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Educator Pay Committee Delays Salary Vote



Comfort Dog Joins Staff



Five Students Authors to See Shows Produced

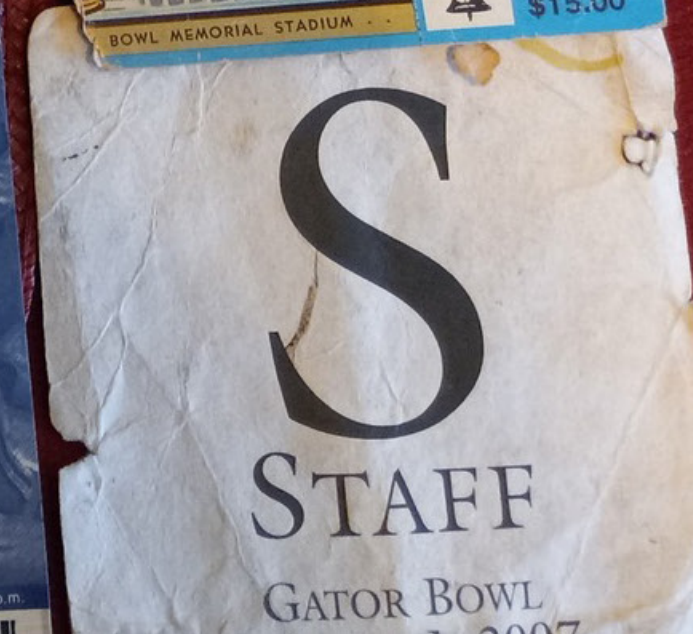


photo link: Scott Evers



# Headlines

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# JFC ASKS FOR RETURN ON INVESTMENT ON EDUCATIONAL SPENDING

BY JAREK RUTZ

Several members of the Joint Finance Committee asked the Department of Education officials on Wednesday when and if they would ever see a return on the state’s investment in public education.

Student achievement metrics, like standardized test scores, have fallen off a cliff over the past decade and the state still faces a teacher shortage.

Education Secretary Mark Holodick and Kim Klein, associate secretary of operations, asked for \$1,976,146,300 from the state’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget. That’s about an 8% increase in available funds from last year.

Sen. Dave Lawson, R-Marydel, said he’s been on the committee for a decade and hears the same speech every year while test scores and school climate continue to plummet.

“We’re not getting any benefit, and the taxpayers are getting tired of it,” he said. “They’re being assessed more and more taxes but they’re not getting the benefit, and kids are coming out lower and lower and lower.”

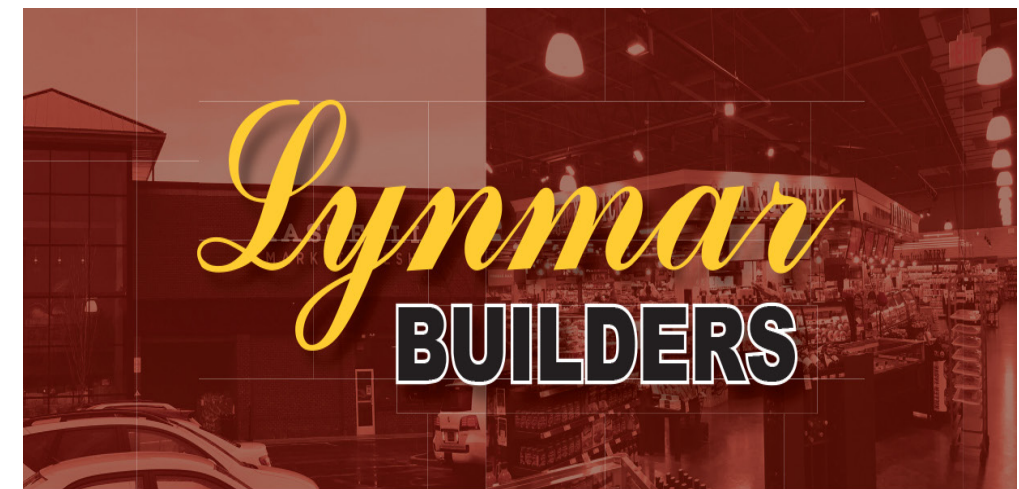
He called for stricter discipline in schools and said too often that students causing serious problems just get a slap on the wrist or counseling.

The department asked the committee for \$30 million for mental health services for next year. Teachers are burdened with much more than just teaching, he said, and students need to be hardened by the realities of life rather than being babied.

“If we don’t have guardrails and discipline and have it enforced, we’re not going anywhere,” he said. “We’re going to go backwards because the teachers aren’t going to put up with it. They’re going to leave.”

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, agreed that students could use a stronger backbone. Schools are teaching students that they somehow went through hell and back during COVID, he said.

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# EDUCATOR PAY COMMITTEE DELAYS SALARY VOTE OVER BUDGET, TIMELINE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Plans to recommend how the state will significantly hike salaries of teachers as well as school administrators and nurses, stalled Monday night amid concerns about the state budget and the timeline of raises. The 15-person Public Education Compensation Committee debating the issue was created this year to make recommendations on Delaware educator compensation.

Officials hope raises will both address the teacher shortage and create salaries to compete with other states in the region, including Maryland, which plans to bring a teacher's base salary to \$60,000 by 2027.

The committee was considering a recommendation that would provide a 2% increase and a flat dollar increase to the base salary for teachers, nurses and administrators each year until it reaches \$60,000.

Sen. Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin and chair of the Senate Education Committee, said she couldn't vote for the plan because there's no formal timeline attached. She called the committee out for making excuses about delaying salary raises.

Sturgeon said some of the members seem to have the mentality that it's OK to be years behind Maryland just because Maryland started first.

"While in the meantime, while this longer period of time is being waited for, our students are the ones who are suffering because they have substitute teachers in their classes, because they're being taught by a computer with a teacher in another room and an aide walking around babysitting them," she said.

A former teacher, Sturgeon said she was told for 25 years to do what's best for students. That's a hypocritical message now as students and their academic success are the victims of the teacher shortage, yet the committee is fine waiting many years to get to the \$60,000 base salary, she said.

