now are banking their livers.

More information about the process is available from the UPMC Liver Transplant Program at (833) 514-5999.

“I’ve been blessed,” she said.  
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# County plans to boost local effort for Chesapeake Bay

**Philip Gruber**

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Pennsylvania's goal for cleaning up the Chesapeake watershed is so big that it needed to be broken into smaller pieces.

So, at the state's request, 34 counties recently finished writing their own water-quality action plans and are beginning to implement them.

Plan leaders say local action is one more tool to fund and implement conservation practices for stormwater and agriculture.

Development of the countywide action plans began in 2017, when Pennsylvania was drafting its Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan, which explains how the state will get to its 2025 clean-water goals.

The state committee that was writing the plan weighed a variety of methods for managing the cleanup by regions. Counties seemed like the most practical unit, with river or stream basins being too large or small to be wieldy.

The county plans grew to become a centerpiece of the state's strategy. In a revision of the plan submitted at the end of 2021, Pennsylvania said it would lean on counties for the largest share of nitrogen reductions, nearly 17 million pounds.

The county programs are meant to unify the efforts of all local entities relevant to conservation — state and federal agencies, municipalities, nonprofits, academic institutions, watershed groups, farms, businesses and consultants.

"Everyone involved in clean water is part of this effort, and we need everybody to be at the table," said Allyson Gibson, the coordinator for Lancaster County's plan.

Each county plan is shepherded by a coordinator like Gibson. Most are housed at conservation districts, with either the district manager or another staffer taking the role. Some coordinators work for the county planning commission or another group.

Caitlin Lucas, the coordinator at the Franklin County Conservation District, said the county-based initiative is making a difference.

"Having this plan now is giving us opportunities to reach



Workers plant trees on a farm in Lancaster County using funding from the countywide action plan. The county plans are part of Pennsylvania's strategy to accelerate its bay cleanup.

PHOTO: LANCASTER CLEAN WATER PARTNERS

out to these people more directly and talk about these issues and solve these problems for them," she said.

Within the broad mandate to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution, the county programs set goals based on local needs. As a result, the counties' plans have similar themes, but each one looks a little different.

A key part of Lancaster's plan is getting streams taken off the state's impaired waters list. That means starting with landowners at the headwaters, setting up conservation projects on their land, and then working downstream, said Gibson, who is the director of strategic partnerships and programs at the local organization Lancaster Clean Water Partners.

Lancaster's countywide program is designed to be a single point of contact for a landowner's water-quality needs. The program can refer farmers to funding and technical expertise from state, federal and private sources, Gibson said.

Cambria County's priorities are implementing regional and county plans that will reduce nutrient runoff, and cataloging practices that have gone uncounted or need to be reverified.

"We feel there is a significant amount of conservation on the ground for which farmers are not receiving appropriate credit," said John Dryzal, manager of the Cambria County Conservation District.

The counties created their plans in stages based on their pollution loads to the bay.

Four counties — Adams, Franklin, Lancaster and York — served as pilot programs, completing their plans in 2019.

Bedford, Centre, Cumberland and Lebanon followed in 2020, with the rest of the bay counties coming a year later.

Cambria County — of which only the northern half is in the Chesapeake watershed — was in the large last group

*Continued on next page*



## Lancaster Farming continued

of counties that set up a county plan last year. The county formed a regional plan with Blair, Fulton and Huntingdon counties — another example of the program's flexibility to serve local needs.

"Some of the priorities or goals (of the collaboration) are regional, while some items are county-specific," Dryzal said.

By the end of 2021, all 34 counties the state had asked to submit plans had done so, and local teams had begun working toward their goals.

The county programs, also known as CAPs, are helping localities secure conservation dollars from a variety of sources.

The Department of Environmental Protection has provided about \$26 million to the counties with CAPs, and

the Conservation Excellence Grant, managed by the State Conservation Commission, has chipped in more than \$10 million.

The CAPs are also attracting funding from other sources, such as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, said Deb Klenotic, a DEP spokeswoman.

This funding is going to a variety of projects selected locally.

For 2022, Cambria obtained funding for an animal heavy-use area, and the county is looking to implement a cover crop incentive program, Dryzal said.

In Lancaster County, agricultural projects have included riparian buffers, improved stream crossings, exclusion fencing and waterways, according to the Clean Water Partners.

Franklin County's work has included manure storages and barnyard improvements, as well as fish habitat structures in a stream. The county program has put an emphasis on projects that can be accomplished quickly and provide multiple benefits, Lucas said.

After all, the pace of Pennsylvania's cleanup is a concern. The state is behind on its Chesapeake goals, with just a few years to catch up before the 2025 deadline.

Klenotic said the county programs are helping to accelerate the cleanup by verifying projects and identifying opportunities for local water-quality improvements.

"To date," she said, "more than 1,200 local stakeholders have been engaged in the process, leading to a groundswell of commitment and implementation."

*Published March 17, 2022*

**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>

**More than 6 in 10 Pa. adults, age 26–41,** each week read a daily, Sunday or non-daily print or digital newspaper, or visit a newspaper website.<sup>3</sup>



65% of millennials  
**trust paid news and information**  
more than free media.<sup>1</sup>

# POCONO RECORD

## Grief, faith and anger

### Christian Hall's parents reflect on a year without their son

**Kathryne Rubright**  
Pocono Record

Christian Hall was always talking.

His voice filled his parents' home as he made calls to friends and family members, preferably via FaceTime because he liked to see them. He yelled questions to an Alexa speaker, asking about the world's largest and smallest countries and whatever else crossed his mind.

At church, he'd still be talking to others in the congregation as his parents, Gareth and Fe, waited in the car.

Every scenario, from jogging around his neighborhood to waiting in line at Disney, was an opportunity for a conversation with the people he came in contact with.

For Christmas last year, one of Gareth's cousins, Nicole Henriquez, got Christian a Facebook Portal, so that he could see her husband and their children on the screen, too, when they talked.

He never got to use it.

On Dec. 30, 2020, 19-year-old Christian Hall was killed by the Pennsylvania State Police. He had called 911 about a possibly suicidal person on a highway overpass.

After about 90 minutes, he was shot with his hands up while holding a realistic-looking pellet gun. Dashcam footage released last month confirmed close-up what a more distant bystander video already appeared to show: Hall did not point the weapon at the troopers before they fired, contrary to what the police claimed.

The Halls' home is quiet now, though Christian is still visible everywhere in it, through family photos and the items he left behind.

His jacket hangs on the back of the dining room chair where he left it the day before he died.



PHOTO: FRANK PISCANI

Fe and Gareth Hall sit for a photo in their home on Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021.

Still on a whiteboard are the equations Christian wrote to try to help Gareth after he substituted for a math teacher and found the students using unfamiliar methods to solve problems.

The Halls did not decorate for Christmas this year. The only evidence of the holiday are the gifts their son got from work last year — fudge, a card addressed to Christian, a maroon tumbler with a Christmas tree on it — sitting on the round dinette table they haven't used since his death.

#### Christian was an 'old soul'

Like many people, Christian Hall's world

became significantly more virtual in 2020. He was still working — primarily at the Giant supermarket in Bartonsville, though he had two or three jobs at times — but socially, the pandemic was tough for the outgoing teenager.

"The lack of social touch with the family, the face-to-face with family, with his friends, it just took a toll on him," Fe said.

All that talking wasn't so that he could hear himself. He was "intentional" in his conversations, Fe said.

"He wasn't just asking 'How are you? How's your day?' just to be flippant about it," she said. If she mentioned a problem,

he'd follow up on it later.

Henriquez — one of numerous extended family members with whom Christian kept in contact, without any nagging or urging from his parents — described him as an "old soul." He wrote letters, and they scheduled FaceTime calls.

Nicole Henriquez speaks about Christian Hall on a video call as her cousin Gareth Hall is reflected in the table on Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021.

"When he spoke to you, it was very intentional. He looked in your eyes and he wanted to understand what you're saying,

*Continued on next page*



## Pocono Record continued

and you understand what he was saying,” Henriquez said.

They talked about everything from clothes to his goals and dreams.

“He told me that he wanted to be a rapper. So I just said, ‘Well, you know, that’s hard to be. So we’ll have to practice on that.’ He did say he was interested in the law,” said Henriquez, who is a lawyer.

The conversations were “refreshing,” she said, and “really made me want to slow down and really listen to other people.”

On family nights, he didn’t take his friends’ calls, and he didn’t want anyone calling his parents then, either.

“I remember one time we were watching a movie, and Fe kept going on her phone, or her iPad or something, and he just got upset. He just got up and left. He said, ‘OK, you’re not with us, so I’m not doing this.’ And he would not come back,” Gareth said.

It was the kind of behavior that distinguished him from most 19-year-olds, like his habit of taking a hot breakfast — toast, eggs, bacon — up to Fe in her home office, or the time he took his break to introduce his father to his coworkers when Gareth stopped at Giant.

“I mean, what 19-year-old does that? Most of the 19-year-olds I know, they see their parent come in, they’re hiding,” Gareth said.

“There’s so much I could say about him, but what I definitely have to say is that he loved very hard, and that’s for everyone. He was very passionate, like in terms of how much love he had for his family, for everyone,” Henriquez said.

When he went through a breakup, that “was also very intense for him,” because of how much he cared, Fe said.

He’d been talking about his ex-girlfriend the day before his death. Gareth does not believe his son wanted to die.

“Do I believe Christian was suicidal? No. But I believe he planned on putting on a good show,” Gareth told Spotlight PA. “He was going to show her that he was going to go beyond what that guy was going to do.”

When police got to the Route 33 overpass above Interstate 80, Hall was standing on the edge.

A series of troopers made de-escalation and negotiation attempts, and Christian did step down from the barrier.



PHOTOS: FRANK PISCANI

LEFT: Nicole Henriquez speaks about Christian Hall on a video call as her cousin Gareth Hall is reflected in the table.

ABOVE: Gareth and Fe Hall haven’t used their dinette table since their son Christian died, instead eating meals in front of the television. Christian’s usual chair is in the foreground. The gifts he received from work last Christmas are still sitting on the table.

RIGHT: Christian Hall’s jacket still hangs from the dining room chair where he left it the day before he died.



But there was no outside mental health professional, which the Halls believe should be a standard part of the response to these calls, and no less-lethal projectiles were used.

State police fired in two rounds; none of the first bullets hit Christian. A corporal and a trooper both fired the second time, striking Hall with three bullets.

“He was by himself on that bridge,” Fe said. “They could hide behind their cars. There were so many alternatives. Why wasn’t a single alternative used?”

### Processing a life without Christian

Gareth and Fe Hall have felt disrespected by authorities for the past year, starting with a 45-minute wait at the state police barracks the day their son was killed.

About 20 minutes in, Christian’s ex-girlfriend called and told them she’d heard that shots were fired.

“That’s when Fe started yelling at the people behind the desk, ‘Get them out here now.’ And they still made us wait,” Gareth said.

Later that day, at the hospital where

Christian had been pronounced dead, the coroner’s office began asking whether he’d left a suicide note.

“Now, we are trying to process the fact that our son is no longer with us. Our son, who my wife took to work that day. The son that I spoke to around noon. We’re trying to wrap our heads around the fact that he’s gone,” Gareth said. “And you’re asking me if he was suicidal. You’re asking me if he left a note. Dude, this is not the time.”

In the following days, the investigators’ use of Hall’s phone made it look like he was still active on social media, “to the point where people were calling us, and messaging us, ‘Is he really dead? Because I see him live on Messenger,’” Gareth said.

Fe recalls seeing that telltale green dot “days into January.”

When the Monroe County district attorney’s office announced it would hold a press conference about its findings in the case, there was no advance warning for the Halls.

The footage shown at that press conference blurred Christian in his final moments, the seconds when the police

had said he’d pointed the gun at them. The shooting was determined by the DA’s office to be justified.

“If they were honest about it from the start, I can tell you right now I wouldn’t have the amount of anger that I have right now,” Gareth said of the state police.

“We’d still be angry. It’s still going to be difficult,” Fe said, adding that “the pain’s compounded” by what Gareth called a “coverup.”

The Pennsylvania State Police did not release the unredacted footage when the Pocono Record made a records request. The Halls’ lawyers obtained it via subpoena, and the video was published in a Spotlight PA/NBC News partnership.

Their lawyers are Ben Crump and Devon Jacob, who routinely work on high-profile cases such as George Floyd’s murder.

Fe questions whether a stereotype about Asians could have led authorities to think the Halls wouldn’t speak out or hire well-known attorneys.

“I feel like they saw him as Asian,” Fe said about the police, “and there’s a generalization out there that Asians are

*Continued on next page*



quiet. Is it possible that they're looking at him as Asian? Is the thought, you know, 'He's Asian, his family, they're not going to fight, they're not going to do anything. They're just going to walk away and deal with it.' I don't know what's in their minds. But is it possible that that's how they felt?"

Christian was born in China and adopted as a baby by Gareth, who is Black and Latino, and Fe, who is Filipino.

"Someone asked me, 'Do you think things would have been different if he was Black?' I had to honestly tell them, 'I think that's why they gave him 90 minutes. If he was Black, he probably would have had maybe 20,'" Gareth said. "That's my sentiment as a Black man in this country. I think his being Chinese is what got him the 90 minutes."

### Faith carries the Hall family

What keeps the Halls going through their grief and anger is their faith.

"Gareth and I are Christians. And it is our faith in God that is keeping us going. And that faith, and knowing, and trusting, and having the confidence that he is with God," Fe said.

"He is in a better place, right, he is having the best time of his life. I mean, he has no problems. He has no bills. He is with his maker. He is with his creator," she continued. "I don't know what eternity is like, but with Christian being very inquisitive, I know that he is out there, probably asking God all kinds of questions and he's getting his answers."

While there is some comfort in this, "for selfish reasons, I just want him here," Fe said.

She asks God questions, too: "Where were you when he was on that bridge? Did you abandon him? Why did you abandon him? Why did you leave him? Why did that happen?"

She doesn't expect to receive answers during her life on Earth, but she does trust that there's a purpose for her son's life and death, and that her purpose is linked to his.

"We all have a purpose. And perhaps the purpose for his life, and the purpose for his death, is so that change will come," she said. Change won't bring Christian back, but it might result in a better outcome for someone else.

"Maybe that is his purpose. And maybe the purpose for my life is to do this, you know, and talk about him," Fe said.



PHOTO: BRIAN MYSZKOWSKI

Dozens of community members came together at a "Justice for Christian Hall" rally at Dansbury Park on Nov. 27 following the release of unredacted footage that showed Hall with his hands raised when he was shot by police.

Henriquez has thrown herself into the cause too, believing that change is what Christian would have wanted.

"I'm not at all a social media person, but I learned it just for this, because I just feel like the love that Christian had for us, and the passion that he had, I had to bring that same energy," she said.

Adoptee mental health has become one of her top priorities, and she wants all adoptees and their families to be offered resources such as therapy.

"If they don't need it, they don't need it. But give them the resources, because it is a trauma in and of itself to be separated from your family, even if your family didn't want you," she said. "Maybe that's even more of a reason to have it, because you have to deal with the fact of being rejected. As much as your adopted family's loving and everything, you still have that loss. And without that, I think most adopted families, innocently, don't realize the trauma. And they believe that they're doing everything they can, but that missing piece is not because they're doing anything wrong."

### Christian Hall's legacy

The Halls want mental health professionals to respond to calls like Christian's, or to accompany police when they respond, "because I do believe that most people, when they see a person in

uniform, they get threatened," Fe said. "They're afraid, they get threatened, they get afraid for their life."

A mental health professional, not in uniform, would "get a better response" from someone in crisis, Fe said. "They would talk to that person more than they would a police officer."

Of interest: Mental health calls are common for police in the Poconos. Is there a better way to respond?

Christian Hall's family also wants to see an independent investigation of his death.

"I find it absolutely crazy that the district attorney, who works hand-in-hand with the police, has jurisdiction over whether or not to turn over an investigation about the very cops that he works with," Gareth said.

Under Pennsylvania law, the state attorney general can only conduct an outside investigation into these cases if the local DA requests it.

That rarely happens, not just in Monroe County but across Pennsylvania: Spotlight PA reported last month that out of at least 108 fatal use-of-force cases since 2017, three have been sent to Attorney General Josh Shapiro's office.

Christian's death "has to mean something," Fe said.

"We don't want other families to go

through what we are doing, because the loss of a child — it's not just one life that is lost. I feel that I've lost my life. I feel that my husband lost his life. The life that we knew is gone and we will never get it back. We don't know how to move on. It's just very difficult to think that it could happen to someone else, and we don't want anybody to go through what our family is going through."

For two decades, everything Gareth and Fe did was for their son, including moving from New York City out to Pennsylvania, where they could afford a house with a yard.

"Everything that we did was for him, and I think that that's what parents are for. That's our role as parents, is to leave a legacy for our child. He was the reason why we woke up in the morning and went to work. He was the reason why we wanted to pay our mortgage, so that we have a legacy to leave him," Fe said. "These are all material things, I know that."

That love is still the motivating factor in their lives. But it's Christian's legacy that they carry forward now, and the impact, they hope, will be far more than material.

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## Pittsburgh police and school district lack a cooperative agreement, defying state law

By Charlie Wolfson

Pittsburgh's police department and its school district have failed for more than a decade to agree on a cooperative agreement that is required by state law as leaders consider how to ensure safety in schools without criminalizing common student behaviors.

The law, established in 2010, directs schools and law enforcement agencies to sign a memorandum of understanding that outlines how the two agencies communicate and interact. Negotiations picked up during the latter years of former Mayor Bill Peduto's administration, but no agreement was signed. The two sides could not agree on how much information Pittsburgh Public Schools [PPS] should share with police.

Mayor Ed Gainey's administration has not yet picked up talks this year. Gainey's first move as mayor was to replace Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich, who was involved in the talks, with Lee Schmidt.

The mayor's office did not respond to requests for comment for this story. The school district solicitor Ira Weiss said he expects talks to resume soon, and "I have no doubt that we'll get this done."

Pittsburgh's police bureau does have agreements signed with other schools in the city. Hissrich, the city's public safety director from 2016 through 2021, said he signed off on numerous such agreements during his tenure, most of them following boilerplate language provided by the state.

Weiss said the talks between PPS and the city were held up over what kinds of student violations the schools would be required to report to the city police. He said city police wanted to go beyond the standard list of violations required to be reported under state law and add some from the list of matters for which reporting was optional. (He could not name specific violations.)



"The school board is concerned about the tendency to overcite disproportionately with Black and Brown students," Weiss said.

School Board President Sala Udin deferred questions to Weiss.

Hissrich contradicted Weiss' account of the talks, saying he only sought the standard agreement. "It was PPS that wanted to limit the list drastically from the state's recommendations," he said.

Hissrich said the school board went beyond his comfort zone in the list of violations they wanted to make discretionary for reporting.

"[The district] would not sign off on it unless we made some concessions that I was not willing to make," Hissrich said.

Hissrich signed a memorandum of understanding in 2020 between the Pittsburgh police and Catalyst Academy Charter School that commits each side to "maintain a cooperative relationship" and lays out exactly which violations the schools are required to notify the police of and which ones are discretionary. The lists in the agreement are the standard ones suggested by the state.

The agreement lists weapon possession, aggravated assault, stalking, sexual assault, rape and vandalism, among others, as mandatory reports. Its list of discretionary reports includes simple

assault, terroristic threats, harassment, indecent exposure, theft and alcohol use.

The document also lays out what information the school will provide to the police when it makes a referral, such as the locations of in-progress incidents and weapons involved, and it provides guidelines for the police to follow when responding at school facilities.

Curt Lavarello, executive director of the School Safety Advocacy Council, said the agreements are an important way of ensuring consistent interaction between two large entities that operate in very different ways.

"The train can come off the tracks easily if someone doesn't know what the other person is doing," Lavarello said. "The [memorandum of understanding] provides a basis for law enforcement operations in an educational environment and provides basic stability."

PPS has its own police that can make arrests but do not carry firearms. Friction in previous talks about a potential agreement centered not only around what kinds of student violations the schools would be required to report to the city police, but also whether police could enter schools to arrest students for out-of-school crimes.

Hissrich said the two sides were "down to the fine print" when he left his post at the end of 2021, but could not comment

on the current state of negotiations. Earlier, in 2019, Hissrich signed a proposed agreement but school board members rejected it.

Hissrich said the police need information about serious offenses like assault or weapon possession, and the ability to arrest students involved in them, to prevent further crime. He said he had no desire to require reports of alcohol or marijuana violations.

The negotiations were ongoing in 2020 when some advocates, while racial justice protests gripped the country, pushed to minimize police presence in schools. While Gainey's mayoral campaign was focused on law enforcement accountability, he has been explicit about the need to reform, but not shrink or eliminate, its police.

Hissrich said the lack of an agreement does not necessarily make it harder for the police to respond to crises, such as active shooters. "I felt confident that they were ensuring safety in the schools," he said. Weiss, too, said the lack of a pact does not threaten safety in schools.

Lavarello said not having an agreement can create "distrust" between the two entities, and "inconsistencies can lead to vulnerability and a lack of communications can lead to more lawsuits."

Weiss said the school district has not yet begun negotiating an agreement with the new administration, though he has brought it up informally with the new city solicitor, Krysia Kubiak. He said he is encouraged by the new administration's "more cooperative" stance toward the school district.

*Charlie Wolfson is PublicSource's local government reporter and a Report for America corps member. He can be reached at [charlie@publicsource.org](mailto:charlie@publicsource.org) and on Twitter [@chwolfson](https://twitter.com/chwolfson).*

*Emily Sauchelli contributed to this report.*

*Published June 16, 2022*

# Dasha's story

## From Ukraine, former Wayne woman shares journey of escape, refugee crisis and rescue efforts

By Lashay Smith, Jacob Pegan,  
Isaiah Dickson, Sydnee Reddy,  
and Marcus Alvarez

Nearly a month ago, Dasha Andrienko awoke at 5 a.m. to what sounded like "fireworks."

She glanced out the window of her apartment in Kharkiv, Ukraine and saw the smokey and fiery aftermath of the first attack on her home city and quickly sent a text message to her family, friends and neighbors.

"Everybody was like, 'hey, it's the war,' " Andrienko said. "It started."

Andrienko, once a resident of Wayne, Pa., is among millions of Ukrainians who fled their homes in the aftermath of the Russian invasion. As of Friday, March 18, at least 6,000 lives have been lost and 4 million people displaced. Many have left the country. Andrienko had her chance to leave, but she decided to stay and help her people.

In a March 16 Zoom interview with Cabrini University's student media, The Loquitur, she described her journey and the struggle to leave home. From a base in west Ukraine, she recalled her first reaction when the bombs started to fall, quickly scanning her apartment to decide what to take and what to leave behind. It was a moment that reminded her that "everything is temporary."

"A challenge was to leave with one backpack, not knowing if you will be able to come home again," she said.

Andrienko packed documents, an emergency bag. Then, she turned on the news to see other cities being bombed.

"Like never before, you understand that all material is temporary and what really matters (are the) lives of people," she said. "I had to learn not to be attached to material things, and not think of my green plants at home for example, that I love a lot...that are so unimportant on the scale of everything,"

After her messages between loved ones, Andrienko immediately looked to God. She prayed about the forthcoming hardship she and the citizens of Ukraine would have to face.

"I didn't panic because I knew I had this deep assurance



"I had to learn not to be attached to material things, and not think of my green plants at home for example, that I love a lot...that are so unimportant on the scale of everything."

**DASHA ANDRIENKO**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY DASHA ANDRIENKO

that my life was in God's hand, but I needed to do something," Andrienko said. "...Emotions become numb in times like these."

### Seven days in a bomb shelter

Soon after she left her apartment, she went to her church to help to prepare the building for people taking shelter. Below the church was a "bomb shelter," where they spread mattresses on a dirt floor, creating a place where she and others stayed for the next seven days. Some were friends and neighbors. Others were strangers who she quickly bonded with.

"I shared a mattress with a girl I had just met," Andrienko said, mentioning that others thought they were lifelong friends.

About 80 to 100 people stayed in the church, she said.

However, Andrienko's family wasn't among them. Her family lived a half hour away and without a car, and it wasn't safe to walk. At first, it was better for them to stay home and only go out for supplies like food and drinking water.

"My mom had back problems, so they weren't sure whether they should go," she said. "But we stayed in touch all the time, asking 'how are you?' and 'is everything fine?' At that time, she said, and it was almost impossible to get a Taxi. You didn't know where the shooting or the bombing was going to go."

In the church, emergency alarms set up by a former

*Continued on next page*



## Loquitur continued

member of the military alerted her and others to incoming attacks, and they moved downstairs for safety when they heard the sirens. Through all of that, the hope in God kept them all together, she said.

“Praise God that nobody panicked,” Andrienko said. “We sang worship, we prayed and we read the Bible.”

Despite the building shaking as the rockets landed close by, the group huddled on mattresses guided by the Psalms that they read, Andrienko said. They sang gospel music, as a man with a guitar played. Her faith in God, she said, helped her through the toughest moments and those uncertain hours when the bombs struck near them.

“(We were) going up and down when it was getting loud and when the bombing was close,” Andrienko said.

As the attacks intensified, Andrienko and others living in the church decided to journey to west Ukraine to find a better place “because it was not getting better at all.” But the most dangerous journey, she said, was traveling from homes or bomb shelters to the train station, where thousands packed trains with standing-room only.

She said they stayed calm by reminding themselves that trust in God would get them through it.

The day after they left for the train station to head west, the church was bombed. Since it was evacuated, no one was hurt.

At the station, Andrienko said the platform was filled with families. People packed into the train for a 15 hour ride. People had to take turns sitting on the floor while the majority stood.

The train arrived at a base in West Ukraine. Volunteers, including Andrienko, work to find ways to get people evacuated out of Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, and out of the country by bus.

“I see everyday and I hear on the phone, the stories of people escaping or their house being totally destroyed,” Andrienko said.

She described the crying children as their father’s placed them on buses because they don’t know when they’ll see each other again. For Andrienko, she was able to see her parents again. She feared for the risk they took to get to the train.

She said it’s unknown when the bombing and shooting will start, and boarding the train can be just as life threatening. A few days before her parents arrived, someone had been shot and killed at the station in an attempt to help people board the train.

“I was really praying for safety and God’s protection when my parents were taking a taxi cab to the train station because you don’t know whenever it can start and whenever it can happen,” Andrienko said.

### An outpouring of support

During her time in the church and on the train, friends from across the globe reached out through social media to offer support and prayers.

She had the opportunity to leave, to either head to Canada where her boyfriend lives or go stay in Germany, where a friend’s family lives. People from across the



PHOTO SHARED BY ANDRIENKO.

**Dasha holding walkie-talkies donated for YWAM Slavic Ministries, which is gathering materials to safeguard those who are trying to escape the war.**

Philadelphia region offered support. A few years ago, Andrienko was an Au Pair, living in Wayne, Pennsylvania between 2016 and 2017.

Jana Wickenkamp, a senior international business major at Cabrini, was among her friends offering Andrienko a place to stay her family’s home in Germany.

“I’ve been so worried, and reached out to see how she was doing,” Wickenkamp said, who learned Ukrainians are looking to gather walkie-talkies, bedding and food. “Right now, she’s helping people rest until they can get to a new place. She’s always been very involved in her community.”

“I asked her if she needed a place to stay,” Wickenkamp said. “But she said her friend wants to be there to “help her community.”

Today, Andrienko is fighting to safeguard herself, her family and thousands of refugees who are making their way through a “transit stop” in western Ukraine seeking a way out of danger.

From the new location, which for safety reasons she did not want to disclose, she now helps to keep refugees safe until they are able to move out of the country.

She said, “It’s like a transit center. We host people on YWAM base to get rest and food for a couple nights, and from here they can move further.”

From the rescue mission, Andrienko – speaking a Zoom

interview with Cabrini University’s student media, The Loquitur – welcomed the chance to share her story and the importance of the YWAM Slavic Ministries, which is gathering materials to safeguard those who are trying to escape the war.

While in the early days, the trains were packed with people trying to escape, the situation has changed. Many people – especially the older population or those with disabilities – don’t have cars and fear leaving their homes.

The fear of being hit by a stray bullet, or becoming the main target, is what’s keeping the people of Ukraine from deciding if they want to leave, she said. She said making that decision is very dangerous, and people risk their lives day to day to get to a destination that will keep them safe and protected.

Andrienko said many young men are braving long journeys, driving vans and buses beyond the frontline to get people out.

She said the war is bringing the community together, and their faith is allowing them to take risks and protect the ones that they love.

Although Russians and Ukrainians share similar aspects of culture, Andrienko mentioned the moral aspects that separate the two nations.

“In the course of history right now, you can see the big difference of the spirit of Ukrainians, who always wanted to be a free nation, who always wanted to live independently, while Russians, who are afraid to speak their minds, who are afraid to post on social media because they have a dictator,” Andrienko said. Ukraine, a country that embraces independence, “are willing to lay their lives on the line for the freedom of their country, for the future and not stay silent,” Andrienko said.

Ukrainians, she said, are blocking tanks and stopping men armed with guns “with their bare hands.”

### Losing track of time

Amid the chaos, she said, “I don’t even remember the dates anymore. The days of the week.”

Just a month ago, she said “everybody thought it would be absolute crazy to actually start the war with all the sanctions that Russia would get.”

Andrienko feels blessed that her friends and connection in Wayne and in the Cabrini area have reached out.

“I have a lot of close friends in Wayne and Phoenixville who reached out and are praying and staying in touch. Some sent donations for my personal needs and others sent donations for the mission, so I feel cared for and loved.”

While she wishes to eventually head to Canada, she is committed to her mission at home, assisting the people of her nation. “I could fly out there right away, but I didn’t want to leave Ukraine without doing anything.”

“We all have a role to play – every one of us.”

When asked what those at Cabrini can offer, she said, “Prayers. We need prayers.”

*Published May 5, 2022*

# Bedford Gazette

## ‘I knew what I had to do’

Local man, as a teenager, piloted WWII landing craft

**By Heather Koontz**

Bedford Gazette Staff Writer

Harry Gardner thinks he may be the youngest WWII veteran in Bedford County.

While this is a difficult thing to verify, one thing is certain – he is not as old as the Navy thought he was when he enlisted almost eight decades ago.

This little white ... something ... (Gardner promises he didn't lie to enlist early, but his smile and a slight glimmer in his eyes suggest otherwise) sent him on a career path in the military that led to two wars, the American Embassy in Cairo, from one side of the world to the other and back again. At age 94, some memories of his service are as vivid as the day they happened. Other aspects are vague. But as he speaks, the pride he has in his service, and that of those with whom he served, is evident.

Gardner promises he did nothing illegal when he enlisted in the Navy at 16. It was a mutually agreeable situation – they needed enlistees as the US entered the war, and Gardner needed a place to go.

“I can't remember how I done that bit, but they took me!” he laughed.

Both of Gardner's parents had died, leaving Gardner with a choice. His older siblings were already on their own, his younger brother taken in by his grandmother, but he did not want to go to the Methodist home with his two younger sisters.

“I didn't want to be a burden on anybody. I thought, ‘I'm going to be 16, I'm going to see if I can get into the service,’” Gardner said, so he hitchhiked his way to the recruiting office in Cumberland, Md.

He had never been on a boat before enlisting. Yet piloting a boat would be his job in the Second World War. Gardner was stationed on a landing ship tank – more specifically, LST 589 – a large vessel that transported tanks, supplies, and other equipment straight to the beach, where the doors would open, items would be unloaded, and the boat could make a quick getaway.

Gardner more specifically operated a Higgins boat – a flat-bottomed vessel that delivered troops directly onto a beach. They are the same boats that were used to take American troops to the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

Gardner, who was barely old enough to drive, would pilot his boat to a troop ship, where about 25 soldiers would descend straight down the side and into his boat using a cargo net. Those were difficult moments, he explained, because “they were nervous to begin with. I don't blame them,” Gardner said, but they would often drop rifles or other gear on their way down.

“I was in a better position than the troops I landed,” he said.

After delivering the troops to shore, “I could back right off the beach and get out of the line of fire. Those guys had a lot of



GAZETTE PHOTO/HEATHER KOONTZ

**Harry Gardner, with his trademark smile, sits in his room at Colonial Courtyard surrounded by photographs and memorabilia from his 20 years of service in the Navy and Marine Corps.**

grit. I just thought how brave they were.”

