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**February 26, 2023**

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Seaford Captures Henlopen South Title

photo link: Longwood Gardens



# Headlines

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## BRANDYWINE PROGRAM PREPS SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS FOR WORKFORCE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Brandywine School District has been helping students with special needs land trade jobs for nearly two decades.

Nazim Bailey, a 20-year-old in his second year with Brandywine's Skills for Independence, Transition and Employment (SITE) Program, said his experience has made him a leader and mentor to his peers.

"This has helped me not only be an intern in the workforce, but also be confident and lead by example," Bailey said.

SITE connects special needs students aged 18 to 22 with vocational internship opportunities. This academic year, 26 interns will have between two and eight internships with various community organizations.

"We serve as a bridge between us at Brandywine and adulthood," said Heather Austin, head of the program.

Each semester, a student selects one to four internships available from the 19 partners of Brandywine. They include Goodwill, ShopRite, Walgreens, Sheraton, El Diablo Burritos and the Food Bank of Delaware. The interns learn skills that would help them find work after they graduate from the program.

Of this year's 26 interns, 11 of them have paid jobs with the organization they were partnered with.

Bailey said he enjoys his experience working at **Goodwill**, where he keeps inventory and stocks movies, books, CDs, shoes and clothes. Since he's adored music since

he was 2 years old, Bailey hopes to eventually work in a music store where he can listen and sell the work of his favorite musician, Dr. Dre.

Aliza Pidgeon, a 20-year-old in her third year with SITE, wants to work in a restaurant.

Brandywine just finished their partnership with the **Food Bank of Delaware**, where interns went through a 12-week program. The first six weeks were spent in the classroom and commercial kitchen with students learning different culinary skills.

"They focused on something different each of the six weeks so like one week it was soups and stocks and then it was breads and then it was sautéing and other techniques," said Michele Huntley, Brandywine's special education coordinator. In the afternoon, they studied for their **ServSafe** certification.

"It's awesome to be able to meet so many people and make friends," Pidgeon said.

She's currently interning at a Sheraton hotel, where she cleans, folds and organizes towels and sheets.

### DAY OF WORK AT SITE

Students arrive at **Claymont Community Center** on Green Street to work Monday through Thursday from 7:20 a.m. to 2 p.m. The program uses a fleet of district vans to transport everyone to jobs.

"We have tried to set it up so it does not look like a school or a classroom," Austin said. "We want this to feel like work."

In the morning, interns go to their locker and clock in as if they were coming in to work. They change into their uniform for the day and look at the schedule to see where they're assigned.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# DOMORE24: YOUR CHANCE TO HELP NONPROFITS YOU LIKE

BY BETSY PRICE

If there's a Delaware nonprofit you like, your donation to it next week could help the organizations win prize or matching money to stretch their budgets.

**DoMore24 Delaware** returns at 6 p.m. Thursday, March 2, and ends at 6 p.m. on Friday, March 3. In those 24 hours, 500 Delaware nonprofits will welcome contributions and also be entered into a variety of contests and matching fund events that total \$625,000 from 25 organizations. One contest, for example, offers a \$500 prize to the first 20 organizations to get 25 individual donors.

James Spadola, executive director of Read Aloud Delaware, has already promised to **kick off the event** with

the cringiest collection of bad puns and dad jokes that he can find as way to help the literacy group win that \$500 again. Last year, it raised \$13,000. (Donate **HERE**)

One of the largest pools of prize money comes from the Delaware Division of the Arts, which will offer \$400,000 in matching funds for arts and culture organizations. Last year, 62 arts and culture organizations set a record by raising \$989,019, according to the Division of the Arts.

“Your donation to Delaware’s arts organizations not only helps the arts thrive, but your gift unlocks additional funding for the organizations through a special grant from the Delaware Division of the Arts,” said Jessica Ball, head of the organization, “Together, your gifts can

shape the future of the cultural sector in our state.”

Organizations like the Delaware Symphony Orchestra are making sure their donors know DoMore24 is coming up.

“Your support is as important as ever as we continue to celebrate our 117th year and prepare for next year’s exciting season of concerts and community engagement programs,” said an email from J.C. Barker, executive director of the organization. It included a **link** directly to its donor site, which hopes to raise \$100,000.

## DOMORE24 HISTORY

Organized jointly by United Way of Delaware and Spur Impact, the **2022** DoMore24 event raised \$2.5 million for participating organizations. The amount raised has climbed each year since the program’s debut in 2016.

“The culture of philanthropy in Delaware and the Delaware nonprofit sector depends on the generosity of many individual donors,” said Charlie Vincent, executive director of Spur Impact. “We are proud that so many Delaware nonprofits participate and activate their donors and supporters—particularly younger board members and donors—around this great event.

“Our goal for 2023 is to get even more Delawareans to support and donate to their favorite nonprofits as part of this year’s giving day.”