"Let's keep in mind that every year we delay in being regionally competitive is another year that our students are negatively impacted, and that is not something I can support," she said.

Sturgeon also took offense to several committee mem-

bers who were trying to determine how the salary increases would work with the state budget.

"This is a recommendation to make us regionally competitive," Sturgeon said. "That's what the PECC has been asked to do. Not to figure out how to pay for it. That is the job of the Joint Finance Committee and it is the job of the governor when he puts out his governor's recommended budget."

By conflating those responsibilities, she said, the committee will be pushed into making a lesser recommendation than what First State students deserve and what teachers need.

"It's not just about what the governor, what the state and the Joint Finance Committee can do, it's also about what the various school districts can do in that time period," said Cerron Cade, director of the Office of Management and Budget.

With the present pay scale, the state is responsible for 70% of a school employee's salary, while the local districts have a 30% share.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



## STATE CHAMBER: PROPOSED FAMILY LEAVE RULES 'VERY UNCLEAR'

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The Delaware State Chamber of Commerce has raised significant concerns about an early draft of regulations to implement a new state law requiring paid family leave.

“While I appreciate the enormity of your task, and with no disrespect intended, I find the law and existing draft regulations to be extremely daunting and difficult to use,” [Timothy M. Holly](#) wrote on the first page of his 41-page letter, prepared for the chamber and sent to the Delaware Department of Labor. He is co-chair of the labor and employment law group at Connolly Gallagher in Wilmington.

“In short, the law and regulations present a substantial burden as to both learning and implementation, with the ‘how-to’ and ‘what must I do’ frequently very unclear.”

The [Healthy Delaware Families Act](#), which Gov. John Carney signed into law last May, mandates up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for Delaware

workers starting Jan. 1, 2025. The long gap is to allow time for creating regulations, forms, portals and other bureaucratic elements.

“This is exponentially complicated,” said Michael Quaranta, president of the chamber, referring to challenges that will make it difficult for small businesses to comply with Delaware’s family leave rules. “Compliance with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is complicated enough.” He emphasized the limited expertise of small businesses and the complexity of compliance.

Delaware has about 57,000 businesses. Big businesses employ about 240,000 workers. Small businesses—56,000 of them—employ the other 240,000 workers. Small businesses often [hire](#) a human resources staffer only when they reach 20 to 30 employees.

In the letter, Holly raises a dozen “high-level observations, requests and/or concerns.”

He starts out by asking how employers should handle salaried workers and owner/employees and how part-time status factors in employee count. Provisions apply differently to employers with at least 25 employees, employers with 10-24 employees and others. That last category includes the obvious (employers with less than 10 employees), and also the federal government and seasonal businesses.

“Employers will have many questions for which there appears to be no answers,” he writes in the letter for the chamber about applying the new law to telecommuting and traveling for work.

In the letter, he writes about burdens and lack of clarity at least 30 times each. “Delaware, including DDOL through these regulations, is making it increasingly difficult to do business in Delaware,” he writes. “It is self-defeating to do so. Proceed with caution. And ease employer burden, please.”

Unsurprisingly, all the politicians quoted when Carney signed the bill lauded the benefits, not the burdens. “It will make Delaware more attractive for younger workers,” Carney said.

Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington and the bill’s primary sponsor, referred questions to the Delaware Senate Majority Caucus, which referred questions to the Delaware Department of Labor. The department plans to submit regulations to the Office of the Registrar March 15.

“This does include a public comment period,” a department spokesman said.

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Culture

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BY BETSY PRICE

A new art house movie theater opens this weekend and will show Oscar-nominated documentaries, animated and live-action shorts. The Screening Room at 1313 will start by showing the documentaries, animated shorts and live action shorts nominated for a 2023 Oscar.

Co-owners Beverly Zimmermann and Bob Weir have worked together before and had been searching for a new theater location when providence presented them with the perfect space at 1313 N. Market St. It's the former Hercules building and now known for its **Chancery Market Food Hall and Bar**.

Zimmermann and Weir were talking to Scott Johnson, who oversees the redevelopment of 1313 North as head of TSG Hospitality, about their idea when he asked to show them something. He took them into the building's former atrium, which included a waterfall running

# SCREENING ROOM MOVIE THEATER OPENS IN DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON

through the room. Now turned off, it left an already terraced space that easily could be lined with theater seats. Johnson's architect drew plans for the theater, but supply chain issues have slowed down its construction.

For the time being, The Screening Room at 1313 will open in a neighboring conference room in the lower atrium and instead of rows of seats, patrons will find comfy armchairs and sofas.

The weekends of Feb. 17 and Feb. 24 will feature a rotating schedule of Oscar short film nominees:

- Documentary (3-hour run time): Saturday 7:30 p.m., Sunday 6:30 p.m.
- Animated (90-minutes run time): Saturday 4:30 p.m., Sunday, 12:30 p.m.
- Live Action (2 hours): Saturday 1:30 p.m., Sunday 3:15 p.m.

Admission will be \$12.50 for adults; \$9.50 for seniors/students; and \$8.50 for the first show of the day. The owners hope their website, [www.TheScreeningRoom.org](http://www.TheScreeningRoom.org), will be up by the weekend, but software conflicts were slowing it down late this week. Patrons may pay at the door, Zimmermann said.

Bonus for those patrons: A parking garage under the building has 130 spaces and parking is free for three hours after 5:30 p.m. on Fridays and all day Saturday and Sunday.

While the theater will sell popcorn and drinks, guests

also are welcome to buy food in the Chancery Market and bring it into the movies. The Screening Room is in the process of getting an alcohol license, so no alcohol is allowed in the theater. It has to be drunk in the market.

Both lifetime movie lovers, Zimmermann and Weir will split the operating duties. Zimmermann will focus on booking films, and Weir on running the movies.

## SCREENING ROOM GENESIS

She fell in love with movies, she said, as a college student. Suffering from insomnia, she and a fellow insomniac would stay up all night watching movies on Philly's Channel 48.

Weir, who is the technical director of the Playhouse on Rodney Square, last summer opened a two-screen drive-in in **Bear**. He worked in projection booths as a teen in a Texas movie theater and a drive-in before moving to Delaware and working in the State Theater in Newark. He opened the Chestnut Hill Cinema Cafe, which sold food, wine and beer to be consumed during movies, about 25 years ago.