And he repeated those words, over and over as he talked about the men he ferried to shore.

“I was used to taking responsibility. It was no big deal to me,” he said. “I was in a better position than the troops I landed. I wasn't afraid. I knew what I had to do. I got them to the beach and put them on the beach like I was supposed to.”

LST 589 was part of what resembled a floating city of ships and boats, more than 100 at a time covering miles of ocean.

Gardner said the food “wasn't all that great,” but the biggest issue was the lack of mail, which would all be delivered to one ship. It could be weeks or months until it reached its proper destination. He would experience “a little period of isolation

*Continued on next page*



where you didn't hear from anybody at all."

Gardner kept a detailed log of his ship's movements, which he has typewritten in diary form. His entries are succinct and straightforward:

- April 22, 1945 Arrived Panang Harbor (D+5)
- April 23, 1945 Beached and unloaded. Departed back to Pollac Harbor, Mortai
- May 18, 1945 Crossed the Equator for the 5<sup>th</sup> time.

The diary is a record, but Gardner does not have a service record that lists where he was and when over the course of his 20 years of service. He has countless certificates of service and merit from those days, but nothing to link together his years of service but his own memory.

And Gardner himself can no longer remember specific names of all of the battles he fought or places he went. It's no surprise, given the expanse of his career and the multitude of projects he was involved in.

His ship log reads like an atlas of ports in the South Pacific. By the end of the war he had gone as far as China. Gardner left the Navy and, as he puts it, walked right over and went through Marine Corps boot camp.

"I wanted something with a little more

challenge to it," Gardner explained.

One of his first posts was at the American Embassy in Cairo, where he served from December, 1948 until December, 1949. He lived there with 10 other Marines. Among his duties was to ensure secrets stayed secret.

"At night after everybody left we went around the Embassy looking for any classified material somebody might have left out," said Gardner. Although he never found any, himself, he knows others who did.

Gardner was eventually called back to war. A Marine Corps certificate recognizes his participation in action against enemy forces in south and central Korea from Feb. 10, 1952 – Feb. 8, 1953. This would have most likely been part of what is sometimes called the Battles of the Outposts that characterized the last two years of the Korean War.

Gardner was a gunnery sergeant as part of a machine gun platoon, and remembers positioning himself on hilltops with guns set up at angles to fire intersecting lines ahead of him, in what's termed "interlocking fire."

"At night I'd have to go around and check out the guns to make sure everyone was

awake," Gardner recalled. He said at night, a deer could trip a flare, causing a young Marine to fire blindly in a panic. He remembers the hope of one hot meal a day, but if he couldn't get to the cooks, he was faced with ration cans. When that happened, a fire could help to make them palatable, he said, adding "At least you'd get some pork and beans that were warm, maybe hot."

From the hills of Korea, Gardner went to the Sierra Nevada Mountains near Bridgeport, Calif., where he served as an instructor at the Cold Weather Battalion, later renamed the Mountain Warfare Training Center. It is considered one of the most isolated Marine Corps posts in existence. There, recruits were sent for two weeks of training on surviving cold weather conditions.

"I'd make snow caves and put people inside of them," he said, laughing.

It was while Gardner was serving at this post that he met his future wife, JoAnne, who he married on July 30, 1955, in Carson City, Nev. She brought with her two daughters, Susan and LeAnne, whom Gardner adopted; the couple had a third daughter, Laurie, together. They were married for 65 years before her passing in 2020.

Laurie Dudley has fond memories of her father growing up, but said he didn't talk much about his experiences in the service. It was only when he was around other service members at the various reunions and events he has attended over the years that she really heard him talk openly about his past.

Gardner finished out his military career in Nevada, retiring from the Marine Corps on May 26, 1964. But his service was far from over. He went straight into the Carson City police force, became a deputy sheriff, and finally joined the Nevada State Police, before retiring. Nicknamed "Happy Harry" for a personality that is evident by the wide smile in every photograph he has, Gardner looks back on his life as one of he is proud of.

"I've never tried to cheat anybody out of anything," Gardner said. "I try to be nice to everyone I meet and assist them if they need assistance. If you're an underdog, you've got me on your side if I can help."

After leaving Bedford at age 16, Gardner did not set foot back on local soil until 2021.

"This is where my family is buried," Gardner said. "I want to be buried here."

*Published May 25, 2022*

# why newspapers?

Local newspapers are the  
**most trusted source**  
of information among Pennsylvania voters.

**87%** of Pennsylvania voters agree that local newspapers are a **key part of an informed community.**

**75%** of Pennsylvania voters **trust stories about local issues** published in local newspapers.



## Local Penn State fruit lab advances agriculture

By Adam Michael  
Times Assistant Editor

Legislators learned how integrated projects at the Penn State Fruit Research and Extension Center advance understanding of effective ecosystems and help Pennsylvania maintain its place in a competitive agriculture industry.

Despite already possessing an overview of projects throughout the state, Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding still walked away impressed by the work taking place at the Biglerville campus.

"We deal with research one-on-one talking about projects, but today we saw the integration across the spectrum from social science to entomologists," he said, Thursday following a tour. "At that intersection, that's where the problems are solved."

State Rep. Dan Moul, R-91, and Adams County Commissioner Marty Qually were also along for the tour.

### Maximizing Farms

Jim Shupp, a professor of pomology in the department of plant science, focuses on ways to keep the mid-eastern region economically competitive with other areas of the state. Toward the tail end of his career, his work recently has focused on pitted fruits.

"Peaches are my dessert, so to speak," he said.

Shupp is responsible for helping farmers get the most productivity out of each acre. This means fitting the most trees in the smallest area without negatively affecting the size or quality of the fruit, he said.

Pennsylvania farmers produce 350 bushels of peaches per acre, compared to Georgia, South Carolina, and the largest producer, California, which averages 600 bushels per acre, Shupp said.

Some seven-to-10-year experiments involve plotting trees in different shapes at various distances from one another to maximize the amount of sunlight and nutrients each tree can absorb within a tight space.



ADAM MICHAEL/GETTYSBURG TIMES

Long He, agricultural and biological engineering professor at Penn State's Fruit Research Extension Center in Biglerville, describes how a pruning robot can help solve labor shortage issues.

*Continued on next page*



To grow a crop of peaches, a crew needs to enter an orchard five to six times, Shupp said. By experimenting with different root stocks, scientists have shortened the average peach tree from 30 feet to 10 feet tall, he said, vastly improving the amount of time spent by workers on each tree.

“Ideally we have a system with good light relations and a tree that can be handled from the ground,” he said. “One of the results has been smaller fruit, so we know there’s a limit to how close we can go.”

**Insect Issues**

Julie Urban a professor of entomology has been an integral part of the state’s effort to reduce damage from the spotted lanternfly. The Asian plant-hopper with spotted white, red and black wings came to Berks County in 2014 and has spread throughout 14 other counties.

Though Adams County is not yet under quarantine orders from the Department of Agriculture for the pest, the insect has been spotted in the area in recent months.

An evolutionary scientist studies other planthoppers, and specializes in lanternflies, she said.

“Other than this little freak show beast of a species, (lanternflies) are not a problem. They are mostly tropical and hard to find, in fact,” she said.

Penn State has joined other institutions to combine funding for matching grants and to share organized research, she said.

“Our work has come from the strength to integrate,” she said.

In areas where the insect is already widespread, scientists are studying the feeding habits on different types of plants, she said.

Cucumbers are a favorite. Vineyards are particularly vulnerable to the large bug with an even larger appetite, she said.

So far, the flies have not devastated apple orchards, though they typically feast late in the season for up to three weeks when they arrive. The insects have not proven to have an appetite for peach trees, or raspberries, Urban said.

“We need basic research to come up with applicable solutions,” she said.

A few natural predators appear to feast on the spotted lanternfly, but none do so enough to limit their population, Urban said. Pesticides have proven to be the most effective preventative measure so far, she said.

The research center isn’t only focused on exterminating insects. David Pittinger, a fruit research entomologist, shared all the ways his team is working to protect a network of pollinators from pesticides and other stressors.

For a long time, honeybees were considered the standard for pollination. This posed two problems. First, it undervalued other pollinating insects, including some of the 22,000 other types of bees that are more effective aids in reproduction.

The honey bee also proved to be more durable than most pollinators, helping its own stock but providing a false confidence that pesticides were safe for all pollinators.

“We thought the honey bee was a white lab rat, but it turns out it’s actually a super bee,” he said.

**The Plant Doctor**

Kari Peter, a professor in tree fruit pathology sometimes called “the plant doctor,” helps growers learn effective, sustainable disease management strategies.

These diseases can affect the blossoms, leaves, fruit, wood and even the root, she said.

“There’s not one point of the plant’s lifecycle where I get a break,” she said.

Peter helps to discover why some prominent apple trees have ceased to produce apples far sooner than normal. She also works to prevent disease on fruit that has already been processed, she said.

Peter provided a few examples of her work. One of the largest threats to Pennsylvania farms are dagger nematodes that live in the soil. The microscopic worms can transmit viruses if left unattended, she said.

To combat the problem, Peter is growing sorghum sudangrass and rapeseed. When the cover crops are chopped up, they release gases that are toxic to the worms. Once it is chopped, it is quickly mixed and sealed in the soil.

The next step is to produce tools that make this action easier on a larger scale, she said.

“This has been around for a while, but growers aren’t adopting this the way we’d like them to,” she said. “We’re trying to find was to make this easier for growers.”

Peter and Greg Krawczyk, a fruit entomologist, frequently visit Pennsylvania farms to design solutions for insect-born infections.

“We are sort of like firefighters,” he said. “We eliminate the threat before it can explode again.”

They also test chemical agents to help farmers understand which will be most useful for specific jobs and conditions. Product tests can take up to three years, Peter said.

“We have heat, humidity and frequent rainfall. It’s important for farmers to understand how those products work in our conditions,” she said. “Chemical companies will tell you anything. I work closely with these folks, so I tell them if it doesn’t work, I’ll be very honest.”

**Robust Robots**

Long He, a professor in the biological engineering department, showed off several robots that have helped minimize waste and others that could provide alternative solutions to workforce issues.

Currently, labor makes up 70 percent of farming costs. This past year, farmers struggled to find enough workers to harvest their orchards, said Penn State professor Steve Loerch.

Precision agriculture has come a long way with the help of Penn State innovation, He said.

His graduate assistants showed how sensors can determine saturation levels in soils. During dry spells, drip irrigators are initiated to provide the proper amount of hydration to grow fruits to the ideal size for their use.

Another graduate assistant showed how drones photographing with different types of light can provide orchard-wide data to show where infection or infestation has presented itself. Other drones then fly through the orchard to detect where infection can be found on specific plants.

For now, hands-free precision diagnosis is the limit to the technology. But the scientists hope to develop another machine that can appropriately spray infected crops and prune damaged ones.

Efficient use of chemicals will help farmers save money and have positive environmental effects, the grad student said.

Another robot under development can safely remove grapefruits from trees with 90 percent accuracy. The next objective will be teaching it to recognize ripe fruit, a graduate assistant said.

“This technology piece, that’s where the solutions are for the labor concerns and environmental concerns,” Redding said. “I realize it’s long term, but that’s where we need to be, particularly in these labor-shortage times.”

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# A brighter shade of Gray

## Residents past & present invest big in little village's future

By Judy D.J. Ellich

GRAY — In the beginning of Gray, residents obtained their water from the mines that ran into two water tanks in town.

"Bring up water," local historian Ryan Sopich said, "and you'll get an amusing response."

Those water tanks are a thing of the past. The village has a new center and beating heart — a community park has gone through a revitalization — thanks to the contributions and volunteer hours of several dedicated residents, past and present. "These small towns ... are in trouble, just the transmission from the old to the new," said Carl Schrock, a former occupant of Gray who is among those who invests in the neighborhood's future. "New people (are) moving in and keeping the core of its generational families. It is all good."

### Gray Community Park

If you're looking for a welcome sign letting you know you've arrived in the community of Gray, you won't find it.

Instead, a weather-beaten "Main Street" sign announces a paved road that loops around the cluster of 108 homes for 264 residents.

Gray is a community that was built around now-dormant coal mines and surrounded by corn and hay fields within 20 minutes of both Boswell and Windber. There are grocery stores, restaurants, bars and gas stations within a few miles, not to mention the NASCAR-level speedway and a historic playhouse in nearby Jennerstown that are open for business in the warmer months.

Residents often join visitors and ghost hunters traipsing through historic buildings and even cemeteries and festivals held near Gray, such as on the grounds of the Somerset Historical Center, which draws thousands of visitors annually.

"People in Gray had to organize the things themselves," Sopich said, "and women were a big part of that."

Carl Schrock's mother, Ollie Schrock, came into her own and was the single most prolific organizer in Gray's history, Sopich said. Ollie ran blood drives and put together dances during World War II.

After the war, her son said, she worked diligently to keep her neighborhood alive and well. She spent time on the



A swing set in Gray was rebuilt by community volunteers.

PHOTO: JUDY D.J. ELLICH/  
DAILY AMERICAN

school board and at the children's aid home. Yet she always had time for her children and to hand food out to anyone knocking on her door.

That spirit of resilience, hard work and generosity has woven itself into the fabric of Gray across generations.

### The names of Gray

Many residents in Gray are self-sufficient and have built up their own businesses in fields such as carpentry, plumbing, welding, electricity and automobile repair. Several have entered the education profession and are staffers and administrators in the Somerset County's school districts.

It's the kind of place where people know their neighbors — the Knapps, the Mullins, the Supanicks, the Brants, the Millers, the Otts — and they walk over to each other's homes or meet in the community park to chat instead of picking up their cellphones.

It's the kind of place where a business doesn't need a name.

Kenny Merle owns the local garage, one of the few businesses found off one of the town's main streets, but

there's no sign announcing it. Locals call it "Kenny's" or "Merle's," and when you drive past he'll offer a friendly wave and a nod.

And it's the kind of place where long-timers are celebrated, and their deaths are mourned by the whole community.

When Ralph Geiyer, a resident in his nineties who grew up in the "king coal" era, died in December, the news reverberated across Gray.

"He was the kindest man," said Sopich, who spent hours gathering information from him for his book

With Geiyer's death, a part of Gray is gone. He had many stories to tell, recalling how the town was ethnically divided when it was built and its residents moved to change that.

His kin, Mabel and Emmie Duray, remembered looking out of their home's window next door and tattle-tailing to their mother, Kelsey Duray, that her grandfather was "on the riding mower again."

He wasn't supposed to be doing that, his daughter

*Continued on next page*



# Daily American continued

Lorraine Ott said last fall as she stood in Gray’s post office parking lot, more or less a part of the village’s community park.

Ott laughed about the memory, a mix of love and exasperation.

Like many others, she left Gray and came back. Her daughter Kelsey Duray had done the same.

## Carl Schrock

Schrock hasn’t lived in Gray for 70 years. But he returns several times a year to Somerset County from the Pittsburgh area.

“I guess you can say I love Gray because it holds all the memories of happy times,” he said.

Schrock’s father was the purchasing agent for Consolidation Coal Co., and his mother was Gray’s nurse in the 1920s, a champion for community improvement.

As a teen, Schrock was a hand loader in low coal in Gray’s coal mine. Before that he was a muskrat trapper, newspaper boy, and a potato and elderberry picker, much like many of the kids of that era. He eventually became the president of EIMCO Mining Machinery International.

He remembered his first introduction to deep coal mining.

“It would have been about 1951 in the summertime. They put me on a crew. I was a kid. They had to look out for me,” he said.

“The coal was about 4 feet high, and they didn’t have mechanized machines like they do today. The coal was shot by explosives and fell on the floor. You went in there on your hands and knees and had to shovel and put that coal into a conveyer that went by.”

At the end of that first day, Schrock remembered asking the crew if he could stay in town because he could hardly walk.

Local residents described Schrock as the product of “the hills of Pennsylvania,” hard- working and tough-minded, viewing the word “can’t” as one would a bully in the playground.

Carl Schrock said he sees family and friendship and God as the real power in life. And he feels Gray’s uniqueness.

“I have a place. I haven’t felt (that) anywhere else,” he said.

“The word ‘Gray,’ it just brings back real good memories, real good memories. Playing baseball, even going to school. The memories and the feelings make me want to help out there a little bit.”

## Gray Community Club

Not too long ago, Schrock said, the vibrancy of the neighborhood was in jeopardy.

Just a few businesses remained. Many of the families who were part of Gray during the height of “King Coal” had moved on or died out. More homes became empty and debilitated.

Even the community park — the town’s gathering place — began to fall into disrepair.

“Grass and weeds sprouted in the infield, rain puddles



Gray’s only remaining church.

PHOTO: JUDY D.J. ELLICH/  
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PHOTO: JUDY D.J. ELLICH/DAILY AMERICAN

A common scene from the village’s residences in Gray.

formed and trash collected along the fences and in the dugout,” said the Rev. Greg Knupp, secretary of the Gray Community Club. “More animals than people spent time on the field.”

Those who stayed kept using it though, even when the equipment fell apart and the ball field became almost unrecognizable.

Members of the Gray Community Club, a nonprofit organization formed by the neighborhood residents in 1956 to steward the community’s local common properties, have kept the neighborhood and its community park’s viability in its sights.

The population slump — and a corresponding lack of funds — diminished members’ ability to upgrade the park.

“The park was starting to fall apart,” said Louis Lepley, who grew up in Gray and works as the superintendent of

North Star School District, the same district that Gray students attend.

Schrock wanted today’s generation of kids to be able to ride bikes and play ball with other neighborhood kids; to taste every sweet known to man and woman loaded on the picnic tables during potluck dinners; and to dream of a future that includes other places, other adventures.

Something had to be done.

## Revitalizing Gray

As a boy running with friends through the streets and yards of Gray, Schrock had no idea he would one day be able to give back to the neighborhood that helped make him who he is.

But in recent years he has given many thousands of dollars to the community, some of it to revitalize his hometown community park.

Members of the Gray Community Club have invested their own money in addition to donations from Schrock and others, small businesses, one major corporation and several community service organizations to bring back Gray’s heart.

“Volunteer labor transformed the infield into a playable ball diamond. Utility poles and safety netting in left field protect the post office from fly balls,” Knupp said.

“There is more work to be done, including continued upgrades to the dugouts, both infield and outfield, more safety measures and some ‘fan conveniences.’”

The village of Gray welcomes visitors who use its park. It has no fixed boundaries when it comes to kids, especially those who attend the nearby North Star School District.

Because the community park is open to others in the school district, the school’s maintenance crew helps out there by using a roller for a firm and faster surface for the youthful ball players.

Schrock believes in education as a way to open doors of

## Daily American continued

opportunity for children and he has become the financial backbone of North Star School District's science, technology, engineering and mathematics program, giving approximately \$70,000. The response from the school kids, he said, is meaningful.

"I just love to see ... the little kids with a sparkle in their eyes," he said. "They are just so happy and the poise they have and the interest they have when they want to show you what they are doing."

Schrock's contributions cannot be underestimated, Lepley said.

"The money and the attention that he's brought back to that old mining town is very important and will be important to future generations of kids," he said. "Mr. Schrock's generosity to Gray ... for generations will be feeling the effects of what he done for the community park."

But revitalizing the park — and keeping the neighborhood thriving — takes a whole community.

"I think the one thing that makes a difference between Gray and other towns is that we have been blessed with people who care about the community and put their own resources into making it a better place to live," Knupp said.

There was a time, a few years back, when the kids could not use the swing set in the community park because of its poor condition. Bob Montgomery, a welder, his three grandsons and another Gray resident, Paul Marker, rebuilt the swing set where children play now, first erecting the structure in the family's yard.

It was a sight his wife, Gwen, said she will not forget: "There was my husband walking in front of our grandsons carrying the swing set, and Bob was pushing aside any wires he could find so the swing set wouldn't get tangled" on its way to its final destination in the corner of the community park.

"We are a family that when one needs we are all there," she added. She could have been discussing other families of Gray.

Bob Montgomery also took it upon himself to mow the grass at the bottom of the main loop to where people still enter and exit and have for years. Residents Don and Cora Brant and Ralph and Dottie Geiyyer also for years could be seen weekly on their four mowers, cutting the grass and weeding at the baseball diamond and the ball field.

"They all did it to keep the town nice," Gwen Montgomery said.

Since Bob Montgomery's death about four years ago, two of his grandsons, who reside in Gray, have taken over the community mowing project. His third grandson moved north in the state.

"This has happened for decades as residents have served on the Gray Community Club; others have volunteered their own time to maintain the memorial, playground and ball field, while others have mowed the common areas including the roadsides on the way into town and the playground area — all at their own expense," said Knupp, who is pastor at North Ridge Baptist Church of Friedens, another former coal-mining town in Somerset County.



PHOTO: JUDY D.J. ELLICH/DAILY AMERICAN

**A view of the playground and ball field from the top of Main Street in Gray.**

The large Gray Community Center, where Schrock attended grade school, was owned by the school district and sold to the Gray Community Club when having a school there was no longer viable. The building was recently sold by the nonprofit for \$10,000 to a local family, and Knupp said the funds will be reinvested into the playground, picnic and ball field area.

Meanwhile, Jenner Township has acquired funding to upgrade Gray's sewage system, according to county officials. Gray also has a water authority that works with neighboring communities to bring them water. Authority members meet in one of the homes clustered around the park.

And there's talk about bringing back the beloved community picnic at the park, last held in 2006.

### The future of Gray

For Gray, invisible threads keep local children, young and old, connected to their roots, pulling them back when the world tries to make them forget who they are and stretching to wrap around the next generation.

Reinvesting in the park and the neighborhood has helped usher in a new generation of young families and convinced others to stay put, some residents said.

Approximately one-third of the people in Gray are children, according to the 2020 U.S. Census, and men and women make up the remainder in equal numbers.

"I haven't seen so many kids in a really long time," Sopich said.

The community park has hosted Little League games, church softball groups and junior football teams, Knupp said. But the park is more than a place to play and gather: it's a living time capsule. The old school bell and a memorial listing military veterans who called Gray home have been lovingly placed near the picnic area.

When visiting the area, Schrock has noticed the sound of renewed laughter and chatter of children that hasn't been heard for some time.

With the boost of young families, he said, there is renewed hope — not only in continuing Gray's legacy, but creating a new one.

### Legacy and future, united

Gwen Montgomery and husband Bob returned to their house after living in New York state for 10 years.

"We just wanted to come home," she said. "There is nothing like family."

Bob grew up in Gray. Gwen grew up in Boswell. Her friends in Gray use to tease her about coming from "the big city," she said with a laugh.

The Montgomerys raised their four children in Gray. Their grandsons — Jeremy Montgomery and Cory Montgomery — and their families live in Gray.

When her husband died, she didn't know what to do. But she knew leaving wasn't an option.

"Where would I go?" she said. "I had friends all around me. I had my grandsons in Gray."

And she has her memories, in this place that will always be home.

Here in Gray, parents' and grandparents' voices ring out, calling the children by name to come inside. It's time for dinner, time for homework, time to be part of a family gathering.

"If you are family and if you are looking for a safe community for a child, that park is a big attraction," Lepley said. "Going over there, you have a baseball field well-maintained and new park equipment, swing sets."

On a warm evening, you may spot at least one of the Knupps' five children with other kids at play in the park. You might even see the pastor himself throwing a football.

"It always get back to the same thing. My experiences were always good in Gray," Schrock said. "So many things comes to mind, skiing and sliding on what we thought was big mountains, playing ball in the summer. We always had something to do."

Kids today have exchanged bicycles for all-terrain vehicles and computers for writing tablets, but when it comes to playing games in the park or pride in their hometown, the same remains.

"Gray may be small, but it really is a great place to call home," Knupp said.

*Follow Judy D.J. Ellich on Twitter at @dajudye.*

*Published March 10, 2022*





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## For transgender people in Butler County, community and resources vary

By Julia Maruca  
and  
Joey Ressler

Northern Butler County resident fAe gibson has spent a good chunk of his life on a remote, bucolic farm in northern Butler County just outside of Eau Claire.

He and his brother are the eighth generation to grow up on the farm, which is located at one of the highest elevations in Butler County. His family is surrounded by the farm's goats, guinea fowl, dogs and stray cats.

"My dad is very attached to the farm, but so are my brother and I, you know, growing up there and really being a part of the land," he said.

gibson, who is transgender, moved back to the farm in 2007 after living for a time in California. He works in his family's medical practice, and coaches high school track and field.

For gibson and other transgender people in Butler County, finding community and accessing resources in a rural context presents its own challenges.

"Trans visibility in Butler is tricky," gibson said. "I can't say that I'm always out and proud and loud. However I do try to be my authentic self as much as possible."

### Out in a small community

gibson said he is close with his family, and likes living in proximity to them.

"I have lived all over the place, but I always end up back here," gibson said. "My family is pretty amazing, and they are very supportive and loving. They're just great people. I really enjoy spending time with them. I have friends all over the country, which makes it hard, but it makes it easier to travel because living here is more affordable."

Since the population is further spread out in Butler County, gibson said, it can sometimes be less likely that an average person will have had as many interactions with people in the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community.

"It's hard to get things galvanized, because it just kind of loses traction, it just kind of fizzles out," he said.

In terms of resources for trans people in the county, gibson says things can be "sparse."



JOSEPH RESSLER/BUTLER EAGLE

fAe gibson walks through a field on his family farm in northern Butler County. gibson is part of the eighth generation to grow up on the farm.

"I do think being in a smaller community and being out and being visible makes an impact, so that other people like me are like, 'oh, maybe I don't have to be as scared,'" he said. "And it's been a pleasant surprise, being in this community and being well received. You know, I, thank goodness, haven't had hate spewed toward me, which is remarkable, actually."

gibson described himself as lucky to have a lot of support, especially when trans people, particularly trans women of color, often face backlash and violence across the country.

"It has been eye opening to me in a good way," he said. "I have been supported and loved, and I know I'm one of the outliers, because a lot of people experience hate, and all of the stories in media show transgender people having violence towards them."

While there are fewer LGBT activism and community groups active in Butler County than in other areas, the

smaller presence doesn't mean there are not LGBT people of all sorts in the county, gibson said.

"In rural areas, queer people are a part of the tapestry," he said. "We're cousins, aunts, uncles, moms, dads, brothers, sisters — there are members of many peoples families who are in the queer community, it's just not talked about. It's not like we aren't here."

### Resources for veterans

At the Butler VA Health Care System, LGBTQ+ veteran care coordinator Krystal Anspach has made it her goal to make the VA a welcoming place for veterans who are transgender.

The VA offers mental health services, creative arts therapy, prosthetics, hormone therapy, HIV and sexually transmitted disease testing, and other prevention, screening, wellness and testing services to veterans who

*Continued on next page*



## Butler Eagle continued

need it, according to its website. Other services are also available through the Butler VA's partnership with the Pittsburgh VA.

"It breaks my heart for the ones who have really struggled, and every one of my veterans just want to be who they are, inside and out," Anspach said. "It is really my whole role at the VA, especially in Butler, to not only change the culture, but to make sure we have the most welcoming environment, and make sure that our veterans know, of any gender, race, or sexual identity, that we only want the best for you."

Anspach is also working on putting together a library of resources at the VA office for transgender veterans and their families.

"I want to make sure my veterans are able to live the life they want to live," she said. "In the future, we hope to have some services for spouses and children of trans veterans. It's a big change."

Alongside more formal health care, Anspach and the VA have brought other events to raise awareness and visibility. In June, during the previous years of the coronavirus pandemic, the VA held a virtual Pride celebration with guest speakers.

"Having this virtual program, where every day there was another speaker and another program and more information and more resources and more sharing, the more we do that, the more everything is going to really change culturally towards LGBTQ and transgender care," Anspach said.

### Helping others feel welcome

At Slippery Rock University a number of organizations advocate for LGBT-related issues. The Pride Center offers services to LGBT students, and the President's Commission on Gender Identity & Expression and Sexual Orientation advises the school's administration on policy that impacts the whole university.

The commission helped set up resources like its Chosen First Name Policy for students and faculty to be able to use their chosen first names in some situations without having legally changed their names.

"When we noticed the damage that not having a chosen name policy was doing, and needing to educate the campus community about how difficult it is to get a legal name change, and that there are places we can use chosen names, that was an example of one initiative (we helped with)," said Emily Keener, an assistant professor at Slippery Rock involved with the commission who studies



fAe gibson takes the pulse of Marietta Carney, of Butler, before a pain relief treatment in Butler. "He has done so much for me," said Carney, who is a regular patient.

PHOTO: JOSEPH RESSLER/  
BUTLER EAGLE

gender and psychology. "It's the education and advocacy around those kinds of inclusive and equitable policies."

Keener also includes language on class syllabi to let students know that they are welcome in class, and encourages colleagues and students to include their pronouns in emails. Keener uses they/them pronouns.

"The syllabus is one way to communicate to students that this space is going to be inclusive of all," they said.

Acceptance for LGBT students can be a situation where "lives are at stake," Keener added.

"When people aren't accepted for who they are and aren't allowed to live as their authentic self, it's very damaging. That's why suicide rates are very high in the trans community," Keener said. "The cure for that is acceptance and affirmation. Just saying, 'I'm not going to question your identity, and I'm going to let you live your authentic life.' When we do that for people, they survive."

In the midst of an increasing wave of legislation across the country that limits trans people's ability to participate in sports or access health services, the subject weighs heavily on many members of the LGBT community.

In Pennsylvania, the "Fairness in Women's Sports Act" bill, which would ban transgender women from participating in women's sports in public schools, passed in the state House of Representatives on April 12, though Gov. Tom Wolf said on Twitter that the bill "won't get past (his) desk." The bill passed the Pennsylvania Senate Committee at the end of May.

"As a university community, and the community of people who do (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work and social justice work on this campus, we are very aware of the threats on diversity, equity, and inclusion," Keener said. "We're paying attention to that as it relates to trans and LGBTQ issues more broadly, and also race issues, and also from an intersectional perspective."

Keener described an on-campus diversity, equity, and inclusion component that is now included in the Rock Studies general education program at Slippery Rock.

"I think (the diversity, equity and inclusion program) also signals to the LGBTQ community and other marginalized communities that we're not part of all that rhetoric," Keener said.

*Published June 4, 2022*

# why newspapers?

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Source: Public Opinion Strategies, PNA Benchmark Survey, 2022



# Chestnut Hill Local

## More check fraud on the Hill

By Tom Beck

A Mt. Airy couple and a Springfield Township woman reached out to the Local last week to report checks they said were stolen from the USPS collection box in front of the Market Square Post Office on Crittenden Street in Chestnut Hill.

The sources asked the Local to withhold their names.

The first source, who lives in Mt. Airy, said she started closely monitoring check withdrawals because of the Local's reporting on the fraud issue.

"I recognized it from the stories you'd done," the woman said, "and I said 'Oh my God, it happened to us too.'"

The check was written on July 2 and mailed likely the next day, the source said. It was written for \$254.40 and addressed to a landscaping company hired by the woman and her husband. The check cleared on July 15, but when the couple saw a picture of the check on their online banking statement, the payee line didn't contain the landscaping company. Instead, it contained the name "Sanai Parker" nearly the same as an earlier check the Local published, which read "Sinai Parker."

"The handwriting on our check is virtually the same," the source said. "It's unsettling and disturbing and annoying."

The rest of the check is in the source's handwriting.

"The only thing that was changed was the payee," she said.

The source said she reached out to her bank, PNC Bank, which didn't advise her to close out her account.

The bank "reassured me that the rest of my bank account seemed to be in order," she said.

"We still use checks, but not as many as we did. Maybe we should use fewer."

**SPRINGFIELD RESIDENT**

The source said that because of the Local's reporting, she had already started to write fewer checks. Historically, she had been reluctant to make payments online.

"That always seems chancy to me," she said, "but I'm now understanding that that may be better."

Unfortunately for the source, her landscaping bill is one of the few that can't be paid online.