Also supporting the program are the Longwood Foundation, Delaware Division of the Arts, Barclays US Consumer Bank, Discover Bank, Chemours, Welfare Foundation, Crestlea Foundation, Laffey-McHugh Foundation, Carl M. Freeman Foundation and Delaware Community Foundation.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# LEARNING COLLAB HIRES DSU, EMPOWER SCHOOLS TO MANAGE PROJECTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Wilmington Learning Collaborative governing council voted Thursday night to hire Delaware State University and Empower Schools as project managers. The council also announced it has **posted** a job description for executive director and already has a dozen applicants.

The initial contracts with DSU and Empower Schools, a national education group that partners with local groups to provide improved and accessible education, will be for six months. The council will pay \$160,000 to DSU and \$140,000 to Empower Schools, the first big chunk it's used of its expected \$10 million budget.

"My role would be playing a significant role in your strategic planning, facilitating those key conversations that are going to take you from these initial launch pieces to getting deep in the work," said Shelley Rouser, chair of DSU's education department.

She said the project management team will make sure that the Learning Collab's aspirations are put to paper and facilitated.

"I would be a key point person for making sure that your team is coming together and that our work is coordinated to serve the deliverables that you have in mind," Rouser said.

DSU will focus on four main areas: project design, strategic advising, technical assistance and implementation.

"The collaboration between Empower and Delaware State University really gives us the full package," said council member Alethea Smith-Tucker. "You have anticipated our needs and have been a part of this process from the very beginning."

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Culture

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# NEW HISTORY TRAIL DOCUMENTS IRON HILL'S FREE BLACK FAMILIES

BY BETSY PRICE

A new history trail at [Iron Hill Museum](#) documents the existence and lives of free Black families who began settling there in the 1930s. No one knows if any of those who lived there had been slaves, although it's certainly possible, historians said after the trail's ribbon cutting on a gloriously sunny afternoon. The families included the Congos, Websters, Earls, Smiths and more.

Some had property large enough to devote their work lives to. Others worked neighboring farms for pay, and some worked in the nearby iron mines. Family members of those who lived there called the dedication of the African American History Trail an emotional moment.

"To see this is so empowering," said Janice Alexander, who spent her tween and teen years there. "Back then you would never think that we would get here, that this would be a monument, that this would be something

that everybody would be interested in."

Opening the trail was one of three goals of a \$25,000 Community Environmental Project Fund grant that the Iron Hill Museum received from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environment. It included establishing the trail with signage installed by Eagle Scout Cameron Mills; using native plants to create a demonstration garden using a German horticulture technique; and coming up with a plan to rid the property off Old Baltimore Pike of invasive species.

"The African American History Trail allows the Iron Hill Museum to broaden its interpretation of the schoolhouse by including the under-recognized history of an independent, long-standing free African American community of landowners on Iron Hill, placing it into the context of a society in which free and enslaved Blacks

co-existed before the Civil War," said Debbie Keese, museum board member who spent two years researching the property and families.

Those families survived post-war reconstruction and segregation, with everyday struggles supported by community and church, she said.

"It is hoped that today's families visiting the site will be able to make comparisons between past and present-day politics, social norms, family structures and educational practices while inspiring thoughtful discourse about issues of equity and justice, both social and environmental, in a safe, comfortable and beautiful space," she said.

## IRON HILL ANNIVERSARY

The state needs more African American history trails, said Ricky Mouse Smith, president of Delaware's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. There are stories to be told up and down the state, he told those gathered for the day.

Iron Hill's property—not far from the I-95 toll booth—includes Iron Hill School No. 112C, one of 87 schools founded by Pierre S. du Pont to educate Black children, who were ignored by Delaware's state schools at the time. It is the school's 100th anniversary.

Family member Shirley Earl, who attended the groundbreaking with her daughter, Donna Johnson, and niece, Janice Alexander, went to school at No. 112C.

The area residents chipped in and bought a bus so they could send their children to Louis Redding Middle School. Eventually, most graduated from Howard High in Wilmington.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



BY BETSY PRICE

A Sussex County community-wide program aimed at feeding the hungry plans to pack and donate as many as 150,000 meals March 4. It already knows it has the money and manpower to pack 100,000 and is hoping for more donations between now and March 2 to help hit their goal.

“I am really kind of ecstatic about where we are, even though we probably won’t quite make the 150,000, but that’s OK,” said Mike Hall, one of the organizers.

The program grew out of Grace United Methodist Church in Millsboro. It has held six similar programs in recent years, packing a total of about 100,000 meals. Then its mission and outreach teams suggested opening up the event to all of Sussex County, said Hall. Now it has about 200 volunteers headed its way and \$30,000 in donations to pay for the food and shipping for the first 100,000 meals, he said.

# SUSSEX COMMUNITY EVENT HOPES TO PACK, DONATE 150,000 MEALS

He’s hopeful that others will step forward with donations in time for him to order the food by Thursday, March 2. A Rise Against Hunger rep told him that there’s usually a surge of volunteer sign-ups right before the event, which will be held at Sussex Central High School’s cafeteria.

Hall and the rep visited the school this week to map out where tables should be to create the most efficient packing system.

The meals cost 39 cents each, Hall said. Food and shipping expenses so far have been paid for by donations from the church, Mountaire, Community Bank Delaware, Long Neck Sunrise Rotary, Lewes Rehoboth Beach Rotary, Georgetown Millsboro Rotary and Rehoboth Beach Sunrise Rotary Clubs, as well as individual contributors.

