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photo link: Wilmington Trail Club



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photo link: Delaware Greenways

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Nonprofits Seek Boost During Do More 24 Delaware



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Dover Advances





photo link: Mispillion River Brewing

Headlines

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HERE'S HOW DELAWARE SLICES ITS SCHOOL FUNDING PIE

BY JAREK RUTZ

One might find it hard to believe that laundry, driver's ed and athletic travel and equipment are considered "instructional costs" in Delaware public schools, but they are. Instruction is one of nine categories of funding for the First State's public schools. It makes up 55.28% of the spending for the 23-24 school year, totaling \$1,584,970,346, according to the [Delaware State Report Card](#).

Some items included in instruction funding are to be expected: pay of teachers, substitutes, paraeducators; computers and technology; books and publications; multimedia equipment; and reading and math specialists.

"The pie chart on the state website shows sums, not averages, and all fund types (local, state, and federal) are included," said Alison May, public information officer at the [Department of Education](#). "It includes all

local educational agencies (19 districts and all charters) where expenses were made in the respective categories."

The definitions for each category of funding is pretty general. Instruction, for example, is defined as anything that "includes the activities dealing directly with the interaction between teachers and students."

Britney Mumford, executive director of [Delaware-CAN](#), said her biggest takeaway from the funding splits is that it's not granular enough.

Teacher salaries are assumed to be under instruction, "which is technically true, but also somewhat misleading," Mumford said. "We want to know exactly how much money is being spent on salaries and exactly how much is going directly to student resources in the classroom, and this pie chart does not provide that information."

Sara Hale, the chief operating officer at the [Milford School District](#), pointed out that those categories were

dictated by the federal government and the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). A few years ago, the state's schools went through a whole re-coding process to map expenditures.

"So when you see those things, that's because those are taken directly from expenditures in the First State Financial System based on how they were coded," she said. The coding for each expenditure — about 600 different codes — can be found on a [master excel sheet](#) under "Financial Coding Guidance."

"All of our teachers obviously are coded to instruction, but if there are student support supervisors or something, they may be educators but not direct classroom teachers," she said. "So when it says 'student support services,' those are most likely mental health professionals, those could be additional counselors, those could be other folks supporting special education."

She agreed with Mumford that it would be more digestible and meaningful to the public if the context behind the percentages, as well as the percentages within the different categories, were published.

Hale also noted that the categories have a lot of overlapping expenditures, as shown with student field trips.

"The coding is based on federal guidance for each federal reporting category," May said. "A team of chief financial officers, Department of Education staff and the Division of Accounting worked on this [pie chart] a few years ago to ensure alignment with those federal rules."

[READ MORE HERE](#)



LEGISLATURE TO BE BRIEFED ON NEW SCHOOL FUNDING REPORT

BY JAREK RUTZ

Delaware’s legislators will get their first official look next week at a recently released funding report that suggests changes to how the state funds its schools and says it should pump \$500 million to \$1 billion more into education. Many of the legislators attended the December announcement of the report by the **American Institutes for Research**.

On Thursday, March 7, at 11 a.m., the Senate Education and House Education Committees will have a joint meeting to be briefed on the report, which cost Delaware \$700,000 as part of the settlement of an education lawsuit. No action will be taken on March 7.

The next steps will be up to policymakers, including the governor and General Assembly, who will have to decide whether and then how to put more into education, which already consumes about one-third of the state’s projected \$6.1 billion budget for fiscal 2025.

Thursday is designed to supply a briefing opportunity for legislators who could not attend the December report unveiling. The joint committee meeting also will provide an opportunity for legislators to ask more questions. No public action has been taken yet in the aftermath of the report release, so it’s likely that the briefing will include questions about how to move forward with potential legislation.

The **Vision Coalition**, a public-private partnership of Delawareans working to improve public education that includes education, community and legislative leaders, will likely play a role in how the state acts on the report. The coalition’s leadership developed the **Vision 2015** plan in 2006. Ten years later, with Delaware adopting more than 75 percent of its recommendations — such as pathways in school — ...