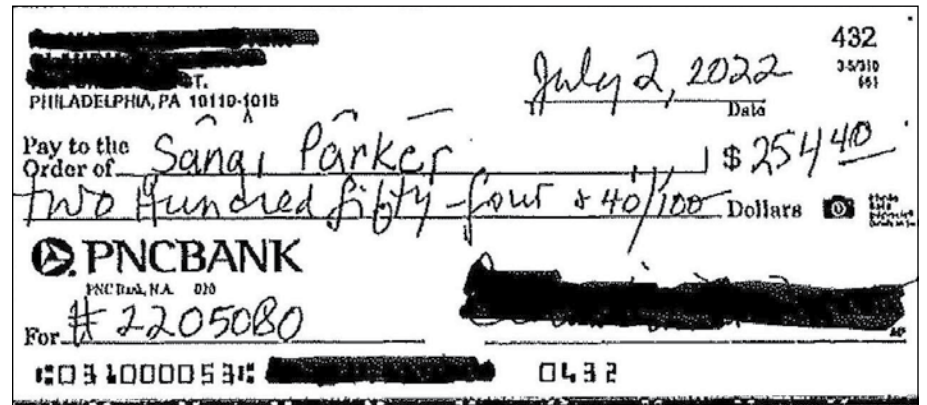
"I don't know if I have another way of paying the landscape guy," she said. "He sends a bill and asks for it to be sent back [via a check]."

Still, the source's recent stolen and washed check has encouraged her to find ways around writing checks.

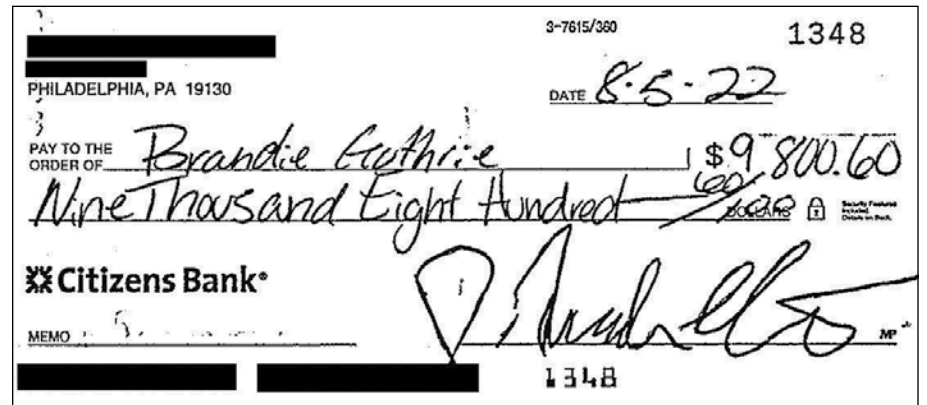
"We still use checks, but not as many as we did," she said. "Maybe we should use fewer."

The Springfield woman said that an \$89 check for a sewer bill her husband mailed outside of Market Square Post Office on July 30 was stolen and washed for \$9,800.60. The check cleared Friday, Aug. 6. She woke up Saturday morning to find that a legitimate check she had written had bounced.

"We saw there were no funds in the account and then [my husband] saw the previous day there was a check written for \$9,800," said the source, who lives just across the city limits in Wyndmoor.



Sanai Parker checks: A source in Mt. Airy says she had a check stolen, washed and the name "Sanai Parker" written on the payee line in the exact same handwriting that wrote "Sinai Parker" on a previous check shown to the Local.



A Springfield Township source mailed this check from the Market Square Post Office.

The source reported the incident to the Postal Inspection Service and the Springfield Township Police. She also reached out to officials at her bank, Citizens Bank, who told her "they're familiar with this happening."

The source said she'd been following the Local's coverage of stolen checks and stopped mailing as many as a result. The

problem is that she's almost as wary of online payments. She had been a landlord in the past and used a "Zelle-like" online service to collect rent from her tenants. The service was a victim of a scam and she lost money as a result.

"It's just frustrating," she said.

Published Aug. 11, 2022



## Meeting students' needs

School districts have various structures in place to meet basic student needs

**By Joseph Cress**  
Sentinel Reporter

A student walks into the school office blurry-eyed from a lack of sleep. He was up all night worried about his parents. His dad took off following an argument with mom.

In another building, a teenager struggles to stay focused in class. The teacher responds with a bag of snacks providing a quick fix of energy until lunch.

Every day in schools across Cumberland County, basic needs like food, clothing, hygiene and safety are being addressed on the spot or over time to remove distractions and to clear the way for learning.

"As I think about it, in the course of my career, schools have always been positioned to help meet basic needs," said Kevin Roberts, superintendent of Big Spring School District.

"The major change over the last 10 or so years is that the needs have continued to increase," Roberts said. "As a result, we had to build systems to support kids."

### Identifying need

The individual effort of a teacher, staff member or administrator is still an important component to the overall structure. Each can be alert to red flags, make referrals to social workers or plug an immediate need with items drawn from a building inventory of food, clothing, hygiene items, school supplies and other necessities.

"They know what to do when there's a child in need," said Christina Spielbauer, superintendent of the Carlisle Area School District. "They just get it done."

Signs of need include the student being hungry, tired or wearing clothing that is dirty or unkempt. Other red flags include changes in behavior, mood or personality, a sudden dip in grades, or an unwillingness to turn in homework.

"If they are seeing signs, we encourage



Danae Klock, counselor at Yellow Breeches Middle School, left, and Angelina Romano, social worker for the South Middleton School District, discuss the wide variety of items they have at the school for students in need.

people to call the school and talk to its principal," Spielbauer said. "Share those concerns so we can help support the child and their family."

Danae Klock, a counselor at Yellow Breeches Middle School with the South Middleton School District, has advice for the general public who want to help students in need.

"We don't want to stigmatize," Klock said. "Being a good neighbor is what it boils down to. If you know someone on your street, talk with them. Build a relationship with them. Understand their story and how you can be a support."

### Meeting needs

Each system not only strives to identify students, but to put into place channels of resource delivery that connect families to government agencies and social service organizations.

In Big Spring, educators work as a team to develop a plan, often for each student, that holds the system accountable while evaluating progress, Roberts said.

In South Middleton, there has been a greater emphasis lately on tracking and documenting ongoing needs as a student advances from one building to the next, Klock said. This is especially important in cases where a family has children in different schools.

"The parent may have had separate conversations with principals," Klock said. "We want to make sure everyone is operating off the same page."

The most common form of direct support from school districts is the lunch and breakfast program. Providing meals to students five days a week helps to relieve some of the strain felt by families. Children from economically disadvantaged households can qualify for free or reduced price meals.

"If you ever tried to learn something on an empty stomach, you really can't because your brain is on overdrive," Klock said. "It's working very hard, but it's hungry."

While meals on weekdays are covered, many families need support to carry them over the weekend. In local school districts,

that takes the form of food packs that are sent home with students to fill in the gaps on Saturday and Sunday.

### Playing a part

Many school districts have organized charitable foundations that support needy families. In Big Spring, there is Operation Bulldog that provides scholarship money to students who can't afford to pay the cost of a field trip or the fee to take an Advanced Placement test.

At South Middleton, work is underway to stock a room at Yellow Breeches Middle School with an inventory of donated shoes, household items and gently used clothing that can be given out to address the needs of students, Klock said. Earlier this year, letters went out to district families asking them if they wanted to be notified of what programs become available, she said.

"At the middle school, we do a drive where students bring in food," Klock said. "It has been very successful. Out of that, we create Thanksgiving boxes for our families." Leftover items are donated to the Project SHARE foodbank in Carlisle.

The best way to help students and their families is to support already existing social service organizations and programs. In recent years, the United Way of Carlisle & Cumberland County has hosted a Fill the Bus campaign in the summer where school supplies and backpacks are donated by residents.

Extra supplies and backpacks are often distributed among Carlisle area schools to distribute to students as needs arise, Spielbauer said. "We are blessed that we have an amazing community with so many organizations that support not only our students but their families."

She cited as examples Project SHARE, Hope Station and the United Way.

*Published Nov. 24, 2021*

# THE LION'S ROAR

Penn State Donald. P. Bellisario College of Communications

## TEN YEARS LATER

### Key figures remember moments, lessons from Sandusky scandal

By Preston Shoemaker

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — It was quiet at the beginning of the week that changed everything for Penn State.

The morning of Nov. 5, 2011, came with a chill in the air, and a football bye week meant Penn State's campus was unusually low key for an autumn Saturday.

By the time the Nittany Lions walked off the field of Beaver Stadium after a loss to Nebraska the following weekend, that serenity would be a memory.

A prominent, long-tenured, and now retired defensive coordinator had been arrested on charges of sexually abusing boys, dominating the national news.

A football coach with more than 60 years of service to Penn State had been terminated over the phone. A highly regarded university president no longer held his position.

A throng of media had overrun State College, chasing the dual stories of the Jerry Sandusky criminal case and the fall of the winningest major college football coach in America, Joe Paterno. The student body reacted to it all by rioting.

As the 10th anniversary of the Sandusky scandal passes, it's a moment to look back and examine what stands out from Penn State's worst moment. This is the story of those infamous November days, told through the memories of key individuals in and around the university who were directly impacted.

#### "An Above-the-Fold Story"

While driving through Ohio on Nov. 4, Jay Paterno's phone rang. The Penn State quarterbacks coach, and Joe's son, was on a recruiting trip that Friday night, visiting some high schools and a playoff game. On the other end of the line, his brother, Scott,



PHOTO BY JOHN BEALE

Then Penn State President Graham Spanier with Joe Paterno.

spoke in a concerned tone about the documents charging Sandusky.

"It is about to hit," Jay recalled Scott saying. "The presentments are really, really bad."

The younger brother sensed his family's world was about to change, he just couldn't tell how much.

Jay had grown up as a part of the Penn State community, riding his bike to Berkey

football in a variety of roles across the country. He returned in 1995 and had been on Penn State's coaching staff for 16 years. When he got the invitation to come home, he was excited.

"It was just phenomenal," Paterno said in a recent interview. "The things that he and I may have missed out on as father and son, I felt like I gained a lot of that back as an adult."

As he made his way across the state, Paterno couldn't stop thinking about his brother's message. News had broken earlier that year, in March, that Sandusky was under a grand jury investigation, but prosecutors managed to keep what they were doing quiet ever since.

Jay Paterno received a call Saturday morning from Pete Thamel of The New York Times, asking for a comment on Sandusky's arrest. Paterno explained that he did not fully know what was going on, as he was returning from Ohio. Thamel's response has resonated with Paterno to this day.

"Well," the reporter said, "this is an above-the-fold story."

The public would hear the details of the investigation later that day with Sandusky's arrest.

The initial charges, later expanded, accused Sandusky of serial sex abuse of children over a period of 15 years, in various locations including Penn State's campus. He faced dozens of charges.

Even more shocking to the public, and a focus of public attention, was a 2001 allegation from graduate assistant Mike McQueary.

McQueary had shared the details of what he thought to be sexual activity between

Creamery and going to Mass on campus every week. Despite being from such a prominent family, Paterno and his siblings were kept relatively out of the spotlight. They weren't on TV or around the field after games. When their father came home, conversations centered around school or daily life, but rarely football.

After a playing career at Penn State, Jay left Happy Valley for five years, coaching

*Continued on next page*



# The Lion's Roar continued

Sandusky and a boy in the showers of the football building, hearing “rhythmic, slapping sounds.” He reported the sighting to Joe Paterno, who passed it along to athletic director Tim Curley, his supervisor.

McQueary was interviewed a week later by Curley and Penn State vice president Gary Schultz, and they briefed then university President Graham Spanier in some fashion, but police were not notified.

The national reaction was swift.

Audrey Snyder, now a sports writer for The Athletic, was a senior journalism student freelancing at the time for USA Today. She said that many major news outlets called upon students that week to help them be eyes on the ground as reporters were sent in.

“I remember walking up through campus and there were just television cameras lined up. It was unlike anything I’ve ever seen,” Snyder said. “It was just a who’s who of national reporters flocking to town and everybody is jostling for this story, but nobody really knows what is going on.”

Thamel was right. It was an above-the-fold story. Happy Valley had become the center of breaking news coverage, and Penn State was in the center of the center.

## ‘I’m Coming to Town to Take Joe Down’

Even just a decade later, it’s hard to truly understand how important Joe Paterno was to Penn State and to college football.

Over his 62 years on the Penn State staff, and 46 seasons as the head coach, the Nittany Lions won two national championships and three Big Ten titles. Paterno’s 409 victories established him as one of the greatest coaches in the history of the sport.

But it was more than the number of wins. It was how Penn State won, his supporters said, the right way. Paterno was famous for valuing the education of his players. Donations from he and his wife, Sue, expanded the school library. He turned down a lucrative offer from the NFL’s New England Patriots in the early 1970s to stay in the community.

He once quipped that he didn’t want to leave the college game to the “Barry Switzers and Jackie Sherrills of this world,” two coaches with a reputation for playing loose with discipline and NCAA regulations.

Quarterback Matt McGloin spent four years learning from Paterno. He said that Penn State’s coach prided himself on



PHOTOS BY ANDY COLWELL

ABOVE: Penn State students gather at the statue of Joe Paterno outside the football stadium minutes after the Penn State Board of Trustees announced Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2011, that Paterno would no longer be Penn State’s coach, effective immediately.

BELOW: The team takes the field for the Nov. 12, 2011, game against Nebraska. It was the first game in decades that Penn State played without Joe Paterno as head coach.



teaching lessons that players would use not only on the field, but later in life.

“It never got old playing for Joe,” said McGloin, who went on to spend four years in the NFL. “I did my best to try to be a sponge and soak up as much football and life knowledge as I could.”

On campus, Paterno walked to work every day and often interacted with students and faculty on campus. When his team had a breakout year in 2005 after a run of poor seasons, the number of Penn

State freshmen spiked the following autumn.

“Joe continued to coach football as long as he did, not because he felt he needed to win more games but it was the window it gave him to support the university more broadly,” Spanier said recently in an interview at his home in State College. “He was very dedicated to the academic mission and fundraising efforts of the university.”

Nearing his 85th birthday before the start

of the 2011 season, Paterno knew that his coaching days were coming to an end. A private signed agreement was completed the summer before the season between the university administration and Paterno, stating that he would retire at the end of the season and the coach would announce it, Spanier said.

According to Jay Paterno, his father was not looking for a farewell tour. He wanted the focus to be about the players and that season. Outside of his family, Jay said only a few people knew of his intentions to retire.

As the week after Sanusky’s arrest started to unfold, Paterno began his preparations for the matchup against Nebraska. But by Monday, Curley and Schultz had been indicted on perjury charges, only making the situation hotter.

Journalists pouring into town prepared themselves for statements from Penn State’s head coach at his weekly Tuesday afternoon news conference. Snyder recalled standing in line with dozens of journalists outside Beaver Stadium for nearly two hours that afternoon.

However, the immediate response from the university was to shut down from a public relations standpoint. The news conference was canceled, leaving scores of journalists outside Beaver Stadium now looking for their own break on the story.

Malcolm Moran, a prominent national sports writer who served as the Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society at Penn State from 2007 to 2012, said that the pressure for digital content drove the media to find a story to cover.

“The need to feed the beast was clouding people’s judgments,” Moran said. The cancelled press conference “was the moment the world came off its axis. The most visible person in the university culture was mute.”

Penn State and Paterno quickly became the focus of the story. The Paterno family believes some looked to take it a step further than breaking news.

“One media guy, and I won’t say who, basically said ‘I’m coming to town to take Joe down,’” Jay Paterno remembered. “What is moving the needle and creating the most clicks? Every time they put Joe Paterno in the story, it does. He became a lens for people to view the story through.”

On Wednesday morning, the elder Paterno released a statement announcing

*Continued on next page*

# The Lion's Roar continued

he would retire at the end of the season. In this statement, he said of the Sandusky case, "It is one of the great sorrows of my life. With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more."

It was the first big moment on an eventful day.

## 'You Can't Take the University Out of Us'

A week before the lowest of lows came the highest of highs. Paterno earned win No. 409 on a snowy Saturday in Beaver Stadium. He was the all-time leader in wins at the highest level of college football.

Paterno coached from the press box that day, as he did for most of the season after sustaining hairline fractures in his hip and pelvis in a preseason collision at practice.

Also looking on from various spots around Beaver Stadium that day were Spanier, Curley and Sandusky.

Following the game, Spanier and Curley posed with Paterno and presented him with a plaque that read: Joe Paterno. Educator of Men. Winningest Coach. Division I Football.

Two weeks later, all three would be out of a job.

Similar to Paterno, Spanier was embedded in the Penn State community in a way that was uncommon for a university president.

He loved his job and kept his finger on the pulse of student life. Living in residence halls at the beginning of every school year and playing the washboard in a Dixieland band downtown were just a couple of Spanier's unique habits.

Spanier described his relationship with Paterno as the best it could have possibly been between a university president and head football coach. Spanier chuckled as he recalled it. "We didn't go to the movies together, but we had a very good working relationship," he said.

The two would recruit donors for the university, and Spanier referred to him as a great supporter who was "all in" for Penn State.

Throughout the grand jury investigation, and in a statement on the day Sandusky was arrested, Spanier had given his full support to Curley and Schultz. After their arraignments, this decision reflected poorly on the president. With tensions rising, the board of trustees wanted to manage the crisis themselves, as opposed to the university administration.

This all came to a head for Spanier around the same time Paterno announced his intentions to retire on Nov. 9. The school president handed in his letter of resignation to the board of trustees. He had made the decision the day before, he recalled, saying that although board members had wished he would not quit, they respected his decision and said he would be treated well.

"It was my decision, but I'm not sure the outcome would have been any different," Spanier said. "It became untenable for me to continue and it might have ended up that way in any case."

Spanier has argued ever since that he was innocent of wrongdoing in the case. But he ultimately lost a protracted legal battle with prosecutors and was convicted on a single misdemeanor count of child endangerment as several other charges were either thrown out or ended in acquittal. He served a short jail term this year.

Spanier said he carries no ill will toward the university and remains a supporter of Penn State to this day, although he wishes the relationship between the two could be stronger.

"You can take us out of the university," Spanier said, referring to himself and the Paterno family. "But you can't take the university out of us."

## 'I Can't Tell Them What I Know'

From the first time that the Sandusky case came across the desk of then-state Attorney General Tom Corbett in 2009, he knew that it would not be pretty.

Corbett worked on the case from 2009 until he became Pennsylvania governor in January 2011. Through those two years, the Republican prosecutor searched for witnesses and resources, building a case against Sandusky. In the beginning, he did not have enough agents to work solely on the investigation. That ultimately changed over time.

It is not uncommon for active grand jury cases to remain confidential for years until the charges are made public. As Corbett began the transition from attorney general to governor, he was tasked with selecting his replacement, knowing that person would receive all of the cases he had started.

He chose Linda Kelly, whom he had worked with since the 1970s. The two had tried cases similar to Sandusky's in the past, and his confidence in her abilities and experience made her the perfect candidate in his mind.



PHOTO BY ANDY COLWELL

Pennsylvania State Police and Attorney General Office officials take former Penn State football defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky to his arraignment hearing in the office of District Justice Leslie A. Dutchcot in State College, on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011.

Because Corbett was sworn to the grand jury, he could not tell anyone about this case, so Kelly did not know about the Sandusky investigation until early 2011. She stayed with it through Sandusky's conviction more than a year later.

At the time, the governor of Pennsylvania held a voting role on the Penn State board of trustees. As Corbett worked with the trustees, and his representatives attended BOT meetings throughout 2011, he couldn't help but think of what was to come.

"One of the thoughts was I can't tell them what I know," Corbett said in an interview at his Pittsburgh office. "I would be very surprised if (the board of trustees) knew, and the reaction was clear that they didn't."

Corbett learned of the Sandusky charges on the radio that Saturday as he was traveling out of state. On Nov. 9, after numerous discussions among other members of the board, Corbett was asked to participate in an emergency meeting, where important decisions were being made, including the status of Paterno's employment.

Corbett listened in on the phone from the governor's residence, 90 minutes away in Harrisburg. He recalled that he did not vote in this meeting because he felt it would have been inappropriate, given his former job, but he shared two viewpoints just before the vote.

"Just before the vote I said, 'Number one, I wish Joe would have done more,'" he said. "And then, number two, I said you

have to remember the children.' That was it. I didn't tell them how to vote and in fact when the vote came I didn't vote."

After the conclusion of this meeting, the board of trustees announced that a news conference would be held that night at the Penn Stater hotel. What they failed to anticipate was the reaction to come from the town.

## 'The Scariest Situation We've Ever Been In'

By this time on Wednesday night, Nov. 9, news satellite trucks accompanied hundreds of journalists in State College. They made their way off of Penn State's campus toward Innovation Park about two miles away, where many reporters and crew members sat in a state of anticipation, waiting for an announcement of massive magnitude.

Around 10 p.m., the Penn State board of trustees held its first news conference regarding the matter, four days after the charges were released.

Inside a room at the Penn Stater hotel, the media was joined by stowaway football fans who had snuck into the room. This created a mixed reaction in the room as the announcement was read from vice chairman of the board John Surma: Spanier was no longer the president of the university, and Paterno no longer the head football coach, effective immediately.

"I was just stunned," Jay Paterno

*Continued on next page*



# The Lion's Roar continued

recalled. "I sat down with my wife and said 'I don't know if I'm going to make it until tomorrow, because if they want him out I'm pretty sure they want me out too.'"

Minutes before the news conference, Paterno had been fired over the phone as he sat inside his house just north of Penn State's campus.

Spanier recalled that he was very disappointed that the university fired Paterno and believed that there may have been ulterior motives at stake. "I think some members of the board of trustees were very angry that he announced (his retirement) rather than letting them make the decision," he said.

In a matter of minutes after the announcement, a crowd of several thousand furious protestors took to the streets of State College.

Then-captain and now State College police Chief John Gardner had been employed by the department since 1990. In his 31-plus years of service, nothing has compared to that night.

"I am not ashamed to sit here and say it was probably the scariest situation we've ever been in," Gardner said.

It was not the first time the police had dealt with a student-led riot. Procedure says to allow the crowd to have some time and to simply maintain order. Police are content to let the crowd demonstrate as long as it is not violent.

This tactic would not work on the night Paterno was fired.

Police were outnumbered nearly 50 to 1. Gardner described a buzz in the air that spread through the crowd. It was atypical for student riots.

"All I can say is there was anger that I'd never seen the depths of before like that," Gardner said.

With the crowd in excess of 5,000 individuals, "flash mob" technology was utilized, allowing students to use social media to clearly communicate better than the police could.

Gardner believed that the intense media coverage that night fueled the crowd. He recalled some journalists threw themselves into the middle of the chaos, inciting the crowd even more.

Signs and light poles were knocked to the streets. A local TV van was flipped over and set on fire. Large rocks were thrown at police officers as pepper spray was deployed on the crowd. This went on until shortly after 3 a.m. Thursday.



PHOTO BY JOHN BEALE

A light snow covers the statue of Joe Paterno on Jan. 29, 2012, a week after his death from lung cancer. Six months later the statue was removed by college officials.

The board of trustees gave no formal warning to the police department that it was about to announce Paterno's firing, which Gardner believes put officers at a disadvantage. The lack of notice paired with the poor timing of the incident – late at night – was described as the "perfect storm" by Gardner.

With the riots creating havoc, Corbett made the decision to go to State College. He arrived on Nov. 10 to try and get a handle on the reaction.

Corbett worked with the leaders of student organizations to host a news conference, giving the students the platform to take control of a spiraling situation. He said those students seized the opportunity better than the university could have, saying that the riots did not represent the student body as a whole.

"I was greatly impressed by the student leadership at Penn State," Corbett said. "It was their voice that really calmed everything for that period of time and kind of brought that period to somewhat of a concluding chapter."

## 'Revered Patriarch to Reviled Pariah'

Joe Paterno spent his first football Saturday away from Penn State in over 60 years in the hospital.

Things deteriorated quickly for the longtime Penn State coach. After coughing up blood for the second day in a row,

Paterno went to the hospital on the morning of Nov. 12, game day against Nebraska.

Jay recalled his sister having to walk Joe out into the garage and lay him down on the backseat of the car. She covered him with blankets to hide him from the media, got in the car and drove away.

This ruse was performed multiple times in the following days, but eventually the family announced the elder Paterno had lung cancer. He passed away in January 2012, just two months after his firing.

"You go from being a revered patriarch to a reviled pariah in a lot of people's minds just like that," Jay said, reflecting on those final months. "It was tough."

McGloin and a teammate went to the Paterno house a few days after the 17-14 Nebraska loss. It would be the last time the quarterback from Scranton would speak to his former coach.

"His concern was 'How are you guys doing?' It was always about us," McGloin said. "You don't get a lot of opportunities to see Joe in that setting. It is definitely one of the great memories that I have with Joe."

Sandusky would be sentenced to 30-to-60 years in prison, convicted of 45 charges of sexual abuse. Curley and Schultz each would plead guilty to a misdemeanor and, like Spanier, serve jail time.

Corbett would go on to become the first Pennsylvania governor in 40 years to fail to win re-election. Although he admits there were numerous factors that affected the

vote in 2014, he says his work on the Sandusky case did not help his re-election.

He recalled a story from about six months after he left office. While walking through a grocery store near his house, someone in a Penn State jacket pinpointed him and quickly approached.

"He goes 'You're Governor Corbett aren't you?' I said yeah. He replies 'We got you,'" Corbett recalled.

But, to the former governor, "It's not about me or Penn State, it was about the children."

## 'A Greater Appreciation'

In and around Penn State, feelings are still strong about the whole episode that began with Sandusky's arrest. Those feelings also vary, depending on the people and their roles and memories of the case.

Joe Paterno helped Penn State build its foundation on a model of what was termed "Success with Honor." His son, Jay, feels Sandusky's crimes were just that – his own. In Jay's eyes, his father was a good man who had a disservice done to his reputation that can never be fully reconciled.

"People have vilified a man who had 61 years of integrity," Jay said. "Unfortunately, they are canceling the wrong guy on this one."

Spanier's opinion is comparable. He says the Sandusky criminal case was portrayed in a way that led people across the country to make broad, sinister conclusions about Penn State that were simply not true.

"A lot of what was reported was not accurate, and that allowed a lot of people throughout the nation to come to conclusions that weren't justified," Spanier said. "(Some reporters) have since apologized to me for how they reported it and wish they could correct the record."

In the time since Sandusky's case broke open, three schools in the Big Ten have had major sex abuse cases come to light. It can happen anywhere, and at any time. Finding a positive side to a story like this is nearly impossible, but if the Sandusky scandal provided survivors with a greater willingness to step forward, Moran said, it would be one grace note.

"A greater appreciation for victims of all kinds of criminal activity and a greater understanding of what they are going through and the importance of listening to them," he said, "that would be a very healthy thing."

*Published Nov. 5, 2021*



## HARRISBURG'S UBIQUITOUS POET: **Marty Esworthy**



*A perpetually in motion 'Gentle Ben'  
of experimental poetics*

**By Randy Gross**

rgross@harrisburgmagazine.com

Think of this as one-part limerick, two parts paean, and three additional mind-blowing parts experimental performance piece. True, that's a lot of parts to swallow, but when the resulting poetical amalgamation comes attached with the name Maurice Esworthy, it's guaranteed to be an intoxicating brew. In other words, this ain't no Julie Andrews "just a spoonful of sugar" bitter pill of a profile. To the contrary, Marty (or, for his Facebook fans, Zuky Kunstweker I or II) is known to so many poets in the Greater Harrisburg world of versification - as an iconic writer, performer, and ubiquitous mentor - that he needs no introduction to those who frequent downtown, midtown, and almost-uptown coffee houses and art and music halls. It is because he is the sweet bit of cream in every finger-snapping wordsmith's cup of java (or the foamy head to every mug of craft-made beer), that he has been chosen as this month's Influencer. Therefore, allow us to introduce the Megaera-award-winning Marty Esworthy to those rare few in the 'burg who may not know him.

### **THE 50 STAGES OF MARTY**

*Basically it's like seeing a sunrise or shivering in the cold. The edges are very important. Do they become undifferentiated void or fall in tune with the rhythms of breathing?*

(from "Stages of Trance," published in *After the Aughts*, © 2018, Lost Alphabet LLC)

Okay, one might say that there have been

more than fifty Marty Esworthy stages - and the word "stage" can also have more than one connotation. The poetry impresario has certainly entered into an eclectic array of "periods" over the decades (think Picasso and his "blue" and "rose" periods, only even more colorful); and, at the same time, he has also performed his poetry - and, as a host, invited other poets to perform - on a multitude of platforms. No matter what period or platform, there has been one constant: the mic has always been open for writers of all creeds, color, and experience level. Moreover, Esworthy has always been a gentle, nurturing presence in the room.

After all, isn't that what a "teacher" should be?

### **TEACHER, TEACHER, TEACH ME MORE**

*Search for absolute zero. Peach blossoms, starry nights - to know no boundaries. The new urbane loneliness, yeah ... these are the things you are to me.*

(from "Life and Love Among the Amish," published in *Twenty-Six Javanese Proverbs*, © 2006, Iris G. Press)

It could be said that the path from child to adulthood was both urbane and lonely at times for Esworthy. The Harrisburg native's parents were well-read, and his grandfather was a schoolteacher, so his home environment was ripe with learning opportunities. There was just one problem: "I never understood the world," he says, describing his own ADD self-diagnosis,

*Continued on next page*



# Harrisburg Magazine continued

decades after such diagnoses even existed. “I never did well in school,” he continues, “and people were always mad at me.” One of the “mad” ones was a guidance counselor who proclaimed Esworthy to be a rebel, something which still makes him bristle.

His learning disability often led to isolation. “My parents didn’t know what to do with me,” he recalls, “and they would let me not go to church, because I said I would learn more by walking down by the river.” It was during one of those solitary walks, at age 7, that Esworthy would write his first verse - a playful song - serving as a precursor to his poetry.

“When I was in seventh grade, I had a really nice teacher who said ‘we’re gonna talk about poetry, and maybe write some poetry.’ So, I did that,” remembers Esworthy. “I wrote some stuff and then I had it published in the school newspaper, and from there on I was a poet. I mean, in the regard of my friends. It got me some respect. To get it published, that changed my life.”

Once out of school and faced with a bleak employment picture, Esworthy worked a couple of stock boy jobs. “But I didn’t know what was going on, so I could never do good in almost any job, because I’d have to follow directions. The only good stuff I did in life was stuff that I initiated. Like with the poetry thing [to come], or before that, in Baltimore, when I was a music lecturer.”

That’s right, following in his grandfather’s footsteps - even if unintended - Esworthy began to teach (“I was more of a musicologist,” he asserts). While still in Baltimore, his Army radio/TV training would also earn him a part-time DJ job (“I was Maurice the Mood Man, over-night on a black radio station,” he says with a chuckle), skills that would serve him well again when working at the now-defunct WMSP in Harrisburg (a Christian station located in the basement of Market Square Church).

Esworthy would also land a teaching position at a middle school in Westminster, MD; and served as a writer for Harry, an underground newspaper in Baltimore in the late 60s and early 70s that included the late political satirist and journalist P.J. O’Rourke (“Eat the Rich”) on its editorial staff. It was a period of extreme growth and change that occurred just before his return to Harrisburg.

“My poetry changed then,” he says. “Even when I first came [back] to

Harrisburg, I was writing the stuff like ‘oh I look at my grandmother’s chair ... and then I took a walk in the woods ... and then the end of the poem would be ‘and then I learned yada yada yada.’ And I thought, ‘well, that’s stupid.’ Because I realized how foolish it was to keep writing what you learned ... epiphanies and things like that. I mean, epiphanies are valid, I guess, but why write about them?”

His self-taught lessons are something he would eventually start imparting to other poets. But first, there was the matter of honing his “sword”-sharpening skills.

## WIELDING THE PAPER SWORD

*Poised. Rich curtains are hushed.  
under gold of streetlamp and furtive  
glance.  
At dawn. Levitation is like that. And  
overflow floods great tendrils of roof,  
because the entire garden is a plane of  
moonlight.  
Glow, look. Listen.*

*(from “Levitating FireEscape,” published in The Fox Chase Review, Summer 2011)*

The “sword” in this case isn’t of the Excalibur type, though The Paper Sword, a group that brought nationally renowned poets to the Art Association in Harrisburg for featured readings and held open readings for up-and-coming writers in the 1980s, retains an aura of the mythological in local circles. It’s legendary members over those years included Gene Hosey, Rick Kearns, Jack Veasey, Paco (Frank Miller), Tom Bickman, and, of course, Esworthy himself. “It was the only real game in town,” he recalls. “When I first came back to Harrisburg, I went to poetry things and so forth ... but they were all a bunch of old ladies and stuff. And that’s not bad, but they had different ideas about what poetry was like. It was just not a very comfortable place for me. I was always writing experimental stuff, of one sort or another, so The Paper Sword was a comfortable place for me.”