Weir collects movie projectors, including the latest all-digital versions. He also has a side hustle, showing movies on inflatable screens and has worked with the Delaware Art Museum and The Grand.

Zimmermann and Weir met in 2002 when they helped Tina Betz open Theatre N in the Nemours Building for the city of Wilmington's Cultural Affairs Department.

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NEW CASTLE COUNTY LIBRARY  
BRANDYWINE HUNDRED BRANCH

# NEW GROUP WANTS TO PRESERVE BRANDYWINE HUNDRED HISTORY

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Brandywine Hundred native Dee Durham has a simple but important reason for creating the Brandywine Hundred Historical Society: “All those stories that we don’t want to lose.”

“People want to learn about the history of where they live,” said member Pam Cawood Rizzo.

The society, like most modern things, started out about a year ago digitally, with a YouTube [channel](#) and a Facebook [page](#). It’s lately added an email (BrandywineHundredHS@gmail.com) and a mission statement (“Brandywine Hundred Historical Society seeks to collect, preserve and share the rich history of Brandywine Hundred”).

It hosts meetings on the second Wednesday of the month, with the one next featuring Leah Brooks of the Mt. Cuba Center on native plants. That meeting is March 8 at the Newark Union Church, 8 Newark Union

Road, a short spur just off Baynard Boulevard in the middle of Brandywine Hundred.

The meeting site’s Colonial history dates back to 1687, when land was donated for a cemetery. In 2020, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, according to its Facebook [page](#), and the Historical Marker [database](#) counts at least eight historical markers within a mile or so. Cawood Rizzo believes the cemetery is one of Brandywine Hundred’s oldest remnants of European colonization.

“There’s a great excitement in saving history and sharing our stories,” said Durham, also a member of New Castle County Council.

Organization members are thinking about gathering artifacts, and they’re thinking of “taking responsibility for an endangered site,” she said. “And there are many to choose from.”

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## UD ALUMNA WILL JUMP INTO 'SHARK TANK' FRIDAY

BY JAREK RUTZ

University of Delaware graduate Joelle Flynn will peddle her lipstick-size toothbrush Friday, Feb. 17, on ABC's "Shark Tank." **FunkkOFF! TeethRefreshers** was created in 2010 as a way for people to discreetly brush their teeth when they're on the move—especially when they're drinking red wine. It hit the consumer market in 2019.

She had applied twice to be on the show with no luck, and was surprised when representatives reached out on their own in 2022.

"'Shark Tank' found us on social media because we are so innovative and it's the only product on the market," she said. "It was such an honor for our company."

Packaged in a lipstick container, FunkkOFF! contains an electric toothbrush head that is good for up to 30 uses.

"The whole unit itself works like a lipstick," Flynn said. "We just twist it up, brush the gunk off your teeth, put the aerated cap on, check out your teeth in the

mirror. It's the only product on the market that is an all-in-one toothbrush and toothpaste that's all-natural, reusable and vegan."

The mechanism already has 11 patents, one international Chinese utility patent and 10 U.S. patents, which are both for the utility and design of the product.

Flynn, now 51 and a resident of Southern California, majored in consumer economics at UD and graduated in 1994. She first came up with the idea in 2010 to help solve a problem for herself.

"I was literally visiting one or two wineries Saturday and Sunday and my teeth would turn purple from the red wine," she said. "I would constantly carry around a full-sized toothbrush and toothpaste in my purse, which is clunky. I would drink my red wine, go to the bathroom and get the funk off my teeth, put my lipstick on and go to the next winery."

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## GO, HORNETS, GO! DSU MASCOT BECOMES A BOBBLEHEAD

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The Delaware State University Hornets are getting their own officially licensed bobbleheads, part of a limited-edition series for 13 Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The bobbleheads are produced by the [National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum](#).

They were released in celebration of Black History Month, but the Hornet bobbleheads won't be scheduled to ship until April.

Each bobblehead is individually numbered to 2,023, and they are only available through the museum's [store](#).

The bobbleheads are \$35 each plus a flat-rate shipping charge of \$8 per order.

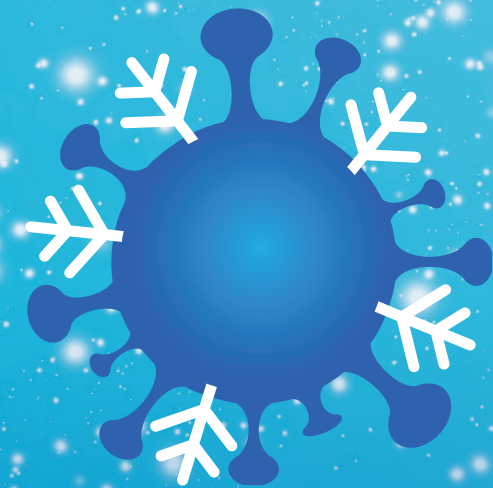
The schools and mascots included in the series are Alabama A&M University Bulldogs, Alabama State University Hornets, Delaware State University Hornets,

Florida A&M University Rattlers, Fayetteville State University Broncos, Grambling State University Tigers, Howard University Bison, Jackson State University Tigers, Morgan State University Bears, North Carolina A&T State University Aggies, North Carolina Central University Eagles, Norfolk State University Spartans and Tuskegee University Golden Tigers.

The museum released a University of Delaware [YouDee](#) in January, and the first batch sold out.

One Wilmington-based entrepreneur on Feb. 1 posted one on [eBay](#) for \$216.99.

A second YouDee batch (again, individually numbered up to 2,023) is expected to ship in May. They're \$35, plus shipping.



## Don't let COVID-19 freeze your holiday season.

COVID-19 doesn't just crash holiday get-togethers — it cancels them. So whatever you're celebrating this season, make sure you've gotten your bivalent booster and follow these other steps to stay safe and leave COVID out in the cold.

**Stay home if you're sick.**

**Get vaccinated and boosted.**

**Get tested before and after gatherings.**

**Wear a mask when cases are high.**



For more information, visit [de.gov/holidays](https://de.gov/holidays).



