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Gov. Carney's State Budget



School Board Public Comments



Sussex Central Wrestling Win  
Over Cape Henlopen



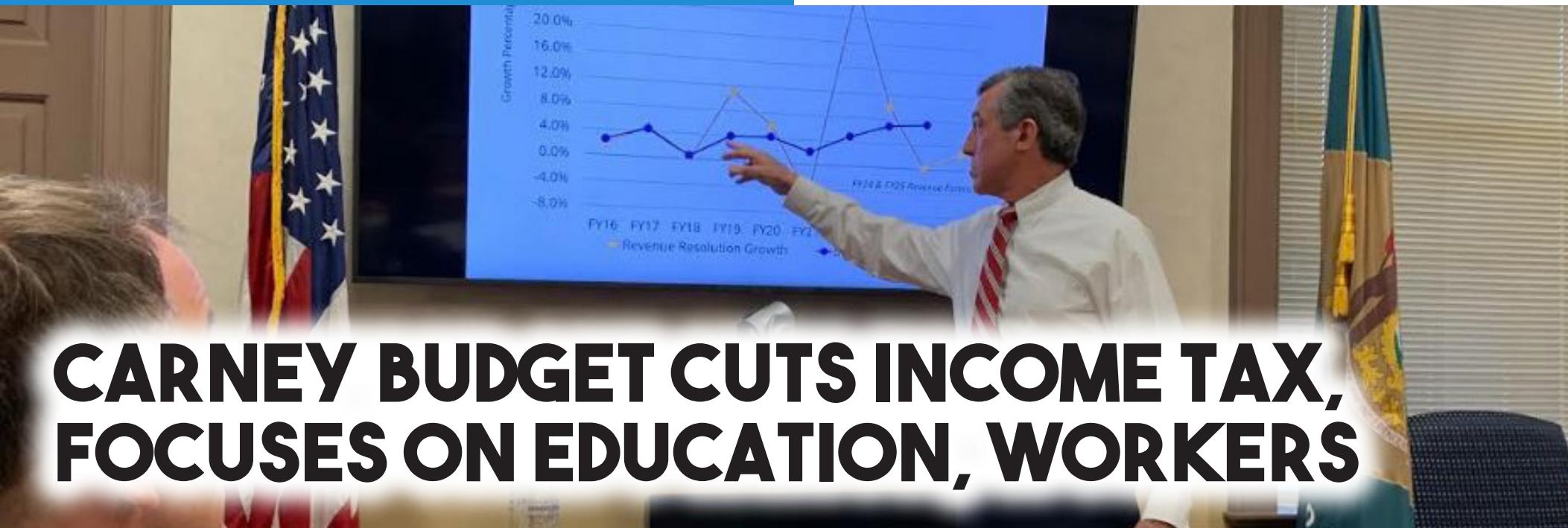
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# Headlines

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# CARNEY BUDGET CUTS INCOME TAX, FOCUSES ON EDUCATION, WORKERS

BY BETSY PRICE

Cutting straight to the “what does it mean to me” point: Gov. John Carney’s \$5.5 billion budget proposal for 2024 will let Delawareans keep more of their hard-earned cash. The budget, which the governor detailed in an 11 a.m speech Thursday, will increase the standard deduction on Delaware income tax by 75% to \$5,700 (\$11,400 filing jointly) from \$3,250 (\$6,500 filing jointly). It also will increase the amount of refunded tax for those who meet federal Earned Income Tax Credit requirements to 7.5%.

Those credits are designed to refund tax to lower-wage earners and are based on tax-filing status, income and number of children. In 2023, the federal credit will be worth \$600 to \$7,430. The state’s rate is lower. An example of a group that qualifies would be a three-child household with an income of \$60,000.

The change in taxes reflects the state’s third year of \$1 billion surplus, fueled largely by federal COVID-19 ini-

tatives and rises in the real estate transfer taxes with home sales soaring after the pandemic started. Those huge surpluses are not expected to end with the 2024 budget.

Carney’s bill is largely focused on improving education, the environment, raising state worker pay, funding programs that help attract jobs and put people to work through tax breaks and child care assistance, he said.

The budget bill, which must be adopted by the General Assembly before it ends June 30, includes a lot of historic proposals, largely because of those surpluses. It recommends putting \$59.8 million into grants-in-aid, which supports nonprofits; \$1.23 million into bond and capital improvements, which provides the state’s infrastructure; and a one-time supplemental allocation of \$324.9 million that will go to healthcare issues.

## REPUBLICAN BUDGET REACTION

Republican members of the Joint Finance Committee,

a bipartisan group that will take Carney’s 2024 budget, said they largely were pleased with it, citing the additions to state funds that help when the state faces deficits, the increase of tax deductions, a focus on affordable housing, increase in programs to help lower-income workers pay for child care, increasing state worker pay, and money for water and environmental issues.

Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown, said Carney showed fiscal restraint by adding to the budget smoothing fund. That and the rainy day fund now contain about \$1 billion, which Carney said will help when the huge surpluses slow.

Rep. Kevin Hensley, R-Townsend, said it made him nervous that the operating budget increase was a percentage point higher than the [Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Committee](#) recommended and he worried that the state should be putting more aside. He said he was surprised that Carney didn’t put more money into the nonprofit grants-in-aid budget. Many are still coping with losses and expenses related to the pandemic, he said.

“These nonprofits provide critical services to Delaware and throughout the state. They do a fabulous job doing it,” he said. He said he was hopeful that the grants budget could be increased by the Joint Finance Committee.

King said she would have liked to see more money go to public safety. Traffic accident deaths and pedestrian deaths were up again last year, she said. Schools need more safety money, too.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

## HEADLINES



BY JAREK RUTZ

Caesar Rodney High School students had a front row seat Tuesday to penguin research in the South Pole.