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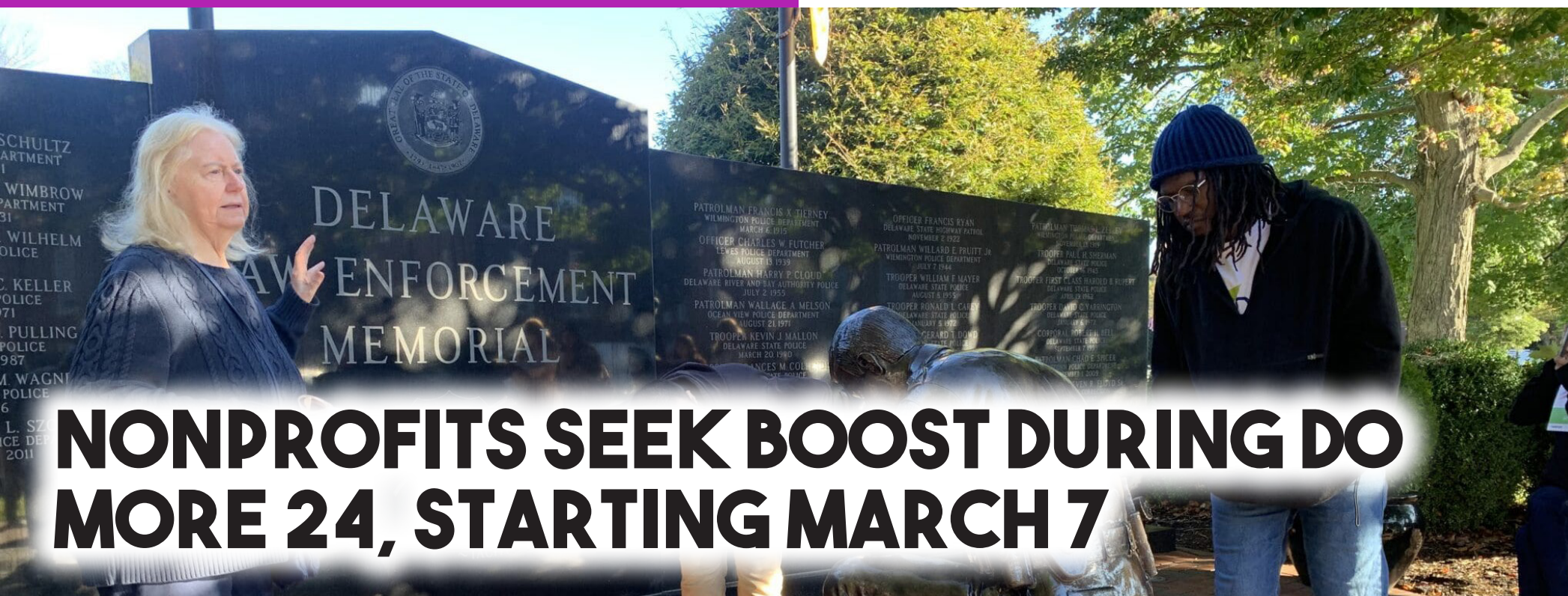


photo link: Delaware Ballet

Culture

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NONPROFITS SEEK BOOST DURING DO MORE 24, STARTING MARCH 7

BY BETSY PRICE

A busload of Dover students last year were treated to a tour of public art as experts talked about the thought processes behind choosing designs to fit those memorials and displays. A Wilmington mom helps 2,000 low-income and homeless children receive name-brand athletic shoes each year so they could better participate in school activities. And the Food Bank of Delaware staff and volunteers next week will assemble hundreds of weekend meal kits to combat children's food insecurity in Kent and Sussex County.

All three of the nonprofits behind those feats will participate in the 24-hour fundraiser, **Do More 24 Delaware**, starting Thursday, March 7. A joint venture by **United Way of Delaware** and **Spur Impact**, the event invites the public to donate a bit more to their favorite Delaware nonprofits — or maybe to find a new cause that interests them among the **500-plus** participating in

this year's event. It runs from 6 p.m. March 7 to 6 p.m. March 8.

Charles Vincent, executive director of Spur Impact, said his organization's interest in working with the United Way for Do More 24 morphed out of smaller, focused events it was doing with nonprofits.

"The idea of putting it all into a single day of giving, sort of like a supercharged Delaware Giving Tuesday, is really to emphasize the depth of nonprofit work here in the state," said Vincent. "It's trying to raise awareness for all the work that nonprofits are doing as a whole."