# CHANCERY MARKET TO OPEN COURTYARD; NEW MOVIE THEATER MOVES IN

BY BETSY PRICE

Two more big changes are coming to the downtown Wilmington space formerly known as the Hercules Building.

- The **Chancery Market Food Hall & Bar** will open its 10,000-square-foot garden plaza in May.
- An independent movie theater—The Screening Room at 1313—opened this weekend, showing first-run movies, starting with compilations of the short films nominated for Oscars.

## CHANCERY COURTYARD

The Chancery Market will complement its indoor court with an outdoor space designed by the Delaware Center for Horticulture.

The courtyard will offer green lawns, new landscaping, decorative hardscaping and seating for 150, as well as an indoor/outdoor bar, fireplace and large screen television. Families and visitors will be able to enjoy games, live music and other seasonal activities surrounded by views of the downtown Wilmington skyline.

It's designed to be family, co-working and business meeting-friendly, said a press release from the Chancery Market.

One of the bonuses of the building at 1313 N. Market St. is the onsite garage, including three-hour complimentary parking for those dining at the market Monday-Friday from 5:30 p.m. to close and all day Saturday and Sunday.

## MORE ON THEATER

The parking and food hall were part of the attraction for the owners of The Screening Room at 1313. Guests will be allowed to bring in dinner from the food court, but also take advantage of the popcorn, snacks and drinks usually associated with movie theaters. Oscar-nominated shorts are expected to run there this weekend and next (Feb. 24).



## Treat Yourself

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photo credit: Vlada Karpovich / PEXELS

# Business

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# DELAWARE GIVES BIG GRANTS TO 10 SMALL BUSINESSES

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Ten small businesses in Delaware have been awarded grants in the sixth round of the Encouraging Development, Growth and Expansion competition. Since the state government launched EDGE in 2019, \$4.2 million has been awarded to 68 promising small businesses. In this round, more than 120 businesses applied for grants.

Businesses that are less than five years old and employ no more than 10 employees are eligible for grants up to \$100,000 for STEM-based companies and up to \$50,000 for others, called the entrepreneur class.

EDGE is a matching grant program. The Division of Small Business matches a winner's investment on a 3-to-1 basis.

Seven out of the 10 winners are women-owned businesses; three are veteran-owned businesses; and two are owned by minorities. Since the program's inception, 41%

of EDGE winners have been women-owned businesses, and 27% have been minority-owned.

## STEM class

**A. I. Who** (Newark) is developing an app for clinicians to remotely conduct gait assessments, used to diagnose disorders in walking patterns. The grant will be used to develop and market the app.

**All Azimuth Solutions** (Magnolia) is developing an electronic Community Advanced Air Mobility Toolkit for educational and outreach materials. The grant will be used to develop the business.

**BioCurie** (Wilmington) is developing the world's first AI-based software for cell and gene therapy. The grant will fund the commercialization of BioCurie's first product.

**Rotulu** (Camden) is developing an app that provides real-time bus information for parents and schools.

The grant will be used to improve the app.

**Voice 4 Impact** (Wilmington) has patented technology to create safer and healthier communities. The grant will be used in various ways, including scaling its platform to serve more utilities and tolling and transportation facilities.

## Entrepreneur class

**BlackDog Behavior and Training LLC** (Wilmington) will use the grant to expand into a more sustainable operating model using a standalone space for training activities.

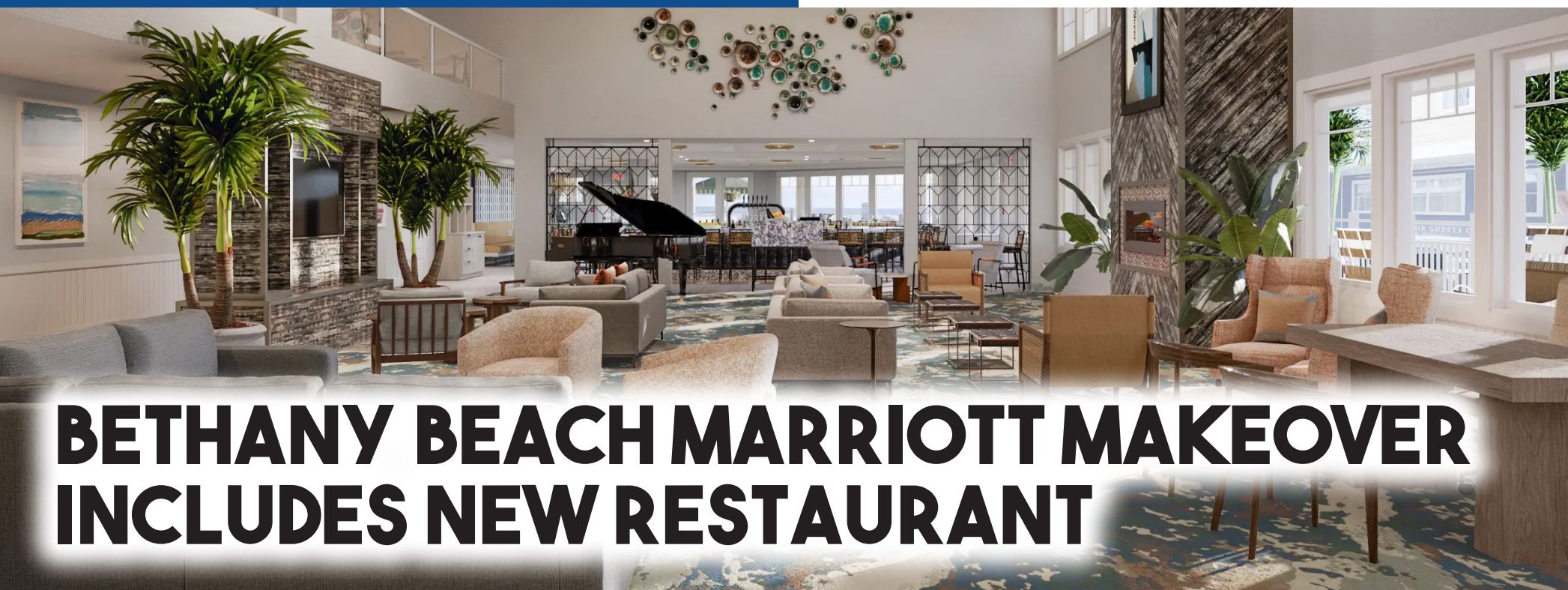
**Nourish Markets** provides 24-hour access to healthy, affordable and sustainable food. The grant will be used to purchase frictionless hardware equipment so it can open a second location. Its first is at 111 Continental Drive, near Newark, is small, cashier-less convenience store, similar to Amazon Go.