You read that right. The students were connected online to a group of University of Delaware researchers down at the pole.

"I really liked learning about how global warming is either affecting or helping certain populations of penguins in Antarctica," said senior Ella Wadhams. "When they were talking about the submersible vehicles that you use, we talked about vehicles like that in class and it was interesting to actually see them being used in real life."

UD's team in Antarctica is examining penguin-prey feeding habits of the Gentoo and Adélie penguins to show the impact climate change is having on these systems. The team uses a new underwater autonomous vehicle to map the krill and phytoplankton populations. The two penguin species eat krill.

About 90 students gathered for the online event. Christine Taylor, a Caesar Rodney

# CR CLIMATE CLASS: STRAIGHT OUTTA ANTARCTICA

High School teacher, said the classes have just started talking about what's happening in the ocean and how it affects the food chain. Krill are invertebrates classified as phylum arthropoda, which Taylor's class will be studying in the coming weeks.

It took the team of researchers 10 days to travel from Delaware to Antarctica. They went through the Drake Passage, a straight underneath the southern tip of South America. "That was not fun," said researcher Matt Breece, who said his ship faced 30-foot waves in the passage.

The team has been working at Palmer Station, an American research base on the northern tip of Antarctica.

"In addition to the IT people we have here, it's essentially a little small town," Breece said. "We have two cooks, we have an electrician, a plumber, a carpenter all on the station."

UD's team of researchers is expected to leave Palmer Station Feb. 1 and return home by Feb. 9. Palmer Station is located in one of the fastest warming places on Earth right now, he said. That's been especially bad for the Adélie penguins who like to live near sea ice.

The penguins also like to raise their chicks where they themselves were raised, but with ice coverage waning drastically in the past decade, there are fewer places for them to raise their offspring. This has caused their population to decline, according to Breece.

"It's really cool to be able to have access to a very interesting research team that's doing really cool and important stuff," Wadhams said.

Breece said the research team is now working on compiling data with their submersible vehicles and satellite tags in order to identify what areas of the ocean have the highest concentrations of krill to track migration patterns of the prey.

He likes best the Chinstrap penguins, who are closely related to the Gentoos, since "they are funny and seem to be more curious than the Adélies."

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## STATE TO EMBRACE NEW MATH 'FRAMEWORK' TO RAISE SCORES

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Delaware Department of Education is championing higher-quality math curriculums, spending more time on the topic and offering more professional training to teachers. It is part of what the department calls a framework to help combat the state's atrocious scores in math, including 18 schools that have single-digit proficiency **scores**. Just 29.48% of First State students are proficient in math, according to the [state report card](#).

It's the first statewide math plan and it will serve as a complement to Delaware's literacy plan. The reading plan was released in 2019 with the goal of having students proficient in reading by the time they finish third grade.

Designing a new framework for state math classes wasn't plug-and-play.

"We looked at a couple of frameworks that had been published by other states and there were very few to

even be able to reference," said Jamila Riser, executive director of the Delaware Mathematics Coalition.

Some legislators questioned how the framework will be effective if it doesn't include goals and metrics to measure success.

"It's a lot of words that don't have a goal beyond lofty aspirations," said Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown. She is on the House Education Committee. She thinks the plan is filled with a lot of jargon and fluff-words that aren't specific enough to make her feel confident that math outcomes will improve.

"Parents want to see some real specific goals and proposed outcomes for student achievement in mathematics, not what they're going to do or the collaborative efforts or all these workgroups," she said.

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## ONE STORE'S STILL STANDING AT TRI-STATE MALL

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The news coverage of what's happening at the old Tri-State Mall (which closed in 2015, leaving a small strip shopping center still running) has largely ignored a store that's thrived there since 1984. [Tri-State Liquors](#) is still in business, as several signs on chain link fencing along Naamans Road proclaim, and it's planning to move soon across the parking lot to spiffy new digs.

"We have a really good long-term lease that they had to honor," co-owner Andrew Byer said in explaining why his landlord is constructing a building just for Tri-State Liquors.

The other businesses in the retail strip are gone, the windows to their empty stores boarded up.

The mall opened in 1967 near Claymont and just off an Interstate 95 exit. The site's major retailers have included Value City (bankrupt), Levitz (bankrupt) and Kmart (not doing so well).

The 41-acre site once featured a traditional mall, with stores accessed from the inside; a strip shopping center, with access from the parking lot; and several self-standing buildings. All told, the complex included 585,000 square feet of retail. Tri-State Liquors occupies about 15,000 square feet in the strip shopping center, and it will get about the same amount of space in a new building.

"We have a great business," Byer said, adding that he looks forward to many more years of success. The store was founded by his parents, and he now co-owns it with his brother, Michael.

Its new building will be on the [site](#) of the old Levitz Furniture Outlet, which was [demolished](#) in 2021, just after the site was purchased by a company now known as [KPR Centers](#).

Byer anticipates being able to move in late summer. "We are very excited about this new opportunity," he



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said. Tri-State Liquors stocks 20,000 cases of imported and domestic beers, soda, wine, wine coolers, liquor and more," according to its website.

"We consistently have low prices on the names you want," he said, when asked to compare the store to Total Wine & More, the large liquor store on the other side of I-95.

### THE FUTURE OF TRI-STATE MALL

The developer of the new space anticipates a single tenant, but has designed the building to be capable of accommodating up to four tenants, said Mike Hoffman, of Tarabicos, Grosso & Hoffman and the developer's local attorney. No tenants have been signed for the distribution center, he told Delaware Live.

