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photo link: Delaware State Police



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2025 Proposed Budget Up 9%



Milford Literacy Plan Encourages Leaders



Field Hockey Mid-Atlantic Teams

photo link: White Clay Creek State Park



Headlines

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CARNEY'S PROPOSED \$6.1 BILLION 2025 STATE BUDGET UP 9% FROM 2024

help make their salaries more competitive with private and other state jobs. The budget will pony up \$93.9 million to pay for employee health insurance plan shortfalls and \$56.1 million for a one-time donation to the fund set up to pay retirees' health insurance, which is woefully underfunded.

The state Medicaid program alone needed \$100 million more for its program, partly because of losing extra federal funding during the COVID-19 pandemic. The healthcare spending alone will crowd out other investment in schools, affordable housing, childcare ad raises for state employees and state retirees, Carney said.

Carney's budget also includes \$66.5 million for Grants-in-Aid, which helps nonprofits; \$943.7 million in state capital projects, and one-time supplemental appropriation of \$91.8 million, which includes money to the retiree insurance fund.

Carney's proposed budget, which would take effect July 1, the start of fiscal year 2025, must be ratified by the General Assembly before June 30.

BUDGET STABILIZATION

The governor had a warning for the legislature during a media preview of his budget.

"One of our primary messages to legislators is to be careful in this year because of the softening of revenues next year and the year off after," he said. "You don't want to build in spending in the budget that you're not going to be able to sustain in the out years."

Delaware is coming off three years of revenues that produced close to \$1 billion of surplus money and allowed the state to give raises, fund projects like clean water initiatives and put money into the state's budget-smoothing fund. This year's budget was built on expected revenues, which provided about \$350 million in supply money. However, revenues are expected to be flat in 2024 and 2025.

"It's hard to forecast 2026," said Secretary of Finance Rick Geisenberger. "We may well need to draw up parts of the Budget Stabilization Fund next year. That would be our current forecast right now...based on current revenue forecasts."

That's what it's there for, he pointed out.

"So if you grow the operating budget a whole lot this year, then you're almost certainly going to be drawing that Budget Stabilization Fund down," Geisenberger said, "and perhaps putting yourself back in the same challenges we had prior to this administration...to do budget cuts and tax increases."

Carney took office in 2018 facing \$350 million in budget shortfalls. He issued an executive order to create the Budget Stabilization, which the state also used in 2020 because COVID-19 whacked revenues.



BY BETSY PRICE

Gov. John Carney's **proposed** 2025 state budget of \$6.1 billion pours \$2.1 billion into education, \$2 billion on healthcare for employees, retirees and Medicaid recipients, and \$129 million into environmental initiatives. It's another record state budget, up nearly 9% from 2024's \$5.6 billion.

Nearly 65% of the growth in the budget over last year's is salary policy and health-related costs, Carney said. Educators and state employees are targeted for raises to



FENWICK MAYOR: WIND FARM DEAL 'RUSHING TO OUTCOME'

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

Fenwick Island Mayor Natalie Magdeburger has a lot of questions about the state embracing a plan to bring an offshore wind power cables ashore in a Delaware State Park near her town:

- **US Wind** is an Italian company and could be sold, she pointed out. Could that give an unfriendly company access to the United States' power grid?
- What exactly is the impact of sonar and radar to be used to build the US Wind turbine farm off nearby Ocean City? How long will that impact last?
- What's the plan to close or remove the farm or its turbines if they outlive their usefulness, and who will pay for that?

Magdeburger wants to see more time taken exploring the impact of the project before any action is taken. "I think they are rushing to an outcome," the mayor said. The wind farm cable possibility has been discussed

for years. In December, Gov. John Carney announced the state is **negotiating** with US Wind, which is building a wind farm in the Atlantic off Ocean City, to bring power cables onshore at Delaware State Seashore Park's 3Rs Beach. That beach is 12 miles north of Fenwick Island. The 3Rs Beach would be leased by US Wind from the state for \$350,000 a year, Carney said.

The cables would continue under the bay to the old Indian River Power Plant, where US Wind already bought the surrounding 142 acres for \$20 million.

FENWICK SAYS NO

US Wind late last year offered a Community Benefits Package of \$2 million, payable in \$200,000 installments over 10 years, to seven beach towns in the Association of Coastal Towns. Fenwick refused the deal.

"We felt we needed to get real answers," Magdeburger said.

Nancy Sopko, US Wind's senior director of external affairs said Henlopen Acres, Rehoboth Beach, Dewey Beach, Bethany Beach, South Bethany and the city of Lewes have begun to evaluate the offer via their respective public meeting processes, "all of which we've participated in."

"We will continue to work with the coastal towns to provide them with information about our projects and answer any questions they might have," she said in written answers to questions.

The Ocean City farm is US Wind's first, and Magdeburger said she and others worry about how safe it will be. But she worries more about what would happen if the company or farm sold to a country that was not a friend to the U.S.

US Wind is majority-owned by Italian company Renexia SpA, a subsidiary of Toto Holding SpA of Italy. "Are we going to allow a Trojan horse to be built on our seashores?" she asked.

Sopko said there are safeguards against such sales. "US Wind will not be sold to China, North Korea or Russia," she said, referring to countries listed in a question.

"The federal government retains certain powers over the transfer of companies operating on federal lands, such as the Outer Continental Shelf, where our projects will be located," she said.

In addition, the wind farm would interfere with sonar and radar technology, Magdeburger said, which the U.S. Coast Guard relies on to keep our shore waters safe. The impact would be widespread should there be a military conflict, she believes. .

"It's not just Fenwick," the mayor said. "It's our entire coast."

[READ MORE HERE](#)



HEARING ON MILFORD HOMELESS VILLAGE IS COMMENT-PALOOZA

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

A Milford City Council hearing on a proposed tiny house village for the homeless packed the council chamber, lobby and a basement overflow room on Monday with people who spent four hours expressing their opinions. No vote was taken.