Hall said he’s been told by several people that their organization will be attending and bringing five or six people, but they haven’t signed up yet. There are jobs for all abilities and even some that can be done by children as young as 5, Hall said. Volunteers can sit if they want or need to, he said.

Volunteers will pack soy, rice, dehydrated vegetables and vitamins in two three-hour shifts—one from 9 a.m. to noon and another from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Sussex Central High School.

Hall is not sure where the meals will go. In the past they have been sent to Haiti, Nicaragua, Guatemala and

Zimbabwe to organizations that Rise Against Hunger has contacts with. Most are sent to schools, who can then offer nutrition along with classes, he said.

Those who are interested in donating or volunteering can go [HERE](#). Sussex Center High is at 26026 Patriots Way in Georgetown. Checks can be made payable to Rise Against Hunger, 108 Darby Commons Court, Folcroft, PA 19032. Include on the memo line that the contribution is for Event No. 57305.





photo credit: Vlada Karpovich / PEXELS

# Business

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# FOOD BANK CELEBRATES TOPPING OFF NEW MILFORD BUILDING

**BY RACHEL SWICK MAVITY**

Nearly 100 supporters, community members, politicians and more gathered Friday at the Food Bank of Delaware's topping-off ceremony for its new \$32 million warehouse. Everyone was invited to sign the steel beam, which when placed symbolized the completion of the structural construction.

The ceremony included the traditional placement of a small evergreen tree on the beam, a symbol of future good luck, as well as an American flag, said Steve Thompson, a Food Bank board member and chairman of its capital campaign.

The 67,000-square-foot facility on 11.5 acres will house the Food Bank's community food distribution program and workforce development programs. It also will allow the creation of a community Healthy Foods

Pantry and have space for a café where culinary students can learn valuable skills while feeding the community breakfast and lunch.

As in Newark, the Milford project will include an outdoor community garden where fresh food will be grown, for distribution to clients and for the cafe.

## **FOOD BANK EXPANSION**

Cathy Kanefsky, president and CEO of the Food Bank, said the project will be paid for through donations and grants. About \$24 million already has been secured, and Kanefsky said she expects to meet the goal over the next few months. The Food Bank hopes to open without a mortgage, she said.

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# Government

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# PROBLEMS DETAILED IN THREE SHORT-STAFFED DELAWARE POST OFFICES

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Last Oct. 25, the Lancaster Avenue post office had 68,493 delayed letters, magazines and packages, a new federal inspector general's report found. And not one was logged as delayed, as it should have been.

That stat is just one part of a numbing inspection of three post offices in New Castle County and three in Philadelphia. The tone is dry, and the problems are rampant.

The 21-page **report** found deficiencies in each post office in five targeted areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scanning, arrow keys (master keys used, among other places, in apartment buildings) and property conditions.

The report comes among continuing complaints about postal service, include days of skipped mail, long delivery times and long lines waiting for service. It made eight recommendations (with local managers "agreeing"

with them all), but it's not clear when the causes cited—repeatedly, lack of staff and inadequate training—will be fixed.

The inspector general "considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations and their planned actions should resolve the issues identified in the report," the report concludes.

The Wilmington area was audited "based on Congressional interest in Delaware" and concerns raised in a U.S. House hearing last September. The station in Philadelphia's Germantown section was audited at the request of Sen. Robert P. Casey and Rep. Dwight Evans.

The inspector general "judgmentally selected" the other five offices based on the number of "stop-the-clock **scans** occurring at the units, rather than at the customers' point of delivery." In other words, somebody marked the item "delivered" before the carrier made it

to the addressee. "Judgmentally selected" **means** they used their expertise of where and what to analyze.

The six offices were Edgemoor, Lancaster Avenue and Marshallton in Delaware, along with Germantown, Logan and North Philadelphia in Philadelphia. The audit started in October to look for election mail—it found 26 pieces of delayed election mail in Philadelphia—and continued through February.

## DELAYS AT DELAWARE POST OFFICES

Managers in Lancaster Avenue explained the delays occurred because they were short-staffed; they had several inexperienced employees; and managers miscommunicated.

Managers in Edgemoor said managers were inexperienced and "were not aware of proper guidelines and reporting policy" on logging delayed mail; and they were short-staffed.

Managers in Marshallton said "they did not adequately monitor operations" because they were "busy with other tasks, including managing staffing and participating in daily meetings." The acting supervisor was also "not aware of proper procedures" for reporting delayed mail and had missed seeing 129 packages left behind in a retail window the night before.

## PACKAGE SCANNING

Between July and September, the audit found 5,337 packages were scanned (say, marked "delivered") at the post office, rather than at the delivery point. The audit doesn't say how many packages were handled by these offices during that time, to put that number into perspective.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# WIFE OF BEAR MAN WHO BUILT SECRET BUNKER GOES TO JAIL, TOO

BY BETSY PRICE

The wife of a Bear man who built a secret underground bunker to grow marijuana may not be able to go to jail with him, but she’s going. Shakira Martinez has been sentenced in federal court to nine years in prison for money laundering, conspiracy to commit money laundering and structuring bank transactions following a jury verdict in July of 2022.