KPR doesn't list Tri-State Mall on its website. The only Delaware property included is Christina Crossing, a

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# Culture



photo link: Out & About

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BY KEN MAMMARELLA

A border marker buried under a manhole, a fiberglass presidential candidate and lots and lots of lima beans are some of the “weird, wonderful and obscure” elements that define Delaware in a new book.

“Secret Delaware” is the second book written together by Rachel Kipp and Dan Shortridge, a married couple who have lived or worked in all three counties. They visited most of the sites, wrote all the words and took most of the photos in their journey from the first entry (the arts in Arden) to the last (one of only three art conservation programs in America).

It is a fascinating book, worthy of the collection of any fan of the First State. That praise is not because this reporter’s work appears at least three times among the sources. It is because of how many interesting facts and figures—fun stuff not known to all natives—are packed into each two-page entry: the narrative, a photo or two,

# 'SECRET DELAWARE' UNCOVERS FIRST STATE'S FUN FACTS, FIGURES

if-you-go info and a related factoid to start (or stop) a conversation.

“*Secret Delaware: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful and Obscure*” is the 53rd book in a series about regional secrets from Reedy Press and is a follow-up to “100 Things to Do in Delaware Before You Die,” their 2020 travel guide for Reedy Press. Kipp and Shortridge’s next book is about “lost Delaware.”

“Secret Delaware” is “dedicated to the journalists—the writers of the first draft of history.”

## SEARCHING FOR INFO

For both books, they searched their memories, the internet and newspapers.com. It helped that when they were reporters for *The News Journal*, they wrote about some of the topics—“We know that they were reliable stories and had great information,” Shortridge said—and they have worked with many of the other writers cited.

Shortridge was born in Boston and grew up in Laurel. He also worked for the Delaware Department of Agriculture, Delaware State Housing Authority and Sussex County Vocational Technical School District. He now owns a résumé writing business and works for Hook PR & Marketing in Milton.

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## ST. GEORGES BRIDGE TO CLOSE FOR 18 MONTHS FOR REPAIRS

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The St. Georges Bridge, which carries U.S. 13 over the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, will close for approximately 18 months for major repairs.

The bridge will close to all traffic starting on April 4. The contractor will begin to close bicycle lanes in February, but at least one bicycle lane will remain open until April 4.

A \$45.8 million contract, awarded to J.D. Eckman, Inc., involves demolishing and replacing the bridge decking, median barrier, drainage features; replacing bridge approaches and roadways; and repairing other bridge structural features. Work is funded by the federal government through Energy and Water appropriations.

The purpose of the repairs is to improve the structural condition and traveling surface of the bridge, a tied arch

structure that was constructed in 1941 and modified in 2010. The last major construction project on the bridge was lead paint abatement in 2000 and 2001.

During construction, traffic will be detoured to the Roth Bridge and Delaware Route 1. Even though the bridges are just a third of a mile apart, detours will be several miles long, to account for the spacing of entrances and exits for Route 1.

The work was announced by the Delaware Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Philadelphia District.

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## TWO LANES OF DELAWARE MEMORIAL BRIDGE TO CLOSE FOR FOUR MONTHS

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Two lanes of the Delaware Memorial Bridge into New Jersey will be closed from early February through near the end of May for rehabilitating the 72-year-old bridge.

The Delaware River and Bay Authority, which owns and operates the bridge, warns drivers to expect delays, particularly during rush hour and peak weekend travel times. Delays could be bad. A repainting project in June of 2021 led to a weekend backup that stretched seven miles on the bridge, Interstate 295 and Interstate 95, below the Route 1 interchange.

A third phase of the \$71 million rehabilitation project is scheduled to start after Labor Day.

Beginning at night on Feb. 1 and continuing through Feb. 4, construction crews will establish a bypass lane on the Delaware-bound span of the bridge. The two left lanes heading to Delaware will be closed 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.,

with a third lane closed 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. for that work.

Once the bypass lane is created on the Delaware-bound span, work will shift to the side heading into New Jersey, and two left lanes into New Jersey "will be continuously closed until just before the Memorial Day holiday weekend," the authority announced. The authority's bridgealerts site gives May 25 as the day the work ends.

The third phase of the project involves the two right lanes heading into New Jersey, west of the suspended bridge midpoint. It's scheduled to run Sept. 5 through Nov. 21.

### WHAT THE WORK INVOLVES

The project includes removal of the top two inches of the deck slabs and replacing the slabs with an ultra high-performance concrete. The work also involves



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replacing transverse deck relief joints and expansion joints.

The bridge's weekday traffic average is 40,000, with 55,000 on weekends, the authority said in 2021, when it set monthly records for June, July and September.

Construction of the bridge began in 1949, and it opened in 1951, replacing ferry service that once plied the Delaware River. Traffic became so heavy so quickly that a second, adjacent bridge was called for, with construction starting in 1964 and opening in 1968. The original span is the one heading into New Jersey.



# Business



photo credit: Vlada Karpovich / PEXELS

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## CONSTRUCTION EXEC: MINI-BOND WILL HURT NON-UNION, MINORITIES

BY SHANNON C. KEITH

A Delaware construction executive says that [Senate Bill 35](#), scheduled to be heard Tuesday in the House, will effectively block non-union contractors from state contracts. Edward J. Capodanno, president of the Associated Builders and Contractors Delaware says a bill to add 17 projects to this year's Bond and Capital Improvements funding, will hurt the more than 500 members ABC represents.

Language in the bill's epilogue includes a pilot program of four projects that demand the winning bidder hire union and minority workers as part of their workforce for the project. Construction officials and Republicans insist that pilot projects almost always lead to wider adoption.

Sponsor Sen. Jack Walsh, D-Stanton/Newport, says the point of the program is to encourage more diversity. Any company can bid on and win projects in the pilot

program, Walsh and Cerron Cade, director of the Office of Management and Budget, said in House hearings. Non-union groups can hire union groups, Walsh and Cade said.