Everyone who spoke agreed that it was important to help the homeless. They also stressed that the city should do something to help with skyrocketing apartment and home costs. But many opposed the plan to put 40 small houses on property either near the old and new police stations or near a former homeless encampment on the city's west side. The village would be built by non-profit [Springboard Collaborative](#), which opened a homeless village in Georgetown last year.

A recurring theme from supporters was that it was the town's Christian duty to approve the plan for the village. One woman, however, took the microphone to announce she was Christian, but did not want the village.

Those opposed, mostly local business owners, urged the council to consider the impact a homeless village would have on Milford's larger economic picture, especially being built in what's considered a gate to the community.

"It's not a good look," said downtown business owner Marissa King, a business owner and the first to speak when the council asked for comment from people who opposed the project.

A homeless village would drive down the local economy because of the fear factor, many said. They cited public safety concerns about mental issues and substance abuse, common among the homeless. Several of those opposed suggested a location further from the business district would be a better solution, King said.

Many residents said they were worried about increased time and safety, especially walking after dark, and increased crime.

Carrie Casey, general manager of the county's Department of Community Services, said that 15% of the 3,470 residents that the New Castle County [Hope Center](#) has taken care of come from Kent and Sussex counties.

"That's more than 500 people who have had to be displaced from where they know their children go to school," she said. "People want to be able to get their life back in the town where they live and where their community is."

VILLAGE FINANCING

The Springboard Collaborative received \$1.4 million in American Rescue Plan money to build a central Sussex village and they want to do it in Milford. The money will cover site plans, lawyer fees and more.

The Milford village will cost about \$1 million a year to operate, the same as Georgetown's, said Springboard Executive Director Judson Malone on Tuesday. That breaks down to about \$65 per day per person since there are 40 to 50 people per village, and most goes to staffers who oversee the site and occupants.

"It may seem like a lot," Malone said, but it's similar to the costs the state paid for housing vouchers during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Additional costs that will be covered include utilities, insurance, business expenses or anything associated with the operating the facility, Malone said.

In Georgetown, the land is being borrowed under a temporary land use agreement, with no conditions from the planning for zoning commission. In Milford, the agency is seeking a conditional use for a shelter agreement.

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photo link: Delaware Ballet

Culture

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BY BETSY PRICE

The city of Wilmington has paid \$900,000 for the elegant Gibraltar mansion on Pennsylvania Avenue and will work to preserve it for future generations, Mayor Mike Purzycki announced Friday. There are no definitive plans at this time for the property, Purzycki said in a press release.

The property, the focus of both commercial and cultural interest for decades, hasn't been able to find a workable development project, despite intense interest in the grounds, which include gardens laid out in between 1916 and 1923 by famed female landscape architect Marian Cruger Coffin. It was built around 1844 by John Rodney Brincklé, grand-nephew of Caesar Rodney, who signed the Declaration of Independence and was Delaware's first governor.

Brincklé named it Gibraltar because the property overlooked Wilmington in an allusion to the Rock of Gibraltar, a limestone is a monolithic limestone promontory located in the British territory of Gibraltar, a limestone cliff that juts out near the Mediterranean. A press release from the city called Gibraltar, which sits on six acres, "one of the most significant properties in Wilmington. It's listed on the [National](#)

WILMINGTON BUYS GIBRALTAR, PLANS TO HELP PRESERVE IT

[Register of Historic Places](#), a list of places the U.S. government says are worth protecting and preserving."

"For too long, well-intended neighbors and other interested parties have not been able to see eye-to-eye on what to do with this property, but everyone seems to agree on one thing — Gibraltar should not be allowed to further deteriorate," said Purzycki. "City residents should understand that after decades of neglect we are at a crossroads when it comes to Gibraltar. Either we commit to preserving it or it will inexorably rot beyond salvation." Purzycki said he was following in the steps of former Mayor James Baker who, as a chronicler of local history, also believed that the deteriorating property at 2505 Pennsylvania Avenue, should be preserved.

GIBRALTAR'S FUTURE

He said he wanted to see the 19th century country estate "fully restored so that it can be enjoyed by future generations of city residents and visitors." The mayor, who lives next to Gibraltar, said he's watched its decline for years.

"Some have suggested a personal conflict of interest. There is none," he said. "Much as I've done throughout my career on the Christina Riverfront and as mayor in preserving neighborhoods, this is about giving new beauty and purpose to part of our city and its history."

The money for the purchase was provided by the Delaware General Assembly after the mayor traveled to Dover to present the importance of saving Gibraltar. He called the purchase price a bargain — especially for six acres in one of the city's highly desirable upscale neighborhoods. As part of the deal, the city also transferred a city street bed, which will require City Council approval, to the former owners of the estate, Gibraltar Preservation Group LLC. Gibraltar has been transferred to the Wilmington Neighborhood Conservancy Landbank with which the city will work.

Purzycki said he has some ideas about how the property could be used and plans to explore them with city council members, neighbors and other interested parties.

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SUSSEX SEES SURGE IN SIGHTINGS OF COYOTES

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

A Delmar woman was startled recently to look out her window and see five coyotes attacking a fox in the backyard of her rural cul-de-sac home. It's a sign of increased activity during breeding season, said Jake Klaverweiden, the Delmar founder of [Eastern Shore Predator Control](#). Lots of pets go missing during January through March, he said.

"Coyotes have learned that small dogs and cats are easy prey," [DNREC](#) says on its web page about coyotes.

Klaverweiden and other wildlife experts warn people to keep a close eye on their pets and farm animals, especially small ones.

"Just keep your eyes on your small animals and don't let them free roam and everything will be fine," Facebook user Christina Fitzwater advised.