She was convicted with her husband, **Omar Colon**, referred to in court as one of the biggest cocaine traffickers in Delaware history. He previously was sentenced to 45 years’ incarceration.

The two were accused of laundering nearly \$1 million in drug proceeds through the purchase of real estate properties in Delaware and Pennsylvania using their company, Zemi Property Management. They deposited drug money into several different bank accounts—and asked their friends and family members to do the same—and then used those funds to buy cashier’s checks that funded the property purchases.

Colon wouldn’t have been successful without Martinez’s money laundering and structuring crimes, the court was told. Colon was arrested on May 6, 2017, shortly after giving his cocaine supplier \$382,045 in cash in a hotel parking lot in Newark, DE. The **Drug Enforcement Administration** later found a secret underground bunker beneath Colon and Martinez’s home, accessed by a tunnel behind a false fireplace.

Circuit Judge Stephanos Bibas said during sentencing that money laundering is a “huge issue that fuels the drug trade with all its harms.” He said the prison sentences were a way for the court to send a message.

Special Agent in Charge Yury Kruty said “IRS Criminal Investigation special agents are uniquely qualified to follow complex financial transactions and uncover the source of the illegal funds. Martinez and Colon employed multiple tactics to clean up their ill-gotten gains, but in the end, they could not outsmart the government.”



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BY BETSY PRICE

*NOTE: This story corrects a statement to say that it costs \$100,000 per mile to lay broadband cable and install equipment. A previous version incorrectly said it cost that much per house.*

Delaware state computers had to contend with 567 billion—billion with a B—cyberattacks in the last quarter of 2022, the director of the Department of Technology and Information said Tuesday. Most are caught and blocked by security software, but the staff had to investigate 4,000, said Jason Clarke, Delaware’s chief information officer. Some of the attacks briefly shut down school computers and other programs, he said.

“It is a constant battle of blocking and tackling,” he said.

Clarke was testifying before the General Assembly’s Joint Finance Committee. It has been holding hearings all month before deciding the state’s budget. It has to be passed by June 30 in order for the state’s fiscal year 2024 to start July 1. Among other things Clarke said:

- The department expects a budget of \$158 million to fund the installation of broadband technology in the state’s internet deserts.

# STATE FENDS OFF 567 BILLION CYBERATTACKS; ADDING BROADBAND

- DTI continues to lose employees to private companies and those employees are being paid an average of \$50,000 more a year. “We are competing not just with Delaware and the banks like we have traditionally done here in Delaware, but we are competing with the whole nation,” he said.
- Schools returning to in-person classes meant that students brought back devices that had not been in school before, stretching the state’s service and forcing it to add capacity. “Schools 10 years ago were 10% of the traffic across the state’s network. Today, they are 90%,” Clarke said. “It’s literally the tail wagging the dog when it comes to managing the network.”
- Inflation is hitting the department hard as it renegotiates contracts for various services, with one contract rising \$267%.

The department is asking for a slight increase to the \$59,087,100 recommended in Gov. John Carney’s proposed budget. Clarke asked for \$60,040,800, mostly for more employees. He said the department request was small because it’s still managing \$125 million in multiyear projects funded by federal COVID and American Rescue Plan money.

Sen. Trey Paradee, D-Dover, said he personally knew someone who had more than doubled their salary when they left the department. Clarke said he left three positions that doubled or more than doubled their salaries out of his calculations because they skewed the numbers badly. He pointed out that he does all the exit interviews and asks to see actual job offers to confirm the salaries.

## BROADBAND DESERTS

Several lawmakers questioned Clarke about the state’s program to **expand** broadband access. He said the state is using a variety of resources to fund the multiyear project: \$33 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act money; at least \$100 million in Federal Communication Commission grants expected this summer; \$12 million in federal digital equity grants;

[READ MORE HERE](#)

# STATE BAR EXAM TO BE TWICE A YEAR; PASSING GRADE DROPPED

BY BETSY PRICE

Delaware will begin offering the bar exam for lawyers twice a year and will drop the passing score by two points as well as reduce the number of essays, length of clerkships and number of proceedings a candidate must attend before testing.

The changes were adopted after a two-year study by the Delaware Board of Examiners and recommendations for reform in the Judicial Branch's Strategic Plan to improve diversity in the Delaware Bar.

It would be a mistake to assume the changes were only to improve diversity, said Sean O'Sullivan, chief of communication for the courts.

"The goal of these changes to the bar exam is also to make Delaware more attractive to all lawyers, including Delaware residents," O'Sullivan said. Only 25% of the people who attend Widener University's Delaware Law School choose to sit for the Delaware Bar exam, he said.

Delaware's exam is known nationwide to be a tough test. Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz Jr. said the Delaware

Bar is not lowering standards, but modernizing the process. Adding another exam each year and dropping the passing grade from 145 to 143 keeps the state competitive and helps attract top legal talent, he said.

"Delaware is the only state to hold the bar exam just once a year," Seitz said in a press release. "This can frustrate applicants because if they fail to pass the exam, which may be required for them to keep or land a job in Delaware, they have to wait a full year before they can try again."