Republicans in the Senate challenged that, saying they had never seen it done.

"We're not discouraging non-union from bidding is what they say," Capodanno said. "But in reality, what non-union contractor is going to hire union workers when they already have a workforce?" He contends the answer is none.

Capodanno said 87% of the work done in Delaware is done by open shut (non-union) contractors.

"If you're really saying the disparity study is why you're doing this pilot program, you have to explain why the requirement is only on 25 percent of the jobs," he said.

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# Food & Dining

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# CELEBRITY CHEF ROBBIE JESTER REVEALS BRUNCH BOARD SECRETS

BY PAM GEORGE

On a Sunday afternoon in January, about 30 men and women packed a room at **Bellefonte Brewing Co.** in north Wilmington. Although they were sipping pints of beer, they were there for more than the craft brews.

It was another sold-out class on board making taught by **Robbie Jester**, owner of **Pizzeria Mariana** and In Jest Events. The attendees were brushing elbows with a TV star—Jester is the winner of “Pressure Cooker,” a Netflix culinary competition and reality show.

The Delaware chef won fans nationwide for his affability and authenticity, and both traits were displayed during his classes.

## BRUNCH BOARDS

His first session last November was on cheese-and-meat boards, which many people—and restaurants—call “charcuterie.” But boards aren’t limited to the traditional. This class, for instance, was on brunch boards, and the Feb. 8 class is on the Lover Board, a sexy mix of chocolate and cheeses.

Boards also go beyond, well, boards. For example, Jester often covers an entire table. Here are some tips and tricks for brunch made easy.

### *Start with butcher paper*

The paper will protect the table or linens and give the “board” a defined space. You can also use deli wrapping paper.

### *Gather your serving pieces*

You don’t need to spend much. Jester bought two silver trays from a thrift shop for \$1.25 and shops Target for affordable dishes for catering gigs.

Choose solid wood or solid marble board — but not a mix. Too often, the marble comes free from the board.

“They’re not made well,” he said.

You’ll also need spreaders and tongs, which Jester buys on Amazon.

### *Use whipped cream cheese for spreads*

A tub of cream cheese costs more, Jester acknowledged. “But it will make your life easier, and you’re going to



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whip it anyway,” he said. The cream cheese should be at room temperature before you add seasoning.

### *Use seasoning blends*

For fast flavor, reach for a spice blend. Jester likes Spiceology products and used Really Ranch and Everything Bagel for the demonstration. However, use whatever blend you wish, he said.

Before adding the seasoning, flip the container upside down and shake well. Blends contain particles of varying sizes, the chef explained, and shaking them ensures they’re well mixed. Add only a little at a time—you can always add more.

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# Government



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## MINI-BOND BILL HEADS TO CARNEY; PILOT LABOR PROJECTS INTACT

BY BETSY PRICE

Despite four attempts by Republicans to amend it, the mini-Bond bill was voted out of the House Thursday and will head to Gov. John Carney to be signed into law.

Passing the bill usually is a routine matter, will add 17 projects to the state's Bond and Capital Improvement fund. Nobody objected to that.

What did draw a lot of heat from Republicans and construction executives was language in the epilogue to [Senate Bill 35](#) to set up a pilot project that said the winning bids on those four projects would need a workforce that include a certain percentage of union workers and minority workers.

Republicans questioned whether the program was designed to favor unions; why the pilot project was included without wider notice to the legislature and others; why the wording didn't detail how the projects would operate or what percentage of projects; why the

pilot programs need to be rushed through with the mini-bond projects were needed immediately; and whether the projects would automatically become state practice.

"What strikes me about this whole process is about the transparency and the public engagement," said Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown.

She said more than 30% of her constituents are Hispanic or Black and none were asked about or allowed to participate in either forming the language or to testify in a hearing about how it would affect them.

Bond bills are created by legislative committees and don't go through the normal hearing process that most bills do. They are simply presented in the full House and Senate.

The bill's wording didn't even specify exactly what the pilot projects are or how they would operate, Republi-

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# RISE IN UNEMPLOYMENT PAY HEADS TO CARNEY'S DESK

BY SHANNON C. KEITH

A bill that would increase unemployment payments by \$50 a week is headed to Gov. John Carney's desk after essentially skating through the General Assembly. The Delaware Senate passed [House Bill 49](#) Thursday. It also will allow the state to use the Delaware Unemployment Trust Fund to pay employer shares of that raise, but only for 2023. The rise will be effective retroactively to Jan. 1, 2023.

Sponsor Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark, said House Bill 49 would bring Delaware more in line with unemployment payments offered in neighboring states. It's the first change to the maximum payment amount in four years. Senate Minority Leader Gerald W. Hocker (R-Oceanview) opposed the change.

"Why are we making it more attractive for those who don't want to work?" he asked. "I'm totally upset with people who won't and we need to change that."