Meeting on Sunday afternoons originally, Esworthy would often be late for the gatherings (not a surprise, for those who know him). “They would say ‘where were you?’ and I would say ‘I was watching a football game’ and then everyone was shocked and didn’t like me for a while. (he laughs).”

Notwithstanding his tardiness, Esworthy wanted to fit in - while standing out - at those early Paper Sword readings. He explains, “so, I’m thinking ‘well, I can’t



PHOTO SUBMITTED

### Marty in his earlier days.

dress as hippie as these guys, so I’ll dress more dressy. And then Tom Bickman came, and he’s wearing a suit and a vest, and everything (laughs) and I couldn’t top him. So, then I went back to more casual attire.”

There was a lot of non-conformity versus conformity going on in those days - including in the world of poetry - and Esworthy was smack dab in the middle of it all. But he had a plan brewing. An “all-inclusive” one.

## POETRY THURSDAYS (BUT WHY NOT MONDAY OR TUESDAY?)

*Sure. Anyone can grow up to be  
President, or a color-commentator.  
Looking out on creation, like Shiva, yes!  
YES! Our drones  
shall rise above infinitives of all nations.  
Oops, there go/ another/ rubber tree  
plant.*

*(from “Totally Blown Away By Walmart’s Strip Mall-Everyman/Everyday Proclivities,” published in After the Aughts, © 2018, Lost Alphabet LLC)*

Not unexpectedly, poetry had already

been brewing - or percolating - even before the emergence of The Paper Sword, and much of it inside Esworthy’s own head. And he was creating enough of it that it necessitated the creation of a collective to promote poetry events in Harrisburg.

Or make that a Cartel. The Poetry Cartel (later to be called The Almost Uptown Poetry Cartel), co-founded with Michael Lear-Olimpi, currently a Communications & Journalism professor at Central Penn College, initially served as way to promote poetic “stuff” the two were doing at the Paul Robeson Center. Says Esworthy, “I wanted to call it a Cartel, as opposed to ‘my gig’ or ‘his gig,’ so it could be a group thing. At least that’s why I used the term.”

A “group thing” would soon become Esworthy’s thing, when he began hosting regular poetry readings that incorporated his customary style of making every poet feel relaxed and welcome to read (or not read). Starting in the late 90’s, he would embark on a string of venues almost too long to list, with the very first Poetry Thursdays being at the long-defunct Sweet Passions coffee shop at 1006 North Third Street.

“I inherited the gig,” he recalls. “There were two women [Tammi Hitchcock & Karen Wisotzky] and they were running a reading close to my house. But I never enjoyed hosting.”

And yet, host he did. Over the ensuing years, Poetry Thursdays would move - and move again. Stops after Sweet Passions would include the North Street Café, the Gamut Stage at Strawberry Square, the Deli Bean (also in Strawberry Square), Violet’s on Walnut, Sparky & Clark’s Coffee Shop, Susquehanna Art Museum (when it was on Market Street), The Crimson Frog (on the West Shore), Midtown Cinema, the Midtown Scholar Bookstore, and finally - Esworthy’s last gig before retiring last year - Hertrich Fine Art.

Why, do you ask, did Poetry Thursdays have so many homes? Explains Esworthy, “They [the venues] had different expectations of what it was. I would tell them ‘Just remember that poets are different than regular people: poets don’t spend money!’”

“Poetry Thursdays was a stupid name,” he continues. “If you’re moving from ‘one week you’re here, and then two weeks later you’re in another place’ ... but it was also a practical name.”

*Continued on next page*

Now renamed The Blacklisted Poets by new host Jeanette Amy Trout in an effort to not only continue but improve upon Esworthy's all-inclusive format ("everybody will be considered a 'blacklisted poet' here," she says, "a group of unanimous people"), Trout also pledges to build on her mentor's work with teaching poetry composition and literary performance - first with a series of workshops aimed at helping new readers overcome their stage jitters.

"It takes a while to get over nervousness," maintains Esworthy, "but Amy is working with people to learn how to present their poetry. Because there are a lot of little tricks. If you pick even two out of ten tricks, it's going to improve your reading."

## SOUND POETRY (and n-numerous n-nights of ng)

*I think everyday of Ng,  
for she is my obsession.  
I am always thinking of Ng.  
But I loves the waitresses  
very muchly. They knows  
what the boys like.  
Sometimes when I think  
of Ng, I listen to the  
aforementioned waitresses.  
Multi-tasking does not  
diminish the quality of  
my art. Hey, ars longa,  
know I'm sayin'?  
Viva Las Vegas.  
Love is a sad charade.  
I could rule the world if I...  
you know what I'm saying, eh wot?*

Marty Esworthy (posted to The Waitresses Forum, Saturday, 22 Feb 2003 02:03)

Uprooting his Poetry Thursdays group and moving from venue to venue didn't deter Esworthy from the pursuit of his own writing. His published books include Twenty-Six Javanese Proverbs (Iris G. Press, 2006), Uh Oh! The Object Looks Back (T&T Press, 2009), and After the Aughts (Lost Alphabet LLC, 2018).

And it also didn't stop him from further experimentation. One of his many so-called "periods" (and one that some may say he is still in today) is his "Sound Poetry" period. Also called "verse without words," Wikipedia defines sound poetry as "an artistic form bridging literacy and musical composition, in which the phonetic aspects of human speech are foregrounded instead of more conventional

semantic and syntactic values." Or, as Esworthy himself would say in his best performance voice, "bluenotes bopping from nine to ten on the night - that wondrous night the beatniks invented rockabilly & WTF! baby, baby-baby baby! bébé-bébé-bébé!- what, I mean WHAT be-came/ of the early me?"

"Besides," he continues, elaborating on the use (or ill-use) of prosody, "people totally waste sound."

Then, there was also his Ng period (1998-2003), or more specifically "Thinking of NG," a multi-year performance-art piece in the making, fueled by Esworthy's vow to think of NG - and ONLY think of her, never look at her - DAILY for five straight years. NG was the name he gave to an internet girl who was living her life publicly at the time ("some would say wantonly," he says) for all to see. This charmed him and became his "pure" obsession. Four public performances of his "Thinking of NG" epic would follow. (His many fans are hoping and praying for announcement of a new NG tour soon).

## MARTY'S LEGACY

*Even the dancers at the fountain in Italian Lake  
Wore a coating of snow that day  
suggesting  
that its name, "Dance of Eternal Spring"  
was no talisman against the onset of winter.*

(from "Right, said Fred," published in After the Aughts, © 2018, Lost Alphabet LLC)

It's springtime in the city. Hibernating poets are starting to emerge, starry-eyed, from HMAc's basement to recite in the courtyard once again. As a poetry host for 21 years, Esworthy has danced his own eternal dance, spurring poets to "awaken" like no one else in the Mid-State. Which begs the question: just what is his legacy? Perhaps that is best summed up with the words of the many poets the one-time Pushcart nominee has mentored, instructed (or maybe even driven to fits of jubilant keyboard playing) ...

## PRAISE FOR ESWORTHY:

When I think of Poetry and Spoken Word Ambassadors in Central Pennsylvania, Marty Esworthy is always at the top of the list. Marty is poetry in the flesh. He smiles, walks, and talks like a Poet. Marty

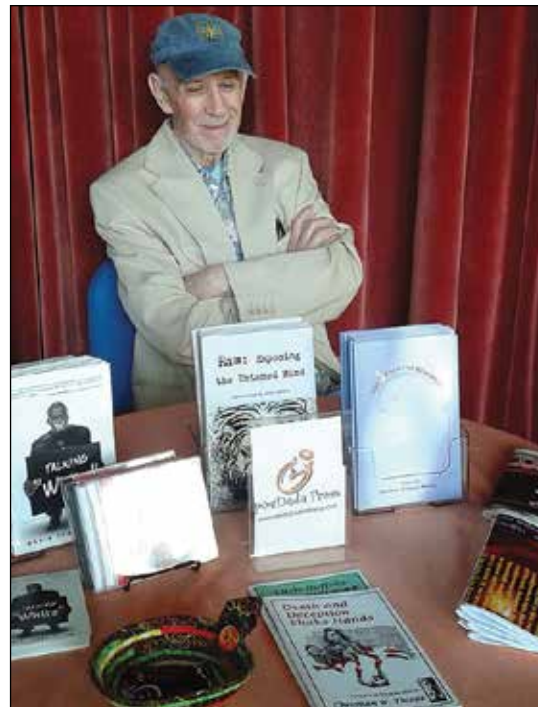


PHOTO: MARIA JAMES-THIAV

Marty with his books.

Esworthy is a community pillar, and an elder with great respect. I am glad I know him. - Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Gadsden

Our first chance encounter was at a poetry reading in the mid-1980s. It impressed me how he wandered into his poems so casually you weren't aware you had been grabbed by the elbow and dragged happily through a flurry of images and language curiosities that flew as they stumbled along every turn of phrase currently in fashion. Marty is a walking talking poem-in-progress. A hero in my all-too-heroless world. - Gene Hosey

Marty is the spontaneous overflow of poetical presence in and beyond Harrisburg. And he never fails to inspire and make us think and laugh! It's no coincidence that central to Marty is a-r-t. Thank you, Marty! Long live your zany flow and magic so generously given! - Michael Hoover

It was years of attending Thursday night poetry hosted by Marty before I heard him perform his own work, and months before I saw him host. Why? Because Marty uplifted, encouraged, held space, and made opportunity for other poets and writers at every turn. More amazing community leaders and creative advocates have come out of Marty's mentorship than can be counted, myself included. - Carla Christopher

Marty Esworthy has contributed so much to the local poetry community over so many years. His zany personality, wit, dedication to people and their words truly makes the world a better place. - Dana Sauers

Marty Esworthy's poetry is focused on sound, language, and elements of postmodern writing. A true narrative is less important. I found out he can edit any form of writing. I spent hours with him editing a poem over the phone. During that conversation he suggested he feigns a narrative which shaped my future writing style. - Keith Snow

For the sake of the artistic word community Marty makes it happen. When one venue is no longer an option, he finds another. Artists can count on a place to share their work. Marty makes sure of it. He has a love for the literary, for the art, for the artists. - Bob & Deb Ryder

Cutting Marty Esworthy in half to count the rings would be like peeling layers of onion to find your new alias. Marty's ageless, playful as a wink, and a truly wondrous planetary being. - Craig Czury

The first time I met Marty, we just picked up where we left off in our previous conversation. That's how it's always been. I've known him forever and just met him. I am the poet I am because of him. I am in his debt. He is in my heart. - Le Hinton

I met Marty in 1982 while he crouched on a curb, capturing "street sounds" with a huge reel-to-reel. He was adamant: The sound of poetry out-sings meaning. He knighted me protégé. We founded The Almost Uptown Poetry Cartel to push his assertion. I never heard poetry the same again. - Michael Lear-Olimpi

Marty Esworthy, all suavity and coolness, is every inch the legend he is rumored to be. He once gave me an opportunity to read my poems at The Midtown Scholar Bookstore, long before any of them were published. I was super nervous, but he was funny and sweet. He even mentioned poems he liked afterwards. That reading and his encouragement mattered and I'm truly grateful. - Dana Kinsey

When I hosted Yorkfest's "Poetry Spoken Here," Marty arrived Sunday afternoon, welcomed joyously by poets performing in an open tent along the bike path. The sun was golden, casting shadow-leaves on the



tent roof. Marty looked up from his reading, entranced. "Look at that!" he said, "It's beautiful! Look at that light!" His delight reminded us all to be appreciative and aware. - *Carol Clark Williams*

A prophet in his own right who howls and laughs and throws an occasional chair. He builds things, collects things, because they fascinate him. The newsprint, the faces, the writers... all collected through his art and his love of the avant-garde. It's like he built so much of us- of what the community is itself. And so patiently, in that gentle Marty way. - *Christine O'Leary Rocky*

Marty Esworthy is a disciple of the avant-garde, an advocate of French new-wave cinema and an eccentric, electric poet with fascinating, mad, creative talent. And he shares it all with us! - *Debberae Street*

Marty has rare words at his disposal and stands out as one of the most unusual language poets. But what is most endearing about him is that during open mics he pays attention and mentors on all kinds of poetry, including many quite different from what he does himself. - *Rich Hemmings*

Marty Esworthy taught me how to write poetry, how to read poetry, and how to

host and maintain a weekly reading. When I took the reading over from him in May of 2021, he was instrumental in making it a smooth transition, from The Almost Uptown Poetry Cartel to The Blacklisted Poets of Harrisburg. I aspire to keep his unique style alive. - *Jeanette Amy Trout*

Marty is nationally and internationally known for his surrealistic poetry. His vast knowledge of US and pop culture history informs his work; snippets of Motown tunes can share space with quotes from Wittgenstein and Will Rogers. While he has the justified reputation for being weirdly comical, there are grand ideas and insights hidden amidst the dense thicket of metaphors and non-linear hijinks in his poetry and prose. - *Rick Kearns, Poet Laureate of Harrisburg (since 2014)*

Marty is a treasure. There's just nothing like him. And it's not just that his poems and brilliant performances are entrancing and surprising, it's that he gives with his art permission for other artists to completely tear down their expectations for what a poem is or what a poem can do. He's a sorcerer, really. His gifts are many and his power is thrilling. - *Barbara DeCesare*

I have taken many a stroll around the city with Monsieur Marty Esworthy. His stochastic multivariate process cannot help

but emerge. He couples these wonders with pop culture sound bites and streams them into his poetry. The results are pure genius! - *Christian Thiede*

Maurice Georges Esworthy III is not only a Space Cowboy and the Gangster of Love, but he is also the Mentor to beat all Mentors! Everyone (and I do mean Everyone) is better for knowing the Man, the Myth, the... well you get the point! I wouldn't trust a person who didn't like Marty! That is the bellwether for determining if a person deserves your time! Viva la Maurice!! - *Kevyn Knox*

Marty has supported me and my art for the last 20 years. I never felt like odd man out at Poetry Thursdays because he always embraced me and because of him, others did too. When my book "Talking 'White'" came out, 76 people squeezed into the Midtown Scholar to support me. That was Marty. I will always consider him a part of my family. - *Maria James-Thiaw*

Marty and I have had many adventures: floating poems on Italian Lake, freezing words in ice, putting together A Poets Tour of Harrisburg, and creating a cacophony of sound with our tribute to John Cage in "Night of the Living Keyboards." The best advice he gave me was, "Don't ever apologize for what you write" and "Always wear something sparkly when you read

your poetry." - *Julia Tilley*

Encouraged to go to a reading in 2009, I was immediately struck by how deftly Marty managed the room. Even on days when I wanted to hide, he would find me (or my daughter) and gently remind us that it had been all men and needed mixing up. As a mentor he taught me that poetry is a living form. As a friend he has taught me more about life, art, and the 76ers than I ever expected! - *Anna Jones*

When I met Marty about 6 years ago, he tried to kick open a locked door at an art gallery. After that, I knew I had to work with him - and did for the next 5 years. - *Jose Morales*

■ ■ ■

Editor's note: The Blacklisted Poets of Harrisburg, "the bastard stepchild of the Almost Uptown Poetry Cartel," currently meets every Thursday evening at 7 pm in the basement or (weather permitting) in the courtyard at Harrisburg Midtown Arts Center, 1110 North Third Street. As a carryover from Esworthy, they still never use a sign-up sheet, and a desk bell is usually available to ring as a signifier that the just-read composition has reached its conclusion.

Ding.  
*Published April 2022*

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

Gen X

- 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>
- More than 6 in 10 Pa. adults, age 42–57, each week read a daily, Sunday or non-daily print or digital newspaper, or visit a newspaper website.<sup>3</sup>



59% of Gen Xers trust paid news and information more than free media.<sup>1</sup>

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Coda Ventures; <sup>2</sup>Brodeur Partners; <sup>3</sup>2022 Release 1 Nielsen Scarborough Report.  
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# Never too late

## WWII veteran receives high-school diploma 75 years after enlisting

**By Becky Lock**

MIFFLINTOWN — Inside the gymnasium at Tuscarora Junior High School, a band played while students streamed onto the bleachers. Visitors and newspaper reporters crowded into the lobby, cameras in hand.

"What's going on," asked Charles Fultz, who thought he was just there to pick up an overdue diploma.

In fact, all the pomp and circumstance were in honor of Fultz, who forfeited his high-school graduation in order to enlist in the U.S. Army in July 1946.

"Seventy-six years ago, Charles Fultz was in 11th grade right here," history teacher Dr. Josh Imes said, referring to the former Juniata Joint High School.

In Europe, World War II began in 1939. The U.S. declared war on Japan after that country attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Fultz was just a boy of 12 in the early 1940s.

"I couldn't wait 'til junior year was out," he said. "Everybody around me was joining. Don Delancey and I ... joined on the buddy system. I served over six years."

World War II ended in December 1946 and Fultz received the WWII Victory Medal and Occupation of Japan Medal, among other accolades for his service. In 1949, Fultz opted to reenlist.

A year later, "the Korean War broke out. I thought they'd send me to Korea," he said.

Instead, the Army stationed him stateside, on a base in Breckenridge, Kentucky.

"I was chief clerk in the finance department down there for my whole enlistment. I got out in January of '53 and I was going to reenlist again, but some woman got me. The right woman, too,"



PHOTOS: BECKY LOCK



Clockwise from far left:

1. Wendy Ehrenzeller hugs Charles Fultz, companion of her grandmother, Irma Tabb, as she presents him with his high-school diploma on Friday. Fultz enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1946.

2. Fultz, right, checks out the new diploma awarded to him Friday, April 23, at Tuscarora Junior High School, the site of the former Juniata Joint High School. Holding his diploma is his companion, Irma Tabb, while family friends Tiffany Hockenberry, left, and Aaliyah Lightner look on.

3. Fultz with his companion, Irma Tabb, holds photos of his first enlistment, left, and his second, also picturing his brother, Sherman.

4. Fultz poses for a photo with school district Superintendent Dr. Gary Dawson.

Fultz said, referring to his late wife, Patricia, who passed away in 2008.

The couple had five children, several of whom accompanied him on Friday.

While Fultz said he has no regrets about deciding to serve his country, he often shared with his family how saddened he was to have not received his high-school diploma.

Irma Tabb, who has been Fultz's companion for several years, contacted Polly Digon, of the Juniata County School District, to see if Fultz, who now lives near

Reedsville, could receive his diploma.

Digon and district administrators arranged the presentation, which grew to include students. Some served as witnesses to the event while others performed with the band or read a poem titled "I Am a Veteran." School administrators and district Superintendent Dr. Gary Dawson spoke to those gathered, while Wendy Ehrenzeller, Tabb's granddaughter and a learning support teacher at the school, awarded Fultz his diploma.

"I've been in education for 30 years and

it's the first one I've ever had the honor to participate in," Dawson said of the veteran's diploma presentation.

After accepting his diploma and posing for photos, a beaming Fultz was escorted around the school for a tour of the facility. Later, he planned to enjoy dinner with his family at a local restaurant, a common experience even now for new high-school graduates.

"I have no regrets at all. I enjoyed the Army," Fultz said. "I'd do it again."

*Published April 27, 2022*



# The Lititz Record Express

## Supporting families surviving in a world that no longer includes their child

The 12th annual Sweet Pea Project ceremony recognizes 26,000 babies stillborn each year in the United States - 19,000 die during their first month of life

**By Laura Knowles**

As the sun began to set in Lititz Springs Park on Friday evening, Oct. 15, a solemn remembrance ceremony was taking place.

The stream was lined with bouquets of daisies, the flowers symbolizing innocence and purity. It was the 12th annual Sweet Pea Project ceremony, meant to comfort families and remember babies who died before birth, at birth, or shortly after birth.

It was the second year that the Sweet Pea Project event was held remotely, with more than 1,000 people watching the ceremony live-streamed online.

The event used to be held with families gathered in the park.

"We are a group who know all too well the meaning of loss," said Stephanie Cole, who organized the ceremony with her friend Beth Gauthier. "We could not take any chances during the pandemic."

As Cole and Gauthier sat on the stone bridge overlooking the stream, they lovingly read the names of little ones who were lost. Cole's voice broke just a bit when the name "Madeline" was read. Her precious daughter died at birth in 2007, for unknown reasons. Gauthier's beloved son Mark was stillborn in 2007, from a cord accident.



As Stephanie Cole and Beth Gauthier sat on the stone bridge overlooking the stream, they lovingly read the names of little ones who were lost. Cole's voice broke just a bit when the name "Madeline" was read. Her precious daughter died at birth in 2007, for unknown reasons. Gauthier's beloved son Mark was stillborn in 2007, from a cord accident.

As the two women read the names of the little ones mourned by their families, Bobbi Carmitchell and Ashley McFalls quietly played the guitar and cello. Tiny candles were lit and floated downstream, each representing the light of the innocent babies.

Each name was read tenderly ... Jordan, Lauren, Angel, Regan, Owen, Scoot, Patrick, Adam, Catherine, Ava, Ezekiel, Kayla, Hunter, Mary, Adam, Josiah, Hannah, James, Isabella, Susannah, Tanner, Mallory, James, Morgan, Carly, Selena, Emma, Felix, Sephora, Violet, Grayson, Sebastian, Willow, Rain, Skylar, Claire, Lennon, Cohen, Tristón, Zane, Francisco, Grant, Bennett, Margaret, Ezra, Olivia, Addison, Jason, Connor, Spencer ... nearly 350 in all.

Their losses were deeply felt by their brokenhearted mothers, fathers,

grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters who watched the livestream and sent messages of hearts. A few added names of babies.

Cole named it the Sweet Pea Project in memory of Madeline. "Sweet Pea" was her unborn baby's nickname by her grandmother.

Cole has since welcomed four children, but she will always feel the sorrow of losing her firstborn, her Sweet Pea. "I have come to realize how many families have suffered the same losses," said Cole, adding that she and her husband realized they were not alone.

There are 26,000 babies who are stillborn each year in the United States, with 19,000 babies who die during their first month of life. Another 20,000 babies die before their first birthday. One in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage.

As Cole explains, "The result is a lot of families with broken hearts and empty nurseries. It is time to break the silence, remove the stigma, and support the families who are trying to learn how to survive in a world that no longer includes their child.

"At Sweet Pea Project, we strive to offer bereaved families comfort, support, and gentle guidance as they navigate their new normal, as well as to offer them safe and sacred spaces to honor their child's place in their family."

To find out more about the Sweet Pea Project and Cole's book "Still," check the website at [sweetpeaproject.org](http://sweetpeaproject.org) or on Facebook. The livestream is available at [fb.watch/8FWD4DkpGc/](https://fb.watch/8FWD4DkpGc/).

*Published Oct. 21, 2021*



# Employees of color leave Gettysburg

## Diversity, equity & inclusion and college departures

**By Nicole DeJacimo**  
Managing Editor  
*and*  
**Phoebe Doscher**  
Editor-in-Chief

This past year, The Gettysburgian has identified eight full-time employees of color who have left Gettysburg College: 11% of all full-time employees of color, and over 50% of all administrators of color. Students and staff members report feeling the loss of these employees and the desire for a more diverse administration.

The Great Resignation has impacted turnover rates at Gettysburg, resulting in an 8% increase for all employees between 2020 and 2021. In four of the past five years, however, the College reported a higher turnover rate for underrepresented minority (URM) employees than for white employees. In 2021, 21% of departures were URM employees compared to 16% of white employees. In 2017, URM employees accounted for nearly double the number of departures than white employees.

### The Impact of Departures

When former Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) Jeanne Arnold left Gettysburg College for St. Francis College in June 2021, the College turned to Darrien

Davenport, originally the Assistant Vice President of College Life, to fill the role in the interim until he left for the private sector later that year. After Davenport's resignation, Dr. Carlos Tasso Aquino became interim CDO that August for the following eight months. The Gettysburg administration is currently conducting a national search through WittKieffer—a search firm where Davenport is now a consultant—for someone to permanently fill the position.

"When a person of color departs, the absence resonates even more due to the fact that we're under-represented and we often tend to function as more high-profile community members, in part, due to that underrepresentation," said English professor McKinley Melton.

The Office of Student Activities and Greek Life (OSAGL) has also lost two notable administrators of color: Associate Director Caitlin Lindsay and Assistant Director Zana Morris. Both were succeeded by white employees.

Executive Director of Communications & Marketing Jamie Yates recognized that several people of color have resigned from the College recently and pointed to the national trend of mass resignations following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In the case of departures of people of

color, we recognize the importance and impact of their presence on campus and what is lost when they leave the College," said Yates.

Other people of color who have recently left include Marcela Service Manzo Vessi, former Assistant Director of the Center for Career Engagement, and Charmaine Cruise, former Dean of Academic Advising and Student Support Services. Some faculty of color have also left Gettysburg, leaving gaps where students previously saw themselves represented in the classroom.

Britney Brunache '22, a psychology and theatre arts double major and Black Student Union President, feels the effects of the lack of faculty of color and noted that she usually puts in a personal effort to write her final papers about race and psychology to provide a diverse perspective. At the same time, she wishes she could be learning from more professors of color.

"You can get away with not having a professor of color because not all of them are spread out within the different departments, which is a problem," Brunache said.

Although she did not take any classes with a Black faculty member, she connected with faculty of color such as

history professor Scott Hancock and professor Melton through their advising to students involved in BSU.

The recent increase in faculty of color departures severs relationships that Brunache deems crucial to students of color at Gettysburg. "I feel like it's alarming that the faculty of color are leaving at the rate they are, especially because ... they have all created some sort of relationship with the students of color that in their absence has affected all of us."

### Administration Representation

The United States Department of Education published a report in 2020 that found that institutions with a more diverse administration had fewer reports of bias incidents against students. Creating and implementing effective inclusivity policies at higher education institutions has also increased the graduation rate for low-income students and students of color.

"A diverse administration is as important as a diverse faculty or student body because the administration is often in the role of making decisions that impact the entire campus community and will shape the future of the College in significant ways," said Melton.

*Continued on next page*



# The Gettysburgian continued

When Arnold, who arrived at Gettysburg in August 2014, assumed the inaugural position of CDO, she initiated the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a tool to assess actual and perceived intercultural competence levels that became required for new employee hires and has been used in groups across campus, including by students.

The IDI has become one way to improve the ways that College employees and students interact and account for diverse perspectives in their work. “[What’s important is] not even exclusively seeing diversity in administration. I think it is having culturally competent workers accessible in administration,” Interim Director of the Office of Multicultural Engagement Monique Gore said.

Prior to her departure, Arnold also helped institutionalize the College’s climate study process and launched the Inclusion Partner Program to systematize the way the College approaches hiring from a diverse candidate pool. Arnold worked with co-chair Music Education Coordinator Brent Talbot to lead the Bias Awareness Resource Committee to assess bias incidents, the resources to support a diverse student body and inclusive campus programming. The results of the report helped inform the College’s commitments to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles for the 2021–22 academic year.

“All four initiatives—the diversity infrastructure review, the curriculum, the strategic plan, and our new CDO—will profoundly and systematically impact Gettysburg College, and our student and employee experience, for many years to come,” said Yates.

Since Arnold’s departure, the College has committed to hiring a new CDO to promote Gettysburg’s DEI initiatives and sit on the President’s Council. The College also intends to implement an additional senior position in the Office of Diversity & Inclusion. Currently, there are no full-time employees of color on the President’s Council.

Although high-ranking administrators do not interact one-on-one with students to the extent that professors do, the Provost’s Office and other administrative roles are responsible for other elements that dictate the student, faculty, staff and administrative experience at Gettysburg, including hiring and providing resources to particular departments, initiatives and programs.

“Everybody wants a piece of the pie, and it’s not an infinite pie,” professor Scott Hancock said of the work in administration to determine how to allocate resources and decide who to hire. “So [the administration] has to make those decisions, but that’s why you need a diverse group of people in administration to figure out how we prioritize and what counts as priority.”

On top of the benefits of diverse perspectives in the administration, the administration’s work to implement inclusive practices, such as a diverse curriculum and completion of the IDI, ultimately impacts the student experience.

For Brunache, having administrators and professors of color is beneficial for two primary reasons: “[first,] to see people who look like you in professional spaces to show that you can make it too, and [second,] have students be more comfortable talking to administrators about their worries and be able to relate to each other.”

## Challenges with Retention

While Gettysburg’s number of domestic faculty of color has increased slightly over the past five years, from 20.1% to 21.9% of the faculty, this trend does not account for increasing turnover rates among employees of color, nor anecdotal evidence of faculty dissatisfaction.

“We hear how we’re improving with faculty diversity, we see graphs,” said Hancock. “What we don’t see or hear are voices of the so-called diverse people that we aren’t doing better with, supposedly. We don’t hear stories about those who left. We don’t get charts and numbers and

graphs about the number of Black women who have come and gone. We don’t hear about how content or satisfied or happy Black and brown diverse students have or have not been.”

Associate Provost for Faculty Development Jennifer Bloomquist is the only Black person in a senior academic administrative position and the only woman in a senior administrator position within the Provost’s Office. In 2018, she also became the first Black woman to reach full professor status. In a letter to Provost Chris Zappe, Bloomquist noted that she feels isolated as a woman of color in the Provost’s Office.

Although faculty, administrators and staff have left for a variety of reasons, employees of color’s dissatisfaction is apparent in their high turnover rates.

“We’re doing better at hiring more employees than we are at retaining employees,” said President Iuliano’s Chief of Staff and Strategic Advisor Kris Stuempfle.

Dr. Kafele Khalfani began partnering with Gettysburg to focus on DEI initiatives when upon Interim CDO Aquino’s departure. Khalfani assessed why employees are leaving Gettysburg through exit interviews conducted by human resources, though participation was minimal. Employees have cited a variety of reasons for leaving, including career advancement, compensation or benefits, work-life balance, flexibility with remote work, a desire to leave the rural area or faculty collegiality. In addition, some have left for other higher education positions, including Jeanne Arnold, while many others have transferred to the corporate world.

“We want to understand why folks are leaving [and] make sure that ... the culture and the climate are responsive and supportive to our faculty, our staff, and especially our students,” Khalfani said.

While the College declares itself to be an equal opportunity employer with a

commitment to “providing a diverse and inclusive learning and working environment,” once employees are hired, their retention depends on a combination of factors, including the professional culture, the environment at the College and in the surrounding community, and their compensation.

“When people leave for a better job, I think it’s often more than just salary, so I think that we should be asking, ‘What makes that job better? ... What isn’t making this enough of an inviting, attractive environment that [people of color] will want?’” Hancock said.

## Next Steps

Moving forward, the College seeks to both fill vacancies and understand why faculty have left. The College’s success with achieving DEI commitments depends on the execution of curricular and strategic plan promises, the hiring of a Chief Diversity Officer and the assessment of diversity infrastructure.

“There’s significant work to be done to ensure that our rhetoric is matched by our actions, which requires a sustained commitment to the values that are supposed to be at the heart of our mission as an institution. Action plans are important, but follow-through is even more so,” said Melton.

Students, faculty and administrators were hopeful that the College will make meaningful strides, but also emphasized that it will require a community effort.

Editor’s Note: During the reporting of this article, the College held public information and interview sessions for four Chief Diversity Officer candidates and information may have changed. Katie Oglesby & Alli Dayton contributed to reporting for this article.

*This article originally appeared on pages 6–8 of the April 25, 2022 edition of The Gettysburgian’s magazine, a publication of Gettysburg College.*



## NEWSPAPERS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF CULTURAL REPORTING

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# The Yellow Jacket

## Pitcher Corey Fischer continues to strike back against cancer

By Tanner Cyprowski

Corey Fischer has loved playing baseball since he was five years old. Nothing will get in the way of that. Not even cancer. In his fourth year at Waynesburg University and as a member of the baseball team, Fischer received news that would change his life forever. He was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma on November 12, 2021.

At first, Fischer, his friends and family thought he had a hip or groin injury. After a trip to Knoxville, Tennessee to watch his favorite team, Pitt football, play, Fischer decided it was time to really find out what was going on.

"It got to a point in October where I couldn't really drive," Fischer explained. "I didn't sleep for probably two months."