**Pink Electrical Services** (Clayton) will use the grant to purchase up to two work trucks.

**Rail Haus** is a German-style beer garden planned for downtown Dover. The grant will be used to purchase outdoor heaters, firepits, trees, sod and a sprinkler system.

**Sassy Bee Honey LLC** (Bellefonte) is a certified naturally grown apiary. The grant will be used to renovate a 400-square-foot space and purchase equipment.





# BETHANY BEACH MARRIOTT MAKEOVER INCLUDES NEW RESTAURANT

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

A hotel on the Bethany Beach boardwalk is getting a multimillion-dollar makeover that includes a new indoor-outdoor pool and a new restaurant, replacing 99 Sea Level, which has closed. The saltwater pool at the **Bethany Beach Ocean Suites Residence Inn by Marriott** will also be refreshed with a retractable roof.

The new restaurant is called Via Sophia by the Sea. The 164-seat, indoor/outdoor osteria will feature live entertainment three nights per week. It's the third branch of **Via Sophia**, which debuted in Washington in 2019. The fare: "Classic Italian dishes, pastas and breads and fresh-from-the-boat seafood will be paired with bespoke beverages and a discerning wine list."

The redesign is intended to provide "a fun and whimsical ambiance," with a varied color palette. The hotel, owned and operated by **EOS Hospitality**, will continue its partnership with Ellen Rice Studio to curate the art.

EOS also operates the Hamilton Hotel that houses the original Via Sophia.

All guestrooms will be renovated with new bed frames and headboards, side tables, dining and workspace tables, bureaus, sleeper sofas and flooring.

The hotel's meeting rooms and grand event hall will be updated with new flooring, wall coverings, painting, and lighting.

A three-night stay over Memorial Day, the traditional start of the beach season, starts at \$2,391, or an average of \$797 a night. A single night midweek in season (July 18 and Aug. 17 were randomly picked) starts at \$652. A single night next winter (Nov. 6 and Jan. 11 were randomly selected) starts at \$784.





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# Food & Dining

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## MOVE OVER, PUBS AND TAPHOUSES. TWO STONES DEBUTS A PIZZA PLACE

BY PAM GEORGE

Michael Stiglitz is justifiably proud of the chefs behind his six **Two Stones Pubs** and **2SP Tap House**, located in New Castle County and southeastern Pennsylvania. But the culinary wizards and corporate chef Chris Meyer shook in their shoes when faced with the prospect of making one common dish.

“They were all definitely scared of pizza,” Stiglitz recalls. “You have to deal with dough, proofing, the oven temperature. It must have great color, great flavors.”

Put too many toppings ingredients on top and guests might get a landslide of toppings on their plates. Cook tomato sauce incorrectly, and it becomes bitter.

The crew soldiered through classes with a specialty food company and a trial run that produced some unintentionally oblong shapes. But in the end, they pulled it off. **2SPizza** is up and running in downtown Newark.

Although linked to the **2SP Brewing Co.**, taphouse and Two Stones family, the new eatery has its own per-

sonality—shaped by its older siblings and a changing marketplace.

### TAKING CHANCES

2SPizza is in the former **Arena’s Deli and Bar** at 168 E. Main St. Before closing, the site was Arena’s only New Castle County location. The other stores are in lower Delaware. The space is in a prime area, but Stiglitz wasn’t looking to open another eater. His tired team had just opened 2SP Tap House in Chadds Ford.

“Do you think I’m crazy enough to sign up for another project?” he asked commercial real estate guru Joe Latina.

“Yes,” Latina replied. “That’s why I am calling you first.”

Another Two Stones was out of the question. After going through the pandemic, Stiglitz knew that concept required significant labor and overhead to pull off. What’s more, takeout doesn’t travel well; the menu is not designed for it.

Pizza, however, was another story.

### NOT YOUR EVERYDAY PIZZA PARLOR

It wasn’t the first time Stiglitz and his executive team had pictured pizza. When he, Meyer and operating partner Ben Muse talked shop, they often commented on the pie’s appeal.

“First of all, everybody loves pizza, and everybody loves beer—and we already have a brewery,” Stiglitz noted. (2SP Brewing Company is headquartered in Aston, PA.)

There’s another reason. The friends have a love-hate relationship with Domino’s Pizza.

“We text each other photos of our order and tease each other when we get a free one,” Stiglitz said. “We’re feeding this giant chain monster.”

Pizza is perfect for today’s consumers, who don’t want linen tablecloths and napkins. Plus, they are accustomed to using technology to order and pay for food. The quick-service restaurant sector has shaped these trends.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



BY BETSY PRICE

In a move that upset a lot of beach diners, the state has awarded a 10-year restaurant contract at Indian River Marina to **Big Fish Restaurant Group**, essentially booting **Hammerheads Dockside** out of a location it's had for a decade.

The contract, open to all bidders, came under scrutiny at the end of January when Hammerheads went public with an announcement on their Facebook page announcing, "There's no room for little fish in Delaware anymore." A week later it posted a photo of the property in 2013, when it won the bid, and another photo showing built-out spaces Hammerheads had installed. It is owned by George Bendler and Cohen Sade.

Many of the people reacting the Hammerheads' posts expressed anger and frustration, partly reacting to restaurant groups such as Big Fish and Sodel taking over a number of longtime eateries that were once solo acts.

# BIG FISH WINS CONTRACT AT INDIAN RIVER MARINA

The **Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control** said in a press release that Hammerheads' contract expires at the end of February.

## WHAT BIG FISH GETS, MUST DO

Big Fish's contract will run from March 1, 2023, to Feb. 28, 2033, and includes the 1,400-square-foot building with an outside usable deck and pergola area of approximately 1,100 square feet, plus a grass area extended from the deck.