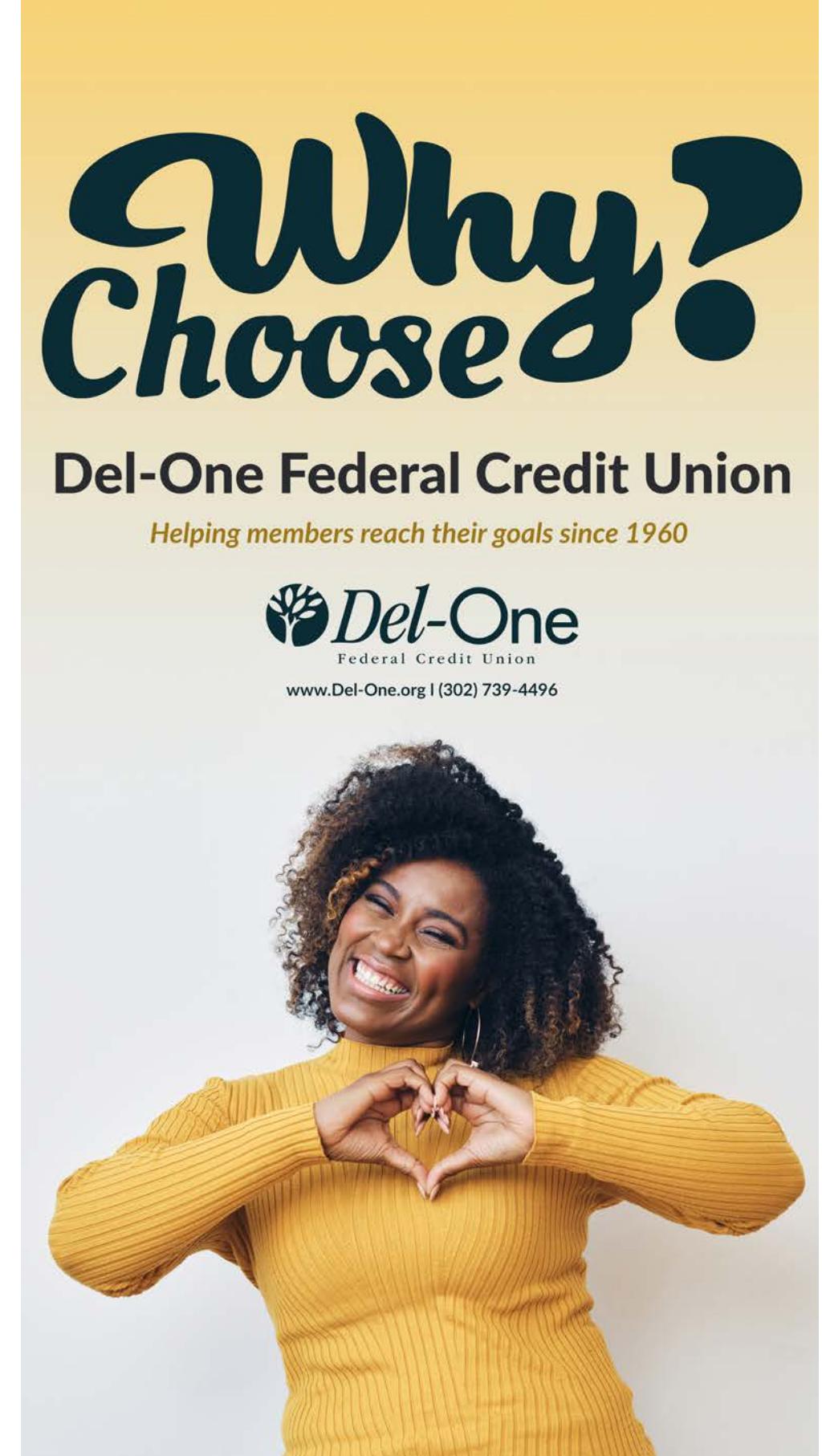
## UNEMPLOYMENT NUMBERS

As of November, the state identified 22,000 unemployed individuals with 37,000 open positions. During January, the state paid an estimated 4,900 claims, with 25% of those unemployed collecting partial or full benefits. The average time people spend collecting varies between 13.9 and 16 weeks, with a 26-week maximum allowed. The average unemployment benefit is \$292 and the top is now \$400.

As of November 2022, the state's unemployment rate was the fifth highest in the nation at 4.4%. According to Statista Research, the national unemployment rate spiked to 8.1% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funds in the state's Unemployment Trust Fund were depleted by the surge of pandemic related claims but

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# WILMINGTON INITIATIVES AIM AT TRANSPORTATION, QUALITY OF LIFE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Delaware's largest city has a master plan to improve transportation and the quality of life, and it's called the Wilmington Initiatives. Ten projects are listed on a landing [page](#) maintained by the Wilmington Area Planning Council. Creating a park over Interstate 95 is the most **prominent** and most **expensive**.

The initiatives go back to **1996**, when Wilmington started to develop "streetscape concepts for downtown corridors." The initiatives now involve the city, the Delaware Department of Transportation; the Delaware Transit Corp., a DelDOT unit that operates DART buses; and the planning council.

The landing page says the projects total \$45 million—which would be dwarfed by the cost of the cap park.

Most projects involve making the roads safer for bicyclists and pedestrians and making the streetscapes look nicer. Here's the current state of the nine other projects (which, as is often said, is subject to change).

## *Union Street reconfiguration*

A presentation from last spring offers a \$15 million to \$18 million plan to rethink Union Street between Pennsylvania Avenue and Sycamore Street.

The familiar goals: "Better function as a Main Street corridor, balancing moving cars while functioning as a place for residents and neighbors to shop, dine, work, recreate, socialize and play" and "improve multimodal mobility and connectivity."

The latest, preferred plans call for switching from angled parking to parallel parking; bike lanes; a long, thin rain garden in one section; wider sidewalks; and space for restaurants to host outdoor dining.

## *Bus service on Orange, King, Eighth and Ninth streets*

DelDOT has accepted a \$2.3 million **bid** that reconfigures Orange Street (between Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and 10th Street), King Street (between MLK and 10th) and Eighth and Ninth streets (between Adams

and Church streets). The "project is to provide better shelters and other amenities at bus stops within the Central Business District of Wilmington, along with safety improvements for pedestrians," Diane Gunn, a senior engineer with Century Engineering, told DelawareLive. The work includes new bus shelters and LED signs with real-time bus arrival information.