DO MORE 24'S GENESIS

After the two groups started looking for the right date to hold Do More, they settled on March, he said. It's far enough from Giving Tuesday after Thanksgiving and from the push nonprofits make for year-end support to make it meaningful for both donors and charities, he

said. Delaware has 1,300 active nonprofits, which sounds like a lot for a state of 1 million people. Most other states have a lot more charities per capita, Vincent said.

Nonprofits also are the second largest employment sector in Delaware, behind the state, with an economic impact of \$7 billion, he said. Many people don't realize the breadth of nonprofits, Vincent said. They typically think of them as a 501(c)(3) with a narrow focus, but don't realize that big organizations such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs also are nonprofits.

The public also doesn't realize how much nonprofits do through contracts with the state to provide services such as child care and afterschool programs so people can work, or care for older people or the homebound so they can remain in their homes, he said.

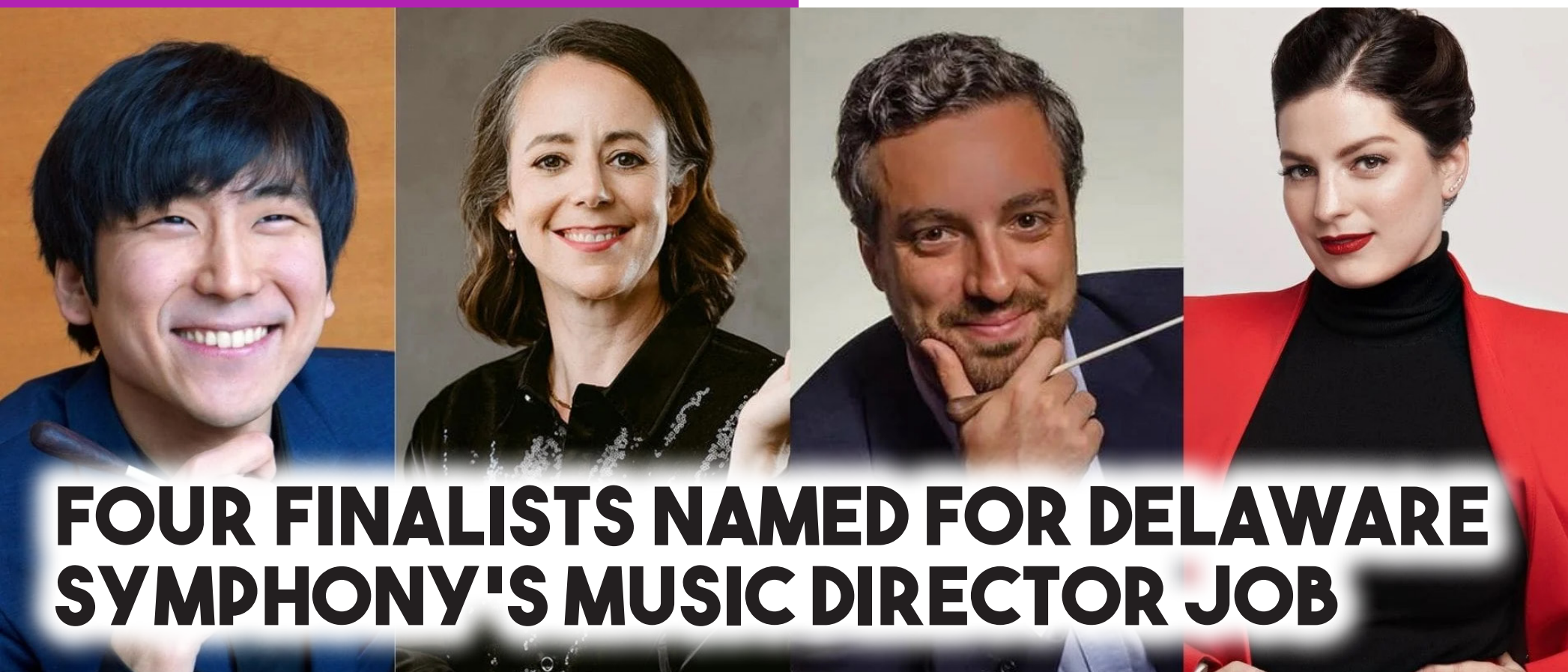
"It's really a symbiotic relationship for a lot of those organizations," he said.