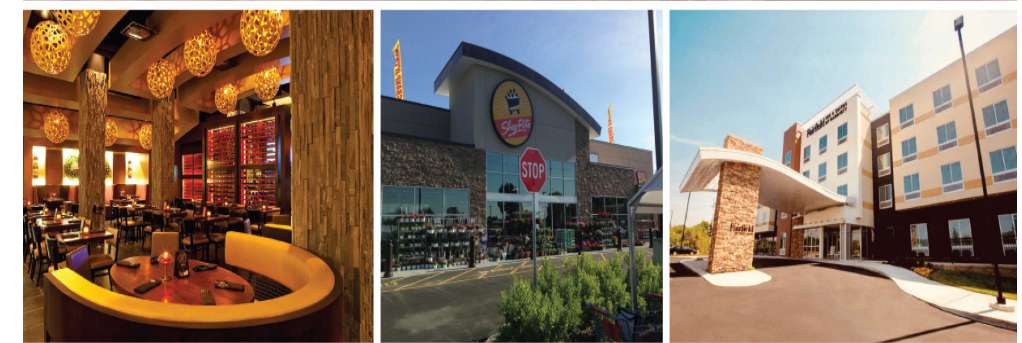
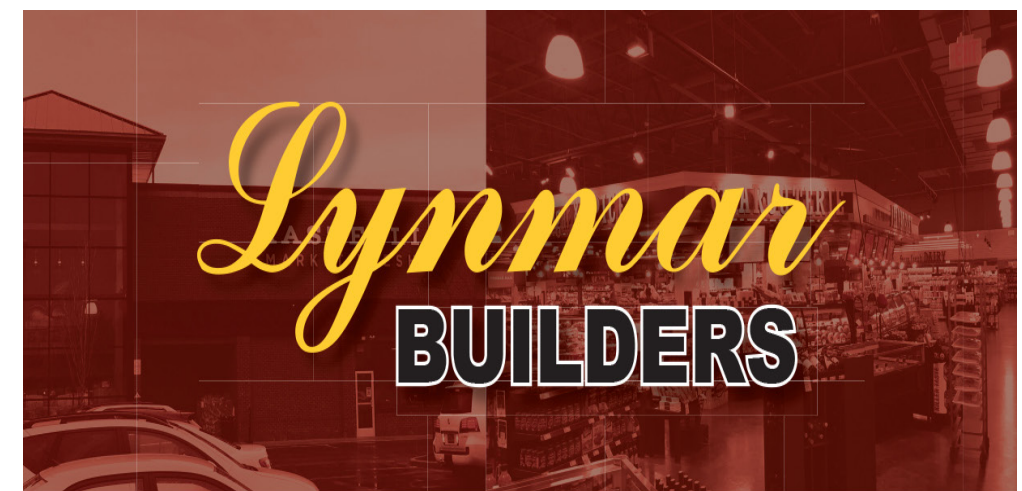
Coyotes are scavengers and will eat any food they can catch or find. They typically hunt alone around sunrise

and sunset, making it rare to spot a coyote during the day. However, that's not always the case, particularly when it's time for coyotes to mate. The coyotes that were in the Delmar woman's backyard "didn't seem to be afraid of her," Klaverweiden said.

DNREC's website says that when coyote population densities increase or when they find an abundant source of food, coyotes are more likely to hunt in groups. Coyotes have been in Delaware for at least 10 years, DNREC said. They are seen on trail cameras, in some vehicle collisions, and hunters and trappers who kill them, DNREC said.

"About a year ago I spotted a coyote in our community, Bay City, in Long Neck," commented Ryan Leonardo on a Facebook [post](#) by Delaware Simply Strong.

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SALESIANUM, URSULINE, PADUA JOIN IN SPIRIT OF SERVICE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Ninth-graders Juliana Carranza and Caroline Lober were complete strangers coming into Monday, but a day of community held by three Wilmington Catholic schools quickly changed that. Carranza and Lober — students at [Padua Academy](#) and [Ursuline Academy](#), respectively — were two of the 450 freshmen that experienced the second SUP Day, which brought together the full ninth-grade classes of [Salesianum School](#), Ursuline and Padua.

“It’s nice to have this experience because you get to learn about the other schools and then you get to be able to relate to each other on a different level that we don’t get everyday,” Carranza said.

Coming off the heels of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the day was focused on service and community, and how the young students can have an impact on the world around them.

This is the first year of the SUP Days — the first was in October and was based on based on the [El Camino Pilgrimage](#), also known as the Way of St. James, which is a pilgrimage in Spain in which people walk hundreds of miles from all across Europe to Santiago, the traditional place where the apostle James is buried. During the pilgrimage, strangers get to know each other and often leave their experience with new friends and shared memories.

“That was all about journeying together through different activities, building community and having that outreach,” said Maureen Ripsom McAleenan, the dean of academics at Ursuline’s Upper School, “and then today they’re back together to strengthen the bonds.”

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Business

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Coollest THING MADE IN DELAWARE

BY
DELAWARE STATE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



BY BETSY PRICE

A new state contest seeks the coolest thing manufactured in Delaware. The **Delaware State Chamber of Commerce** and the **Delaware Manufacturing Association** have started the **Coollest Thing Made in Delaware** contest to highlight Delaware’s vibrant manufacturing industry and promote the sector as a top career path. Manufacturing now employs 28,000 Delawareans.

The contest will be structured in a bracket format that hopefully will draw the interest of the general population while educating them about the diversity of manufacturing industry’s economic outputs, innovative products, impact, careers opportunities and more.

“Delaware’s low cost of doing business, central location and skilled workforce position the state as a center for manufacturing. With an output of nearly \$5.6 billion, the industry is a major force in Delaware’s

THINK YOU MAKE THE COOLEST THING IN DE? ENTER THIS CONTEST

economy and the third-largest traded sector,” said DSCC President Michael J. Quaranta. “Not only do manufacturers make products that meet the needs of consumers right here in the First State, but they have global — even galactic — impacts.”