It says that Big Fish will operate the marina restaurant "with full waterfront menu fare, including but not limited to, fully prepared seafood dishes (excluding off premise raw seafood sales), entrees, appetizers, desserts, alcoholic beverages, non-alcoholic beverages, and any other refreshments necessary to carry on the business for the public."

Big Fish will also be required to provide breakfast and delivery service to the **Indian River Marina** and to the park's North Inlet Campground.

"We welcome Big Fish to the Indian River Marina and look forward to watching their progress in meeting the growing needs of our park and marina visitors. Their business has won more than 50 awards for quality of service they offer to the public," said DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin. "While it is it is never easy to change concessionaires, the state RFP process is fair and Big Fish Restaurant Group submitted the winning proposal this time."

The process used seven criteria categories, a DNREC statements said, with 80% of the score including quality and diversity of the menu; past performance; the vendor's action plan; vendor's financial stability; creativity in planning; and designing and delivering a successful establishment, and revenue paid to the state equating for 20% of the total score.

Hammerheads said in its Jan. 31 Facebook post that its owners had submitted a proposal to keep its business and staff at Dockside for 25 more years. Their proposal included plans to expand the building to accommodate year-round dining and events.

[READ MORE HERE](#)





# Government

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# COMFORT DOG JOINS DELAWARE JUDICIARY STAFF

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

A comfort dog has joined the staff of the Delaware courts system.

“The courthouse does not have to be a scary place,” said Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz Jr. “We believe the services of Officer Vinn will help make the Justice Center more welcoming, or at least not as stressful, particularly for children involved in court proceedings.”

Vinn is a “facility” dog, assigned to work in the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center in Wilmington. His hiring is a joint effort of the Delaware Judiciary and the Delaware Capitol Police. He was inspired by **Nikko**, the New Castle County Police Department comfort dog, who **visits** schools and otherwise helps police.

“Vinn is a highly trained K-9 that loves interaction with people,” said Delaware Capitol Police Chief Michael F. Hertzfeld, who created the pilot program. “He has a natural personality and demeanor that is different from our other working dogs at the courthouse.”

Vinn has been trained to help those dealing with anxiety in a courtroom or courthouse setting and will be available on **request** and as-needed basis. Sr. Cpl. Donna DiClemente is his handler.



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# \$60K FINE, TWO-YEAR SUSPENSION FOR MILLTOWN FINANCIAL ADVISER

unit the reason a former employer had terminated him. In June 2022, the presiding officer overseeing the matter found that Prettyman had made materially false and misleading statements to the unit. Around the same time, the unit received additional information that led it to open a new investigation into four issues:

- Whether he continued to provide advisory services while unregistered.
- Whether his recommendations to former advisory clients regarding annuities were suitable under the circumstances.
- Whether his attempt to move client assets en masse was a breach of his fiduciary duties to those clients.
- Whether he acquired a Florida driver's license in an attempt to avoid having to register in Delaware.

This settlement resolves both the administrative matter and the new investigation. Financial professionals—who use various titles, such as broker and investment adviser—need to register at [brokercheck.finra.org](https://brokercheck.finra.org) and [adviserinfo.sec.gov](https://adviserinfo.sec.gov).

**Prettyman's** profiles on the two **sites** have similar information. He was terminated at Hornor, Townsend & Kent in Horsham, PA, in 2019 “for violating member firm policy by use of copied signature pages to open multiple accounts for the same client and changing dates on client paperwork.” He also worked at Cambridge Investment Research, which has multiple offices, and Kovack Advisors in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

“Protecting investors from unscrupulous financial professionals is at the core of investor protection,” said Attorney General Kathy Jennings. “Investors put a lot of trust into their investment professionals and it is important that the trust is deserved. This means that investment professionals may not mislead the very regulators tasked with monitoring them.”



BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The president of a Milltown financial advice company will pay \$60,000 in fines and serve a 2½-year suspension from registration in Delaware. The penalties were assessed on financial adviser Robert Brandon Prettyman for “making false and misleading statements” to the state securities regulator and “providing advisory services to clients while unregistered to do so.”

His Kirkwood Highway company, Summit Wealth Advisors, has a live [website](#) where the only person profiled is R. Brandon Prettyman. According to the site, he is a Delaware native and a graduate of Caravel Academy. “His choice to play college golf led him to Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he graduated with a business and finance degree.” He and his wife, Tina, live in Bear with their children, Shayne and Brantley, it says.

Work by the state agency involved, the Investor Protection Unit of the Delaware Department of Justice, allowed three Delaware investors to unwind their purchases of annuities and avoid collectively spending over \$100,000 in commissions, along with tens of thousands of dollars in surrender charges, associated with those unwanted transactions.

The unit initiated an administrative matter against Prettyman in December 2021, alleging that, among other things, he had misrepresented in a sworn statement to the



# IRS: DELAWARE'S \$300 REBATE WILL BE FEDERALLY TAX EXEMPT

BY BETSY PRICE

The \$300 state tax relief rebate that nearly 800,000 Delaware residents received in 2022 will not be taxed by the federal government.

The Internal Revenue Service said Feb. 10 that the First State is one of **21 states** whose rebates will not be included in income because they are designated as qualified disaster payments.

The General Assembly authorized the payments last year, on the heels of two years of complaints from Republican members that the state's record high surpluses should mean tax breaks for residents instead of only splurge spending by the state.

Legislators contended it was needed to help people still recovering from losses during the coronavirus pandemic and because of rising gasoline prices and widespread inflation.

Then in January, House Democrats moved to classify the tax rebate as a qualified disaster payment, and the **House Bill 25** blew through the House and Senate before they took their February break.

## REBATE COST STATE \$180 MILLION

The money also is not subject to Delaware income taxes. House Minority Leader Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, Wyoming, in a January press release that he hoped the General Assembly “can retain the bipartisan cooperation demonstrated on this measure as we look to further help working Delawareans struggling with higher inflationary costs.”

The Delaware program was estimated to cost more than \$180 million, which was funded through a budget surplus.