The bar exam is not supposed to be a barrier, but a test of an applicant's ability to successfully practice, he said.

## BAR EXAM CHANGES WELCOME

Phillip J. Closius, dean of the new Wilmington University Law School, said the changes were needed and welcome.

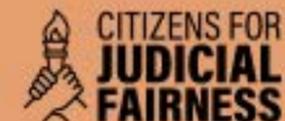
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# COMMITTEE MULLS ADDING WEIGHT LOSS DRUGS TO STATE HEALTH PLANS

BY BETSY PRICE

*NOTE: This story has been updated to say Sussex County government has no knowledge about any efforts to assure Medicare patients they can have weight loss drugs when others cannot and that county government has no control over what is in individual medical plans.*

The **State Employee Benefits Committee** wants more information about new weight loss drugs that are helping people across the world shed pounds, as well as more information about who else is covering them. The committee must approve the drugs' inclusion before insurance plans for state employees and retirees pay for them.

Employees and retirees have been calling and writing to the benefits office to ask for the drugs to be covered, said Jaclyn Iglesias of Willis Towers Watson. The drugs would cost the program about \$8,000 to \$9,000 a year per person who used it, after rebates from manufacturers are included, she said.

While the drugs are less expensive than bariatric surgery, they are likely to be ongoing costs, she said, that ultimately will cost the state an additional \$1.8 million to \$2.9 million a year, depending on whether the drugs included management. That would mean that state health insurance premiums would need to rise to cover the costs, she said. The committee already is **considering** raising premiums because of a projected deficit of \$138 million by the end of the 2024 fiscal year.

"We're not necessarily recommending moving forward with offering coverage, at least in the short term," Iglesias said. "Recognizing that there's a greater deficit to solve, this additional cost of drugs doesn't necessarily help in the short run."

Others weren't sure.

Committee member Cerron Cade, who also is the director of the Office of Management and Budget, said he didn't want to block access for state employees and retirees if Medicaid and Medicare already approve it. Medicaid does, the committee was told, but Medicare does not.

Trinidad Navarro, a committee member and Delaware Insurance Commissioner, said many in his office favored approving the drug. He pointed out that they do lower blood sugar, weight and cholesterol and for diabetics, that means less damage to their kidneys, eyes, hearts and other organs that are hurt by high blood pressure.

But, he said, there also have been no 10-year studies of the drugs. Most health officials consider 5- and 10-year studies to be critical to confirming a drug's effectiveness and teasing out side effects.

Navarro said he was in favor of studying the drugs more, but also believes it is possible that they could have great benefits down the line by saving the state money it now spends because of the widespread bodily damage caused by diabetes.

Cade wanted to know what New Jersey bases its approval on, and Iglesias said she would find out more about it and report back in March.

## CALLERS SUPPORT WEIGHT LOSS DRUGS

Several people who called in during the meeting's public comment session urged the state to approve the drugs.

Teresa Craig said she has not been able to lose weight since her thyroid was removed because of cancer, and she's been turned down for bariatric surgery because she has a hormonal issue, not an eating problem.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

# STATE HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS MAY RISE 7% FOR NEXT THREE YEARS

BY BETSY PRICE

The state of Delaware's health insurance program could soon be split almost evenly between workers and retirees because of the shortage of workers and rising numbers of retirees. That's important because in general younger workers use less healthcare. Employers everywhere rely on that to offset the higher costs of older workers who generally use more healthcare services.

How much a program spends determines the cost of premiums, and the state of Delaware insurance program users may see premiums rise nearly 10% in each of the next three years, members of the [State Employee Benefits Committee](#) were told Monday.

A rise in premiums is necessary to help the state overcome a deficit now projected at \$138.1 million by the end of fiscal year 2024, which starts July 1.

Claire DeMatteis, secretary of the state Department of Human Resources, said the state has about 2,000 job vacancies. Prior to the worker shortage of recent years,

it usually had a few hundred jobs open at any moment, she said. The state is hiring 150 to 180 workers per month, but seeing 60 to 80 workers retire each month, she said.

Those worker shortages are not evenly spread out, DeMatteis said. The Department of Correction, for example, has 300 open jobs. While the state has stepped up its efforts to hire critical shortages in jobs such as correction officers, nurses, engineers and accountants, the remaining employees will be the ones who will bear higher costs, she noted.

It was not clear whether retirees paid premiums, too.

The state now has about 13,800 workers with an average age of 46.

## HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS

The committee—under fire in recent months for a decision to move state retirees to a Medicare Advantage program to try to save costs and make them more predictable—covered a slew of topics in its regular meeting

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The Medicare Advantage issue didn't come up in the first two hours of the meeting.

Health insurance premiums had gone without being raised for about five years and the insurance program recently had avoided deficits because of federal and state COVID-19 payments, said Chris Giovannello in presenting budget numbers.