Nominations will be accepted until Feb. 21.

RULES, EVEN FOR THE COOLEST

Eligible companies are manufacturers whose nominated product is manufactured in a Delaware-based facility. The product must be made using a manufacturing process. Participants are welcome to nominate as many products as they’d like during the initial nomination period.

On Feb. 22, all qualifying nominees will be announced and the popular vote will commence. Manufacturers, employees and consumers alike are welcome to participate in the voting. Votes can be cast once per day, per device at www.DSCC.com/MFG.

After the popular vote round ends on Feb. 29, the top 16 products — one per company — will proceed to compete in the bracket-style contest, ultimately culminating in one champion. Nominees will be cut to eight on March 14 and then four on March 21.

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EXPANDED WILMINGTON AIRPORT AMONG DRBA'S \$132.7M CAPITAL PLAN

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The Delaware River and Bay Authority will spend \$6.6 million to improve and expand the Wilmington Airport terminal, according to its five-year capital investment plan. That is one of 120 major improvement projects costing \$132.7 million at the Delaware Memorial Bridge, the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, the Forts Ferry, the Millville Executive Airport, the Cape May Airport, the Delaware Air Park and the Civil Air Terminal. The most expensive project involves designing and building new ferries, budgeted at \$109,130,000.

The two capital projects planned at Wilmington Airport, which include demolishing a nearby hotel, will delight the passengers of Avelo, an airline that expanded its routes out of Delaware twice last year.

Consumers may also notice two projects to improve the roadways near the Cape May Ferry terminal, plus restoration of the war memorial near the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The plan includes the following major capital projects, with costs assigned to 2024 and “the out years,” meaning 2025-28.

WILMINGTON AIRPORT'S CAPITAL PLANS

Hotel demolition: The authority has acquired control of a hotel adjacent to the Wilmington Airport terminal building, which it does not plan to operate. The project will demolish existing hotel buildings and provide for immediate temporary parking. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$2,847,000 in 2024 and \$502,000 in the out years.

Terminal improvements: This project programs the cost to finalize design of the improvements to expand and modify the terminal, including hold room capacity, frontage improvements and customer service. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$1,951,000 in 2024 and \$4,659,000 in the out years.

DELAWARE MEMORIAL BRIDGE

Annual bridge steelwork repairs: This project makes miscellaneous steelwork repairs to preserve the bridge's steelwork while maintaining safety and operational service levels. Work typically includes replacement of worn bearing assemblies, access platforms, maintenance of steel connections, installing new safety features, suspender rope replacement and other items. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$6,200,000 in 2024 and \$47,000,000 in the out years.

Annual maintenance bridge span painting: The annual bridge inspection report recommends continued repairs to the coating system. The project will strip affected areas to bare metal and recoat with a three-layer protective overcoat system. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$8,338,000 in 2024 and \$25,525,000 in the out years.

Ship collision protection: This project provides a protection system meeting current standards and consists of eight 80-foot diameter dolphin structures, two at the approach of each tower pier. Through 2023, the authority has expended nearly \$44 million on this project. It has an estimated authority cost of \$25,240,000 in 2024 and \$18,016,000 in the out years.

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JUDGE: CABELA'S CAN'T HIDE BEHIND FED ISSUES IN STOLEN AMMO CASE

BY BETSY PRICE

A U.S. District Court judge has told Cabela's it has no grounds to have a stolen ammunition lawsuit tried in federal court and sent it back to state courts. The suit began with Cabela's refusal to answer a subpoena and provide information to the Delaware Department of Justice, which is investigating the theft of ammunition said to have ended up in criminal hands. The case drew a huge amount of attention when it was revealed in court records in July 2023.

Danielle Brookens, 38, was arrested in the process of stealing ammunition. She told police she had been doing it for a year and stole as much as 500,000 rounds of ammo. She then sold it at one-third of the cost to others, including drug dealers and violent criminals in Delaware and Philadelphia. Brookens, who had a history of substance abuse, was sentenced to a treatment program.

The state said that the **Cabela's** at Christiana Mall had stacks of ammunition in the middle of the sales floor

and that violated rules about ammunition needing to be stored out of customer control. Cabela's would not cooperate with the Department of Justice investigation and when sued tried to move the case from state to federal court, relying on federal rights.

Judge Richard G. Andrews of the District Court for the District of Delaware said Cabela's lawyers "do not describe any issue of federal law" that the state "must win to prove any element necessary to the enforcement of the subpoena." Andrews awarded legal fees to the Department of Justice, adding emphasis to the ruling, saying none of those appealing to the higher court met the legal test that courts use to determine federal jurisdiction.

"It should have been obvious," Andrews said. "There is no qualified civil liability action...There was no basis to remove the case." The state case essentially argued that Cabela's itself contributed to the thefts through its hands-off approach to the shoplifting.

CABELA'S LEGAL MOVES

After the DOJ sent Cabela's a subpoena, the company relocated ammunition in the Christiana store to behind a sales counter. The company would not produce any meaningful answers to the state's questions and instead tried to move the case to delay and ultimately block the investigation, according to a Department of Justice press release.

"I'm grateful to the Court for its ruling and glad that Cabela's legal games continue to be unsuccessful," said Attorney General Kathy Jennings in the press release. "Almost a year into this investigation, Cabela's is still evading basic questions and trying to hide the truth."

Every round of ammunition that walked out of the store is capable of ending a life, she said,

"Cabela's apparently casual attitude about that fact raises serious questions about just how pervasive their issues were," she said. "Gun dealers need to take reasonable steps to prevent gun violence — we are still waiting for evidence that Cabela's did. We're looking forward to stating our case in Superior Court."