## *Walnut Street, Third to 16th streets*

This project is intended to make it easier for people who live elsewhere in the city to get to jobs downtown. Make it safer, somehow, for bicyclists. Make it safer for pedestrians (one technique is to reduce the number of through lanes, reducing how many lanes of traffic that pedestrians face when crossing the street). Make it look nicer. The plan calls for two or three travel lanes on Walnut, with off-street parking on one side or both. An off-peak parking lane would be evaluated between Eighth and 12th streets.

It calls for "strategic bump outs," which extend the sidewalk into the parking lane, reducing how much traffic pedestrians need to cross. It also calls for evaluating floating bus stops, which allow "buses to stop curbside and limit stopping times and congestion and delay" and provide "bicycle buffer from vehicles, reducing conflicts."

It's being designed now, with construction to start in 2024.

## *Fourth Street, Adams to Walnut Streets*

"Fourth Street could be transformed to emphasize its role as a gateway corridor into the city and a neighborhood Main Street by focusing on blight reduction and redevelopment, beautification, traffic calming and biking amenities," according to its DelDOT page.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



## MINI-BOND BILL GETS MIRED IN SENATE DEBATE OVER LABOR CHANGES

BY SHANNON C. KEITH

A typically commonplace measure that would have added 17 projects to this year's Bond and Capital Improvements funding got mired in controversy Tuesday over wording that required union and minority participation in four bids. That requirement in a four-project pilot program would mean that some minorities, including Hispanics, would be left out, Senate Republicans maintained.

Rep. Jack Walsh, D-Newport/Stanton, sponsor of [Senate Bill 35](#), and others argued that it actually made sure they could participate and that the measure would increase minority opportunity to earn state bids.

Ultimately, the measure passed 15-6 along party lines in the Senate Chamber today.

The change in labor requirements was detailed in epilogue language and included mandatory hiring of union and minorities, along with state residency goals

suggested by the Office of Management and Budget for four Department of Transportation projects.

The pilot projects have no place in SB 35, the Republicans said. They worry any findings could ultimately end up altering Delaware's approach to the areas of Community Workforce Agreements and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise. Any pilot project sets a precedent that almost always is adopted, Republicans said.

### MINI-BOND CHANGES

Walsh and Cerron Cade, director of the Office of Management and Budget and former secretary of labor, said the pilot projects will ensure a bigger minority stake in state-funded construction contracts.

One minority engineering and construction owner, Javier G. Torrijos, testified that for members of the Latino community, the pilot projects add up to nothing more than a "union mandate."

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Education



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# DOES SCHOOL BOARD PUBLIC COMMENT BILL GO FAR ENOUGH?

meeting, rather than giving people the chance to speak when an item is up for a vote.

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, argued that the bill should require public comment on each action item vote. He said putting everything into a single segment is simply a convenience to school board members, who are elected officials, rather than the parents who put them into office.

"Not all action items are going to be contentious, and not all of them will even require a public comment because no one will stand up," Buckson said.

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that blew through the House unanimously got some blowback Wednesday in the Senate Education Committee. [House Bill 34](#), sponsored by Rep. Kim Williams, D-Marshallton, chair of the House Education Committee, would require district and charter school boards to hold a public comment period before the board moves on to action items requiring a vote. It will not require public comment on procedural items such as a request to approve minutes or enter into executive session.

Williams said most school boards already have public comment segments in meetings. However, she said, Red Clay Consolidated School District sometimes allows for public comment only after its board votes on matters.

The state Board of Education and many city councils already allow public comment on each item to be voted on. Others lump public comment into one section of a

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# PRESCHOOL SPECIAL ED. FUNDING BILL DRAWS STAFFING, MONEY CONCERNS

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that would increase funding for preschool students with disabilities was released by the House Education Committee Wednesday, but not without some concerns.

**House Bill 33**, sponsored by Rep. Kim Williams, D-Marshallton, would increase funding for those students by revising the current ratio of 12.8 students per education unit to 8.4 students per unit for preschoolers three years and older. The new funding ratio would go into effect July 1, 2023.

That's also the time students with disabilities in kindergarten through third grade will get the same funding change via a law passed in July 2021 which aligned funding for students with disabilities for PreK with kindergarten through 12th grade.

"As a parent with two children that have had developmental delay, I know from this experience how much early intervention is crucial for our children's lives,"

Williams said. "My children were able to receive necessary services early on, but we know too often stories of children that are left behind."

HB 33 also creates a "preschool 2" unit with a ratio 7.0 students per funding unit, in order to accommodate two-year-olds with disabilities who are enrolled in school district programs.

Cindy Brown, speaking on behalf of the Department of Education, defined the beneficiaries as students who "either have a significant developmental delay, autism or some other conditions so they're not considered a typically-developing preschooler." The 12.8 funding ratio has been in place for 20 years.

"When you look at that child with a disability, they really do take and require a lot more adult supervision and more support," Brown said. "So by doing this, we're going to do a much better job in providing all of those different supports that a little kiddo with disabilities

needs to be to benefit from their special education."

Lowering the ratio is crucial to their success, she said.

## CONCERNS WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Rep. Jeff Hilovski, R-Long Neck, questioned what metrics were used to land on the new 8.4 number, or if it was just arbitrary. Brown indicated that the number was a result of recommendations from the **National Association for the Education of Young Children** and the **Office of Child Care Licensing**.

The state has 2,138 preschoolers that have disabilities, Brown said. There are about a thousand licensed child-care centers throughout the First State.

"There's been a lot of impetus from the federal government to really look at early identification, especially around autism," she said, "to make sure that we're getting to these kids at a young age."