If a group like the Boys and Girls Clubs didn't exist, a lot of child care programs would disappear. "The state can't do everything," Vincent said.

But even with support like that, most nonprofits are under-resourced and understaffed, and Do More 24 helps by letting them take advantage of collective marketing efforts, he said.

Organizers built in some bonuses for the organizations and their donors. More than 25 sponsors have ponied up cash to match gifts and to create incentives and rewards for things like the largest total of gifts in the first hour, or the largest number of single donors to one cause.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



FOUR FINALISTS NAMED FOR DELAWARE SYMPHONY'S MUSIC DIRECTOR JOB

BY BETSY PRICE

The Delaware Symphony Orchestra has invited four finalists to conduct the orchestra next year before it chooses a new music director from them in spring 2025. Up for consideration are Mélisse Brunet, Filippo Ciabatti, Michelle Di Russo and Taichi Fukumura.

The search, which began in July 2023, drew 150 applications from around the world. A 13-member search committee, including community leaders and symphony musicians and board members, spent 20 hours interviewing candidates throughout the fall. After each performance, audience members will be surveyed.

“I was astonished and impressed by the caliber and quantity of applications we received for the music director position,” says Frank Clowes, president of the Delaware Symphony Association. “I’m looking forward to

seeing our finalists join us on stage next season to demonstrate their musical skill and their ability to inspire and connect with our audiences, musicians and community.”

THE FINALISTS

Mélisse Brunet

American conductor Mélisse Brunet, a native of Paris, France, lives in Philadelphia. She is gaining attention on both sides of that Atlantic as a “skilled and polished conductor with panache” (ClevelandClassical.com). She is in her second season as music director of the Lexington Philharmonic in Kentucky, and in her fourth season as the Music Director of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic.

A dynamic advocate of contemporary music, she also is a conductor of opera and music theatre. She’s conducted “Dead Man Walking” by Jake Heggie and Puccini’s “Gianni Schicchi,” Mozart’s “Die Zauberflöte,” Bernstein’s “Trouble in Tahiti,” Menotti’s “The Old Maid and the Thief,” Sondheim’s “Sweeney Todd,” Strauss II’s “Die Fledermaus” and Verdi’s “La Traviata.”

As a Pops conductor, Brunet has been programming pops concerts for Holiday Pops, Independence Day, Halloween, Valentine and other thematic programs, indoors and out for up to 6,000 people. She also conducted orchestras during live movie projections.

Filippo Ciabatti

Praised for his “sensitive and nuanced” musicianship, Filippo Ciabatti is a dynamic and versatile conductor. Amid a robust calendar of guest conducting engagements, in October 2023 he was named assistant conductor of Boston Baroque, the first in the prestigious ensemble’s history.

He is the founding artistic director of Upper Valley Baroque (New Hampshire), a professional orchestral and choral ensemble, which after only two seasons has already received critical acclaim and regularly performs to sold-out houses. Ciabatti also is active on the opera stage. He was recently named music director of the Opera Company of Middlebury (Vermont), where he made his debut with a production of “Fidelio” in June 2023. Ciabatti serves on the faculty of Camerata Bardi Vocal Academy and Opera Viva (Italy).

[READ MORE HERE](#)



photo link: [Bethany Beach Events & Entertainment](#)

Business

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AMTRAK TO INVEST MILLIONS IN CONTROVERSIAL WILMINGTON SITE

BY KARL BAKER

In 2022, a government watchdog said a Wilmington office building Amtrak bought for a lofty \$41 million was structurally unfit for its intended use and that the rail company's goal of saving money by moving hundreds of workers to the site rested on unrealistic assumptions. In spite of the [critique](#) from the Amtrak Office of Inspector General, rail company executives persisted with plans to remake the eight-story Renaissance Centre into a central hub for at least a portion of its dispatch, police and other staff.

Today, Amtrak is on the verge of awarding a contract to retrofit the building for a previously estimated cost to taxpayers of \$37 million.

WHY SHOULD DELAWARE CARE?

Amtrak is a major employer in the Wilmington area, but its own inspector general also criticized its purchase of the Renaissance Centre, which Amtrak is now investing in further. As a federally chartered corporation, state and federal taxpayers fund the company while passengers support its operation with fares.