After multiple hospital visits and talks with different doctors, the devastating news was made official.

Starting in late November, Fischer went through five days of in-patient chemotherapy, blood work, getting a week off, and then back in the hospital for two more days of chemo. Fischer started radiation about a month ago at Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh while still receiving chemo treatments.

During his time in the hospital, Fischer had the opportunity to FaceTime with a few famous Pittsburgh athletes. First it was Sidney Crosby and Jason Zucker. In January, he received a surprise call from TJ Watt of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Fischer received two Super Bowl tickets and a paid trip to California for the big game.

"It was awesome, it came as a complete surprise," Fischer said. "I've never experienced anything like it, so I'm very appreciative of Children's Hospital and the Steelers for that."

"The one thing you want to do is try as much as possible to try to keep things normal. Baseball has always been my escape from anything going on in reality."

**COREY FISCHER**

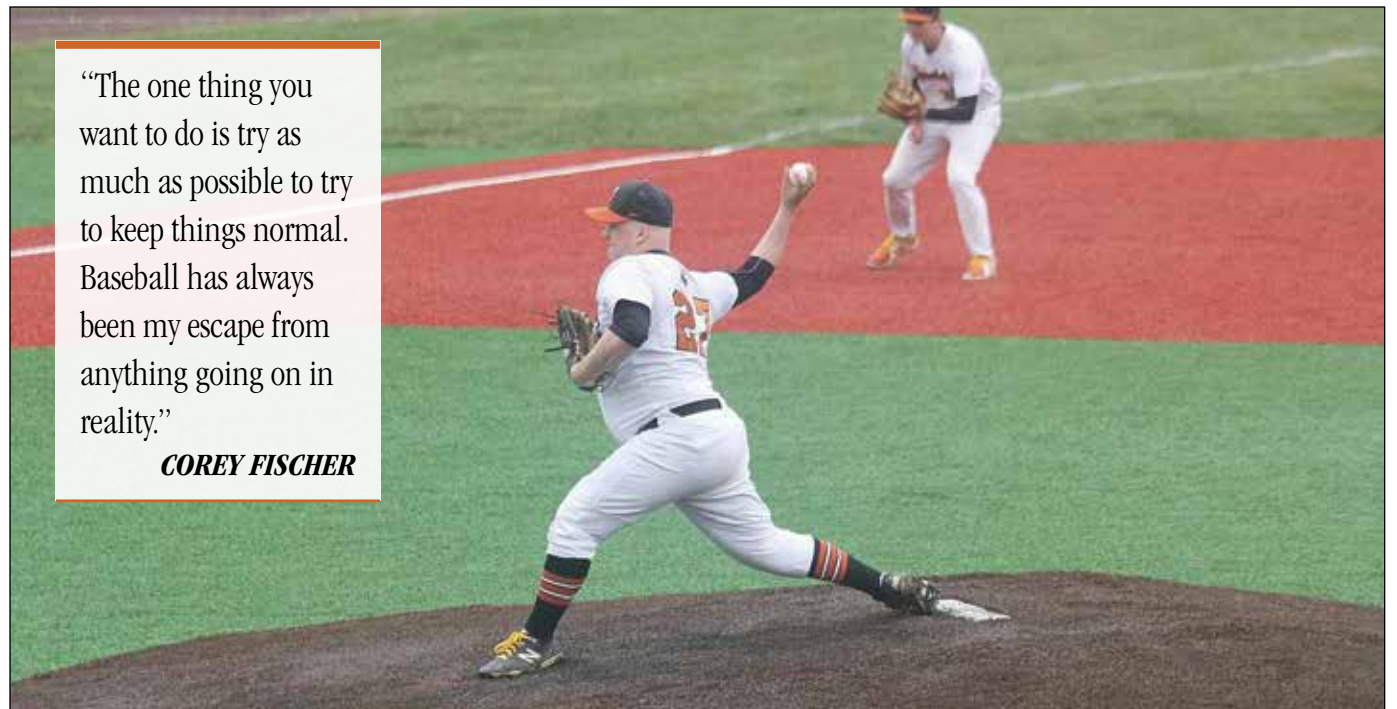


PHOTO: GINA FISCHER

Fischer can't say enough good things about Children's Hospital and how they've treated him.

"You wonder when you hear about cancer research, where all that money goes," Fischer noted. "There's a lot of stuff that people do for the whole floor of Children's Hospital that whatever you can do is helping kids, which is pretty awesome."

Even during his incredibly busy schedule, Fischer is still a main contributor to the baseball team.

"The passion he brings to the field, that's the same passion I know he's taking to his medical fight right now," head coach Perry Cunningham said in an interview for WCTV. "If we can plug him in certain situations

and a certain role for us, I think that just makes our team that much better."

His first pitching appearance since starting treatments was against Concordia College during the team's annual spring break trip to Florida. That performance was something you couldn't write. Fischer had a no-hitter going into the seventh inning. He finished the day with 6.1 innings pitched, three strikeouts, only giving up two hits en route to the team's 10-1 victory.

He also finished up the Florida trip with a save in the last game against Wartburg. Sealing the week with a strikeout.

This situation for Fischer is difficult. Family, friends, and Waynesburg University have been with him every step of the way

and don't plan on slowing down. But for Fischer, baseball has always been the answer.

"The one thing you want to do is try as much as possible to try to keep things normal," Fischer said. "Baseball has always been my escape from anything going on in reality. This is my biggest testament to that now."

There are no words to describe what Fischer's been going through. But you can describe him as a fighter and a warrior. Everyone's rooting for him and he's received endless support from everybody. When this is all over, everyone's going to look back and realize cancer really did catch the wrong Fisch.

*Published April 21, 2022*





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# THE EPHRATA REVIEW

## Enveloping her father's amazing war story

College student from France locates Ephrata's Gunselman after finding piece of WWII history

**By Laura Knowles**

It all began with a phone call...from Paris.

Back in February 2021, Sue Gunselman of Ephrata noticed that she had a call coming in on her mobile phone from Paris. Not knowing a soul in Paris, she didn't take the call. She assumed it was a very long-distance spam call.

Not long after, she got a message on Facebook asking if she was a relative of William Schannauer. The person sending the message was a university student in Paris. He was looking for Gunselman's mother to find out more about William Schannauer, if she was still alive.

"She was, and that kind of piqued my interest. I decided to respond and asked him why he was looking for relatives of my Dad," said Gunselman, whose father passed away in 1997.

As it turned out, the caller was 21-year-old university student Matteo Grouard. He was trying to track down the man behind a 1940s envelope that he had acquired among some World War II documents. The envelope had Pvt. Wm. Schannauer's return address with the 18th Infantry and was addressed to Narrow Fabric Co. in Reading, Penna. That was Schannauer's employer before he left to serve in World War II.

"There was no letter inside the envelope, just the empty envelope," said Gunselman. "I wanted to know more."

The two exchanged several emails and she learned that Grouard is a World War II buff, who does a lot of research, partly because of his university studies and also because he wants to honor those who fought to liberate France from Nazi Germany.

Through their correspondence, Gunselman felt that Grouard's interest in her father and other World War II soldiers was legitimate. Gunselman provided information about her father's World War II honors, including a Purple Heart, Oak Leaf Cluster, and other wartime memorabilia.

As a child, she admitted that her father never spoke of



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Matteo Grouard with the envelope in front of the monument in Normandy.

**France's Matteo Grouard wrote an article as a tribute to her father (William Schannauer). It was his way of thanking the young American soldier who had fought for his country, many decades before Grouard was born.**

his time in the war. She only knew that he served in the U.S. Army in France, Sicily, and North Africa, and that he had been injured during the war.

It was Grouard who helped to fill in some of the blanks.

"When I was very young, I became interested in the history of World War II and the personal stories of young Americans who liberated my country, nearly 78 years ago. I started collecting the military artifacts I found in the area



PHOTO BY LAURA KNOWLES

Sue Gunselman with her father's WWII keepsakes.

and made it my mission to preserve them and share the individual stories with the young people of my generation," explained Grouard in an email.

As he noted, "I recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in history and political sciences at the University of Caen, in Normandy, and I am now preparing a master's degree in history, specializing in the conservation and

*Continued on next page*



## The Ephrata Review continued

enhancement of historical heritage. My fields of research revolve mainly around American soldiers in Europe during World War II."

Through his research on Gunselman's father, Grouard wrote an article as a tribute to her father. It was his way of thanking the young American soldier who had fought for his country, many decades before Grouard was born.

He titled his article: "In the footsteps of William Schannauer, D-Day Veteran" by Mattéo Grouard.

In his article, the young historian wrote of how he had visited Colleville-sur-Mer, in Normandy, to see the monument of the Big Red One overlooking the beach of Omaha above the WN62 German defence complex. It was there on the morning of June 6 1944, that hundreds of soldiers of the First Infantry Division were among the first to land in Normandy.

"Among them, the Private First Class William M. Schannauer, a 21-year-old man from Denver, Pennsylvania, is about to experience his third landing after the landings of North Africa and Sicily. With the rest of the 18th Infantry Regiment, its mission is to land on Easy Red, one of the bloodiest sectors of Omaha beach located between the towns of Colleville-sur-Mer and Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer.

"Embarked aboard the USS LCI-93, a US Navy troop transport ship, William is not supposed to land before 10 a.m. However, 210 minutes after the beginning of the assault, the fighting is still raging on the beach. The first waves suffered heavy losses and the soldiers of the Big Red One struggled to hold the beach. The area is not secured until the afternoon," wrote Grouard.

He went on to write, "Despite a high number of casualties that day, William miraculously survived D-Day. Awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his heroism in combat, he would not emerge unscathed from the Battle of Normandy. Wounded in the back by a German artillery fire, he was to be repatriated to England in a military hospital.



PHOTOS BY LAURA KNOWLES

LEFT: Sue Gunselman's photo of her father, William Schannauer.

RIGHT: Several of Schannauer's military honors.



After a few weeks of convalescence, he was finally able to join his regiment and take part in the Liberation of Europe until the end of the war in 1945."

Gunselman was very touched by the interest the young man, who was the same age as her father had been back then, took in telling her father's story. She was even more moved by the envelope that the young man held in his hand near the monument in Normandy.

"I think it is very impressive that someone who was not even alive during World War II took such an interest in preserving memories of that time" said Gunselman.

Grouard has an Instagram account named @americanpatrol and a Facebook page named "Mattéo Grouard - Away From Home." He uses social networks in order to share the memories of this generation of heroes to the people of his generation. His goal is to share with

the people of his generation stories of World War II, from the perspective of young people of their age, who sacrificed their youth so that future generations could live in peace. He also has an exhibitions called "Away From Home," which shares heart-felt portraits of the "Greatest Generation" through the artifacts of the time period.

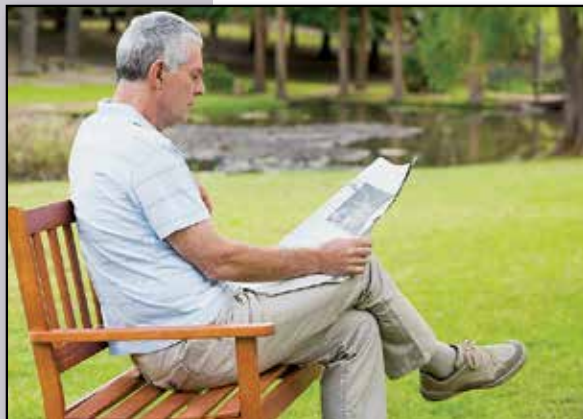
While Grouard was able to track down the man who sent that letter to his employer so long ago and connect with his family, there is one mystery that has never been solved.

"We still don't know what was in the letter, when it was opened, if it ever got to my father's employer, and what became of the letter itself," said Gunselman. "But I am very grateful that Matteo found that envelope."

*Laura Knowles is a correspondent for The Ephrata Review.*

*Published May 25, 2022*

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# Indiana Gazette

## Living donor organ transplant gives family the greatest gift

By CHAUNCEY ROSS

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Bryan Force was elementary school-aged in the 1980s when his dad got a concerning letter from the American Red Cross.

David Force, a worker at an electric power plant in Williamsport, had responded to a blood drive at the plant. When the lab ran tests on his donated pint, the liver counts signaled trouble. The Red Cross sent him to his doctor.

At his age then, Bryan Force didn't get the full implication.

More than three decades later, he got it.

Around dawn on Nov. 29, the Forces lay side by side on gurneys in UMPC Montefiore Hospital in Pittsburgh to be prepped for surgery.

By nightfall, doctors had sliced the failing, shrunken liver from David's belly, incised more than half of the healthy liver from Bryan's abdomen, and implanted it into his struggling father.

At Thanksgiving, the Force family anticipated what turned out to be a life-saving gift.

Now at Christmas, Susan Force said, her husband and son — and all their family — are giving thanks for David's new lease on life.

\* \* \*

***David Force's liver disease was both the wrong kind and the right kind, if that could be said.***

***There was no cure.***

But doctors, specialists that he visited in Pittsburgh, had drugs that let them make a bet.

"Doctors told him for years he could just take care of his body, and medicine would eventually catch up and he could receive a



David Force, left, his son Bryan Force, center, and wife Susan reflected on recent surgery that headed off David's battle against liver disease. Bryan donated a portion of his liver for transplant to his father.

PHOTO: CHAUNCEY ROSS/  
GAZETTE

transplant," Bryan Force explained.

"The doctor said what this (medicine) will do is ... stall this as much as possible," David Force said. "Back then they weren't doing a lot of transplants. They weren't evolving like they are today, especially with living donors."

David Force has primary sclerosing cholangitis, known as PSC. Its best-known victim was NFL Hall of Fame running back Walter Payton of the Chicago Bears, who died in 1999 at age 45 while awaiting a liver transplant.

Dr. Abhinav Humar, the clinical director of the Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute at UMPC, said PSC is irreversible and leads to liver failure.

"It's an autoimmune disease that attacks specific portions of the liver, the bile

ducts," Humar said. "It causes scarring and narrowing of the bile duct, which can lead to infection, cirrhosis and cancer. The only treatment, really, is a liver transplant."

David and Susan Force moved with their young sons Bryan and Chris to Indiana in the early 1990s. David Force finished out his career as a welder in power generation at the Homer City station, then worked eight years for Bryan Force's oilfield services company, Force Incorporated.

For those decades, the meds kept David's PSC in check.

"He kind of beat the odds, hanging on for 36 years," Bryan Force said. "Then he hit the wall."

David's skin took on the yellow-orange tone of jaundice. PSC sapped his strength. He didn't have the stamina to sit and yell

for his grandkids in the Little League games at Optimists Field. Sitting indoors with sunlight pouring on him through the window was unbearable, he said.

"I didn't understand it was liver failure at the time. I was sweating, shaking, I had a fever," David said. "All of a sudden I had no energy. I was sitting there talking and all of a sudden it hits you."

David said he shook it off after a good night's sleep but had a second bout of symptoms not long after.

"In May, it was the worst," Susan Force said. "He was in the hospital for five days."

Doctors checked his score to get on the transplant waiting list. But the grueling fact of waiting for a donor liver, in a time when

*Continued on next page*



demand far outpaces the supply of designated organ donors, was that David Force had to be near death before his need would get to the top of the list.

Thirty years of advances in medical science was about to pay off.

“In 1990, the first liver transplants were happening,” Humar said. “There were few programs doing liver transplants and it was considered a relatively experimental therapy at that stage. But now liver transplantation is the established therapy and the gold standard for treatment of someone with liver failure.”

The people at UPMC then talked about the option of a living donor because David Force’s condition was getting worse.

Stones had built up in his bile ducts. Doctors inserted stents to clear the path. Then they had to insert more.

If someone qualified to donate part of their liver, there would be no more waiting list.

\* \* \*

*The gravity of giving up more than half of a major body organ was made clear to both Force sons. Bryan was screened first and declared a suitable living donor.*

Bryan Force said he “went into ‘save-my-dad mode;’” although the transplant center staff at UMPC gave him every opportunity to back out.

“When it’s right there in front of you, it becomes an extremely easy decision,” Bryan Force said. “It’s probably been harder on my family than on me.”

Being declared compatible as a living donor now depends on a fairly subjective list of criteria, other than the 18-to-60 age bracket that Humar asks donors to fit.

A blood type match isn’t necessary like it is for other organ transplants. “We have a protocol for doing that at our center,” Humar said.

Being a blood relative doesn’t increase the odds of being a match. People approach the center with offers to be partial liver donors for total strangers and are as easily accepted, Humar said.

Bryan Force said he was told to strike a healthy regimen from August, when he was accepted, through November, when surgery was scheduled.

No drinking. Exercise. Knock off 15 pounds.

Worse for him, Bryan said, would have been to be disqualified because the screening process might have uncovered an underlying condition that he would have to worry about.

“It’s a pretty terrifying experience,” Bryan said. “Knowing you are either going to donate your liver, or end up being told something you don’t know about your own body.”

Humar said living donors have every chance to make a careful decision.

“They should be cautious. It’s not something you want to go into with blinders on,” the doctor said. “There is no question that for both the recipient and the donor that this is a very big operation we’re talking about.”

Outcome statistics are comforting: the one-year survival rate for liver transplant recipients is 90 percent. Humar said many live normal lives of 10 or 20 or even 30 years.

“It’s not like a one- or two-year Band-aid solution,” he said. “For the donor it’s the same thing. It’s something that should not be taken lightly; this is a major operation where you’re removing 60 percent of someone’s liver and you’re essentially operating on someone who doesn’t need an operation and is only doing it to help someone else.”

The mortality rate is small but not zero, Humar said.

“We don’t want people to be going in with no caution but it’s definitely an option for families to consider. We are the leading center in the country doing this procedure and have seen very good results with it.”

\* \* \*

*Bryan Force, 40, and David, 66, talked about their recovery at David and Susan Force’s White Township home about nine days after their surgeries.*

Their scars are different, they said. Bryan’s is straight up and down. David called his the Mercedes logo, like an upside down Y.

Both were stitched up.

Neither laughed. Not even when David teased that Susan said they saved each other.

“Helping to save him!” Susan clarified: David received a liver, and Bryan has lost some weight.

They compared notes about the days in the hospital.

Bryan was wheeled into the OR first on that Monday morning for the 6- to 7-hour procedure. Humar removed the needed section of his healthy liver and carried it to the adjacent room, where David Force had been taken for the estimated 10-hour implantation of the organ.

After a night and a day under heavy sedation in the intensive care unit, they were moved in stable condition to rooms on 11 North, the transplant recovery floor at UMPC Montefiore.

“I think we first saw each other on Tuesday, or Wednesday?” Bryan recalled.

“He walked into his father’s room,” Susan Force said. “He was walking pretty good. It was pretty emotional.”

“Emotional, but you can’t really breathe,” as Bryan remembered it. “Such shortness of breath. Like in ‘Grumpier Old Men.’”

“We kind of smiled at each other,” was what David recalled of it.

Both went home before the end of that week. David spent a longer time on restricted diet. Normal sleep hadn’t returned soon, either, because of the general discomfort, Bryan said.

Both have had follow-up appointments with doctors. David Force had more, as his physicians adjusted his battery of anti-rejection medications. He has been on 14 pills a day.

Bryan is on orders to lift nothing that’s more than 10 pounds for three months.

Because liver regenerates, both are expected to have normal full-size livers eight weeks after the surgery.

Healthy livers.

\* \* \*

*Fear, apprehension, worry — those sentiments have been overcome.*

Bryan Force confessed to more anxiety than his dad.

“I thought the recovery would be a lot harder and more painful,” Bryan said. “The folks prepare you for the worse. The reality is that I’m nine days out and I’m taking low-dose Tylenol. It’s not as bad as I thought it would be.”

“I was not worried about anything,” David Force explained. Emotions got the better of him.

“I got the peace of God. I put it in his hands ... I had none, no worries.”

Others shouldn’t worry either, they said, whether their interest ranges from mild curiosity or a quest for survival.

Humar, at UMPC, encourages his patients to evangelize for the transplant program.

“We want to educate the public, patients who need this procedure,” Humar said. “Often we see patients that don’t even know this is an option, so they don’t ask anyone. Family members don’t know of this option, because if they knew they would be willing to be donors, to look around to see if they can find a suitable donor for their loved one.”

“I want to make clear ... I want to bring awareness to what these folks are doing and the miracles they are performing,” Bryan Force said. “If we can bring some awareness — if we can save one life 10 years from now, it all is worth it.”

“People think about organ rejection but my doctors tell me I would have more problems with infection than rejection, here in 2021,” David Force said. “If my blood work is showing anything, they can tweak it. I would just like people to know. Don’t be afraid of it.”

\* \* \*

*For both men, their immediate plans call for taking it easy. Long term, David has plans already: weekends at Raystown Lake, evenings in the center field bleachers shouting at Little League umpires.*

A big family gathering on Christmas Day won’t be in the works, at least to reduce David’s exposure to others so soon in his recovery. Susan Force said they’ll visit Bryan and his wife Brittnei and their four kids, then spend time with Chris, his wife, Gina, and their newborn.

“This will be the best Christmas ever!” Susan Force texted The Gazette.

“This Christmas I think we’re going to appreciate each other as a family,” Bryan Force said. “This experience has helped us realize what’s the most important thing. Health, life and family.”

*Published Dec. 24, 2021*

## United Way of Wyoming Valley puts emphasis on reading in fight against childhood poverty

By Roger DuPuis

rdupuis@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Do you want to build a snowman?

Ask a room full of preschoolers and you're likely to stir up a resounding "yes," accompanied by some starting to sing their favorite lines from the popular "Frozen" ballad.

Of course, it doesn't have to be a snowman, as the song also says.

OK, then, who wants to build a snow bear?

United Way of Wyoming Valley President and CEO Bill Jones looked around at the young faces, all enthusiastic, but a little bit confused by the reference.

"A snow BEAR!?"

Jones then proceeded to explain, reading to preschool readiness program students at the Wyoming Valley Catholic Youth Center from "How to Build a Snow Bear," a picture book about two siblings sharing an adventurous wintry day.

When Jones was finished reading, another surprise lay in store: Amid many fist-bumps and high-fives, he and colleague Jennifer Deemer handed out a copies of the book for each of the youngsters to keep.

This collaboration with the CYC is one of many examples of how the United Way works with area schools and organizations to promote early childhood education, one of the group's signature causes.

"It is really critical that children learn these early literacy skills before they start kindergarten," said Deemer, who serves as the United Way's vice president of community impact, including oversight of the organization's Poverty to Possibility portfolio of school-based literacy programs.

"It improves their vocabulary, it improves



Students at the Wyoming Valley Catholic Youth Center examine their new copies of "How to Build a Snow Bear," a picture book about two siblings sharing an adventurous wintry day. The books were provided by United Way of Wyoming Valley.

PHOTO: ROGER DUPUIS | TIMES LEADER

their listening skills, and their ability to be ready for kindergarten," she added.

"Kids love the program," Deemer said. "It is a very innovative way of teaching children the fundamentals they need to be better prepared."

Happy preschoolers headed home with books in hand is the positive side of the equation. On the other side is a sobering reality: Locally, nearly 40% of third grade students are not reading proficiently, Jones said.

Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a critical milestone toward high school graduation and success later in life because it marks the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," he added.

Students who are not proficient in reading by fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school and struggle throughout their lives, he

continued. And, Jones said, the numbers closely parallel each other: National statistics show that the percentage of students who are not proficient in reading by that point tends to mirror a class's dropout rate later on.

"We're approaching this truly as a long-term strategy," Jones said of the United Way's efforts.

### 'We need to start somewhere'

That strategy is inextricably linked with the United Way's fight against childhood poverty, which contributes to low literacy rates and vice-versa.

While the United Way works with a number of school districts in Wyoming Valley, Jones said the agency has been most focused on those with the highest number and percentages of low income children: Wilkes-Barre Area, Wyoming Valley West, Greater Nanticoke Area and Hanover Area.

Attendance among the elementary schools in these four districts is a big part of the concern: The chronic absenteeism rate is 24.3%, meaning nearly one out of every four elementary school students is considered chronically absent, missing 18 days or more of school, Jones said.

"They are good partners and they are working hard to address these issues," Jones said of the districts.

Beyond the classroom, low literacy rates and high dropout rates go on to create other problems in the lives of children and families, leading to greater reliance on human services later in life and cycles that continue for years.

"This is multi-generational," Jones said, "and we need to start somewhere."

It's also a growing trend.

In his presentations to the community

*Continued on next page*



and to potential donors, Jones frequently cites U.S. Census statistics that underscore the problem: In the 2000 Census, the child poverty rate in the Wyoming Valley was 14.7%, he points out. By 2012, the rate had more than doubled, to 29.6%. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic began, the rate was 26%.

Jones sees several issues as contributing factors to rising childhood poverty here over the past 20 years. Key among them are stagnant wage rates, particularly for lower income families, but that is only the start.

"During that time period, we had a lot of migration of families from New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia into our area," he said. "They were leaving those areas because of the high cost of housing, which is much more affordable here."

Our region's wages continue to be lower than in those metro areas, however and new arrivals began to find themselves pinched by that: Over time, the costs of housing, transportation, food, medical care and other essentials were rising, Jones noted, "but wage rates were not."

To the mix was added one more factor: A growth in the number of single-parent households. An average of 40% of Luzerne County households with children are headed by one parent, Jones explained.

As costs rose and wages stagnated, families' finances were stretched thin and more found themselves below the poverty line, particularly those with only a single parent. Those parents also found themselves with less time to spend reading with their children — and, indeed, many may have struggled with reading and school work themselves as youths.

"Poverty and scarce resources play a role in people's health and their educational attainment," Jones said. "The challenge is that when families struggle, children will struggle. We all need to work together to help improve the odds of success for children."

Jones has spent a lot of time thinking — and reading — about reading. During a recent interview, he frequently cited academic reports and news articles he has read on the subject over the years, following up with links in emails. One of them was "Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters," a 2010 report by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation, a national watchdog on child welfare issues.

Depending on your perspective, the



PHOTO: ROGER DUPUIS | TIMES LEADER

Jennifer Deemer, the local United Way's vice president of community impact, distributes books to students at the Wyoming Valley Catholic Youth Center recently. "It improves their vocabulary, it improves their listening skills, and their ability to be ready for kindergarten," Deemer said of the United Way's literacy programs.

report either makes for grim or hopeful reading, perhaps both. It lays out the case for early reading proficiency, including a look at the challenges which gave rise to the crisis and the ways in which it can be solved.

The report also graphically details the threats to American society if the problem continues unchecked.

"Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity," the report states, adding that "high school dropouts are also more likely than those who graduate to be arrested or have a child while still a teenager, both of which incur financial and social costs."

That is just the beginning.

"Behind these statistics, as one military expert notes, lies a 'demographic surprise,'" the report continues. "The current pool of qualified high school

graduates is neither large enough nor skilled enough to supply our nation's workforce, higher education, leadership and national security needs."

### United Way programs

With the 2012 local childhood poverty statistics in mind — and warnings such as that in the Annie E. Casey report — the United Way began research and planning into how it could tackle the region's growing childhood poverty epidemic. That effort got underway in 2014 as the Poverty to Possibilities model.

While the agency continues to support "safety net" services that benefit those who face an immediate threat to their well-being, the United Way of Wyoming Valley currently funds 25 programs provided by 16 agencies that specifically advance the goals of helping children.

Since 2014, the United Way has

developed 11 signature initiatives that focus on brain development, school readiness, grade-level reading, school attendance, summer learning, health and hygiene supplies for students, and their newest initiative, eye glasses for students in need of vision correction.

Each has an impact on educational attainment, with a focus on underlying challenges that can keep young children, especially those in low-income families, from learning to read proficiently:

**SCHOOL READINESS** — Too many children are entering kindergarten already behind

- Annual Children's Book Drive: Distributes more than 12,000 free children's books to students in preK through 5th grade.
- Annual Literacy Kit Initiative: Take-home kits for use by preschool children and their families to support kindergarten readiness.
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library: Free book-by-mail program for Wyoming Valley children ages birth through five.
- Reading Buddies: School-based reading program that pairs community volunteers with struggling readers in the early grades to promote improved reading proficiency.

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE** — Too many young children are missing too many days of school.

- Attendance Awareness Poster Contest: Family engagement initiative in elementary schools to address high rates of chronic absenteeism.
- Loads of Love Initiative: School-based washer and dryer purchase program to provide students with access to laundry facilities and remove barriers to school attendance.
- School-Based Community Navigator Initiative: School-based initiative to assess and address student, family, and school needs including crisis intervention, counseling, and home visitation.
- See to Succeed: Mobile vision program to provide at-risk students with screenings, eye exams, and eyewear, if needed.
- The Nurse's Pantry: School-based initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism in young students by providing clothing, shoes, medical supplies and other essential items that address needs of an urgent nature.

**SUMMER LEARNING** — Too many

*Continued on next page*

## Times Leader continued

children are losing ground academically over the summer.

- Summer Learning Workbook Initiative: Take-home workbooks for K-2 grade students to retain and strengthen their math and reading skills during the summer months.

- Tag In for Summer Learning Reading Challenge: Summer Reading Challenge for elementary students combining parenting education and awareness on summer learning loss and a free book fair for elementary students.

### Success, expansion

On top of her long career in music and acting, Dolly Parton has become an internet celebrity in recent years as more people came to learn of the charitable work the legendary singer has been quietly undertaking for decades.

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library launched in her native Tennessee in 1995, according to the program's website, and went national five years later. The United Way of Wyoming Valley began participating seven years ago.

"We started our partnership with Dolly Parton's foundation because reading to children is one of the best things you can do to help brain development," Jones said, noting that "90% of our brains are developed by age 5."

"For many families in poverty, books for their toddlers are a luxury and too often not a priority," he added. "We just enrolled our 6,000th child in this program since September 2014. It is an investment in children that is worth every penny!"

Locally, the United Way launched its See to Succeed eye clinic in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District last fall to bring eye exams and the selection and fitting of glasses into district buildings for students who failed a school eye test and might need the clarity corrective lenses provide.

"We started our eye clinic that rotates between buildings in the WBA school district because 84% of children who did not pass the school's vision screening test do not get the follow up care and glasses they need," Jones said. "Our plan is to expand this program to the Hanover School District in early 2022."

### Firsthand experience

Deemer can appreciate the programs' impact not just in her role with the United Way, but as a mom.



United Way of Wyoming Valley President and CEO Bill Jones is seen reading to preschool readiness program students at the Wyoming Valley Catholic Youth Center recently. The United Way has put significant emphasis on early literacy as a cornerstone of its Poverty to Possibility initiatives.

PHOTO: ROGER DUPUIS | TIMES LEADER

"When I started working at United Way in 2013, my daughter just turned two, and my son was just turning one. All of the early childhood development work that we were starting was resonating with me as we strived to create awareness around the importance of reading to children beginning at birth and introducing the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to Wyoming Valley as well as creating access to high quality early learning programs and child care," she said.

"Seeing these programs in action through my own personal experience helped me connect and shape our work especially as a full-time working mother," she said.

The COVID-19 outbreak only underscored the importance of such programs.

"When the pandemic hit, my youngest was in first grade and has suffered from learning loss like so many other early grade students in our community. The United Way has created innovative programs to respond to the needs of our community as a result of both poverty and pandemic," Deemer said.

"While my family has not struggled to have access to needed resources as many do in our community, the need has only fueled my passion for ensuring that we reach as many children and families as we can because I can see firsthand how important it is to create access to early learning opportunities for young children so that they have the best chance to succeed in school and life," she added.

### 'It does engage the kids'

Karen Borton is one of the United Way's Reading Buddies volunteers — as is her husband, Chris — and has participated in the program since 2019, when it was still operating in schools before the pandemic.

She and the other volunteers continue to work with young readers, albeit virtually due to COVID protocols. If there is a benefit to that, Borton said it allows for more personalized one-on-one encounters between volunteers and students — a level of attention that teachers typically don't have the time and resources to provide, especially now.

"If the child can read I will have them read the story and then we will discuss it page by page. If that's not possible, I'll read the story and we'll discuss words they may not understand," Borton said. "These are very basic books, there are a lot of pictures. Then we will discuss the book. It does engage the kids. They love to give you feedback."

For some of the students in the program, English is not their first language, Borton said. She observed an interesting trend among those students while working with children at the CYC last summer.