The change in funding would cost the state \$4,438,304 in Fiscal Year 2024, with the local share totalling \$1,243,680. In Fiscal Year 2025, the state share would be \$4,768,463 compared to the local share of \$1,336,196. The state share would increase in Fiscal Year 2026 to \$5,114,978, with the local share of \$1,433,295, according to the bill's fiscal note.

Rep. Kevin Hensley, R-Odessa, reminded the group of the state's teacher shortage.

"Do we feel comfortable that there's an adequate workforce available to be able to accommodate that growth?" he said.

Brown admitted that was a good point. "We know that our public schools are having a challenge to recruit and retain highly-qualified personnel, so that is a concern, it's a legitimate question," she said.

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# DOE OWNS LEAD TESTING BLUNDER, EXPECTS NEW RESULTS BY MAY

BY JAREK RUTZ

A Senate committee hearing Tuesday heard the state Secretary of Education apologize about the way lead testing in schools was handled and that trained pros will handle testing instead of school staff.

Through a federal grant, the Department of Education began a sampling initiative in October 2020 to identify the levels of lead within drinking water at schools.

“While well-intentioned, mistakes were made in this initial lead sampling including testing buildings during COVID-19 closures and testing many nonconsumption sources,” said Secretary Mark Holodick.

“We also didn’t communicate the results nearly as well as needed. We didn’t communicate well with our partners, meaning our districts, we didn’t communicate well with our communities or the state as a whole.”

## TESTING FOR LEAD AGAIN

Last month, the state hired **Batta Environmental**, a New York environmental consultant, to retest all fixtures that showed dangerously high levels of lead. The state didn’t have a lot of confidence in the first round of sampling conducted via the federal grant. It used school staff to take samples.

“This time trained professional staff are completing the testing,” Holodick said.

The **Environmental Protection Agency**, which provided the \$209,000 grant to Delaware in 2020, says that anything over .015 milligrams of lead per liter of water is dangerous. Sen. Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin, chair of the Senate Education Committee, asked how the state plans to fund this second round of testing.

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Health

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# PUBLIC HEALTH TO CLOSE COVID-19 CALL CENTERS TUESDAY

BY BETSY PRICE

In another sign that COVID-19 is becoming a part of ordinary life, the Delaware Division of Public Health will close its COVID-19 call center and vaccine call center Jan. 31 because the number of calls has dwindled.

It's one more indication that the state and the federal government are starting to consider how to handle the ebbing of the pandemic as the number of cases drop and vaccines help many avoid critical illness.

Gov. John Carney said Wednesday during a briefing about his 2024 budget proposal that the state already is considering how to handle the wind down of federal aid when a public health emergency order is lifted.

The state will need to focus on the dismantling of the expanded Medicaid program, which now is serving one-third of the state's residents because of expanded eligibility rules.

Carney said the feds will remove funding faster than they will allow the state to remove people and will limit how fast the state can remove enrollees. That will mean Delaware will have to pick up a larger part of that expense.

The governor said the state also will have to consider how to help long-term care facilities, which received a lot of federal COVID-19 funds and used them to hire and retain workers.

## CALL CENTER GENESIS

Public Health's call centers provided critical advice and aid for state residents from 2020 to 2022 as the virus rampaged up and down the state and especially when the vaccines began to come out in winter 2020-2021.

"We started with multiple call center operators, even having to open a separate Vaccine Call Center when the vaccine program rolled out," said Dr. Rick Hong, interim director of the Delaware Division of Public Health. "However, significantly lower call volume concerning COVID-19 as the pandemic wanes and evolves is allowing us to re-allocate personnel to other critical health work. Most people are accessing information through the web."

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# Sports



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## SUSSEX CENTRAL KNOCKS OFF DEFENDING CHAMP CAPE HENOPEN

BY BENNY MITCHELL

To be the champs you have to beat the champs and the Sussex Central wrestling team took a big step in that direction Wednesday night handing defending state champion Cape Henlopen a 36-30 loss in front of a capacity crowd.

The Golden Knights took a 33-30 lead into the final match of the night featuring No. 4-ranked Holt Baker of Cape Henlopen and No. 5-ranked Evan Cordrey at 126 pounds. Baker scored a takedown in the first period and then rode out Cordrey in the second period, taking a 2-0 lead into the third period.

Baker chose bottom to start the period. Cordrey worked in a leg and then torqued Baker's torso to his back scoring two sets of nearfall points to earn the 6-2 decision giving Sussex Central the 36-30 victory.

"I knew I was down two to nothing and needed to score, I am comfortable with legs and tried to get them

in and once I did I knew I got something there," Cordrey said.

Sussex Central head coach Shane Miller said the match did not go as he had envisioned, but his team stayed tough and Cordrey came up big for the Golden Knights at the end.

"That is tough to do being down two points and needing to get a turn to win, but Evan showed resiliency there and got the win," Miller said.

The match began at 132 pounds where the Knights Talon Savage won a 7-0 decision over Nick Walker, but the Vikings responded with a pair of wins. Josh Wright pinned Justin Craig in 2:48 at 138 pounds and Andrew Schaen followed with a 11-4 decision over Andrew Long to give Cape Henlopen a 9-3 lead.

Sussex Central responded with a pair of wins as Jayden Drummond won an 8-7 decision over Braydon Cole at


  
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144 pounds and Cody Layfield recorded a pin over Hayden Wheeler in 32 seconds at 157 pounds, giving the Golden Knights a 12-9 lead.

Luke Bender answered for the Vikings with a pin over Jadyn Craig in 3:01 at 165 pounds followed by C.J. Fritchman's 9-3 decision over Gabe Cannon at 175 pounds as Cape Henlopen jumped back out into the lead at 18-12.