The renovation will involve construction of four “control centers, a data center and office space,” according to a document announcing the bid, which began last summer. When complete, Amtrak is expected to move 40 dispatchers from outside of Delaware into the Wilmington building, down from the 250 originally planned,

according to the inspector general's report. Amtrak could relocate as many as 35 information technology jobs to the renovated building, down from the initially estimated 400.

In all, it is the latest chapter of a yearslong murky story that has prompted Amtrak executives to fervently defend their real estate purchase to critics questioning their stewardship of public dollars.

This story began during the onset of the COVID pandemic when the real estate brokerage JLL announced that Amtrak had purchased the Renaissance Center from the Wilmington-based real estate investment firm Commonwealth Group. Prior to the purchase, the building's commercial mortgage sat on a creditor's watchlist, weighed down by too many empty offices.

In its announcement, JLL proudly stated that the sale would eventually fill about 4% of vacant office space in the then-struggling downtown Wilmington real estate market. It didn't, however, disclose the sale price for the building located at 405 N. King St.

In response, *The News Journal* filed an open records request to Amtrak for the purchase agreement and related documents. Amtrak responded a year later with the requested records, but redacted every reference to the sale price. Weeks later, rail company officials changed course and revealed that they spent more \$41 million for the building — which was constructed in 2007 with roughly 150,000 square feet of office space and 86,000 square feet of parking. In late 2018, a nearby, 160,000-square-foot office building that had been recently renovated sold for \$12.5 million.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



AGILENT, INCYTE SEEK WAY TO PREDICT EFFECTIVENESS OF DRUGS

BY BETSY PRICE

Agilent Technologies and Incyte have begun working together to create tests that will help a patient understand how good a candidate he or she may be for Incyte's immunotherapy treatments.

Incyte, a biopharmaceutical company headquartered in Delaware, specializes in drugs that treat unusual and rare cancers. **Agilent**, headquartered in Santa Clara, CA, with a campus near Greenville off Lancaster Pike, specializes in "companion diagnostics," which are tests that can be used to check potential patients; cells and see how likely it is that Incyte's drugs will help.

It often comes down to whether or not the patient has a lot or a little of the proteins that Incyte's drugs want to activate. In many cases, the drug needs to essentially lock

onto those proteins to manipulate the body's immune system into attacking the cancer. Therefore, the more protein, the better for the patient. The fewer proteins there are on the surface of a molecule, the less likely it is the treatment will work for that specific patient.

Agilent's tests often require a biopsy — or taking a tiny piece — of a patient's tumor so its cells can be checked for things like the production of proteins.

Companion diagnostics are a hot topic in the biopharmaceutical business and are predicted to expand to nearly \$14 billion in U.S. sales by 2030, partly because these tests help doctors target treatment decisions for a growing range of cancers and some chronic diseases. Ultimately, said Paul Beresford, vice president and gen-

eral manager of Agilent's Companion Diagnostics Division, the point of companion diagnostics is to help both pharmaceutical companies and doctors "select the right patient for the right drug at the right time."

AGILENT AND KEYTRUDA

Former President Jimmy Carter credits the immunotherapy drug **Keytruda** with destroying the brain tumors he was diagnosed with in 2015. That raised the profile of immunotherapy. Agilent worked with Keytruda maker Merck on companion diagnostics for that drug, focusing on a patient's antibodies.

"It was one of the biggest companion diagnostics ever brought to market," Beresford said.

Agilent's and Incyte's scientists will work together and separately on those diagnostics for drugs under development.

"So when their drug comes to market, the diagnostic comes to market and then we go commercialize a drug and diagnostic together," Beresford said.

Neither company revealed the financials of the deal. It will allow Agilent to expand its companion diagnostics portfolio with novel biomarkers and Incyte to leverage Agilent's expertise in the test development, global regulatory approvals and commercialization to support clinical trials as well as the potential registration and commercialization of the diagnostics in the United States and Europe. Ultimately, Beresford said in a press release, the companies hope to speed up the development of precision medicine products, and help improve patient outcomes in the precision oncology sector.

"I'm a big believer in immunotherapies," said Beresford, who has a PhD in immunology.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



DECARBONIZATION, HYDROGEN COMPANY EXPANDS IN KENT COUNTY

BY BETSY PRICE

An international company has chosen a site in Kent County to base its operations to support global decarbonization and the hydrogen economy. FFI Ionix will move from its 15,000-square-foot site in Harrington to 60 Starlifter Ave. in Dover. More than 22,000 square feet of the new facility's \$57,000 square feet will be lab space.