“

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The IRS announcement Feb. 10 said it had “determined that in the interest of sound tax administration and other factors,” Delaware residents didn’t need to report that money on federal tax returns.

Other states whose payments were related to general welfare or disaster relief included California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

Some Alaska, Georgia, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Virginia residents also will be able to benefit from the ruling, if they meet certain requirements.





# Education

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# SCHOOL BUS CONTRACTORS CALL FOR HIGHER PAY, EXPANDED BENEFITS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Companies that provide Delaware school bus drivers want the state to raise school bus driver pay to \$25 an hour. They also want the state to pay more for insurance for buses below the C&D Canal and expand benefits to mechanics, backup drivers and office staff.

Those requests from Gerald Dutton, president of the [Delaware School Bus Contractors Association](#) came Wednesday at the Public School Transportation Committee meeting.

If a driver worked 40 hours at the \$25 an hour rate, it would equal \$52,000 a year.

The committee decided to wait until March to make final recommendations to the General Assembly's Joint Finance Committee, which is meeting this month to hear requests for the 2024 state budget. It starts July 1.

Dutton's request for a pay raise follows the state hiking bus driver pay to \$21 an hour last year, partly to help school districts attract more drivers amid a nationwide shortage. Drivers aren't the only ones who need attention, Dutton said.

"We had to look at everything that's associated with that bus, anybody that's associated to it, your office staff, mechanics," Dutton said.

If there's health, vision or dental benefits for one group of workers, there needs to be those same benefits for all that help buses operate smoothly, Dutton argued.

He also said the key to attracting workers is the pay. No one will enter the field solely based on benefits, he said.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

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# FIVE FIRST STATE STUDENT AUTHORS TO SEE SHOWS PRODUCED AT DTC

BY JAREK RUTZ

Five Delaware high school students will show off their work in this year's Delaware Young Playwrights Festival. Their scripts were chosen from a pool of 58 one-act plays written by 64 students in recent months. The showcase winners are:

- Morgan Baker of William Penn High School: "The Ladder Escape"
- Danielle Chapman of St. Elizabeth High School: "Happy New Day"
- Mackenzie Lane of Charter School of Wilmington: "Football Practice"
- Lauren MacAllister of St. Elizabeth High School: "Hope Prevails"
- Jane Oommen of Charter School of Wilmington: "One of Us"

Each play is 10 to 15 minutes long and part of the challenge was the writers could only use two characters in the entirety of the play.

The five will be honored at a free public showcase performance of their plays Thursday, March 2, at 7:30 p.m. at Wilmington's [Delaware Theatre Company](#). The performances are open to the public.

This year's festival began in September with a workshop for Delaware teachers and students in eighth through twelfth grade. Plays had to be based on a theme inspired by one of Delaware Theatre Company's productions. This year's theme was inspired by a quote from Layon Gray's play "Black Angels Over Tuskegee": "We all want to succeed. That's why we are here." It tells the story of Black American men who served as Tuskegee Airmen during World War II, examining each character's unique experiences as a Black man.

The Delaware Theatre Company asks anyone who needs wheelchair accessible seating to contact them prior at (302) 594-1100. Tickets are not needed to attend. Learn more about the [Delaware Young Playwrights Festival](#).



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# GREAT RELATIONSHIPS = GREAT LEARNERS, VETERAN EDUCATOR SAYS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Schools are in the relationship business, says Vicky Yatzus, who is retiring in June after 15 years as head of Independence School in Newark. That's the only way to ensure children's academic and social success, the private school administrator said.

"We're not organizations that can swiftly and quickly move on a dime and change things up because our kids need constancy," said Yatzus.

"They come to school every day and they have expectations about what's going to happen. We know from research that the more consistent we are and the more supportive we are and the more our kids understand what the expectations are, the more successful they are in school."

That lack of consistency was one of the tragedies of

the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced classes to go virtual. While virtual classes and online lessons have a place in teaching arsenals, Yatzus said, "Not every child can handle an all-online option. To be successful it has to be done well and closely monitored."

Yatzus, whose first college degree was in psychology from her home country of England, took a round-about path into her 40-year teaching career in Delaware. She originally picked psychology because she was fascinated by why people thought and acted as they do.

Born and raised in the United Kingdom, Yatzus earned that degree from [Newcastle University](#) in northeast England in 1979. She quickly realized she would need to earn a master's degree to really make an impact in the field.



"I didn't want to do that so I made the decision to find a job and sort of figure out what it was I really wanted to do," she said.

Yatzus worked in export sales for a while and then decided to act on her desire to work with children by going into teaching.

Her parents had moved to Delaware while she was in college, and she decided to move to the First State, too, and in 1979 enrolled at the University of Delaware.

UD officials suggested she earn a master's instead of a simple certification and offered her a scholarship that would pay for her tuition and give her a stipend for working as a teaching assistant in the College of Education.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

# COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS APPLICATION DEADLINES ARE APPROACHING

BY JAREK RUTZ

A variety of community groups are offering college scholarships, and students who want to apply need to get on it, because at least one deadline is today.

“Our scholarship programs are created by generous people who understand that higher education is expensive and they want Delaware students to have more opportunity,” said Allison Levine, vice president of marketing for the Delaware Community Foundation.

Applying to scholarships is important because being granted one helps ease the burden of debt students can accrue during their college years, she said. Scholarships are available for students of all different backgrounds and interests.

“Some scholarships are for students who are from certain communities or certain high schools,” Levine said.

“Some are for students who are pursuing particular career paths or have certain kinds of experiences. We have some that are specifically for students interested in careers in agriculture or health care or business.”

Here are some scholarship opportunities throughout the state:

### ***Delaware Community Foundation***

Deadline: Wednesday, March 15

The Delaware Community Foundation is distributing about \$400,000 in various scholarships this year. The foundation partners with donors who create scholarship funds to build opportunity through education and awards roughly 200 scholarships annually. Explore the more than 50 scholarship opportunities the foundation offers [HERE](#). Many of the scholarships are for \$1,000 or more.

### ***Department of Education’s Office of Higher Education***

Deadline: Friday, Feb. 24; Monday, May 15.