Whether and how much premiums should be raised has been a discussion in several meetings, with suggestions of spreading premium rises over three years in a “smoothing” process meant to avoid shock and awe from participants. One option was raising premium costs nearly 17% in one year, but didn't seem to be a popular idea.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# Education

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# SAINT MARK'S UNVEILS SEAN'S ROOM, A MENTAL HEALTH LOUNGE

BY JAREK RUTZ

**Saint Mark's High School** students were anointed with holy water Friday as the Catholic school opened a mental health center named for a former student whose 2018 suicide led to a movement to help other youth cope.

"Let us ask God's blessing on all who will enter into this place, seeking peace and guidance and upon those who will be here to offer an ear to listen and strength support and lift up," said Deacon Pat Johnston.

Sean's Room is an extension of **Sean's House**, a mental health center in Newark that serves 14- to 22-year-olds. Both are named for Sean Locke.

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

"Sean Locke is a beloved Spartan who loved this school," said Principal Diane Casey. "Today is a great day to let our light shine and be the light for others."

So far, the home has helped more than 18,000 Delawareans get the mental health treatment and support they need.

Sean's Room is a former classroom converted into a lounge where students can relax, ask questions and learn about mental health. Sean's Room will be staffed by **University of Delaware** specialists two days per week during lunch periods. Specialists will work with Saint Mark's guidance staff to keep continuity of care consistent while handling everyday student concerns.

On both ends of the main lounge are two smaller breakout rooms where students can have one-on-one time with UD workers.

The school declined to identify the donor or donation amount that paid for the room.

Casey said mental health struggles have increased because of the pandemic isolating children. Returning to normalcy after years of masking and online classes was overwhelming to a lot of students.

According to the SL24:Unlocke the Light Foundation, which runs Sean's House and Sean's Room, more than

35 million people in America suffer from depression.

Two of Sean's former classmates and friends told Friday's crowd that Sean's Room is an incredible way to honor Sean's legacy. They asked students to take advantage of the room because they always thought Sean was the last person who would be struggling mentally.

Once Sean's House was created in 2020, Saint Mark's had planned to start a Sean's Room on its campus.

"Room 156, with natural sunlight coming through the windows, was the perfect place," Casey said.

Chris Locke, Sean's father, said that he plans to open additional Sean's Rooms in Delaware schools, but wanted to start with the place where his son left such an impact.

"You know you have a Sean in your life and that's why all of you are in this room today," he said. "Each of you wants to make a difference for how we deal with mental health with this generation."

Locke admitted he and his father never spoke about mental health, and he never knew how to talk to Sean about the subject.

"I did not create an environment where Sean could come and open up about what he was struggling with," he said. "I would have said all the wrong things. I would have told him to suck it up."

Mental health struggles do not discriminate, Locke said. Sean held his demons inside even though he was a star athlete, homecoming king and heavily involved in extracurricular activities.

"It could be the kid that has no friends in the cafeteria, or it could be Sean who had all the friends in the cafeteria," Locke said. "This is your room now. This is what you make of it."





# REDDING CONSORTIUM SEEKS ALIGNMENT WITH LEARNING COLLAB

BY JAREK RUTZ

**Redding Consortium** officials said Wednesday night they will prioritize aligning their plans with the Wilmington Learning Collaborative, investing in wraparound services and building community partnerships.

“How do I say what Redding should be doing next if I have no idea what the connection between Redding and the WLC is,” said Cerron Cade, director of the **Delaware Office of Management & Budget**. “It’s kind of putting the cart before the horse.”

## WHAT IS THE CONSORTIUM?

The Redding Consortium, founded in 2019, recommends policies and practices to the governor and legislators to ensure educational equality for all segments of society and to improve outcomes, both academically and socially, for students in Wilmington and northern New Castle County.

Several consortium officials suggested establishing a definition for equity and metrics so they can measure progress in the coming years.

“How do we know when we’ve achieved educational equity?” was asked in some form or another multiple times Wednesday without a clear answer.

The group also has worked to add wraparound services—before- and after-school programs, counseling, social services and wellness centers—to some Wilmington schools as well as awarding scholarships for people studying education.

The consortium’s goals are similar to the **Wilmington Learning Collaborative**, an agency that was created in November 2022 to help Wilmington children in nine city elementary schools across Brandywine, Red Clay and Christina school districts.

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# STATE MOVES TO CONTROL CHARTER SCHOOL LEADER CERTIFICATIONS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The state is in the process of creating rules that govern the licensure and certification of charter school leaders. It's a move that the executive director of Delaware Charter Schools Network said is offensive and degrading.

"It's absolutely beyond ridiculous and it's infuriatingly insulting," Kendall Massett said Tuesday. "Especially the suggestion that those of our current leaders that do not have traditional licenses and certification aren't qualified."

The move flies in the face of charter schools' ability to try fresh and different ways to educate students, which is the reason that charter schools exist, she said in last week's board meeting.

Requiring certifications was one of the suggestions made by the [Delaware Professional Standards Board](#), which will vote on the issue next month and then bring it to the Delaware State School board.

During last week's State School Board's meeting, Education Secretary Mark Holodick said Delaware wants to make sure charter school heads are certified

and licensed in accordance with the requirements of district school leaders. The state's charter school law, now nearly 30 years ago, never required charter leaders to hold licensure and certification within Delaware.