The site will be the first Central Delaware location to benefit from the state's Graduated Lab Space Grant funding, which was established in 2021 to help companies find and outfit the laboratory space they need. It's part of the state's move to attract and keep high-tech and biotech companies interested in Delaware. FFI Ionix will receive up to \$1.6 million for lab space; a Jobs Performance Grant of up to \$70,400; and a Jobs Retention Grant of up to \$42,500 from the Delaware Strategic Fund.

A press release from the Delaware Prosperity Project did not specify how many Delaware employees the company has or plans to increase. It did say the move and expansion has the potential for new professional and semi-skilled positions, including engineers, lab technicians, chemists, quality control personnel and production and warehouse associates.

"This is very exciting for Dover and the greater Dover community," said Dover Mayor Robin R. Christiansen. "Developing here reassures more jobs and more opportunities for our younger generations, in an industry with the potential to grow, all while decreasing our carbon footprint."

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photo credit: Delaware State Police

Government

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NEW BILL WOULD GIVE FLAG TO SERVICE MEMBER'S NEXT OF KIN

legislation, but paying respects to the deceased service member and his or her family is the right thing to do.” Wilson said in a press release that this bill is long overdue.

The next of kin, defined in the legislation as an “individual who is a surviving spouse, partner, parent, or individual legally entitled to the remains of the deceased person”, would be able to choose which flag is draped over the casket.

“I don’t spend taxpayers’ dollars without good reason,” Wilson said. “Volunteer fire services alone save Delawareans millions annually, and the selfless service of those who volunteer make this small gesture of gratitude more than justified.”

SB 221 will first be heard in the Senate Elections and Government Affairs Committee. The bill will be sponsored in the house by Rep. Bryan Shupe, R-Milford South. Shupe is the chief executive officer of Delaware LIVE LLC.



BY JAREK RUTZ

A new bill headed to the General Assembly would immediately provide next of kin of Delaware National Guard, fire or police department members with an American or state flag.

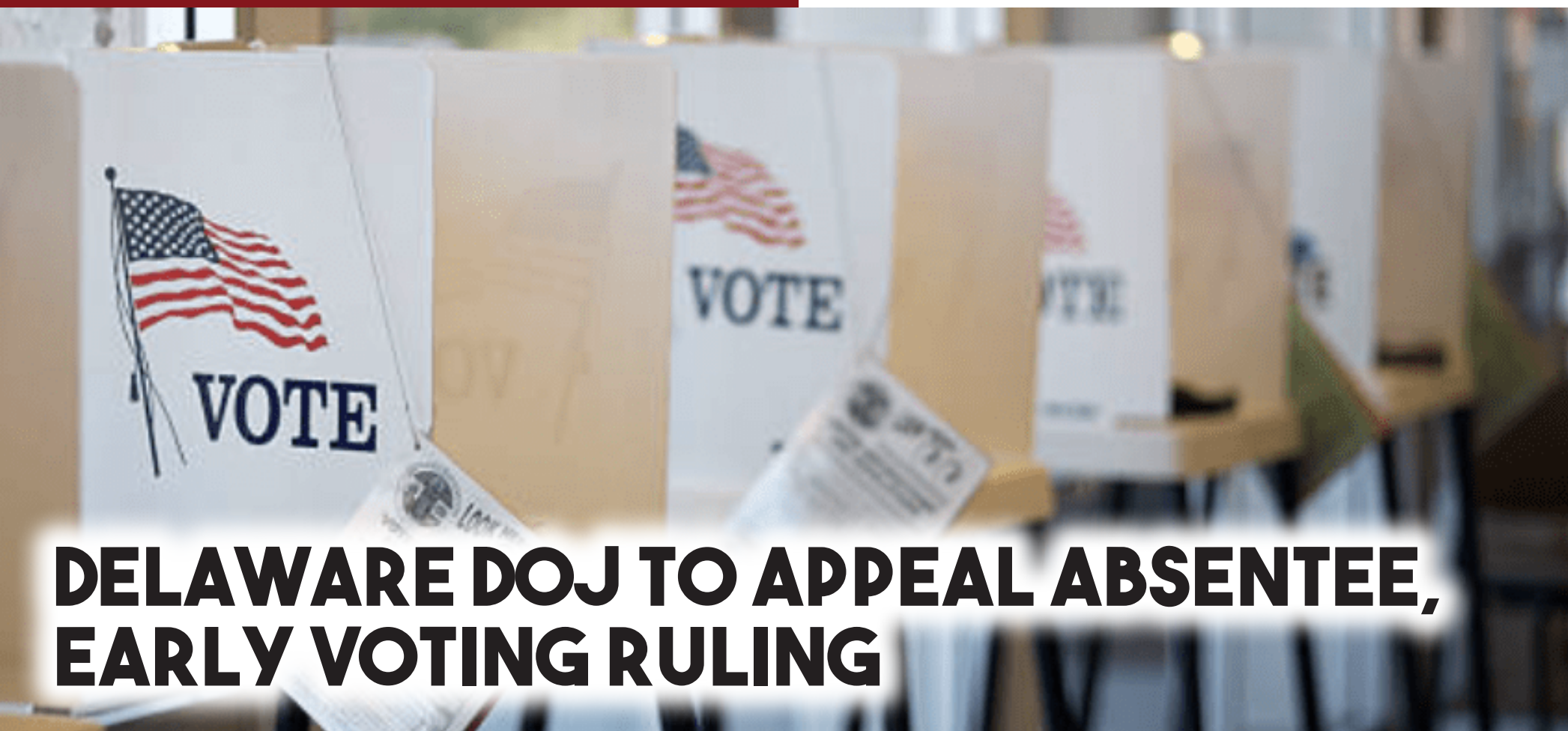
Senate Bill 221 would give the flag to the first immediate living family member or partner of a service individual who dies after serving in the Delaware National Guard, a police department and/or a fire department for at least 10 years. The flag could be draped over the member’s casket at a funeral service or displayed at a memorial one, as is typically done for deceased military veterans.