The Department of Justice's investigation explores potential violations of several laws, including the Keshall "KeKe" Anderson Safe Firearms Sales Act. The Act, passed into law in 2022, is named for KeKe Anderson, an innocent bystander who was killed in a 2016 shooting involving a firearm bought through a straw purchase at Cabela's.

The bill repeals **special immunity** granted to gun dealers like Cabela's under state law, making Delaware the first state in the country to repeal a gun industry liability shield.

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photo credit: Dan Gold / Unsplash



Food & Dining

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BY BETSY PRICE

Matt Kern, chef and owner of **One Coastal** in Fenwick Island, is a semifinalist for a **James Beard Award** in the Best Chef Mid-Atlantic category. This is Kern's third semifinalist nomination. He was a semifinalist in 2019 and 2020 while working at **Heirloom** in Lewes.

"It's way different," this time, said Kern, who purchased One Coastal from Scott and Carlie Carey in 2022. "I have put everything I have into this tiny 50-seat strip mall restaurant — everything. I've spent God knows how many hours believing in this place — painting, struggling, failing, thriving, teaching and believing in my staff — just to be able to do this on my own terms," he explained.

Kern is the only Delawarean nominated this year. He had no idea he was on the selection committee's radar and he didn't know that he'd earned a semifinalist spot until a friend congratulated him. The announcement was posted this morning.

ONE COASTAL'S MATT KERN IS JAMES BEARD AWARD SEMIFINALIST

"I cried a little bit," said Kern, who immediately called his wife, Karen, a business partner.

The Bethlehem, PA, native came to coastal Delaware to work at a restaurant that quickly closed, but by that time he'd met Karen and decided to stay in the area. Before Heirloom, he worked at Salt Air and the Blue Moon in Rehoboth Beach.

KERN'S FOCUS

One Coastal originally was an extension of the Careys' farm and Kern respected their mission. "Out of the many restaurants in Sussex County, few are really farm-to-table," he said when he purchased the restaurant. "This place already has such a loyal following and we have similar interests."

Kern, who is passionate about supporting local farmers, said community involvement is part of the criteria for a James Beard nomination — a culinary Oscar honor.

Kern doesn't have half the equipment he had at Heirloom, but he buys top-shelf ingredients and has the chops to prepare beautiful food.

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Government

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LAW ALLOWS ELDERS TO SELF-CERTIFY FOR MARIJUANA CARD PASSES HOUSE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Another marijuana law sponsored by the apparent champion of cannabis in the state legislature, received some opposition in the House Thursday before ultimately passing. **House Bill 285**, sponsored by Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark, who has been a champion of marijuana in the state legislature, would allow Delawareans 65 or older to obtain a medical marijuana card without their doctor's approval got some pushback Wednesday in a legislative hearing.

It would allow them to get the card without a certification from a health-care provider, circumventing the doctor-patient relationship. It would also:

- Remove the requirement that a patient must have a debilitating medical condition to qualify for a registry identification card. Instead, health-care providers would determine whether a patient has a diagnosed

medical condition that would benefit therapeutically or palliatively from the use of medical marijuana.

- Modify the issuance process of medical marijuana registry identification cards, which facilitate the acquisition, delivery, possession or transfer of medical marijuana.
- Allow for flexible expiration dates on registry identification cards, enabling 1-, 2- or 3-year expiration dates.
- Allow card holders of other states to use their card for purchases in Delaware.

There's 17,000 Delawareans who have medical cards and about 5,000 of those are 65 or older.

Just as he did when the bill was first discussed in a committee hearing two weeks ago, Rep. Jeff Hilovsky, R-Long Neck, expressed opposition. Older folks typi-

cally have reduced hearing, sight, smell and cognitive abilities so it wouldn't be a good idea to allow them access to marijuana without consulting a doctor, he said.

There were also concerns about how users would be able to properly know their correct dosage, to which Osienski said it's always recommended to go low and slow when a person starts using marijuana. He also pointed out there's no dosage requirements for harmful substances like alcohol and tobacco, and it is the responsibility of the consumer to use them responsibly.

Osienski also said there will be labels that recommend users to consult their doctor before consuming any form of marijuana.

"That doesn't connect," said Rep. Valerie Jones Giltner, R-Georgetown. "If we're recommending that they should already be talking to their doctor and we're suggesting it then why are we allowing them to self certify?"

Hilovsky also challenged Osienski's comments that there are no harmful health effects of marijuana, citing that there's research that shows it increases the chance of psychosis. Most products at marijuana dispensaries do have a label that indicates its usage might increase the risk of psychosis.

The bill was passed with a vote of 25 "yes" to 10 "no", with all 10 votes against coming from Republicans.



BILL TO CHANGE STATE TAX BRACKETS HALTED IN COMMITTEE

BY BETSY PRICE

A bill that would alter Delaware's tax code in a way the sponsor says would ultimately lower tax payments for everyone, was put to death Tuesday by the House Revenue and Finance Committee. Another was delayed for consideration until the next meeting.

Votes for [House Bill 233](#), sponsored by Majority Leader Mike Ramone, R-Newark/Pike Creek, split along party lines in the Democrat-dominated committee. All four Republican members voted yes. No Democrats did.

The bill would have raised the minimum income subject to income tax from \$2,000 to \$2,500 and collapsed the state's six income tax brackets into three brackets, giving all a slightly reduced tax rate, Ramone said. He said the bill had been designed to give every Delaware resident some tax relief and to simplify Delaware's income tax guidelines because they were one of the most complicated in the nation.

Rep. Kendra Johnson, D-Bear, said she was all for helping taxpayers, but worried about the loss of revenue and how that would ultimately affect nonprofits and others who relied on state grants. Ramone responded that if the state finances are as tight as expected, there was a budget smoothing fund that could be used. He also pointed out that with the coming change in governors in 2025, there was no guarantee that fund would be continued. It only exists as a result of an executive order from Gov. John Carney, who is in the last year of his second term, and is not a matter a law, Ramone said.