"We were in person outside. I would have a group of maybe six children. Some were very attentive, but I could tell they did not know any English. They had other children, friends, who would translate for them," she said. "They have such a zest for learning. They want to learn."

Borton has been volunteering with the United Way in different capacities for about 15 years, including as a board member, and was a co-chair of the committee that led the organization's transition to the Poverty to Possibilities model. Husband Chris is a former board chair and campaign chair. She encourages other adults to consider volunteering for the program, which she has found very rewarding.

As a trained educator herself, she sees the need for and value of imparting reading skills to young children.

"A lot of these kids come from a socio-economic background that is impoverished. They don't have books at home, they don't have access to libraries. Their parents are not able to get them to a library," she said.

"The parents have so many other issues that are overwhelming them. They just don't have time," Borton added. "And it's a cycle, because they themselves were not taught. If we can get to these kids early and get them started, this is a way out of poverty for them. Education is a way out of poverty."

### How to help

**Online:** [www.unitedwaywb.org](http://www.unitedwaywb.org)

**By mail:** 100 North Pennsylvania Blvd., 2nd Floor, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

**Mobile:** Text the word SUPPORT to 26989

*Published Jan. 2, 2022*





# TOWN AND COUNTRY

LOCAL NEWS FOR LOCAL READERS SINCE 1899

News from Bally, Douglass, East Greenville, Green Lane, Hereford, Lower Salford, Marlborough, Milford, New Hanover, Pennsburg, Quakertown, Red Hill, Trumbauersville, Upper Hanover, Upper Salford, Washington Township and nearby communities.

## More than 200 people stage opposing protests at the square

By Larry Roeder  
Editor

It was broadcast on social media as a peaceful protest against the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) overturning the Roe v. Wade decision that has been in effect for nearly 50 years.

Organizers planned the protest to begin on Wednesday, July 6, and take place from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Square in Pennsburg – where Routes 29 and 663 intersect. The location is a popular place, allowing for high visibility and ample space.

But, it was more than that.

About a dozen or so pro-life protesters began arriving much earlier and took up positions on the sidewalks surrounding the intersection. After that, the crowd grew until around 5:50 p.m. when more than 200 pro-choice and pro-life protesters filled the sidewalks.

The mixing of opposing groups appeared awkward at first, with a mingling of opposing protest signs being held next to each other and chants from both sides. To all the protesters' credit, except for some pushing while jockeying for a better position, the protest was peaceful on both sides.

The intersection, which is normally busy at that time of day, became congested as traffic slowed to view the protesters and their messages. Horns were honking though it was hard to tell who the driver was supporting as the sidewalk was filled with sign carriers standing side-by-side.

Only one minor traffic accident was witnessed on Main Street during the event.

After seeing newscasts of protests that turned violent, causing injury and property damage, it was welcoming to witness people of differing views, in close proximity, in peaceful protest.

Upper Perk Police Chief Joe Adams, Jr. and his officers kept a watchful eye on all and were quick to intercept disagreements or actions that could have escalated. No arrests were made during the protest.

By 6:35 p.m. the crowd began to thin out, and 10



More than 200 pro-choice and pro-life protesters fill the sidewalks along the intersection of Routes 663 and 29 in Pennsburg on Wednesday, July 6. They expressed their support and displeasure over a June 24 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court related to abortion rights.

PHOTOS: BOB ESPOSITO/TOWN AND COUNTRY

minutes later most were gone. By 7:15 p.m. one would not have known that 200+ people gathered there to exercise their First Amendment Right to peacefully gather for their respective causes.

But, the reaction on social media was anything but social as the restraint shown by protest participants waned once

people returned to their phones and keyboards. Arguments for and against, some displaying disrespect and outright hatred, quickly appeared.

Fortunately, the people on the social media sites waited until the public protests were over.

*Published July 14, 2022*



# It takes partnership and it takes a village

By **Theresa Auriemmo**  
Special to the Republican

MJ2KB (Mount Jewett to Kinzua Bridge) Trail Club had a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the Knox & Kane Rail Trail (MJ2KB Trailhead) on Center Street in Mount Jewett giving many thanks and back history of the trail and its members.

"Anyone that's involved with developing Rail Trails knows that it doesn't happen overnight," MJ2KB President Stroup began.

Stroup said that the MJ2KB Trail Club started the first big project in 2018, repairing and refurbishing three old railroad trestles between Mount Jewett and Lantz Corners.

With a grant from North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission, the Trail Club was able to replace a large sluice pipe between Center Street and Kushequa Avenue.

Stroup stated that the Mount Jewett Borough and Brian Sees contributed by repairing and refurbishing all the sluice pipes and adding some between Kushequa Avenue and US Route 219. With funding from the McKean County's Act 13 Greenways grant, Keven Sluga did the work.

The Trail Club received a grant from the Trail Volunteer Fund (Pittsburgh Foundation) for a tractor and flail mower to maintain the trail.

Half-mile markers and a kiosk have been installed near the Kinzua Bridge State Park.

In 2020, the removal of railroad ties (4,000 tons) left along the trail from Kushequa Avenue to US Route 219 was delivered to Casella after Denny Rettger



PHOTO BY THERESA AURIEMMO

Pictured is the MJ2KB Trail Club Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony at the MJ2KB Trailhead on Center Street in Mount Jewett.

moved the ties to two locations. Meyers Trucking delivered them for free.

In 2021, improvements were made to the Trailhead located on Center Street in Mount Jewett. A kiosk, bike repair station, handicap parking, trailhead sign, placed a storage container, and an acknowledgment sign was installed and funded by the National Fuel Charitable Foundation.

Artisan Angela Cornelius painted the mural on the storage container that was partially funded by Lumber Heritage Region.

Stroup acknowledged and thanked those agencies and contributors that helped to make the development of the trail.

MJ2KB Member Ron Keim, thanked the

neighboring trails for joining the celebration on July 15: the Kinzua Valley Trail Club and the TAMED (Trail Association of the McKean and Elk Divide) Trail Club.

Keim said that the section of trail from Center Street in Mount Jewett to the Kinzua Bridge State Park was a vision of Janie French who is the Director of Headwaters Charitable Trust.

"There was money available that the County took advantage of and contracted to build this section (Center Street to Kinzua Bridge State Park). With engineering it was a million dollars," Keim said. Keim has been on the board since it was built and has been maintaining that section of the trail. Keim continued, "Carolyn had a vision that we would take

another three and a half miles to Lantz Corners. I thought that was quite a vision!"

Keim explained that there were challenges, the first one was acquiring the funds. "Writing grants is kind of like going to the dance and asking all of the pretty girls if they want to dance. You are told 'no' quite a lot," Keim said. Keim and Stroup wrote a grant together that was received. This grant was used to get materials after a bridge engineer certified the worthiness of the bridges. At that time, the MJ2KB Trail Club members went to work and covered the trestles.

Keim talked about the workforce that MJ2KB Trail Club has and said that there are "master carpenters that are excellent!"

*Continued on next page*



Keim focused on the drainage project for the Knox & Kane Rail Trail. Keim said McKean County (through Act 13) granted the money to fix the drainage with Kevin Sluga doing the work.

Keim said that the hard part was the surface on the trail. Keim said there was three and a half miles for the additional trail (Center Street to Lantz Corners) and did the calculation for the TSA (Trail Surface Aggregate). "It was somewhere around 3,800 tons TSA! That is not cheap! It is \$46 a ton delivered," Keim explained.

A grant was written for DCNR, said Keim. The Trail Club talked and decided to do the labor themselves. The TSA material was stockpiled in two locations.

"The ingenuity of the experience of the people who were volunteers, Denny Rettger, Ken Stroup, and Jack Forquer.

Keim explained that Rettger fabricated a box spreader (paver). Forquer was the "Roller Man Extraordinaire." Stroup was the "Finish Guy."

Cleveland Brothers Construction Equipment Supplier at Lantz Corner donated the use of the company's roller for the laying of the TSA project, an \$8,000 savings to the MJ2KB Trail Club.

Keim explained that the DCNR grant was \$182,200 and the Trail Club matched it with about \$45,000 "of our own" labor. "We built this equivalent section for about \$230,000 compared to \$900K when it was contracted.

"I just want to give credit to Denny, Jack, and Ken," Keim exclaimed.

Director of Headwaters Charitable Trust, Janie French, said "this" wouldn't happen without community. That is the role that

### A LETTER FROM LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JOHN FETTERMAN

*Thank you for the opportunity to share this special occasion with you and celebrate the opening of this new trail.*

*Every time I travel through McKean County, my wife Gisele and I always try to stop at the Kinzua Bridge State Park. It's really one of my favorite places throughout all of Pennsylvania. We love to spend time in the park and walk around, especially in the fall when the leaves are in season.*

*This new trail is going to make the park's beauty more accessible for people walking and biking throughout McKean County. It's such a beautiful place and deserves to be enjoyed by as many people as possible.*

*I want to especially thank all of the volunteers who helped make this happen, and all of the elected officials who worked so hard on this project. I look forward to walking this trail next time I'm in the area.*

*John*

Headwaters Charitable Trust Plays, an intermediary between the community and their needs and funders. "We wouldn't have taken this project on without the commitment that the folks in Mount Jewett have. We have trail groups through the 73.8 miles."

French said that they completed the acquisition in 2017, raising \$1.95 million between 2015 and 2017. "There was a lot

of support thru federal and state governments and especially the McKean County Commissioners because they have a very big voice in supporting their own community. That is what funders look at," French said and added that the MJ2KB Trail Club has been "absolutely phenomenal."

"I just want to thank everybody because you all are the reason that this is so successful but it would not have happened

without the MJ2KB Trail Club. That is vital and we see that along the whole way through the 73.8 miles. I thank all of you. I thank the elected officials and I thank Executive Director, Linda Devlin, from the Allegheny Forest Visitors Bureau." French said that It takes a partnership and it takes a village.

French read a letter from Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman that was sent on July 15, the day of the ceremony to be read. The letter read:

*Thank you for the opportunity to share this special occasion with you and celebrate the opening of this new trail.*

*Every time I travel through McKean County, my wife Gisele and I always try to stop at the Kinzua Bridge State Park. It's really one of my favorite places throughout all of Pennsylvania. We love to spend time in the park and walk around, especially in the fall when the leaves are in season.*

*This new trail is going to make the park's beauty more accessible for people walking and biking throughout McKean County. It's such a beautiful place and deserves to be enjoyed by as many people as possible.*

*I want to especially thank all of the volunteers who helped make this happen, and all of the elected officials who worked so hard on this project. I look forward to walking this trail next time I'm in the area.*

*John*

French said that she thinks the outreach from Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman was important and "we" have to keep our elected officials incredibly involved. "They have a bigger voice to reach what we need to have done," French added.

*Published July 19, 2022*

# why newspapers?

Recent studies indicate that nearly  
**7 in 10 Pennsylvania adults**  
have read a newspaper in the past week.

## MENTAL HEALTH

# Access is needed but staffing is down

By Justin Strawser

jstrawser@dailyitem.com

Nine-year-old Jeremiah Albertson started showing signs of anxiety in kindergarten.

It took his parents, Renee and Ryan Albertson, months to get a formal diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder and the help he needed.

The Albertsons grew frustrated because they never imagined how difficult it would be to navigate waiting lists and systems.

"For us, because we both work in education, we felt like dealing with kids is kind of our business, we really didn't imagine how hard it would be to get him therapy sessions or even a formal diagnosis," said Renee Albertson, a teacher at Shikellamy School District. "I can't tell you how many days I spent the entirety of my lunch telling his story and trying to get someone to take on his case."

Staffing shortages, exacerbated by the pandemic, are among the leading issues preventing mental health treatment in the Susquehanna Valley and beyond, according to national and local experts. It is the focus of this first part of what will become The Daily Item's ongoing series exploring mental health and mental health treatment in the Susquehanna Valley.

### Need spiked

Reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder in adults in the United States increased by more than 20 percent, from 11 percent in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic to 31.6 percent in 2021, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation report.

The American Public Health Association reported that "almost 83 million people diagnosed with anxiety or depression were unable to access counseling services in 2020, a study published in June in Psychiatry Online found. About 42.9 million



PHOTO: ROBERT INGLIS/THE DAILY ITEM

Ryan and Renee Albertson, along with their sons Jeremiah, 9, left, and Samuel, 5, have all worked together to help Jeremiah with his anxiety disorder.

people with undiagnosed anxiety or depression had an unmet need for counseling, double the annual number in recent years."

The association said staffing shortages are widespread across the U.S., with patients in the South and middle of the country having the most difficulty, according to data from the Health Resources and Services Administration.

"The shortages impact an estimated 132 million Americans," according to the association's report.

More than 6,600 mental health practitioners are needed to fill vacancies, the report notes and the shortage isn't going anywhere. A labor market analysis by Mercer released last fall predicts there will be a 10 percent increase in demand for

mental health workers by 2026. During that time, 400,000 workers are expected to leave the occupation and put 27 states in a position where they are unable to meet hiring demands for skilled or semi-skilled mental health workers.

Pennsylvania is among the states expected to experience severe shortages.

The median annual wage for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors was \$47,660 in May 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### Albertsons seek help

Renee Albertson said she and her husband knew their son had anxiety issues but it was difficult finding help.

"We took him to his pediatrician, who

gave us a packet of people to call and try to find services (therapy or a formal diagnosis)," said Albertson. "I was working as a kindergarten teacher at the time in a special needs setting, so I felt like I should have access to the resources he needed."

"I was grossly undereducated and underprepared to find private care service for him because he didn't have medical assistance."

Albertson said she called at least 20 different locations, but was told they didn't "take kids that young" or didn't take the Albertson's private insurance.

"I explained over and over what was going on and that we just needed someone to talk to him and get him some coping skills," she said. "Many places were listed as accepting pediatric patients, but they were referring to teens, not small children."

Albertson said they were finally able to get on several waitlists and even visited a few locations until they "found somewhere that we all felt comfortable."

Albertson said they found a private care therapist that was working out of a house in the area.

It was awkward and the setup made them feel uncomfortable, she said, but it was the earliest appointment they could find and they felt a need to get his treatment underway.

"He wasn't getting any better and I was trying everything I had access to as an educator," Albertson said. "I wasn't able to do it on my own. We really needed professional help for him."

They got a call from Geisinger Pediatric Psych Services a few days later that they had an opening. They never returned to the first therapist, she said.

"At Geisinger, we saw an amazing doctor

*Continued on next page*



## The Daily Item continued

there, Dr. Christine Chew, who said he was absolutely in need of some services, but also urged us to consider testing for giftedness," Albertson said. "He saw her for about 5 months and left there with some amazing tools to keep his anxiety better under control. From the time we started until he started doing sessions at Geisinger it was probably about three or four months."

Not having access to service means a patient may wait in a hospital emergency room or to schedule an appointment for a long period of time, Dr. Frank Maffei, Chair of Pediatrics at Geisinger, said.

Maffei cited two planned Geisinger facilities, one in Moosic and one in Danville, which should provide some relief. Geisinger announced last year that it would be building two inpatient behavioral health facilities beginning this fall in partnership with Acadia Healthcare Company. Under the partnership, two new freestanding inpatient behavioral health facilities will be built — near Danville and in Moosic, Lackawanna County — with plans to serve adult and pediatric patients.

"We believe in the next two or three years, we will have a greater capacity to care for those children at those facilities," Maffei said. "Those are both adult and children, but there are dedicated pediatric beds."

### Start over

In January, Alberston said they revisited this frustration when Jeremiah asked to return to therapy this year. The Albertsons called their original Geisinger clinic and found out Jeremiah was no longer listed as an active patient, so the family had to start over.

Albertson said they felt incredibly fortunate Geisinger picked him up again pretty quickly. He is doing teletherapy sessions with Dominick Agosti out of Selinsgrove Geisinger.

Finding help at all is hard, but finding help for your child can be even more challenging, Albertson said.

"I would have moved heaven and earth to help my son and so many days I was tired and overwhelmed at the prospect of finding something that would work for our family," she said. "People I worked with were absolutely shocked that my child would need access to therapy. But it was explained to us by a specialist that his brain is just wired differently than most people. He takes something as simple as, 'Buckle



**Dr. Frank Maffei**  
Chair of Pediatrics  
at Geisinger



PHOTO: ROBERT INGLIS/THE DAILY ITEM

Jacqueline Kieffer of New Berlin says her daughter Kylie, 2, helps keep her focused on dealing with her mental health issues and doing the best she can.

up to stay safe and turns it into my mom will die in a car accident. I wasn't afraid of the help, it just wasn't available."

Jeremiah also qualified as gifted in first grade.

"I did tons of research and it's pretty common for kiddos that are gifted to have other mental health issues," she said. "I think there's a stigma for parents too — if your child needs access to mental health services, you clearly did something to them, which most often is not the case."

### 'Great magnifier'

As with many things, COVID-19 has been "the great magnifier" for issues, including mental health, Maffei said.

One of the biggest issues has been an increase in reported child abuse cases resulting in death or near fatality, he said.

"COVID stressed the infrastructure to keep our children safe, but it also eliminated the extra eyes and ears that are watching our children. For example, social workers, coaches, clergy, teachers," said Maffei. "We probably were grossly underestimating the number of abuse cases during the pandemic. There were some reports that the cases brought to attention had far greater severity. Perhaps those less severe cases were being hidden."

Pennsylvania needed to address staffing ChildLine, maintaining appropriate compensation for social workers and having medical expertise available for

cases of child abuse before the pandemic magnified all of them, he said.

"We know child abuse in Pennsylvania is far worse than before, but it was already on the rise," Maffei said.

Additionally, America has had to adapt to a "terrible nursing shortage," he said, which affects child abuse and mental and behavioral health.

One way to tackle that is through more telemedicine.

"We may have to break away from traditional models of how we deliver behavioral health," said Maffei. "We have to be able to go where our patients are so there's proximity to care not only community-based clinics and schools but in the home by doing telehealth visits. Perhaps we can learn from the telecommunication aspect that the pandemic forced us to get better at, to get rapid access to a behavioral health professional by a phone or a private Zoom meeting."

### Children/teens

Northumberland County Children's Mental Health Program Specialist William Brecker, of the county's Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities Services, said he is seeing more services for mental health needs than ever before but there are waiting lists for agencies that provide these services. The issue comes down to staffing, he said.

Joe Laposky, mental health director at the

county agency, said caseworkers are not allowed to have waiting lists: They're either open or closed. At this point, the county is open for case management. Each case manager can only have 30 cases, he said.

"It's common to be open but we've been struggling with staff," said Laposky. "That's been the biggest thing. We have staff come, they don't stay. We lost staff through the pandemic. Five to eight years ago, we put out requests for civil service and we might get a list back with 10 people on it. We're lucky to get three now, and thankful if we get one on the list."

It's hard to be competitive because workers can make as much money working at a warehouse or somewhere else without the stress involved in the mental health industry, said Laposky.

Case managers get great benefits but that is not a deciding factor for younger workers, he said.

While there are some long-term employees, Laposky said new hires stay on only for a few months. Laposky said a significant part of his job recently has been filling vacant positions although, at this moment, the staffing is filled.

Brecker said salary may be an issue but workers get frustrated with a lack of results, coming to work and feeling like a failure.

"Children are being treated, we are working with them on a daily basis, and

*Continued on next page*

workers have kids on their caseloads for three years, and it's not going to change if nothing is changing in the child's home," said Brecker. "We keep treating these children (with mental illness), but unfortunately these children are in the same environment where the trauma occurred. It's hard to improve someone's mental health status when the factors causing their mental health are not being addressed."

### Aging adults

Lynn Cooper, the behavioral health specialist for the Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging, said staffing of direct care workers for older adults is a problem for a host of reasons, including COVID-19.

"Some of it is COVID, some of it is people deciding it's not a field they want to work in anymore," said Cooper. "It's a hard job. Everybody is understaffed. Hospitals are understaffed. Mental health is understaffed. Our AAAs are. We're hanging in there right now."

Maffei said the industry as a whole needs to attract talented individuals into those fields of psychology and psychiatry.

"We have to place value, more value, on those careers because they provide such important help for our children," he said.

Maffei also said social workers need encouragement to receive more training and for providers to help facilitate that.

There are not enough providers who understand the unique needs of older adults.

"That's a huge one," said Cooper. "We're pushing very hard to help our mental health system to offer more training for the unique needs of older adults. A 70-year-old who relapses on alcohol is not the same as a 20-year-old, or a 30-year-old or a 40-year-old. They're totally different generations."

The other issue is access in general. Medicare makes it extremely difficult for older adults, she said. The program only allows three types of outpatient therapy providers: psychiatrist, psychologist or licensed clinical social worker.

Cooper, in therapy for depression, said she lost her counselor on the day she turned 65. Her counselor couldn't bill Medicare because that specific coverage doesn't cover a Master's-level licensed marriage and family therapist.

Like so many of the issues in the mental health field, COVID exacerbated an already existing problem, she said.

"If someone can make more at McDonald's rather than helping an older adult at a senior center then they're probably going to take the McDonald's job," said Cooper. "Part of it is the pay. Part of it is hard work."

"It's a shame that there are some professions that are not given the kind of attention and importance they need."

Karen Leonovich, the administrator of Northumberland County Area Agency on Aging, said there are very few mental health workers in the area who specialize in geriatrics, so those patients with mental or behavioral health problems often get pushed to the side.

### Workforce issues

Kristen Houser, the deputy secretary for the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in the state Department of Human Services, oversees those receiving services through Medicaid and those who are under-or-uninsured and receive services through county mental health administrators.

"Workforce issues are one of the driving things and it shows up in a couple of different ways," she said. "We've had people leave the field, experienced burnout. We have had an exodus of providers. We've been watching this conundrum come toward us for quite a few years. Human services is not a field that is well compensated for the most part."

Trends in career choices have shown a decline in people interested in human services, an issue not unique to mental health, she said.

"There are many, many fewer people in the pipeline," she said.

The lack of adequate staffing, due to an exodus of people, people not willing to do the job and concerns about the pandemic, means demand isn't met and people are spending too much time in emergency rooms, Houser said.

"We do have safety nets in place," said Houser. "We have crisis lines across the state. We have the national suicide prevention lifeline. People who feel they are in a crisis and need immediate assistance can get it by calling those numbers."

"There are also a variety of warmlines around the state. This is for those not necessarily in a crisis but want to talk to someone and get support."

Houser said there are some efforts being made now to increase access.

One of those is a crisis response system to establish a three-digit national number next summer. Another is a sustained funding stream for crisis services at the state level.

"This is going to be a multi-year undertaking," said Houser. "We have received some federal grant funding to support our planning. We are seeking more. We will also be pursuing a way to get a dedicated funding stream in Pennsylvania through legislation. That legislation is not introduced yet but we're interested in pursuing that."

If people can be trained in mental health intervention at the moment individuals need it, the police won't need to respond and patients won't be admitted to medical facilities that aren't equipped or prepared, she said.

"You wouldn't send somebody with a medical emergency to a psychiatrist. On the flip side, we don't want to send people with mental health emergencies to medical facilities where they don't have behavioral health care available," said Houser. "We are looking in the long term to enhance and increase the availability of services in Pennsylvania."

*Published April 2, 2022*

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# PARKLAND PRESS



## Community garden now open in Parkland

**By C. Richard Chartrand**  
Special to The Press

The Allentown West Rotary in partnership with Parkland Community Library and South Whitehall Township held a ribbon-cutting ceremony April 20 to officially open the community garden behind the library.

Allentown West Rotary President Gail Micca has spearheaded the Allentown West Green Thumbs Garden Project, which started two years ago at the CedarBrook Community Garden.

Building on the philosophy of growing food for hungry community members and donating all produce to local pantries, Micca has worked with township officials during the past year to bring a learning program to life with the Parkland Community Library.

Both Debbie Jack, executive director, Parkland Community Library and Micca have similar visions in wanting to promote home gardening education and helping community members to grow some of their own food.

With the help of the South Whitehall Township team, the board of commissioners and the Green Advisory Council, the idea to build these six raised beds came to fruition.

Tori Morgan and Ben Long were instrumental in getting this project approved by the board in December 2021.

This project is in its infancy, but there are great hopes for building a community of gardeners.

With support from the Allentown West Rotary and the Parkland Garden Club and the educational resources provided by the library for patrons of all ages, this program aims to address the lack of garden knowledge for many community members who want to garden, but just don't feel confident about how to get started.

A garden kickoff event is planned for May 12 and community members are encouraged to come, learn about the project and plant several raised beds.



PRESS PHOTO BY C. RICHARD CHARTRAND



PRESS PHOTO BY C. RICHARD CHARTRAND

**ABOVE:** The raised garden beds are designed and built by South Whitehall Township Public Works Superintendent Herb Bender.

**LEFT:** Bill Weber, Allentown West Rotary Club, Sue Weber, Allentown West Rotary Club and Parkland Garden Club and Gail Micca, president, Allentown West Rotary Club, are joined by members of the Allentown West Rotary Club, Parkland Garden Club, Parkland Community Library, former South Whitehall Township Board of Commissioners, Parkland CARES Food Pantry, South Whitehall Township Parks and Recreation for a ribbon-cutting ceremony April 20. Missing from the photo are Frank Petrocelli, chairman, Green Advisory Council, Randy Cope, interim township manager, South Whitehall Township and Herb Bender, public works supervisor, South Whitehall Township who designed and built the raised beds.



## Ganther says Bucks must boost enrollment

By James Bonnell

With national higher education enrollment reaching historic lows, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, budget deficits that are seemingly impossible to overcome, and a future as uncertain as ever, many institutions find themselves searching for methods to turn it all around.

Bucks President Dr. Felicia Ganther is more than aware of what the college has faced, will face, and how it intends to ensure its success in the future.

While an estimate from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center claims higher education enrollment across the country has declined by 5.1 percent over the last two years, the drop at Bucks is actually even higher.

Bucks saw an enrollment decrease of 8 percent from 2019 to 2020 and a 12 percent decrease from 2020 to 2021.

In response to those numbers, Dr. Ganther points out that, "We're still lagging in Fall and Spring enrollment, so those numbers kind of hold."

However, she also notes that the college has seen, "...a 30 percent increase in summer enrollment over the same time last year and a 10 percent increase over the same time two years ago."

Unfortunately, since enrollment just opened up for the Fall semester, there aren't any comparisons to previous Fall enrollment at this time.

Although we can look at the fact that national enrollment has actually been on a steady decline since before the pandemic, there are many obvious aspects of the outbreak that were specifically influential in continuing the decline.

Dr. Ganther believes that, "...opening back up the campus, people knowing that we're open, and people feeling more comfortable with being back," will almost certainly have a positive impact on enrollment.

Aside from recovering from the



Bucks President Dr. Felicia Ganther

pandemic, Bucks has been involved with an enrollment consulting firm known as Ruffalo Noel Levitz for some time now.

The commitment with the firm will last 12 to 18 months and will feature a number of recommendations aimed at boosting enrollment.

While the college is hopeful some of these recommendations may be implemented sometime during the summer of 2022, the real objective is to have the recommendations used to increase the Fall 2023 do you mean 2022? enrollment.

According to Dr. Ganther, "This work is very critical to our accreditation, to our strategic planning, and of course to revenue generation due to tuition."

When Dr. Ganther mentions the various levels of importance this relationship with the firm will bring, she's stressing the value of taking the necessary time and conducting the correct amount of research to be able to gain a significant increase in future enrollment.

Bucks wants to be able to have a variety

of unanimously agreed upon recommendations before mass implementation.

One particular implementation that is already decided upon revolves around the student information system.

In the near future, Bucks will be turning to the ERP Workday for student information services.

ERP stands for enterprise resource planning, which is software created to collect, log, manage, and translate many forms of information.

Where Workday is a means to simplify and efficiently provide information for students and faculty, there are unfortunately some future recommendations that may be hindered by the software.

"A lot of the functionalities that we would need in order to support enrollment are a part of the implication of this student information system. So, some of the recommendations may have a lag time, because they will be dependent and predicated upon successful

implementation of the various components of Workday," explains Dr. Ganther.

Perhaps not the most encouraging information, we must remind ourselves that large changes take time, and tend to have periods of stasis before success.

Outside of the research from the Noel Levitz firm, Dr. Ganther and other Bucks administrators have been looking at numerous ways to be accessible to anyone interested in an education.

When looking into course scheduling and offerings, it became clear that students with specific timing engagements are unable to complete full time programs on the current Monday/Wednesday, or Tuesday/Thursday class schedule system.

To combat this issue, the college hopes to launch weekend course offerings that would be part of an 18-month degree program in January of 2023.

Many people who participate in New Year's resolutions tend to look into pursuing education in hopes of bettering their careers.

"We want to right there to support those who may be thinking about doing that," Dr. Ganther half jokes.

Another portion of this accessibility relies on institutional partnerships. A student who is able to remain in a similar location, with a similar course schedule, and a similar time frame will be more likely to pursue a degree after acquiring their Associate's.

The more comfortable students feel about accessibility, the better the chance is of increased enrollment and institutional funding based in tuition and other areas.

As we continue to face a \$7 million budget deficit at Bucks, it's no surprise that finances and funding are extremely crucial in positively moving forward.

Referring back to our conversation last year, Dr. Ganther still maintains that all employees of the college need not worry

*Continued on next page*



## The Centurion continued

about programs losing funding, or individuals losing employment in order to cover the deficit.

Currently, we are exploring interim structures. This is to say the college is searching for individuals already employed by the institution who would be able to serve in alternative capacities.

"Next year, we'll have an interim provost, interim academic vice presidents, and interim deans," expresses Dr. Ganther.

This process will allow the college to determine what is actually affordable before hiring new employees.

With regards to changes to academic

departments, the kinesiology and sports studies programs will be moved to the health sciences department. This integration will keep the faculties of said departments intact.

As someone who does not believe it cutting things unnecessarily, Dr. Ganther has also been looking into external funding. This can include grants and scholarships.

"We have been working hard with some of our partners to see if they can step in and provide a service, in lieu of us trying to pay for that service," she adds.

Her hope is to be able to redirect traditionally set aside funds for programs and services to areas in need.

At the end of the day, Bucks will need to be present in the community in order to reach desired success in the future.

"The community has to see the value proposition of why the college exists, how the citizenry can benefit from the fact that we are not necessarily just an institution that beings in traditional aged recent high school graduates....," expresses Dr. Ganther.

She finishes the interview reminding us of the importance of accessibility.

"I think the success of Bucks is going to be predicated on our ability to meet the needs of people where they are at this moment and not continue to project a

traditional college environment. That's core to who we are, but we're more than that, and we have to be more than that. We have a lot to offer and we're going to have to blow our own bugles. People have to see us because we are showing people who we are."

Even though nothing is promised in these trying times, we at Bucks should be confident that Dr. Ganther and her administration has the institution's best interests at heart, and that she fully intends to lead us out of the depths of the last few years.

Published May 4, 2022

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## Traffic headaches

### Residents voice concerns about construction

Road construction across the state is in full swing. Since mid-July, a stretch of U.S. Route 15 near Franklin Church, Cabin Hollow, and Hickory Roads is being reconstructed to include jug handles and longer acceleration and deceleration ramps to eventually make travel on the highway safer. However, there have been a number of accidents on that stretch in recent weeks.

Last Friday – Friday the 13th— police and rescue vehicles responded to two accidents there. The first one occurred at 6:27 p.m. when a 48-year-old male driving a 2020 Silverado pickup truck hit a construction barrier. According to Lt. Greg Anderson of the Northern York County Regional Police Department, the man was arrested at the scene for driving under the influence.

Later that evening at 11:11 p.m., a 34-year-old male from Louisiana was traveling northbound toward Franklin Church Road, fell asleep, hit a barrier and flipped his vehicle, Lt. Anderson said. He did not seek medical attention.

On Sunday, August 15, at 4:45 p.m., the driver of a 2008 Ford Escape was traveling in the southbound lane and made a right-hand turn onto Hickory Road. The driver of a tractor-trailer behind the vehicle failed to slow down in time, and he hit the SUV. A front seat passenger in the SUV suffered minor lacerations to her leg, according to Lt. Anderson. All four occupants of the Escape were transported to Holy Spirit Hospital, he added.