“Those who risk their lives to protect our communities deserve to be honored,” said Sen. Dave Wilson, R-Lincoln, who is sponsoring the bill in the state Senate. “To some, this may not seem like an important piece of

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DELAWARE DOJ TO APPEAL ABSENTEE, EARLY VOTING RULING

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Department of Justice announced Tuesday it will move to appeal a Superior Court judge's ruling on absentee and early voting. Judge Mark Conner ruled last week in favor of former state attorney general Jane Brady's suit that laws passed by the General Assembly — over objections that they were not constitutional — were indeed “inconsistent with our Constitution and therefore cannot stand.”

His ruling both denied the state's motion to dismiss a partisan challenge to Delaware's early voting law and issued a judgment striking down early voting and the state's 14-year-old permanent absentee voter law. The permanent absentee statute passed the General Assem-

bly unanimously, including with the support of then-Rep. Gerald Hocker, the plaintiff in the Superior Court case.

Attorney General Kathy Jennings, in addition to appeal of Superior Court ruling, vows support for constitutional amendment. A statement from the Department of Justice pointed out that there were 21,000 permanent absentee voters — overwhelmingly the sick, disabled and military servicemembers — are set to lose permanent absentee status, and 56,000 Delawareans voted early in 2022's general election.

Conner's ruling only applies to general elections. The ruling does not impact the April 2 presidential primary.

“We respectfully but fundamentally disagree with this ruling and will appeal,” Jennings said. “No idea that requires silence to survive has any place in a democracy. But that is precisely the fight we're having: in statehouses and courthouses alike, extremists are trying to empower losing ideas by eroding the right to vote itself.”

Jennings had a press conference Tuesday, in which she emphasized three messages:

“First, we respectfully but fundamentally disagree with this ruling. After our own legal analysis and speaking with Commissioner Anthony Albence, I have directed the Department of Justice to take all necessary steps to appeal the Superior Court's ruling. We will file our appeal quickly and intend to request a decision from the Delaware Supreme Court so that voters have final clarity in time for the September primaries.

“Second, it is critical for the state to have one policy on elections. There is an unambiguous solution to this problem, which is for the General Assembly to address voting rights through a constitutional amendment in the next three months and to confirm it next year. I urge Democrats and Republicans alike to start by voting for Senate Bill 3, sponsored by Sen. Darius Brown.