He also said that Delaware continues to attract people to move here because of low property taxes and the lack of a sales tax. They will bring more money into the state, he said.

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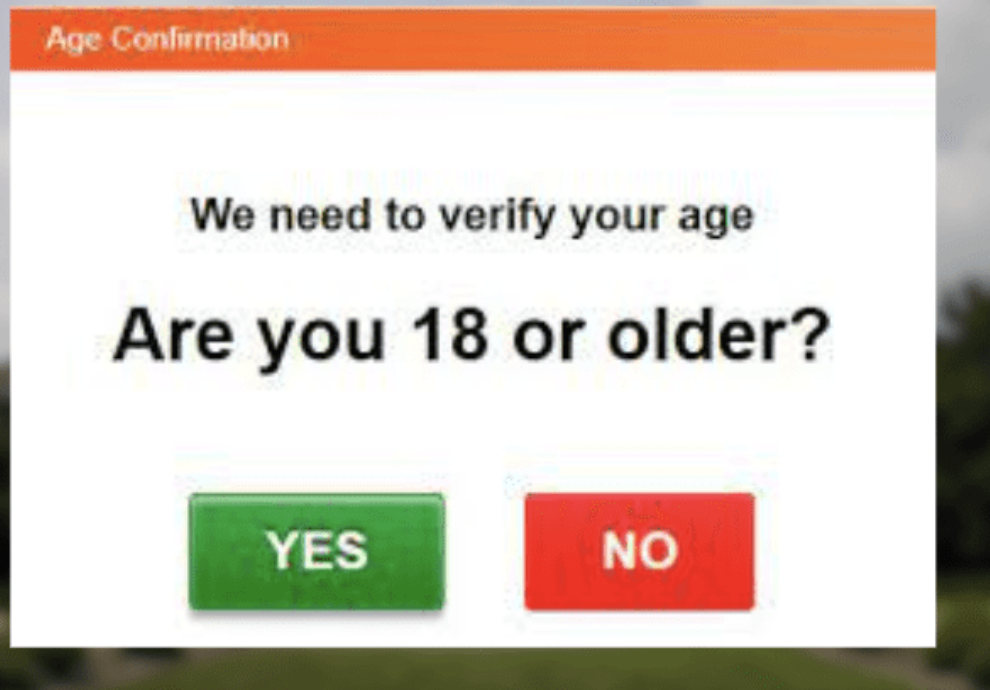
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BY JAREK RUTZ

The discussion in a House committee Tuesday got testy in response to a bill that would hold porn websites liable for showing graphic content to minors.

“You’re getting a little snippy, and I’m trying to support your legislation, but I can stop...would you prefer that?” said Rep. Madinah Wilson-Anton, D-Newark, after asking a series of clarifying questions to Rep. Mike Smith, R-Pike Creek.

Smith, who is the sponsor of [House Bill 265](#), said his proposed legislation is a preventive measure and not a solution to the problem.

“This bill will never be something that’s going to solve a full problem,” he said. “Anything we do down here is going to be a piece of the puzzle. It’s not going to be full on and that’s just the nature of what we do here. We’re never going to stop and solve everything but we can help.”

COMMITTEE WRESTLES WITH PORN SITE CONTENT SENT TO MINORS

Smith’s bill, which he said is largely based on laws passed in Virginia as well as Utah and Louisiana, requires a commercial entity that knowingly or intentionally provides pornography and other materials defined as harmful to minors to verify the age of individuals accessing the material. Civil liability and a civil penalty are imposed on commercial entities that fail to comply with verification requirements.

The bill details harmful materials to minors as any description or representation of nudity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse when it: appeals to the prurient, shameful or morbid interest of minors; is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the adult community as a whole with respect to what is suitable material for minors; and is, when taken as a whole, lacking in serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value for minors.

Those in the House Economic Development, Banking, Insurance and Commerce Committee meeting were all in agreement that the premise and goal of the bill is in good faith and important, especially with the abundance of access and exposure to online pornography that today’s younger generation has.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

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STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS RESCHEDULED

BY JAREK RUTZ

The annual State of the State Address has been re-scheduled after Gov. John Carney had to cancel last week's originally planned event due to illness.

Carney now will deliver his 2024 address from the House of Representatives Chamber in Legislative Hall on Tuesday, March 5, at 2 p.m. The event will be livestreamed on de.gov/sots and on the governor's YouTube channel.

At 1 p.m. on Thursday Carney will present his budget proposal for fiscal year 2025 at the Delaware Public Archives building. The event will be livestreamed on de.gov/budget and on the governor's YouTube channel.



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photo link: Sussex Central High School



Education

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NEW 'FUTURE FLEXIBLE' TATNALL SCHOOL LIBRARY DRAWS MORE STUDENTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Tatnall School's new \$1 million library lets students just get on with the business of learning, says a student at the private college preparatory school in Wilmington.

"We have a whole bunch of open classrooms, movable whiteboards and desks, and then we have a whole bunch of charging stations for them to work by themselves," said junior Nate Hunter. "It's really just letting them get to work on their own and a space that they can really feel comfortable in."

He and his classmates have benefited from self-learning and also from the help from tutors and teachers in some of the conference rooms.

Ensign Simmons, director of innovation and technology at the pre-K through grade 12 school, said there has been a surge of students using the space since its upgrade over the summer.

"I think we probably had about four or five students in here each period up until last year," he said. "This year, we have close to 20 students each period in here, so we're talking about a four- or five-fold increase in the number of students that are using this space throughout the period and throughout the day."

The largest contribution to the \$1 million project was a \$475,000 grant from the **Longwood Foundation**. The remaining funds came from other local foundations and Tatnall alumni, parents and board members.