“Most vehicle crashes are the result of driver behaviors such as speeding, tailgating, improper passing and turning. Unfortunately, we’re seeing far too much of that in our work zones. This is in no way a commentary on any specific crash that occurred in this work zone, it is simply an observation of what we see on a daily



Since mid-July, this stretch of U.S. Route 15 near Franklin Church, Cabin Hollow, and Hickory roads is under construction to include jug handles and longer acceleration and deceleration ramps to eventually make travel on the highway safer.

basis in work zones statewide,” Dave Thompson, district press officer of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) said.

Curt Werner, the Dillsburg Banner photographer and member of the local fire department said he responded to four motor vehicle accidents in the construction zone from August 1-15. Two of those accidents involved a tractor trailer. The Banner reached out to the Northern York County Regional Police Department yesterday for a total count of accidents in the construction zone since mid-July, but two telephone calls were not returned by press time.

On Tuesday, the owners of Miller’s Auto and Staub Automotive, both located on Franklin Church Road which is closed off during the construction, said that the project has been a worry to their customers and suppliers. Both businesses have been directing their customers to travel the back roads to get to their garages.

“Our customers are very angry. They do not know how to get here,” Stacey Staub

said on Tuesday. Customers are avoiding using Route 15 because people say they cannot see to go across Cabin Hollow Road, she added.

Janet Biden, who works in Dillsburg and did travel Route 15 South to go to her home on Braggstown Road in Adams County now says she now drives to and from work on back roads to avoid what she calls a dangerous situation at the intersection with Cabin Hollow Road. Biden, who drives a sedan, said that the turning lane is short and that the barriers block her vision.

“I can’t see the traffic going in the opposite direction,” she said. PennDOT, however, has yet to receive any complaints about the intersection at Cabin Hollow Road, Thompson said.

Adam Miller, who along with his brother owns Millers Auto, said that he has heard a few of the vehicle crashes that have occurred in recent weeks. He said he saw a tractor-trailer hit a barrier and roll over onto its side. Its windshield was on the grass.

The Millers also said that early this week,

they have noticed more signs, including one with flashing lights, in the construction zone to alert motorists. They said that they noticed a Jeep along the highway with a camera on its roof, which alerts speeding motorists.

PennDOT confirmed the brothers’ observations. As part of PA’s Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement (AWZSE) program, the vehicle-mounted systems are used to detect and record motorists exceeding posted work zone speed limits using electronic timing devices.

“It’s important to remember that the Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement program isn’t about issuing violations, it’s about saving lives,” PennDOT Secretary Yassmin Gramian said. “The goal is to encourage motorists to slow down in work zones, change their behavior, and ultimately improve safety for both motorists and workers.”

According to state records, 43 percent of crashes in work zones result in injuries or fatalities.

To alert local motorists, access to Century Lane and Franklin Church Road from U.S. Route 15 is closed. Detours will continue to October 1. Motorists can access Century Lane via Range End Road (TR-851), Franklin Church Road via Cabin Hollow Road (Rte. 4036), and Clearview Road (TR-888).

Motorists can check the conditions along the construction zone as well as other major roadways in the state by visiting [www.511PA.com](http://www.511PA.com). The free, 24-hour site provides traffic delay warnings, speed information, weather reports, and access to more than 1,000 traffic cameras.

For more information on the progress of this and other traffic projects, check out [www.projects.pennidot.gov](http://www.projects.pennidot.gov).

*Published Aug. 19, 2021*





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## Beltzville State Park expected to be hot spot for the 4th

By Jill Whalen

jwhalen@tnonline.com

For as far back as he can remember, state Rep. Doyle Heffley said Beltzville State Park has had problems with overcrowding.

"Even when we were growing up, there were always weekends in the summer that drew large crowds," he said.

It continued when his father, Larry Heffley, now retired, was a ranger at the Franklin Township park.

And it happened again Sunday, when officials had to close the gates to new visitors at 11:30 a.m. when it reached capacity.

"We are the Poconos. People want to come here. And the fact of the matter is that people are going to come," said Heffley, who expects the upcoming Fourth of July weekend will bring much the same. "The park can only safely hold so many people because of its infrastructure. One of those things is that they have their own treatment facility and it can only handle so many people."

But Heffley, R-Carbon, said park management and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has partnered with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Pennsylvania State Police and local police to address the matter.

For example, parking at many of Beltzville's trailhead lots is prohibited on weekends and the park issues alerts when overcrowding is expected. Notices are posted on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and illegally parked vehicles are ticketed or towed.

Park staff can also direct would-be



visitors to other state parks in the region, Heffley said.

Beltzville's manager, Benjamin Monk, said the park's capacity is determined by the 904 parking spots in its day use area. So far this season, it has reached capacity six times, he said.

"If it is a nice weekend day between Memorial Day and Labor Day there is a strong chance we will reach capacity," Monk said. "The holiday weekends are especially busy for us at Beltzville."

The park begins closing trailhead parking lots from sunset on Fridays until Monday mornings during the busy season.

"We close the other parking areas to protect those areas from overcrowding. The closed areas are more environmentally sensitive than the main day use area," Monk explained.

And when the day use area is filled, no walk-ins are allowed.

Monk said that if the park expects an influx of visitors, it calls staff from other parks to help.

"The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat

Commission, Franklin Township Police and Pennsylvania State Police also come assist with the weekend operations when they have available officers. We could not do it without the support we receive from our partners," Monk said.

This weekend, additional staffers will be working.

Those wishing to visit the park are advised to call to make sure there is room for them.

And notices are issued when it reaches capacity.

"Our partners at the (Pennsylvania) Turnpike Commission do put messages on the electronic boards when we hit capacity. We also have electronic signs at either end of Pohopoco Drive," Monk added.

When the park reached capacity on Sunday, it was a mix between vehicles with Pennsylvania and out-of-state registration plates. Some travel for hours to Beltzville, Heffley noted.

"Visitors are certainly disappointed when they can't enter the park," Monk said. "A majority of visitors move on to find another

place to recreate after they are informed that they will not be permitted to enter."

DCNR spokesman Wesley Robinson said Beltzville is among the commonwealth's most visited parks during the warmer months.

"It's great that Beltzville is popular and we love that it is a staple in the community. That said, there are other state parks, forests and recreation opportunities to experience if Beltzville is full. If you can't get to Beltzville early, plan ahead and try a new park. You might discover something new you enjoy," he suggested.

Parks that don't see as many visitors include the nearby Lehigh Gorge State Park, which follows the Lehigh River from Francis E. Walter Dam near White Haven to Jim Thorpe. While there is no swimming, it has opportunities for hiking and bicycling.

Other state parks with swimming, picnicking and other activities include Frances Slocum in Luzerne County; Gouldsboro in Monroe and Wayne counties; Promised Land in Pike County; Tobyhanna in Monroe and Wayne counties, and Tuscarora in Schuylkill County.

Hickory Run State Park near White Haven isn't among the suggestions because it's also prone to overcrowding when the weather is favorable.

Heffley, who supports charging fees for access to state parks, reminded people that there are only a few weekends out of a typical year when Beltzville reaches capacity.

"There's always going to be some frustration with it. But at the end of the day, I think that the new park manager and the team that they have there are doing the very best they can," Heffley said.

*Published June 30, 2022*



# NORTHEAST TIMES

## Knowing CPR can save a life

By Tom Waring  
Northeast Times

Patrick and Melissa Mulhern certainly know the importance of knowing how to perform CPR.

Back in the early evening of April 15, the Mulherns were at their Academy Gardens home, making plans to grab McDonald's for dinner.

Suddenly, Melissa, a healthy 40-year-old at the time who had worked earlier that day, began making strange noises, as if in distress, and soon lost consciousness. Patrick called 911 and her parents, who live on the same block of Treaty Road.

Patrick, thinking his wife was suffering a stroke, moved her from the couch onto the carpeted floor and began performing chest compressions. Neighbor Art Anderson, a 39th Police District sergeant, also came to the house to perform chest compressions.

Paramedics Jermel Bowen and Timothy Bullock, stationed that day at Frankford and Linden avenues, responded quickly, continuing the CPR and using an automated external defibrillator to successfully restart Melissa's heart.

Medics monitored Melissa for 10 minutes before taking her to Jefferson Torresdale Hospital.

Melissa was hardly out of the woods, but was able to recover and go home after an eight-day hospital stay.

"She's a fighter," her husband said.

In the end, it was determined she had sudden cardiac arrest, caused by an undiagnosed heart arrhythmia. Statistics show that there is just an 8-percent survival rate for people with sudden cardiac arrest.

Melissa is alive because her husband performed chest compressions, allowing blood to continue to flow to the brain until medics arrived and were able to use an AED.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

1. From left: Patrick Mulhern, Samantha Mulhern, Art Anderson, Melissa Mulhern, Ryan Mulhern, Jermel Bowen, Timothy Bullock.
2. Melissa and Patrick Mulhern
3. Stranger Than Normal



"He is my hero," she said.

Due to the experience, the Mulherns wanted to host an event where people could be trained in CPR. They teamed with the office of City Councilman Bobby Henon to plan the event, which took place Sunday afternoon at Cannstatter's.

Minutes Matter conducted the CPR classes. Anderson, Bowen and Bullock were on hand, along with the couple's two children and other family members.

The day included a performance by Stranger Than Normal, recently named the WMGK house band. There were vendors and free food and beverages, along with raffles and activities for children.

Patrick Mulhern knew CPR from his days

as a teenage lifeguard and when he worked at DuPont, where all employees were certified in CPR and AED use. Anderson knew CPR due to his job as a police sergeant.

Looking back, the Mulherns realize the seriousness of the trauma. Melissa has no memory of the incident. She was in the emergency room for eight hours and had a CT scan and brain MRI. She was later moved to ICU, but doctors gave her only a 10-percent chance of living a normal life.

But, less than 48 hours after the incident, she was taken off life support. Several days later, doctors knew she would make a full recovery. Melissa is thankful that her husband's quick action prevented permanent damage.

"CPR not only saved my life, it kept me," she said.

Melissa has a pacemaker and has to visit doctors a couple of times a year. She'll be on medication the rest of her life, and joked that she's been ordered only to not jump out of an airplane or drive with a CDL.

"I have no physical restrictions," she said.

Melissa and Patrick thank the staff at Jefferson Torresdale's ER, ICU and telemetry unit.

The Mulherns plan to become CPR instructors, and they note that Pennsylvania has a Good Samaritan Law that protects people using CPR and an AED from personal liability.

*Published Oct. 20, 2021*

# THE DAILY NEWS

## Church's mission continues

### 12th St. UMC sells 150-year-old building to arts council

By **MICHELLE EHRESMAN**  
Staff Writer

A famous quote from the former CEO of GE advises "change before you have to." While change is a word that strikes fear into the hearts of many, Jack Welch's sentiment is a wise one. Fear of change has held back the growth of both individuals and groups of people alike whether it be in the business world, religious realm or personal endeavors.

However, one area church has shown a great deal of faith and forward thinking with a recent ministry decision.

The congregation of the 12th Street United Methodist Church in Huntingdon, sold its present place of worship, originally built in 1871, to the Huntingdon County Arts Council, in order to maintain the church's primary purpose of being a mission-minded church.

Cindy Wetzel, who was chair of the trustee board at the time of the vote to sell in 2019, explained there were a lot of repairs that needed to be made to the 150-year-old building.

"We knew we were coming to the end of the life of our roof and it would need to be replaced. There were also a lot of things we wanted to do inside the church. We wanted to have it repainted. We wanted to refresh our kitchen which hasn't been renovated since the 1950s. We wanted to put a restroom upstairs.

"We are a very mission-minded church. A lot of our money and a lot of our effort goes to missions, some are local and some extend beyond that. So when we looked at the cost (it was going to be around \$340,000 to do everything we wanted), I just got to thinking, 'do we want to put it into a building or do we want to actually put it into missions?' and we voted to put it towards missions."

The vote came in summer 2019, but then the question became, "what now?"

If they were selling their building, they would obviously need a new place to meet, and certainly they wanted their beloved building to go to a buyer who would use it to better the community.

As is often the case in small towns, there were already many connections between the members of 12th Street UMC and members of McConnellstown United Methodist



PHOTO BY HALDAN KIRSCH

**The 12th Street United Methodist Church in Huntingdon will soon become the new home of the Huntingdon County Arts Council. The congregation will gather in the building one last time for a de-consecration service at 4 p.m. Sunday, March 27.**

Church. The churches had been friendly with each other through the years and McConnellstown's congregation graciously agreed to allow the members of 12th St. to meet in their building at a separate time from their own services. One congregation holds its Sunday school hour while the other is holding its worship service and vice versa.

According to Pat Shope, pastor of 12th Street UMC, the arrangement is working well.

"We have found McConnellstown to be very cooperative in helping to work through this together. They have been nothing but accommodating. They understand the emotional breathing that is taking place with this big change."

As far as the fate of the building, Wetzel had been mulling it over in her mind and one night it came to her. The building would be the perfect place for the Huntingdon County Arts Council.

Wetzel explained she had known John Kearns, executive director of HCAC, for years, supports the council and has even helped them out on occasion.

"I called John and kind of blindsided him saying, 'what do you think about this?'" she recalled.

Kearns said there was definite interest in the building from the start.

"The building on Fourth Street was great for exhibition space, but it was a little small. We've always been interested in doing classes and workshops and other things, so we actually have been looking for a building for five or six years."

However, when COVID hit, two of the council's major funding sources were canceled.

"That really made the money dry up," stated Kearns.

The group terminated their lease on Fourth Street in June 2020 and later used space offered by the McConnellstown Playhouse.

"They were our savior," Kearns said.

While the council was able to kind of get things rolling again once COVID restrictions were lifted, Kearns said it still took a while until everyone on council was willing to take the big jump.

"We really will need to step up our activities to generate the revenue to cover this," he admitted.

Larry Mutti, HCAC president, agreed, "This will be an expensive facility to run, but it offers so much potential that was not available to us before. We're imagining a view of the arts that is very broad and inclusive."

The council is not wasting any time getting to work as they plan to host a Pysanky egg decorating workshop at the site Monday, April 4, and open their annual Spring Thaw, a youth art and writing juried exposition, Friday, April 8, through Sunday, May 1. They are also planning an official grand opening from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 21.

"It will be a day full of art demonstrations and hands-on activities for young and old alike," explained Kearns.

As for the 12th Street UMC congregation, they will hold one last service in the old 12th Street building. The de-consecration service is scheduled for 4 p.m. Sunday, March 27.

"There's a lot of grief and sorrow to leave a building with so much history, but we remember what we are about — we are the church, not the building. So, we reaffirm that and we grieve and have those moments of reflection, and then we remind ourselves who we are. We are the church, and thus, the vision for the future is for this congregation to continue to be the church in the community and elsewhere," Shope said.

Wetzel noted that even choosing to ask the arts council to be the next owners of the building, she feels, is fulfilling the church's mission to the community.

*Published March 26, 2022*



# the rocket

## OUR VIEW

# A series of unfortunate miscommunications

*Our View is a staff editorial produced collaboratively by the entire Rocket Staff. Any views expressed in the editorial are the opinions of the entire staff. Our editorial policy, which includes our blotter policy, can be found on our website.*

We bet you would like to know what is going on around campus. We, the journalists of The Rocket, are just as curious.

But, if racist attacks, COVID-19, accidents, administrative replacements and whether someone is an employee at this university have one thing in common, it's, "Don't say anything and it will eventually go away."

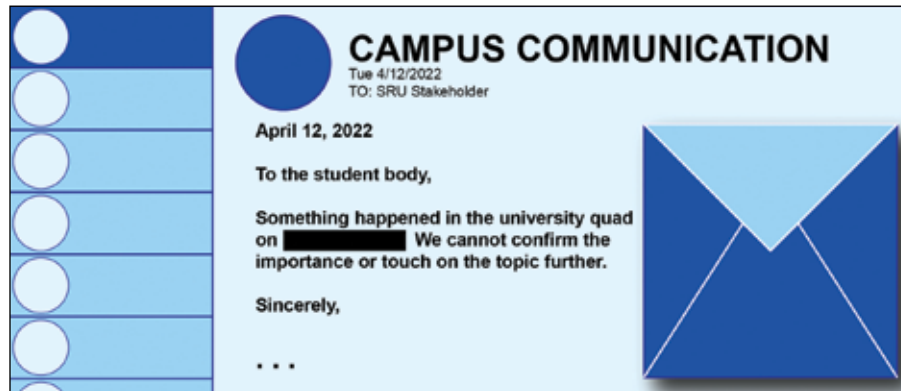
Most of the university's reactions to events have been underwhelming and inadequate. SRU has a history of being reactive as opposed to being proactive. This is evident through the administration's response to events over the past two years.

In an email to SRU stakeholders Saturday morning, Dean of Students Karla Fonner broke down the accidents that occurred the day before.

"Slippery Rock University has experienced an unusual series of student-related accidents within the last 24 hours that have resulted in significant or life-threatening injuries to those students who were involved," Fonner said.

While we were told the injuries were significant and life-threatening, how many injuries, where these accidents took place and the nature of them were never specified.

But this is not the first time the university announced major news during that week with seemingly zero details. On April 4, faculty and staff received an email from SRU President William Behre announcing in just one sentence that Abbey Zink was replaced with Michael Zieg as interim provost.



The reason why she was replaced has yet to be disclosed. The university even refuses to say if Zink is still an employee of the university, despite SRU being a public institution.

However, Behre did request everyone join him in thanking Zieg for "lending his skills and knowledge to this vital role."

The Rocket has worked hard to pry information from university documents and employees. Yet, instead of being met with welcoming transparency, we are often told we must file Right-to-Know requests, which can take more than a month, after deadline extension requests, to get an answer.

At least twice, we have had to appeal denials for university documents. In one of those cases, the university turned over the requested documents. In others, SRU has invoked the Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

The university is so reactive that they are often in a defensive posture toward the campus community they swear to support. When SRU hosted an open forum in response to the Zoom bombing attacks in February 2021, they spent nearly half an hour boasting about everything they do for minority students, instead of discussing the incident at hand.

Students at the forum and The Rocket

staff called out the administration for its opaque messaging. Behre acknowledged this misstep that night, admitting himself that "dialogue is best when it's ongoing, not just when it's in crisis."

"By not providing a greater level of detail, we actually created a situation where the individuals who were victims of this event were forced to repeat the story over and over and have to relive it," Behre said of the Zoom bombing. "That was terribly unfortunate, and I'm sorry that occurred."

It's not just about being first or implementing policies before incidents happen, but rather being communicative after the fact with clear, quality responses.

Students should not have to hear about a tragic event through an anonymous social media platform. It's incredibly unfortunate that Yik Yak provides more information than an SRU Communication email.

When we don't hear anything from official sources or said sources attempt to conceal information from the public, unreliable sources gain power and shape the narrative.

The lack of clear communication also makes the university look weak, as if the administration doesn't know exactly what is going on either. Students—the only reason the university exists and who pay

thousands of dollars to attend—feel excluded rather than informed.

The university needs to stop worrying about its public image and be concerned about the campus community losing faith in it after every attempt to hide what should be public knowledge. We shouldn't have to fight so diligently with a public institution for transparency.

Lack of transparency has a clear link to the spread of misinformation, something that could be easily avoided. The staff and faculty are left in the dark, even though they are intended to be the leaders and are supposed to serve the students.

Despite these roadblocks, we have not stopped chasing after the truth. After this past week, many of you reached out to The Rocket to share information or ask what we know and when we would be reporting it.

To those of you who reached out, thank you. And to those who wonder why we don't cover a particular topic or have a particular fact; A journalist is only as good as their sources.

Our relentless reporting proves us to be a serious, trustworthy news outlet. Never hesitate to reach out if there is something you believe the campus should know.

At the online forum after the Zoom bombing just over a year ago, then-Special Assistant to the President Terrence Mitchell laid out programs that could significantly improve the culture and communication on campus, beyond just diversity and inclusion aspects.

"Hopefully, in three or four years, you'll have a campus that is having dialogue in different ways," Mitchell said. "And be deeply understanding their role in conversations when we're trying to build a community."

Yet, we're still waiting.

*Published April 14, 2022*

# Latrobe Bulletin

## A hopping good time

### The Fairfield Boys Club hosts its 52nd Annual Frog Jumping Contest

**By Joe Wells**

Bulletin Staff Writer

For 53 years the first Saturday of August has been marked on the calendars of families from Fairfield and surrounding communities as a day of friendly competition amongst themselves.

That Saturday is not for a baseball game, football scrimmage or race; instead, it is the annual Frog Jumping Contest hosted by the Fairfield Boys Club.

The contest brings generations of families out to compete, settle rivalries and raise money for the local nonprofit organization.

Many families and friends have come and gone over the years but for over 20 years the competition has had Dave “The Frog Man” Altimus racking up wins and passing down his knowledge of competitive frog jumping.

“They’ve called me ‘The Frog Whisperer’ too,” Dave said. “But I don’t keep any secrets, I’ll tell anyone who asks what I know.”

When he was younger, Dave would come out to compete in the contest but he never won as a kid. But this year, Dave has eight division wins along with a championship final win, and he’s looking to get a ninth win.

As families arrive at the Laurel Valley Elementary School, host of the 52nd Frog Jumping Contest, they set up tents for shade and check on the frogs they caught days before.

Catching frogs prior to the event is as much a family affair as the day’s competition. That’s how Liz Byers of Ligonier spent her Friday night with her daughter Addyson.

“We spent the night at my grandmother’s



PHOTO: JOE WELLS

Jaedyn Payne, 13, of Cannonsburg, hits the ground just right to get his frog closer to the finish line.

pond catching frogs,” Liz said.

The contest is fun for families because no matter the age, you can compete, Liz said.

While some families don’t mind talking about their pre-contest catching, many chose not to disclose where their frogs came from — many from “private ponds.”

Not wanting his spot to become everyone’s, Paul Black — Dave’s longest rival — decided to not give up the location after his last spot was picked clean years back.

Paul has been competing for nearly 40 years, his mother used to bring him when

he was a toddler. His son, Paul “PJ” Black Jr., is 15 years old and competes as well.

Paul brought 21 frogs this year to throw at Dave and the other competitors.

“I actually have more fun just going out with my kids catching the frogs,” Paul said.

The Black family typically goes out a few nights before, staying out as late as 2 a.m. to find frogs.

Paul looks forward to the competition with Dave no matter the outcome.

“I just want to beat him,” he said. “It doesn’t always happen that way but I just got to pick my lucky frog.”

Many carry frogs in old coffee containers filled with water and some holes in the top for airflow.

Dave has a system. He brings two large totes filled with smaller plastic containers each with its own frog and a number. Those that don’t feel like hopping get retired early.

“I always threaten to turn them into frog legs,” Dave jokes.

The contest is broken down into five divisions with those just a few months old to 4-year-olds making up the tadpole division and age 16 and older classifying as the bullfrogs. The ages between are classified as peepers, croakers and froggers.

The division you compete in doesn’t factor too much into the size of the frog but competitors must be able to hold onto them at the start of the race — a challenge for many.

In fact, this year’s heaviest and longest frog came from 9-year-old Ashton Chero of New Florence. His frog was the only one to measure in weight over a pound and clocked in at over 14.75 inches in length, beating PJ by less than an inch.

This is Ashton’s third year and he likes winning. The big frog was caught by his grandfather, Rock.

“I mostly enjoy winning but I also like that my pap and friends come to watch me,” Ashton said.

And while it may be a challenge to hold onto your frog at the start and get it to cross the line first, the real challenge are the stubborn frogs after the whistle blows. It’s then that the frogs spring to life, evading the clutches of child and adult alike.

“I call those the second whistle jumpers,”

*Continued on next page*



## Latrobe Bulletin continued

they don't jump until the second whistle blows," Dave said.

The secret to chasing down a frog is to not run directly behind it after it, Dave said.

"You've got to go out to the side and get in front of it," he said. It's one of the many insights he's learned over the years.

The competition consists of three rounds, the longest being the first since contestants can buy extra entries and it takes only one win to move to the next round. But the competition is a single elimination format and once you're out of tickets, you'll have to wait for next year.

Although the day is about frog jumping, for the families there it's about tradition. The annual contest is about a Saturday afternoon spent with family eating hot dogs and slushies and spending time with one another.

Cell phones can be seen in hands but no one is mindlessly scrolling social media or playing games. They're capturing the moments, moments that have been handed down over 50 years.

"It's a pretty neat, unique family tradition," Michael Sisitki of Bolivar said.

Michael and his wife, Brooke, have been bringing their two children, Carter and Charlotte, since 2015. Even though one of the kids isn't too crazy about frogs, they like coming out to support the Boys Club and watching the event grow year after year.

The traditions also expand beyond the families with kids bringing their friends to spend the day learning the ins-and-outs of frog jumping.

For Jaedyn Payne, 13, of Canonsburg, his friend Tyler suggested he give it a shot.

"It's pretty fun, I like the competition aspect," Jaedyn said.

As the competition moved into the second round, a short rain storm moved in, halting competition for roughly 20 minutes. The rain and cooler weather was a blessing for everyone including the frogs who seemed to be jumping farther.

Quickly, the contest moved into the final rounds.

Some of the final rounds were over seconds after the whistle was blown. Ed Short, who won the tadpole division, had a frog that couldn't stop jumping.

At the bullfrog division, Dave found himself poised for a ninth win. Facing three other competitors, Paul not being one of them having been eliminated prior, Dave went with lucky frog number 13 for his final run. It was the right choice. Two large leaps and the frog was across the line.

One final contest between all the division winners to be named grand champion is all that remains of the day. Dave, who has only won once just to say he did it, brings out a special frog for this race.

It's one that's been with him for years — a large stuffed green frog. It's The Frog Man's way of letting the kids be the focus and be named champion. This time no matter how many times Dave blows on the frog it doesn't budge — a defeat Dave is proud to have.

The annual Frog Jumping Contest is the Fairfield Boys Club's big fundraiser, which raises money for educational trips with a focus on history and scholarships for members in high school to use for education after graduation, said Doug Nixon, former president of the organization.

This year the Boys Club awarded two \$500 scholarships, including one to the event's announcer, Kamden Boyle of Seward. He hopes to pursue a degree in political science.

This year's contest came to a close with kids discussing their victories and narrow defeats, some with trophies in hand, others with a plastic container and frog. Another year of memories and traditions passed down to family and friends. And a new build-up of anticipation for the next first Saturday in August.

*Published Aug. 12, 2022*



PHOTOS: JOE WELLS

ABOVE: PJ Black Jr. hands over his frog for the longest and heaviest frog competition. PJ had the second longest measuring in at 14 inches.

BELOW: Matthew Rummel, 5, of New Florence tries everything in his power to get his frog to move outside the ring.



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# THE CENTRE COUNTY GAZETTE

## Motions rescinded ... BASD brings back the 'Red Raiders'

By **VINCENT CORSO**

vcorso@centrecountygazette.com

BELLEFONTE — The Red Raiders are back less than a year after the district moved to drop the term word “red” from its school nickname or moniker.

A new-look Bellefonte school board voted 6-2 to rescind that motion and retain the name “Red Raiders” during a meeting on Jan. 11. The board also voted 6-2 to rescind a motion pertaining to the removal of Native American imagery associated with the name from the district.

The moves wiped out two April 2021 controversial decisions made by the previous board that have had the community in an uproar since the summer of 2020 after a group of community members and alumni created a petition asking the board to consider the changes to the “harmful” logo and imagery.

In November, candidates running on the “Win 4 Bellefonte” ticket — consisting of incumbent board members Jeff Steiner and Jon Guizar and incumbents Andrea Royer and Jack Bechdel II — swept the school board election, giving the change back to “Red Raiders” some momentum.

All four voted “yes” to rescind both motions. Board members Marie Pernini and Kimberly Weaver also voted to reinstate the Native American imagery, while Weaver and Smith also voted “yes” on the motion to bring back the word “red” in the district’s moniker.

It was just back in April when the previous board voted 8-1 to remove Native American imagery and 6-3 to remove the word “red” from the district moniker. This was after months of discussion and informative sessions by the board on the matter.

Newly appointed board president Steiner had the board sit through two public work sessions on how to move forward with rebranding, before bringing the motions to rescind to the board during the first board meeting of 2022. The board voted on the matter, despite not being a full board, after former member Mark Badger resigned on Jan. 4.

Earlier in the Jan. 11 board meeting, the board heard from seven community members who threw their names into the hat before unanimously choosing Nate Campbell. Campbell was not sworn in until after the end of the meeting and was not allowed to vote on rescinding the motions.

During the public comment section of the meeting, community members on both sides of the issue again spoke passionately to the board concerning the image, with roughly 10 asking them not to rescind and five speaking in favor of going back. Since 2015, the district made the Native American imagery its secondary logo in favor the block “B” for the primary logo.

Steiner said the district can continue with phasing out that logo as it moves forward. Steiner said there was an “honest” disagreement on the issue between the community.

“The imagery was already being retired. All we are saying with this is that we are not going to immediately get rid of it. We are just going to figure out how to phase it out while letting it remain where it is at,” said Steiner.

Guizar who voted for the two motions, said he did not consider the financial cost associated with the move last April, saying the board “jumped the gun.”

“When I voted for this, I made a mistake. I was not doing my fiduciary responsibility

by understanding the cost and the impact to taxpayers, to the people in this district that are on a fixed income and the prices of everything going up all around us. Then we are going to approve something and make this kind of a motion and approve it and then find out after the fact that we have to come up with a \$100,000. That was not the right thing to do, okay,” said Guizar.

He added, “We all make mistakes, but I am a firm believer that when you make a mistake, you have to admit it and fix it.”

In October, the district director of fiscal affairs said costs associated with rebranding — which included re-painting two gym floors, replacing wrestling mats and replacing scoreboard panels — would run up to \$100,000. But, he added that some of these things would be reaching the end of their life cycles soon, and not add any additional cost to the district.

Other board members expressed how much work the board put in before making the decision in the spring, saying the board was not rushed. Guizar said the motions were too restrictive and suggested that the

rebranding committee move forward with its work without motions in place.

He also suggested the board consider bringing in a professional firm to help the district move forward in a way “that will bring the community together on the matter.”

“Many people are excited about the block ‘B’ and finding ways to modify that,” said Guizar. He added, “For all the people watching, we do not have a mascot. We have a logo and it is officially a block ‘B.’ There are native images and if those images are offending people, I’ll apologize. I don’t want to offend anybody. But on the other hand, you can’t just go ripping things up and offending 80 percent of the people, either.

“We just need to work together and find a solution moving forward. I think we can preserve the past. We can honor the past and honor natives. I think we reach out to those groups and ask for their input on how we can respectfully memorialize these things and carve a path forward.”

*Published Jan. 13, 2022*

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# Downtown in full bloom

## St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group continues popular flower beautification project

**By Amy Cherry**  
Staff Writer

ST. MARYS - While passing through downtown St. Marys it's hard not to notice the abundance of colorful flowers thanks to the efforts of the St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group.

Group members and volunteers recently placed 46 hanging baskets on the city's historic lampposts, setup large freestanding planters and planted several areas with the same flowers.

Emily Landis, chairwoman of the flower project committee, said the group tries to support local businesses and purchases the flowers from Hanzely's Greenhouse and Morning Glory Hill Greenhouse, both located in St. Marys. Each year the group strives to place the flowers prior to Memorial Day, in time for the city's annual observance of the holiday and parade. They will remain displayed until after Labor Day.

Landis explained the group opts to purchase Supertunias, a newer breed of petunias which boast masses of soft plummy-pink flowers adored with rich plum-purple veins. These are a vigorous flower and bloom freely all season from late spring to the first frosts.

"Petunias are the one flower that seems to work well for us and always look great," Landis said.

The St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group, a small non-profit organization founded in January 2012, took on their first project in the summer of 2013 when they

added 34 hanging baskets to lampposts. The project has only grown from there.

Over the years the community has stepped up and assisted the group with the chore of daily watering of the flowers. Volunteers range from individuals, couples and families to various groups of people.

"Our volunteers have been awesome," Landis said.

Monica Radkowski, who organizes the schedule of flower watering volunteers, said the group is very thankful for the volunteers and their support of the program.

The group is seeking volunteers to help maintain the flowers. Maps and watering instructions will be provided to volunteers. Landis said the flowers are also fertilized each week. Those interested in volunteering may contact Radkowski at 814-834-6848.

The hanging baskets can be found throughout the downtown hub of the city including along the General Edward Meyer Boulevard, Railroad Street, the lower portion of Lafayette Street near city hall, a portion of Center Street up to the St. Marys Public Library and on a portion of N. St. Marys Street.