Holodick pointed to a deputy attorney general's opinion that in February 2022 said charter leaders needed to be certified and licensed like all traditional 19 School District leaders.

"We have charter leaders who are fully licensed and certified and we have some who are licensed but not certified as leaders and we have some who have no licensure and certification," said Linnea Bradshaw, executive director of the Delaware Professional Standards Board.

Massett said this issue stems from 2010, when the definition of educator in Delaware Code was changed to include charter schools.

"It triggered a bunch of things that I don't think anybody was thinking," she said. "This need to require all



charter school leaders to be licensed and certified just never came."

For existing charter school leaders, the standards board proposed a traditional certification model and an alternative method for new charter school leaders to get certified through a portfolio. The board suggested adopting the options for certification for charter school leaders who are employed before June 30. For certification, charter school leaders may either:

- Enroll in a traditional or alternative route to certification program that leads to traditional administrator certification and complete the program within three years.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

# NEW CASTLE SCHOOLS COULD WIN MONEY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PLEDGES

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Thirty New Castle County schools will split \$15,000 in cash prizes as part of an environmentally-friendly initiative. Wednesday, county executive Matt Meyer announced the return of the “Great Schools, Clean Streams” campaign, in which participants assign their pledge to the school of their choice in the county.

The five pledges are:

- Scoop the poop: Picking up after a pet is a simple way to keep pollution out of waterways while keeping parks, neighborhoods and yards clean.
- Garden for water and life: Gardening with native plants—plants that originated in the area—supports both water and wildlife. These plants thrive in Delaware’s climate and are easy to grow and care for without using extra water or chemicals.
- Only rain down the drain: Only let rainwater go down storm drains since they runoff to Delaware’s streams and rivers.
- Reduce household chemicals: Chemical cleaners, medications, paint and lawn chemicals are common pollutants that can pass through treatment and end

up in waterways.

- Cease the grease: Pouring cooking greases down the drain can lead to water pollution. Fat, oil and grease harden in pipes, causing them to clog, so throw those liquids in the trash.

The schools that collect the most pledges win cash awards for classroom materials and school projects.

“More than 30,000 New Castle County residents have taken the pledge to do their part to protect our waterways,” Meyer said. “We have awarded almost \$100,000 in prizes to schools here in the county and we are looking forward to another great year in 2023.”

Whether strolling the River Walk in Wilmington, playing fetch in the Christina River, or biking along the C&D Canal, Meyer said residents want to enjoy clean water along with fresh air.

First, second and third place awards from each category will receive awards of \$1,500, \$1,000 and \$750, and all schools with 50 or more pledges will be entered into a wild card drawing for one of twenty-one \$250 awards.

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## SEAFORD PULLS AWAY LATE TO CAPTURE HENLOPEN SOUTH TITLE

BY GLENN FRAZER

The second-ranked Seaford Blue Jays made five of seven three-point shots to start the game and took a 20-12 first quarter lead they would never relinquish in an 89-76 win Tuesday night.

The win secured the Henlopen South title for the third straight season, as the Blue Jays improved to 19-1 (14-0 in the South) heading into today's (Saturday) conference championship contest against the North Division winner, Polytech.

The script was almost identical to the Seaford win at Laurel in January when the Blue Jays jumped out to an early lead then played evenly with Laurel the rest of the game to win by five. In Tuesday's rematch, Laurel trimmed the Blue Jays lead to seven at the half. Corey Mumford paced Laurel with 12 points in the opening half, constantly gaining great position in the lane for easy baskets. Every time Laurel made a run, Seaford would respond. Late in the third quarter, Laurel's Don-

tarius Jones had a dunk rim out, then the Blue Jays pushed the ball down the floor to Brent Ricketts on the baseline and he made a "one-hand" slam to ignite the crowd and give the Jays a 10-point lead.

Akendre Matthews then drained a long-range jumper from the right wing and the lead ballooned to 13. That caused Laurel coach Kevin Walmsley to call a timeout to settle his team. His players responded to cut the Blue Jays advantage to seven points going into the final eight minutes of the game.

Jones made a layup off a Seaford turnover and the deficit was five points early in the fourth quarter. Later, Joel Parker "dished" to Mumford for a "bucket-and-one" opportunity which he made and the Bulldogs were down 61-59 with 5:45 left. It would be as close as Laurel would get as Seaford outscored them 28-17 down the stretch for the win.

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# SALLIES HEAD FOOTBALL COACH WILLIAM DINARDO LEAVES PROGRAM

BY NICK HALLIDAY

Salesianum School has announced football head coach Bill DiNardo is leaving the program. DiNardo has coached the Sals since 2004 totaling 156 wins and four state championships. His team won his 300th career victory during the 2022 season. DiNardo helped SALS make 16 state tournament appearances with four state championship titles in 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2013.

Salesianum's football program began in 1921 and will enter its 96th season this fall, pausing from 1939-1944 for World War II.