"This will also drive admissions," Simmons said. "We had an admissions event in the space yesterday for our lower school students looking at the middle school, and some of those lower school parents...walked in and just saw what a space like this could provide in terms of opportunities for their kids as they grow up and go through the different grade levels."

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MILFORD SCHOOL LEADERS ENCOURAGED BY DISTRICT LITERACY PLAN

BY JAREK RUTZ

Officials in the **Milford School District** answered questions and gave updates Monday night about the progress of the district’s literacy plan. Kelly Carvajal Hageman, Milford’s chief academic officer, pointed out in the district’s monthly board meeting that Gov. John Carney and Education Secretary Mark Holodick have urged the state in the past two years to focus on literacy.

A 2022 law mandated that by the 2027-28 school year districts and charters would be required to create a curriculum from a state-curated list to make sure all reading teachers are trained to teach lessons rooted in the science of reading. The **science of reading** stems from brain research that shows how students learn to read. It has six essential components: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension and oral language.

“Milford is very far ahead of the curve because we have a very robust literacy professional learning plan in

action for our schools that has been started this year,” she said.

Hageman said the literacy plan was build with four goals:

- Strengthen all components of Tier I literacy instruction K-5 to include rigorous grade level access to all students in all settings.
- Develop the school reading specialist role into a literacy coach, enabling them to lead the literacy teams in their respective schools, coach teachers on all components of Bookworms instruction and facilitate data analysis meetings.
- Integrate Multilingual Learner Services and Literacy Services in K-5.
- Create School Literacy Teams with reading support paraprofessionals, multilingual teachers and paras, and reading specialists.

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STUDENT LOAN BORROWERS COULD GET BILL OF RIGHTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Laws that would establish a Bill of Rights for student loan borrowers and adjust the transfer of leave days for educators garnered support in a Senate Education Committee hearing Wednesday.

Senate Bill 132, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, would make Delaware the 19th state to have a Bill of Rights for student loan borrowers.

Of the 18 states who already have such, 12 have a student loan ombudsperson — which is essentially an advocate who can help with resources, disputes and assist legal matters — and 13 have a licensing program, with another two states having a registration program instead of a licensing program.

The Student Loan Borrower Bill of Rights would:

- Require student loan servicers to engage in certain practices related to communications with student loan borrowers and cosigners of student education

loans and handling of transactions by student loan borrowers and cosigners of student education loans.

- Prohibit student loan servicers from engaging in certain practices including unfair or deceptive practices or abusive practices.
- Require student loan servicers to retain records related to student loan transactions for seven years and to yearly report non-identifying information about student education loans serviced in Delaware, including default and delinquency rates, to the student loan ombudsperson.
- Establish the Office of the Student Loan Ombudsperson which will receive, investigate, attempt to resolve complaints from student loan borrowers and more.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



photo credit: Nick Halliday

Sports

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MIDDLETOWN HANGS ON IN WIN OVER SALESIANUM

BY GLENN FRAZER

The fourth ranked Middletown Cavaliers pulled a “mild” upset over No. 3 Salesianum 57-55 Thursday night. The Cavs led by as many as seven points in the fourth quarter and still held a six-point advantage with one minute left. Then the Sals dialed up mid-court pressure, forcing several turnovers and sliced the lead to a single point at 56-55 following a Justin Hinds layup with 20 seconds to go. It has been said that the little things go unnoticed. With 16 seconds left, Eric Methenge tipped a missed foul shot off a Sals player to give possession to the Cavs. Then he was fouled — converted one of two free throws to give his team the 57-55 lead with less than 14 seconds to go. With no timeouts left, Kareem Thomas took the inbounds pass, dribbled to mid court and passed to Luke Brown in the corner. By the time Thomas got the ball back in his hands there was a second to go. His desperation three-point attempt bounced off the front of the rim starting a celebration by the Middletown players.

Middletown head coach Azeez Ali told us in the post game interview, “We tried to deny Thomas the ball, but he got it anyway. He’s too good from three and at the line, I checked the last five games and he was averaging like 10 free throws a game at 90%. We just wanted to contest the shot and hopefully get the rebound.”

Salesianum led almost the entire first half by as many as seven points at 21-14. The Sals dominated the glass

while Thomas was a perfect 6-for-6 from the line and paced the team with 12 points in the opening half. Their lead was 28-23 with three minutes to go when Middletown stormed back as Methenge nailed two mid-range jumpers to give the Cavs the lead at halftime 30-28.

The home team Cavaliers outscored Sallies 16-11 in the third quarter to take a 46-39 advantage into the final eight minutes. The closest Salesianum came in that quarter was 34-32 after Thomas made his third three-pointer of the game. Zion Mifflin and Aizyon Matthews both hit long-range jumpers and scored five points each in that third quarter to pace Middletown. Avyion Matthews chipped in with six points for the Cavs.

That set the stage for an exciting finish. The Cavaliers held a seven-point lead with 3:47 left in the game, when the Sals dialed up mid-court pressure. That pressure resulted in one of the highlights of the night when Isaiah Hynson passed to Justin Hinds for an “alley-oop” dunk that pulled Salesianum to within 54-48 with 96 seconds to go. The Sals kept the pressure up and made a combined five of seven from the foul line to cut the deficit to 55-53 with 34 seconds to go. Then the final sequence occurred with Hinds’ layup, and Methenge’s heroics to end the game.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

WILLIAM PENN'S BIG FOURTH QUARTER LIFTS IT OVER CARAVEL

BY NICK HALLIDAY

The Caravel Buccaneers came into the hostile William Penn Colonials gym Wednesday night, but they were not intimidated. The Buccaneers were able to keep pace with the No. 5 Colonials leading them at halftime 27-23, and after three quarters they found themselves only down by two with a 43-41 lead by the Colonials.