Delaware’s Department of Education lists seven open scholarships for children of dead military veterans, for those pursuing a degree in a high needs career fields, such as education, nursing and computer science, and more. Awards vary but the highest scholarship amount listed is for \$5,000.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and apply.

### ***New Castle County scholarship program***

Deadline: Friday, March 24

New Castle County students who are currently enrolled in or will attend an accredited college in the fall of 2023 are encouraged to apply [HERE](#). The scholarships range from \$500 to \$3,000. More than \$100,000 in scholarships to more than 80 students were distributed last year.

To be eligible, students must reside in the county, must demonstrate financial need through the following documents: FAFSA student aid report, W2, pay stubs and/or a benefits verification letter or statement.

Family members of the applicant who are also enrolled in post-secondary degree programs are encouraged to apply. Finalists will be invited to interview with the scholarship committee starting in April and winners will be invited to an awards ceremony in May.





# Sports

photo credit: Kenny Correll

# SUSSEX CENTRAL, CARAVEL TOP SEEDS IN STATE WRESTLING DUALS

BY BENNY MITCHELL

The Sussex Central Golden Knights earned the top seed in Division I while the Caravel Academy Buccaneers got the nod in Division II for the upcoming DIAA dual meet state wrestling championships.

The top four seeds in each division hosted their first round matches Wednesday. Sussex Central (20-0), the Henlopen North champ, hosted Wilmington Charter (4-3). Cape Henlopen is the number two seed in Division I (17-4) and hosted St. Georges (9-7), with third seed Caesar Rodney (10-2) hosting Smyrna (9-9). The fourth seed Salesianum (8-3) entertained Blue Hen Flight A champion William Penn (13-3).

Three-time defending Division II state champions Caravel Academy (7-5) hosted Blue Hen Flight B champion McKean (10-3). Delaware Military Academy earned the two seed and hosted Red Lion Christian Academy (4-4). Three seed Tower Hill (13-3) hosted Lake Forest (9-7), while fourth seed St. Mark's (9-2) entertained Henlopen South champion Laurel (8-4).

All first round matches began at the 175-pound weight class. The winners advanced to the state semifinals which are being held at Smyrna High School today (Saturday).

The Division II matches will begin at 2 p.m. with the Division I matches beginning at 4 p.m. The state championship matches in both divisions will begin at 6 p.m.



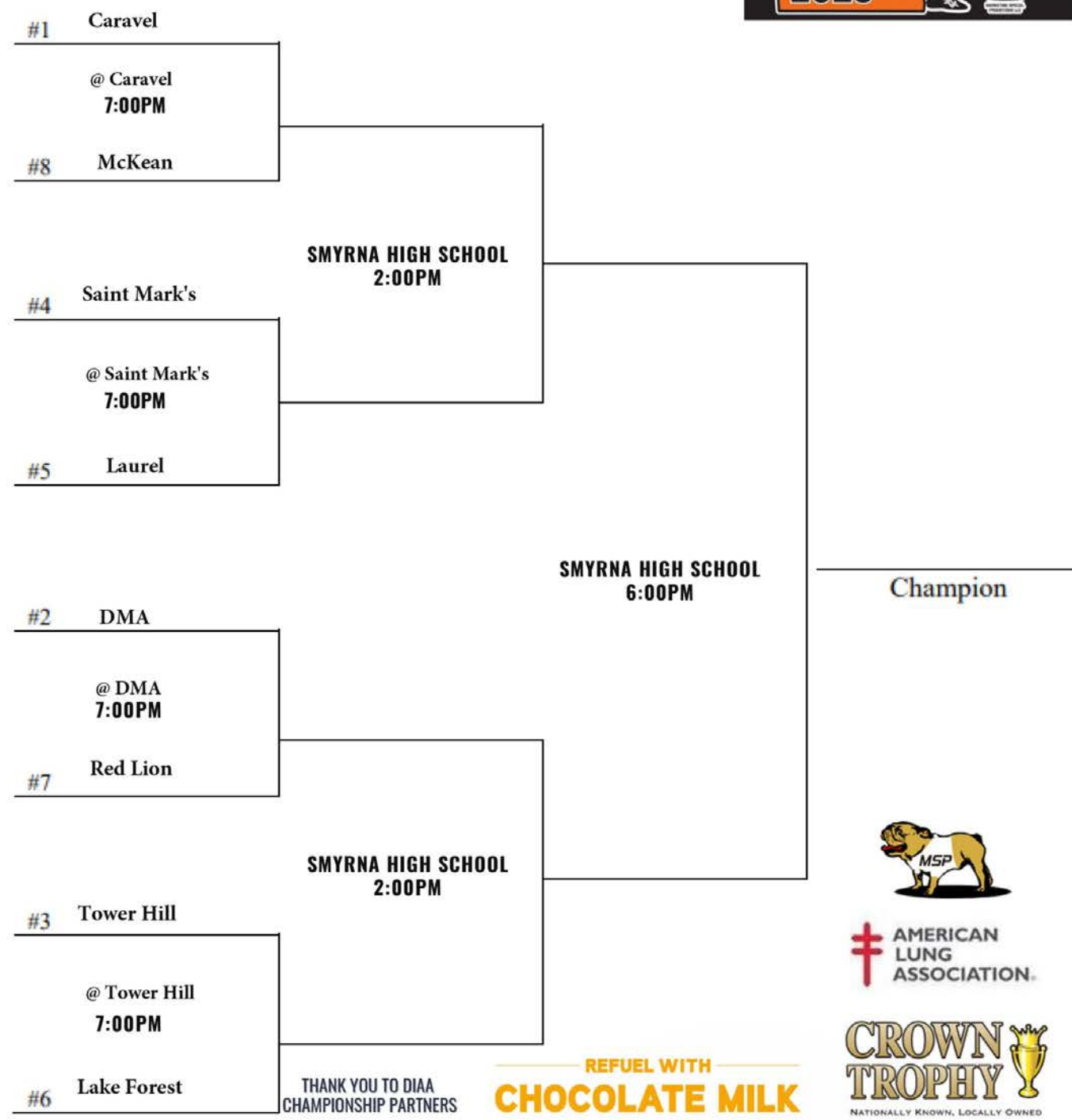
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