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## BONUS HOOPS AS NO. 7 APPO HOLDS OFF NO. 6 CARAVEL

BY GLENN FRAZER

When the sixth- and seventh-ranked teams in the Delaware Live-302 Sports poll get together, a close game is expected. That is exactly what transpired Tuesday night as the Caravel Buccaneers (No. 6) and Appoquinimink Jaguars (No. 7) battled into overtime in a Jags' 71-62 victory.

There was no indication the game would be tightly contested early, as the Jags made three shots beyond the arc, one each by Haji Bell, Riley Buzby and Christian Barksdale to take a 20-11 lead with 1:10 to go in the opening quarter. Caravel tightened things up as Trevor Webster went on a personal 7-0 run closing the gap to 30-27 in the second period. The first of two buzzer beaters happened just before half, as the Bucs' Ryan Black drained a "three" and the two teams headed to the locker room with Appo ahead 32-30.

The Bucs and Jags would battle the entire second half. Appo went on an 8-0 run early in the third quarter thanks to the "3-B's" as Buzby and Barksdale nailed long-range shots and Bell converted a layup. That gave

the Jags a 40-32 advantage. Undaunted, Caravel put together a 10-0 run on baskets from Mekhi Carmon, Miles White, and six points by Dominique Wyatt. That run gave Caravel its first lead (42-40) since the start of the game. From that point on, the game would be closely contested.

There would be seven ties in the second half and you could feel the tension building. The final 3:30 of regulation featured tenacious defense, clutch rebounding, and excellent-unselfish ball movement. With the home team Jags nursing a two-point lead, Rey' Carrier used his length to save a ball headed out of bounds and made a great pass to Buzby for a "lay-in" and a two possession advantage. On the other end of the floor, a White "dish" to Wyatt in the lane produced another "highlight" basket and the Bucs closed to within two points. Those two players would reverse roles on the following play, as Wyatt found White for a layup and the game was knotted at 50-all with 1:45 to go. Two foul shots by Appo's Barksdale and a Buccaneer bucket by White and the

game was 52-52 with barely 80 seconds left.

The defenses took over until Appo was whistled for an offensive foul with 26 seconds on the clock. Caravel head coach Mark Tobin called a timeout to set up the pursuing (and crucial) play. The Bucs came out of the timeout and worked the clock down until Wyatt drove into the paint, cradled the ball in his right arm and "kissed" the glass for a 54-52 lead. Appo coach Tom Purse quickly called a timeout to set up the final nine seconds and hopefully tie, or take the lead. Daniel Harvey was guarded tightly as he crossed half court. He momentarily bobbled the ball before passing off to Bell. Haj' faked right, moved left and swished the buzzer-beater jumper to send the crowd into a frenzy, and the game into the extra period.

The overtime began with Buzby making two free throws, and a Caravel long-range jumper by John Clemons to give the Bucs a one-point lead. After two foul shots by Carrier and one by Trevor Webster, the game was tied at 58-all with 90 seconds left. The Jags grabbed a two-possession lead when Buzby made four consecutive foul shots and Caravel could not overcome that deficit. Buzby went 9-of-10 at the line in overtime keeping the Jags "at arms length" from the Bucs, who were forced to foul in the final moments of the game.

Caravel was led by Wyatt's 18 points, while Clemons added 13, and White scored 12. The Bucs fell to 6-4 with "in-state" losses to Tower Hill and Appo, both ranked in the top 10.

Appo was paced by Bell's game-high 19 points, Riley Buzby put up 17 with all but three of those points coming in the second half and OT. The Jags improved to 9-3 with the win.



## TOWER HILL INVITATIONAL PRODUCES SPIRITED COMPETITION

BY NICK HALLIDAY

The season's Indoor track & field is winding down as the DIAA State championships are on tap in two weeks. Several Delaware high school athletes met at the Carpenter Fieldhouse on the campus of Tower Hill Jan. 21 and turned in some stellar performances. Sixteen schools participated in the Invitational with a large crowd in attendance.

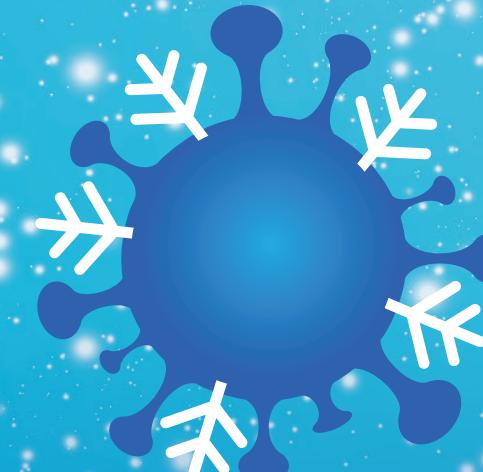
The day began with St. Mark's senior Samantha Miner winning the 55m hurdles in 9.40, while her Spartan teammate Bryce Tucci won the boys' hurdles in a time of 8.39. Tucci also took first place in high jump. Caravel freshman Kennedy Smith won the girls' 55m sprint event in 7.5 while Dominick Pietlock of Tower Hill took first in the boys race with a time of 6.73, as the sprinters took early stage. Pietlock also was a double-winner as he finished first in the long jump.

The relay events drew loud encouragement from the spectators. On the girls' side, Middletown edged Archmere in the 4x200 relay by .5 seconds. Host Tower Hill took first in the 4x400 while Newark Charter won the 4x800. The Archmere boys' team won the 4x200, and just like the girls, the Hillers boys won the 4x400 and Newark Charter took the 4x800 event.

There were many highlights, including the 1-2 finish in the boys' 1600m race as Middletown seniors Jonas Rush and Walter Samuels were separated by .6 of a second. Rush led from start to finish in a time of 4:42.12 while Samuels closed the gap on the final lap, finishing a close second in 4:42.79.

For a complete list of all events and results, visit <https://de.milesplit.com>.





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