However, the fourth quarter was all William Penn. Jaylin Horsey who led all scorers in the game with 29 points scoring 11 of them in the fourth quarter. When asked about fourth quarter Horsey said, "We knew we needed energy. So we came out with energy. We had a couple big threes with turnovers that led to points and we never went back from there."

Jah-Ri Cole who scored 16 points in the game scored seven of them in the fourth quarter. The Colonials scored 25 points in the fourth quarter to defeat the Buc-

caners by a 68-50 victory. The Colonials stepped up their defense in the last quarter to keep Caravel to single digits, only allowing nine points.

After the game, we asked William Penn Colonials coach Gary Lumpkin about that fourth quarter effort his team gave and he replied, "The message to the team was continue to fight and continue to battle. I told them at halftime that teams take on the persona of their coach and I know how I played so I am trying to get that to resonate with them. That last 6-7 minutes of that fourth quarter they showed up and played the way Colonial basketball is played."

Caravel was led by Zane Bohn who scored a team-high 13 points while Trevor Webster added nine points.



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RIDERS RALLY TO PIN RAVENS

BY BENNY MITCHELL

The Caesar Rodney Riders trailed the Sussex Tech Ravens 29-17 with just five matches left in their Henlopen Conference Northern Division matchup Wednesday night. The Riders recorded four straight pins winning the dual 41-29.

The match began at 106 pounds where the Riders' Ben Donato won a 17-0 technical fall over Parker Hampton. Ashton Graham then recorded a pin in 1:05 over Anthony Costello at 113 pounds giving the Riders an 11-0 lead.

The Ravens' Anthony Andrews put a stop to the Caesar Rodney run at 120 pounds pinning Cole Moffett in 3:56 seconds, but Trevor Copes answered for the Riders pinning Noah Holcomb-Figgs in 46 seconds at 126 pounds putting Caesar Rodney in front 17-6.

Sussex Tech then reeled off five straight wins to take its first lead of the match.

Hobe Givens won a 14-4 major decision over Sean Dixon at 132 pounds, David Kristunas followed with a 12-2 major decision over Alex Batton at 138 pounds.

The Ravens continued their run at 144 pounds when Dustin Elliott pinned Jamisen Dean in 3:14. Bennett Brumbley won a 3-0 decision over Craig Dixon at 150 and Ryan Cooper won a 6-3 decision over Miguel Sigaran at 157 pounds giving Sussex Tech a 26-17 lead.

Caesar Rodney coach Trey Mitchell said he was pleased with the fight his wrestlers showed in the matches they were not favored in during that stretch.

“We had to put faith in Miguel (Sigaran) to go out there and do what we call shaving points and he did more than I asked him to by keeping it to a decision and Sean Dixon did the same thing down low. That’s two freshmen that we asked them to do a lot tonight and they did it,” Mitchell said.

The Riders bumped their lineup starting at 165 pounds where Kenneth King pinned Logan Micinowski in 2:36, Logan Heffington followed by pinning Christian Hedges in 1:00 at 175 pounds. Owen Dixon kept the roll going at 190 pounds with a pin over Ethan Horner in 33 seconds and Owyn Dixon put the dual meet out of reach pinning Malachi Miller in 3:27 at 215 pounds as Caesar Rodney led 41-26.

Landon Sockriter ended the match with a 5-1 decision over Caleb Kellum at 285 pounds.

Each team won seven bouts during the match, but it was the six pins by Caesar Rodney that made the difference in the final outcome.

“Matches never go as planned and I have to tell myself that every time we come out here, things didn’t go our way down low and our upper weights had to pick us up tonight. We talk about scoring and going after pins and we work on it at practice. Tonight we had some guys step up and get those pins,” Mitchell said.

Sussex Tech fell to 5-7 overall and 1-3 in the Henlopen North, the Ravens will host Indian River on Monday, Jan. 29.

Number four ranked Caesar Rodney improved to 6-0 overall and 4-0 in the Henlopen North, the Riders will travel to number two ranked Salesianum on Saturday.

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FIELD HOCKEY PLAYERS NAMED TO ALL MID-ATLANTIC TEAMS

BY NICK HALLIDAY

MAX Field Hockey has announced its All Region Players and Teams. They look at data throughout the year of each graduating class of players in their selection process. A lot goes into the decision to place players in the Top 10, Top 100, Top 150, the Watch List and to the All Region Team.

They work class-by-class, sorting through data about the Nexus/USA Program, High School Team performance, Club Team performance, as well as MAX player profiles, National Player Combine profile, coach recommendations, player profiles, highlight videos and college commits.

Three of our Delaware field hockey players have been named First Team All Mid-Atlantic Region and three have been named to the Second Team. In addition, three Delaware High School Field Hockey Teams were ranked in the Top 20 for the Mid-Atlantic Region.

“As we start working on a specific class, we sort through it all. The top players tend to rise to the top, especially for the top 50-80 players or so. Beyond that is where it is starting to get harder and harder.”

While there may not be a set formula, MAX does feel as though the level of play in the region a player is in matters. Teams with players competing at the highest level is worth more than a player with potentially better stats playing in a weaker area.

Athletes don't necessarily have to spend a lot of money, attend the National Player Combine, etc., to be selected but they cannot just have a recommendation.

We need some sort of “proof.” Our motto for the events we've added: “Prove it on the field.” It doesn't have to be at one of our events, ...but you do have to prove it somewhere, somehow.”

Delaware high school field hockey players have done just that. They have proved they are the best of the best and have earned the recognition they deserve.

The MAX Field Hockey All Mid-Atlantic Region First and Second Teams were announced Jan. 16. They also rank the Top 10 in each class, players on the Watch List, and they rank the Top 20 Teams in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

We will look at each of these awards and recognize our Top Field Hockey Players and Team selected by MAX Field Hockey for the 2023 season.



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