Flowers are also planted in the historic clock bed along the boulevard and the railing between N. Michael and N. St. Marys streets. Large freestanding planters featuring the same flowers can be found outside the St. Marys Post Office on S. Michael Street, the St. Marys Area Chamber of Commerce office, and near the Boys and Girls Club of St. Marys.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

**Members and volunteers of the St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group recently placed hanging flowers throughout downtown St. Marys.**

The St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group has been busy planning several projects for the summer and beyond. They are currently in the midst of finalizing a self-guided walking tour project featuring numerous historic properties throughout the downtown area.

A sandwich sale is slated for June 12 in partnership with Anytime Lunchtime along with a Community Fun Night on June 13 on the Diamond in downtown St. Marys.

The group is also seeking interested vendors for a Farmers and Artisans Market taking place every Saturday starting July 9 and continuing until Sept. 17 in the Market Street parking lot. There is a small fee to participate.

The mission of the St. Marys Heritage

Preservation Group lies in advocating for, building awareness of and encouraging the conservation of the cultural, historical, natural, recreational and economic resources in the St. Marys Historic District. Their belief is a vibrant core business district in the historic downtown is a vital element in promoting economic development.

The group has helped purchase historic black rod iron benches and trash cans through grants in an effort to create a cohesive look throughout downtown. These items replaced the mishmash of former concrete benches and trash cans from the 1970s and other random wooden pieces.

*Published June 2, 2022*

# Art100 celebration concludes with Waldo F. Bates Jr. dedication and student shows

By Julia Carden

*"May the vision of 'Pop' Bates to create a high-quality art education program at Edinboro continue to inspire future generations as the university evolves. From arts education to the studio arts, graphic design, animation, film and art therapy, may we always be a place where the arts thrive."*

— AMANDA SISSEM

EDINBORO – The Edinboro University Foundation and Alumni Association collaboratively hosted one final Art100 celebration in remembrance of the first art dean for the State Normal School of Pennsylvania's Fine Arts Department in 1920 – Waldo F. Bates Jr. – on Friday, April 29.

Bates, often referred to as "Pops" by students, passed away in 1956 at the age of 65. As stated by the university, Bates was first recruited to the school after the Pennsylvania Board of State Normal Schools Principals divided the 14 state schools into specialized service areas, assigning Edinboro the art specialty. Bates was brought onto the staff to "establish the art department and develop the curriculum." He taught at the university for over 30 years, from 1920 until 1954.

According to Phyllis K. Woods, president of the Edinboro Historical Society, Bates instructed art students in topics including mechanical drawing, basketry, woodworking, oil painting, watercolor, charcoal, outline making, art theory and more. Bates also founded the ScaRAb Club in 1923, a student organization "aimed at promoting fraternal understanding and harmony among art students."

"Professor Bates continued to promote the value of art at Edinboro by expanding the art department. By 1929, Bates had successfully established Edinboro as a recognized art program in the Western half of Pennsylvania's state colleges," Woods explained.

Edinboro students, locals and alumni gathered on East Normal Street, across the street from Compton Hall, for the unveiling of a historical marker in honor of the late art professor who left a profound effect on students and the program that he played a significant role in creating. The red street marker is located on the property where Bates resided with his family during his three-decade-long career at Edinboro University.

According to Amanda Brown Sissem, Associate Vice President of Alumni Engagement, the event was originally planned to be included in the 2020 Art100 celebration that was extended due to COVID-19 related disruptions.

"COVID-19 altered the plans for the celebration, pushing the committee to move to virtual events when possible and extending the celebration through spring semester 2022," Sissem explained. "The extension allowed the time necessary for the review and approval of the Waldo F. Bates Jr. Historical Marker, making the dedication and events of April 29, the most appropriate way to close the celebration."

Various university officials and offices were involved in the event, including Provosts Dr. Michael Hannan and Dr. Scott Miller, Lisa Austin, Suzanne Proulx and Dietrich Wegner, Dr. Mary Paniccia Carden, and Dr. R. James Wertz.

Additional support for the Waldo F. Bates

Jr. Historical Marker was provided by President Phyllis K. Woods, Janice Castro and members of the Edinboro Area Historical Society, ART100 donors and the Celebration Planning Committee, 2006 alumna Jean-Marie Burdette Hannan, 1975 alumna Jan Woods, 2011 alumna Kristen Brocket, and the family of Waldo F. Bates Jr.

Sissem further extended thanks to "the many talented professors, students and alumni of the Edinboro University Art Department."

"You can't tell the story of Edinboro University's Art Department without Waldo Bates, but it was the initiative of Dr. M.J. Campbell to connect the support of the Edinboro University Foundation and the Edinboro Area Historical Society to create a lasting legacy through the historical marker program. The Edinboro University Foundation sponsored the application fee for the marker," Sissem said.

Erie County Executive Brenton Davis also attended the event, where he spoke on the importance of art education and accessibility in the Erie region.

"It's a really interesting story and I am honored to come here today and say a few words, not only as a graduate of Edinboro and a proud alumnus but also as a former soldier – Professor Bates being a veteran. Art is such a big part of the sense of place that builds our community and makes it a place that people want to live, stay and work," Davis said.

Following the unveiling ceremony, the celebration continued with student featured artwork. Several Loveland Hall ambassadors wore alumna Jean-Marie Burdette Hannan's five-part Loveland Hall

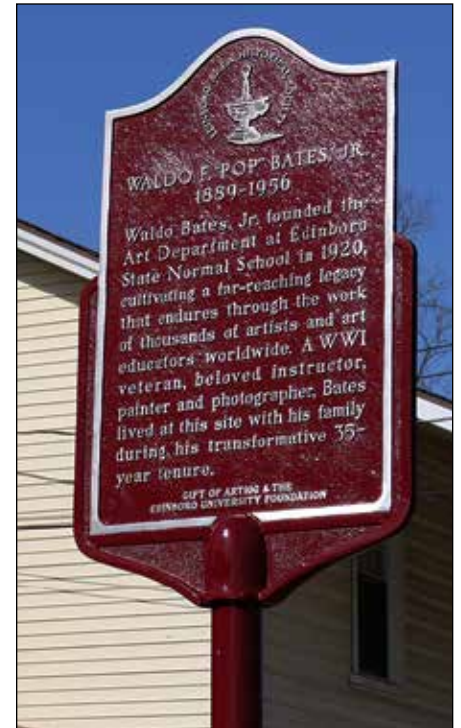


PHOTO BY JULIA CARDEN

The Waldo F. Bates Jr. historical marker located on East Normal Street, across from Compton Hall, the property where Bates resided with his family.

dress showcasing the "the building that Bates built." The piece was originally created by Hannan when she attended Edinboro University in 2006.

Senior illustration student Nicole Ellwood had a solo show titled "Just Being Human" on display in Bates Gallery. Additionally, MFA students Vicki Branagan and Kimberlyn Bloise presented their final thesis shows in Bruce Gallery located in Doucette Hall. Branagan's show was titled, "Soft Spoken" and Bloise's was titled "To Transform."

The Edinboro University Alumni Facebook page live-streamed the dedication ceremony. Coverage of the unveiling of the historical marker dedicated to Waldo F. Bates Jr. can be viewed here. The historical marker is now on display at 213 E Normal Street in Edinboro.

Julia Carden, executive editor and social Media director | @EdinboroNow

Published May 13, 2022



# NORTHWESTERN PRESS



## Lehigh County honors Willard Snyder as 2022 Unsung Hero

**By Jenn Rago**

Special to The Press

May 18 was no ordinary day for several very extraordinary people.

Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services organized its 22nd annual "Tribute to Unsung Heroes" award pre-sentation.

This event honored 17 older Lehigh County residents who displayed exceptional generosity with their time and talents to enhance the lives of others throughout their communities.

Willard A. Snyder, of Lynn Township, was among those honorees nominated as an Unsung Hero.

In 1965, then-President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Older Americans Act declaring May Older American Month.

The theme for this year's nominees was "Age My Way."

Guests were welcomed by Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services Executive Director Clayton Reed Jr.

Secretary of Pennsylvania Department of Aging Robert Torres gave the opening remarks.

Both gentlemen presented certificates and citations to each recipient.

According to Snyder's tribute:

"In hand with his new bride Lucille in the late 1950s, Willard A. Snyder migrated from his native Carbon County across the Blue Mountain to the New Tripoli area of Lynn Township.

"While it was a short journey by today's standards, this young man, fluent in Pennsylvania German, blended quickly with the tightly knit locals, also mostly Pa.



PRESS PHOTO BY JENN RAGO

**Robert Torres, secretary of the state Department of Aging with Willard Snyder at the Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services 22nd annual "Tribute to Unsung Heroes" award presentation.**

German, and with the name Snyder, the door opened to their fellowship and ancestry.

"With a degree in business education, Snyder began as a teacher, quickly moving into the world of the local trustworthy banker, eventually wearing the hat of president and CEO of the New Tripoli Bank.

"The well-earned title of board member or president or treasurer or association

director attached his name in more than a half-dozen banking associations throughout Pennsylvania.

"In the community, he replicated these leadership roles with the Ebenezer Church Consistory, various Lynn Township boards, Community Fire Company of New Tripoli and founding president of the Northwestern Lehigh Educational Foundation.

"All these contacts, along with being the father of three active sons, nurtured Snyder's developing passion for absorbing and preserving local history.

"In 2000, Snyder teamed with a few other locals, including his late friend and avid artifacts collector, Carl D. Snyder, in creating the Lynn Township Historical Society, serving as president or treasurer for many terms, and later expanding to include neighboring Heidelberg Township.

"Snyder was the leader; the originator and hands-on promoter of the many to date accomplishments of the Lynn Heidelberg Historical Society.

"Instrumental in developing the historical society's permanent museum/library in the old New Tripoli Bank, Snyder and his team also enjoyed a well-deserved working relationship with Lynn Township officials and community leaders to become part of the much-anticipated rebirth of the previously widely known Ontelaunee (amusement) Park in New Tripoli, dating back to 1929, sadly later abandoned.

"Restored as a recreational space, Snyder enjoined the local historical society in creating 'Pioneer Village' as a historical and educational treasure in the park, now home to the relocation or re-creation of these important local structures:

- Zeisloff House log cabin from its original site where many family members were massacred during the French and Indian War.

- Early frontier Fort Everett, replica of the nearby Blue Mountain forts established by Ben Franklin.

- An 1800s bank barn, generally credited solely to Snyder's acquisition and reconstruction directives.

- The "Tripoli" Train Station replica through which the "Berkys" hauled potatoes and students throughout Berks and Lehigh counties.

"Willard was likewise a major player in establishing the park's annual October 'Pioneer Festival' recreating early frontier life with costumed re-enactors.

"Willard Snyder has truly dedicated his life and many personal resources to his love of local history.

"You will find his name engraved on the plaque in Allentown's Liberty Bell Museum as a participant in the Bicentennial re-enactment of the original 1776 Liberty Bell Trek between Philadelphia and Allentown, commemorating the rescue of the bells of Philadelphia, including our symbolic Liberty Bell, to safety in Allentown. Subsequent treks found Willard and others honoring local farmer Frederick Leaser who contributed his wagons to the 1776 trek.

"Snyder announced and led the restoration of the Leaser Family grave site in Lynn Township from an overgrown wildlife refuge to an annually renewed public memorial with Old Glory flying overhead."

*Published May 26, 2022*

# The 'Red Violin' added Ukraine to its legendary travels

By Bridget Wingert

Among the many local residents with close ties to Ukraine is violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn, who has performed with her legendary "Red Violin" here and around the world.

Pitcairn, a Bucks County native, performs "in partnership" with the legendary 1720 Red Mendelssohn Stradivarius, which is said to have inspired the 1999 Academy Award-winning film, "The Red Violin."

One of the places she has performed has been Ukraine at the Palace Concert Hall at National Law University in Kharkiv with the Ukrainian Youth Academic Orchestra Slobzhansky of Kharkiv.

Pitcairn has made friends in Ukraine as executive director of Luzerne Music Center in the Adirondacks, where students from Kharkiv have been awarded summer camp scholarships. Sergiy Dvornichenko from Ukraine is the clarinet faculty member at the Luzerne Camp.

In Kharkiv last year, Pitcairn played in an open-air concert to an audience of 1,000 people for a celebration of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic (before the Omicron variant).

Her arrival at the airport made Ukraine national news with a radio interview. "Hundreds of people came off the street," she said this week. Her group drove to Kyiv for a recording with the state orchestra.

"I took to them. They took to me," she said of Ukrainians.

Last weekend Pitcairn held a benefit performance here and raised \$10,000 to support Ukraine. Now she is involved in fundraising to bring students to the United States.

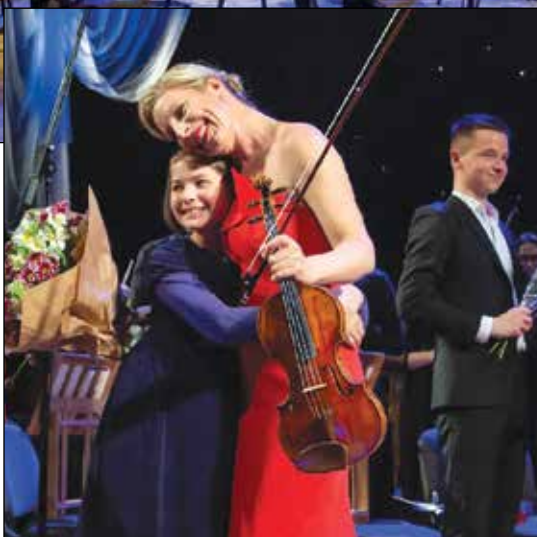
Donations can be sent to [uarc.org](http://uarc.org).

*Published March 10, 2022*



PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY ELIZABETH PITCAIRN

ABOVE: A Ukrainian girl plays the legendary Red Mendelssohn Stradivarius spontaneously from the stage following the conclusion of Elizabeth Pitcairn's performance of the Beethoven violin concerto in Kharkiv. Pitcairn, who has Bucks County roots, has been active in support of the Youth Orchestra of Kharkiv.



LEFT: Violin virtuoso Elizabeth Pitcairn hugs a member of the Ukrainian Youth Orchestra after the girl played Elizabeth's Stradivarius.



# Special events take to the ice at a local ski mountain

**Mya Gelet**

The Montgazette Contributor

An exciting winter event draws residents to a local ski resort to witness the sold-out, first annual Winter Classic. Music fills the frosty air as onlookers watch the Zamboni glide over the ice. The driver smiles as anxious spectators file in, admiring the perfectly smooth surface from behind the glass panels. Two local high school rivals get to experience what many have not, a true outdoor regulation hockey game, just minutes from their hometown.

The Winter Classic is just one of the special events being held at the newly constructed rink. It was a dream come true for the owners of Spring Mountain, Rick and Gail Buckman, and their daughter and son-in-law, Jen and John Brown. When the ceremonial puck hit the ice, the crowd cheered. Spring Mountain Ice is the latest addition to Spring Mountain Adventures. "We thought there would be a demand for an outdoor rink. All the rinks in the area are indoor," said Buckman.

The local family-run ski resort wanted to offer something more to its winter sports community. The mountain has been a popular destination for skiers and snowboarders alike for the past 20 years, and now ice skating can join the ranks of outdoor winter sports being offered. "We wanted to be the only ski area around with a rink," Buckman added.

After losing their Treetop Adventure zip line business to hurricane damage and closing their tubing feature, the family thought it was time to build the rink they had dreamed up four years before. Buckman explained, "Since we eliminated tubing, we thought it would be good to



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SPRING MOUNTAIN

Spring Mountain ice rink

add something else, especially for birthday parties." They hope events like the Winter Classic are the first of many.

Buckman explained the mountain experienced a record year during COVID-19, "since people wanted to take part in outdoor activities." The increase in business allowed them the capital to complete the project.

Spring Mountain Ice began its construction in July 2021 and took five months to complete. The grand opening of the rink in December 2021 began with a Holiday Tree Lighting event. Hundreds flocked to the resort to be a part of the special sold-out event. Music and themed

public skate nights like "Dress Like Your Favorite Superhero Night" are attracting new patrons, allowing the mountain to expand its customer base to the non-skier and snowboarder crowd.

Men, women, children, and hockey players, of course, are getting to experience skating under the stars. Gianna Bagola said, "I love that it is outside. It reminds me of going to Philly, but so much better not having to go the distance. It has a family-friendly feeling, and I will definitely come again soon."

The rink accommodates up to 300 guests and offers lessons, skate rentals, and public skating. It also generates

additional income through the rental of the rink through private parties, hockey team practice or full-on games like the sold-out Winter Classic.

The family is hoping the addition of Spring Mountain Ice will become another reason to continue visiting the destination that provides family fun for all ages each winter. Ready to lace up and experience skating under the stars? Visit their website, [springmountainadventures.com](http://springmountainadventures.com), for dates, times, special events, or even a peek at the rink via their webcam.

*Published May 2022*

# Inexpensive cold tubs could save athletes' lives

**By Steve Bennett**  
Staff Writer

High school football players across Pennsylvania hit the practice fields Monday for what is known as heat acclimatization week - a series of days where players are provided the opportunity to adjust to warm temperatures while wearing their equipment.

Heat and humidity can put athletes at risk when internal body temperature rises.

Since 1995, 70 football players have died from heat stroke, according to a study by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Fifty-one deaths were among high school players and from 2016-20, there was an average of 2.2 heat stroke deaths per year.

"The key with heat stroke is dumping as much heat out of the body as fast as you can," said Dr. William O. Roberts, who is on staff of the Department of Family Practice and Community Health at the University of Minnesota Medical School. "You want to bring the body temperature down into the normal range rapidly."

An inexpensive method is a cold water immersion tub that quickly cools a player's body temperature.

Fifteen states and the District of Columbia require cold tubs for onsite cooling for all warm weather practices. Pennsylvania is not one of them.

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, the governing body of high



COURTESY OF THE KOREY STRINGER INSTITUTE

**A cold tub, which costs just a couple hundred dollars, could save an athlete's life if they're suffering from a heat-related illness.**

school athletics in the state, requires coaches to be educated concerning heat illness and it provides a lengthy summary of ways to help prevent heat illness in the sports medicine section of its handbook. It also notes the signs of heat illness and ways to avoid it.

"We have not had discussion on making (cold tubs) mandatory," said Melissa Mertz,

Associate Executive Director for the PIAA. "It is up to each individual school's medical team (physician/trainer) on what heat prevention equipment they want to have on hand."

The Lake-Lehman School District has taken a proactive approach when it comes to the safety of its athletes.

"We have an inflatable hot tub that we fill

up with ice," football coach Jerry Gilsky said. "We can get it as cool as 60 degrees."

## **What some states are doing**

New Jersey has mandated cold tubs since 2017 and New Brunswick High

*Continued on next page*



## The Citizens' Voice continued

School has four tubs, which were paid for by the district.

Former Wilkes University linebacker Corey Tucker, who serves as the defensive coordinator at New Brunswick said, fortunately, the tubs haven't been needed to save someone's life.

"We do use them a lot for recovery for athletes after workouts," Tucker said. "We haven't had to use them in an emergency situation, but it is the No. 1 way to cool down a person's body."

Tucker, who played high school football at Plainfield High School before making his way to Wilkes, where he was a senior on the 2008 team, said when he played, ice tubs were available but weren't mandatory.

"We have all seen multiple deaths with heat stroke or overexertion from professional to college to high school," Tucker said. "One death is too many. To have them and utilize them and prevent any damage is what we should be looking to do."

In December, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference distributed cold water immersion tubs to 74 member schools to be used by athletic departments and following the 2017 death of Florida High School football player Zach Polsenberg, the Lee County School District provided all 14 of its high schools cold tubs.

### Dedicated to saving lives, educating

The Korey Stringer Institute at the University of Connecticut, which is named for the Minnesota Vikings offensive lineman who collapsed and died of exertional heat stroke on Aug. 1, 2001, has spent the last 10 years working to educate athletes, coaches and trainers on all levels.

"KSI deals with preventing sudden death in sports with a large focus on exertional heat stroke," said Christy Eason, PhD, ATC and Vice President of Sport Safety at KSI. "It is a medical emergency that happens because the body gets to a point where the core temperature rises so much, the body can't cool itself off. Because of that, it leads to significant consequences. If the core temp is not brought down quickly, it can be fatal."

KSI advocates for rapid cooling and Eason said if an athlete suffers from heat stroke, death could be preventable if the body temperature can get below 102 degrees.

Eason said an individual tub can cost a couple of hundred dollars, but when

## SIGNS OF HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

- **Fatigue**
- **Nausea**
- **Weakness**
- **Cramps**
- **Weak, rapid pulse**
- **Vomiting**
- **Body temperature exceeding 104 degrees**

discussing the importance, it is fairly inexpensive.

The institute ranks how well each of the 50 states as well as the District of Columbia have fared implementing health and safety policies aimed at preventing the leading causes of sudden death in middle and high school athletics. Pennsylvania ranks 31st. New Jersey is first, while California is last.

Staff from KSI are visiting Pennsylvania in October to host a Team up For Sports Safety meeting with athletic trainers, school administrators, health care providers and more. The goal is to lay the groundwork for change in the state, either at the legislative level or through the state athletic association.

"We leave the state with a plan on how to try and enact the policy changes," she said.

Also, while football players are the only athletes in Pennsylvania required to participate in heat acclimatization, Eason said all student-athletes should be given the same experience.

"We recommend a heat week for everyone," Eason said. "It doesn't really matter what sport you play. The body needs to acclimate to the heat."

While football teams across the state will be able to get out on the field Monday, the remainder of the fall student-athletes will have to wait a week to start official practice for the fall sports season.

"We have no data to suggest (heat week) for other sports at this time," Mertz said.

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MARK MORAN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Lake-Lehman football coach Jerry Gilsky, right, and former player Jake Trumbower show the school's inflatable tub that can be used to cool an athlete's body temperature in the event of a heat-related illness.

## COLD TUBS REQUIRED

15 states and the District of Columbia require presence of cold water immersion tubs for onsite cooling for all warm weather practices:

- |                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| • Arkansas             | • Massachusetts  |
| • District of Columbia | • Mississippi    |
| • Florida              | • New Jersey     |
| • Georgia              | • North Carolina |
| • Hawaii               | • Oregon         |
| • Idaho                | • Tennessee      |
| • Kentucky             | • Utah           |
| • Louisiana            | • Vermont        |

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**PENNSYLVANIA NEWSPAPERS**  
COVERING THE ISSUES THAT MATTER MOST

# McPOYLE STRONG

## Community comes together to support CAHS teacher

By Joe Abramowitz  
The Daily Courier

Facing a right-leg amputation Feb. 24, Jamie McPoyle has somehow found a silver lining despite a chilling diagnosis.

At least now, the Connellsville Area High School science teacher “knows what it is,” after months of lingering pain and consultation with 29 doctors.

“It” is epithelioid hemangioendothelioma, a many-letters-long condition commonly known in medical circles as EHE.

A rare cancer, it grows from the cells that make up the blood vessels, according to the National Cancer Institute.

It can occur anywhere in the body, with the most common sites being the liver, lungs and bone.

The answer came at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, and McPoyle believes Providence played a role.

“I believe God put me in that place with this specific doctor,” he said.

In a way, McPoyle is eager to have the surgery over with because he has endured pain for so long.

### Reaction

“Initially, it was a gut punch for about two hours on the ride home from the hospital,” said McPoyle, now awaiting test results to see if EHE has spread elsewhere.

“I told my wife that when we enter the house, we are going to move forward. No pity. We’re going to attack this head on.”

McPoyle’s wife, Gwen, is a Highlands Hospital nurse. The couple has four



Connellsville Mayor Greg Lincoln pushes Connellsville Area science teacher Jamie McPoyle at the start of the 40th anniversary of the John Woodruff 5K Run and Walk on July 6 as Frank Jacobyansky follows. McPoyle, a Woodruff regular, is battling a rare form of cancer.

PHOTO: LORI PADILLA | FOR THE DAILY COURIER

children, Jamison, 18; Gavin, 17; Maggie, 15; and Sully, 14. Asked how the children are holding up, McPoyle said, they are OK, adding, “I don’t think they can wrap their brains around it.”

In his role as educator, community volunteer and nice guy, McPoyle has touched the lives of many people since he moved to Connellsville from the Philadelphia suburbs, one of 12 children in an extremely large family and an unabashed Philly sports fan.

“That family wants to be here, and it’s nice have the community support, acting

as my family that’s not here,” he said.

As McPoyle faces a major health challenge, support from the community he has adopted has been sudden and explosive.

One of his students, senior Hannah Peck of Normalville, launched a GoFundMe campaign – “Mr. McPoyle’s recovery – five days ago with a goal of generating \$5,000.

By Wednesday, the campaign had reached nearly \$13,000.

Taylor Froetschel of Sharon, a family friend, former student and babysitter of the McPoyle’s children, has established a T-shirt

fundraiser to benefit the family.

The T-shirts, in Connellsville Area Falcon blue and white, state “We Fight EHE Together Stronger – #MCPLOYESTRONG.

Froetschel is asking people to wear the T-shirts on Feb. 24, the day of McPoyle’s surgery.

Three days into the sale, Froetschel received requests for 550 shirts and placed an order Tuesday with Linda Brown of Homerun Graphics in Mt. Pleasant.

Froetschel said she is still receiving

*Continued on next page*



requests for the \$15 T-shirts, although they will not arrive by Feb. 24. To order T-shirts, message Froetschel through her Facebook account.

“He’s been a lifelong family friend, a really good guy,” Froetschel, the daughter of Bill and Mary Ann Bauer, said of McPoyle.

Bill Bauer is a Connellsville Area teacher and friend who has vowed to help in any way possible.

Froetschel, who is in Connellsville today to help around the McPoyle house, said she’s not surprised the T-shirt sale came together so quickly. “Connellsville is a tight-knit town, and the people are just awesome,” she said.

Amy Riccio, a Connellsville Area High School teacher, has planned a prayer rally in support of McPoyle.

It is scheduled around the flagpole outside the high school 6:35 a.m. Feb. 23 and is open to both school district and community members.

Fellow teacher Beth Shreve said friends have banded together to provide meals each day for the McPoyles after the surgery.

“That’s one thing they won’t have to worry about,” she said.

McPoyle said community response has been incredible.

“Random people are stopping by, sending cards,” he said. “I feel like George Bailey in ‘It’s a Wonderful Life.’ I feel like it’s the end of the movie when the whole community comes out to help him.”

McPoyle said the Connellsville community always steps up when needed, “always rises to the occasion.”

He saw that happen through relief efforts in the wake of the 2016 flood that devastated parts of Connellsville and Bullskin Township and during a campaign to improve the ballfield at Austin Park on the city’s South Side.

Again, McPoyle sees a bright light amid the darkness of EHE.

“If there’s a silver lining, maybe this is it right now, all these people contacting me, cards, emails, texts,” he said.

McPoyle was touched by Hannah’s GoFundMe campaign gesture, something she did on her own the day she learned of his plight.

“Phil Martell, our old superintendent, sent me a beautiful text,” McPoyle said. “I’d gone head-to-head with him a few times.”

As president of the Connellsville Area Education Association – the teachers union – McPoyle fights hard for the educators he represents.

A frequent speaker during public meetings, he is often tough on the school board and Superintendent Dr. Joseph Bradley.

That’s all about business, and McPoyle said Bradley greeted warmly in recent days at the administration building after learning about the extent of the illness. “People have been amazing,” McPoyle said.

**Ever the teacher**

McPoyle said he has accumulated nearly enough time off to finish out the school year. The fundraisers will help cover lost salary.

He has other concerns related to work – the students.

“I had hoped to schedule the surgery in April or May, but they penciled me in for the 24th,” McPoyle said. “I felt obligated to tell my students.”

He has been preparing the kids to take standardized Keystone Exams, end-of-course test designed to assess proficiency in a variety of subject areas.

McPoyle explained what he will experience and said he will try to work with them outside the classroom virtually.

**About McPoyle**

“He’s been a lifelong family friend, a really good guy,” Froetschel said. “I’ll keep praying and hoping for the best.”

“He’s been my teacher since freshman year, and he’s teaching my neuroscience class right now,” Hannah Peck said. “Whenever he told us in class, I almost cried.

“We all just kind of looked at him, and he tried to make it like it was OK. He doesn’t like people to feel bad for him. He told us he was going to IHOP.”

Hannah said McPoyle is a really good teacher, but she sees him in another way.

“He is the most athletic and outstanding person,” she said. “All he wanted to do was keep his knee and he couldn’t.”

“There are so many wonderful things to say about someone who does so much, someone from Philly,” said Jamie Bielecki-Quinn, a Connellsville Area Middle School guidance counselor.

The two worked together for years at the former Junior High West, now West Crawford Elementary.

“We would walk to school with kids for Earth Day, start on the South Side with kids and pick up trash on the way to school,” she said. “He constantly is trying to give to the community, get students engaged.” McPoyle has always organized groups of students to participate in Connellsville citywide Cleanup Day.

She said McPoyle volunteers for the Heart to Hope Telethon, helps kids study and “will drop everything if someone needs help.”

“He has a heart of gold and is a genuine and nice guy,” Bielecki Quinn said. “He’s constantly coming up with fresh ideas, little things to impact the community.”

Another colleague, teacher Beth Shreve, could not hold back tears as she discussed McPoyle.

Shreve said the two have had disagreements over the years but said McPoyle liked that she never backed down when they happen.

“He calls me his Pittsburgh sister,” she said. “He came here from outside of Connellsville and he dove right in. He loves this town. I’ve worked alongside him a long time with Little League, booster football ... he’s an amazing man.”

Shreve said McPoyle was humbled by Hannah’s kindness.

“He’s not one to reach out,” she said. “Jamie does not what people to feel sorry for him, just keep him in our prayers.”

Mayor Greg Lincoln said he came to know McPoyle through Connellsville Parks and Recreation Board activities, and they have become friends.

“I’m praying everything goes well with the surgery and he can start the process of dealing with one leg,” Lincoln said. “Jamie’s a strong-willed person, and he’s very optimistic.

The mayor said McPoyle came to Connellsville for a job and decided to stay and have a family.

“That he’s a Philly sports fan is his only negative,” Lincoln quipped.

McPoyle raised a lot of money to fix Austin field a few years ago, and he’s always thinking of ways to make Connellsville better, the mayor said.

Lincoln said McPoyle is a leader, whether it’s organizing the “Youghzilla” endurance event, bringing young people together to help with Cleanup Day or working with the Connellsville teachers to provide hot

chocolate for the New Year’s Day Polar Plunge into the Youghiogheny River.

“If anything is needed and he can help, he will do it,” the mayor said. “If there’s a community event, you will see Jamie there.”

Lincoln said his son, Gregory, a Connellsville Area senior, is a shy kid, but McPoyle is able to get him talking.

“They always razz each other about sports,” Lincoln said of McPoyle and Gregory. “Jamie’s been impactful to so many kids. He does the job he’s supposed to do, inspire the kids.

**The future**

McPoyle is looking beyond surgery, possible additional treatment and recovery.

“I expect to be back in the classroom next year,” he said. “I told Greg Lincoln I am going to walk in the Woodruff Race and he’s going to walk with me. I want to get as many people as I can to join me in the Woodruff.”

“He told me his goal, come hell and high water, is to walk the Woodruff this year and run it next year,” Shreve said.

“That’s what we’re gonna focus on after his surgery,” Lincoln said of the John Woodruff 5K Race, an annual event to honor the Connellsville man who won the 800-meter run – facing incredible odds – during the 1936 Olympic Games in Nazi Germany.

The mayor said he plans to help McPoyle drive toward his goal, and sent him a photo of Rocky Balboa and his manager, Mick.

In a series of films, Mick helps Rocky rise from club boxer to heavyweight champion.

“I told him he’ll be Rocky and I’ll be Mick,” Lincoln said.

McPoyle has something else on his mind.

He’s been talking with Dr. Frank Jacobyansky about developing a community disc golf course around the Connellsville Area School District campus comprising the high school, middle school and Career & Technical Center.

McPoyle has pitched the idea to school board President David Panzella.

McPoyle’s links to Jacobyansky are through Boy Scouts, the Austin Field project and the Polar Plunge.

Jacobyansky is a Polar Plunge founder and serves as Rec Board president.

*Published Feb. 17, 2022*

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