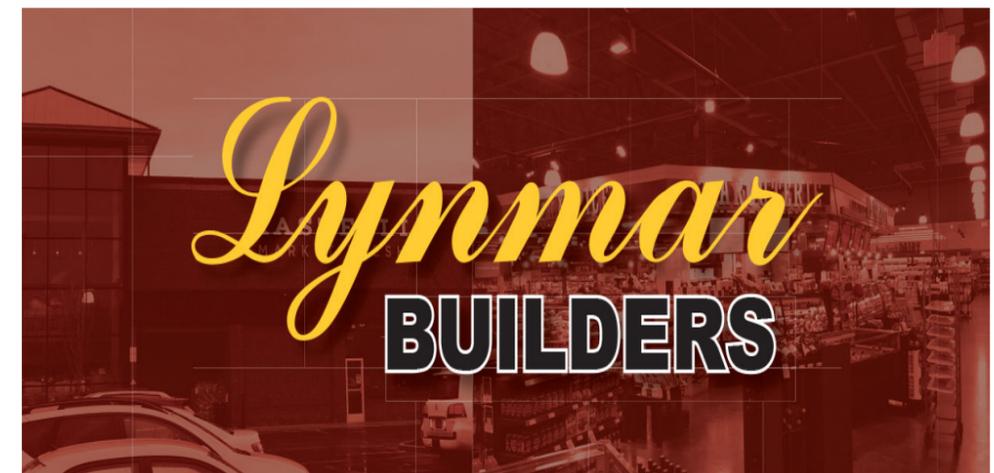
DiNardo is one of the school's longest-tenured coaches with more wins than any other coach in the program. Salesianum President Thomas Kardish said DiNardo's wins obscures the greater achievement of shepherding thousands of students on their journey to becoming Salesian Gentlemen.

"Through his gentle strength, patience and generosity, Bill has provided an example that will be missed but will live on in the successes of those he coached and taught," Kardish said.

DiNardo also held roles in the classroom and, most recently, as a member of the school's administrative team focused on student life.

DiNardo told his team Tuesday that he was leaving. "With the exception of my own family, you have been the most important thing in my life," he said. "There is nothing that has made me prouder than to be called coach."

Salesianum will begin a search for a head football coach immediately.



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## MIDDLETOWN CELEBRATES SENIOR DAY WITH WIN OVER CARAVEL

BY GLENN FRAZER

The Middletown Cavaliers honored its 10 senior basketball players before its Feb. 18 final home game, and then those seniors excelled on the court in a 91-66 win over Caravel.

All 10 of those seniors played and eight of them scored as the top-ranked Cavs broke open a close contest with an offensive barrage in the final quarter, outscoring Caravel 30-13.

Jayden Rogers paced Middletown in the opening eight minutes as he hit three long-range shots and poured in 11 of his game total of 18 in that period. In the second quarter, his teammate Amir Cunningham nailed three consecutive shots beyond the arc to also score 11 points. His last deep shot from the right wing gave the Cavs a 34-23 lead, the largest of the first half. Caravel point guard Dom Wyatt committed his third personal foul and sat out the rest of the half with the Bucs trailing. However, John Clemmons converted a couple of free

throws and a shot from “downtown” to go along with Trevor Webster’s three-point make and a “fast break” basket by Zane Bohn as part of a 10-2 run that closed the gap to 36-33. Middletown responded with a Marcus Edmond three-point jumper to spark the Cavs to a seven-point lead at the half.

The two teams played an even third quarter (Middletown 17-16 advantage) to set up the final eight minutes with the Cavaliers ahead 61-53.

The Cavs would open the fourth quarter on an 8-2 run to push the lead to 14 with under six minutes to go. From that point on, the halfcourt defense forced a few breakaway points as Middletown was releasing players down the floor and either converting, or drawing contact and scoring from the line.

Middletown converted 27 of 34 foul shots (79%) for the game. Caravel (a very good free-throw shooting team as well), managed to make seven of 11 from the line.

The teams combined to make 17 three-point shots (Middletown-10) as Rogers was game-high with four, Cunningham nailed three, while Clemmons and Webster each made three long-range shots for the Bucs. The Buccaneers were led by Clemmons with 23 points. He scored 17 in the Polytech win and 18 against Sanford to give him 58 points in the Bucs’ three games this week. Also scoring in double figures for Caravel were freshman Webster with 15 and Wyatt with 15.

The Cavaliers received balanced scoring from its seniors as Jaiden McGhee led the way with 24, Cunningham added 19, Rogers scored 18, Amir Hite poured in 12 and Edmond contributed with 10 points.

Middletown head coach Azeez Ali was asked in the post-game interview what his game plan was against Caravel. “We wanted to make them play in the half-court and not let them run up and down the floor. We knew with No. 2 (Clemmons) and No. 3 (Wyatt) they would thrive in transition. If we let that happen, we would be in trouble.” Coach Ali also commented about the seniors picking each other up. “First, it was Jayden (Rogers) that got hot, then it was Amir (Cunningham) and then McGhee took over, and the rest of the team got excited for them.”

With the win Middletown extended its winning streak to six games before playing its final regular season game Monday at Cape Henlopen. The top-ranked Cavs improved to 16-2.

Caravel only suffered its second loss in the last nine games in a week when it upset No. 3 Polytech and No. 5 Sanford. The Buccaneers fell to 13-6 before playing its final regular season game with St. E’s, also on Feb. 20.

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