“Third, to voters: here's what you need to know. This ruling does not affect the upcoming presidential primary on April 2. Ballots will go out to permanent absentee voters soon and early voting locations will be open.”





LEGHALL PARKING DECK DESIGNERS RECOMMEND STREET CROSSING

BY BETSY PRICE

Architects designing the proposed parking deck at Delaware Legislative Hall Wednesday recommended using a raised street crossing rather than tunnel or pedestrian bridge for legislators to cross the street there. A raised street crossing would be more economical than the tunnel, which is budgeted at \$2 million, but could cost \$3.7 million, or a skywalk, which could cost \$3 million and would be hard to blend into state capital’s Colonial architecture, said Philip Conte with **StudioJAED** during Monday’s meeting of the **Legislative Building Committee**.

The tunnel is not budgeted as part of the \$22 million deck, but as part of any LegHall expansion that may take place. It — or a skywalk above Martin Luther King Boulevard — would only be open to legislators and staff members so they could park and enter leave the build-

ing without having to encounter any members of the public. Jesse Chadderdon, chief of staff of the Delaware State Senate Majority Caucus, said the street crossing offers “a lot of exposure.”

“Would the recommendations be to take care of any security concerns with live police or security personnel, or are we not at that part of the conversation yet,” he asked.

Conte said he would agree that someone using the raised table top intersection would be more exposed. He said that ground testing is still underway and that designs now have room for a security office of some kind. Designers are about to embark on a round of meetings with Dover, state and legislative stakeholders.

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- URSULINE ACADEMY

photo link: Sussex Central High School



Education

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HODGSON'S MAISS HUSSEIN REPEATS AS DELAWARE POETRY OUT LOUD CHAMP

That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –
I've heard it in the chilliest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet – never – in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of me.

Hussein beat out the 11 other state finalists, a couple who were also finalists last year. Her round one poem was “Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear” by Mosab Abu Toha, and her round two poem was “If They Should Come for Us” by Fatimah Asghar.

The finalists were named after round two. They included Hussein, as well as Joelle Caternor from Smyrna High School, Olivia Stevens from Mount Sophia Academy, Grace Sullivan from MOT Charter High School and Jono McGarvey from Delaware Valley Classical School.

With her win, Hussein is headed to the national finals in Washington, DC, April 30 to May 3, to represent Delaware and compete for \$50,000 in awards and school stipends.

Contestants were judged on their physical presence, eye contact and body language, pace, rhythm, punctuation, dramatic appropriateness, articulation and evidence of understanding. The contestants had advanced through school competitions, choosing works from an anthology of more than 1,200 poems.

The night began with 12 poets:

- Jono McGarvey, Delaware Valley Classical School
- Grace Sullivan, MOT Charter High School
- Olivia Stevens, Mount Sophia Academy
- Maiss Hussein, Paul M. Hodgson Vocational Technical High School
- Hunter Brown, Red Lion Christian Academy
- Abigail Ehemann, Saint Mark's High School
- Perrin Brown, Sanford School
- Joelle Caternor, Smyrna High School
- Harrison Dabbs, Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences
- Nife Anawo, Sussex Central High School
- Caliana Velasquez, Sussex Technical High School
- Jamie Feldman, Wilmington Friends School



BY JAREK RUTZ

Maiss Hussein, a senior at Paul M. Hodgson Vocational Technical High School, is once again Delaware's Poetry Out Loud winner. She went back-to-back, winning this year's competition at the Smyrna Opera House Thursday night with her rendition of “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers” by Emily Dickinson. The poem reads:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –
And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –



VOTE

Yes

No

BY JAREK RUTZ

Colonial School District’s capital and operating referendum has passed, a day after Red Clay’s referendum also passed. With the successful referendum passes, there will be a phased approach to a local tax increase, with a spike of 25 cents per \$100 of assessed property value in fiscal year 2025, 10 cents in fiscal year 2026 and five cents in fiscal year 2027.

The average annual increase to a Colonial taxpayer will be about \$250 a year. Among the districts in New Castle County, Colonial has the lowest tax rate.

The operating component of the referendum passed with 2,228 ‘yes’ votes (63.0%) and 1,307 ‘no’ votes. The capital component of the referendum also passed, with 2,201 ‘yes’ (61.6%) votes and 1,372 ‘no’ votes.

A large part of the capital ask is for upgrading very outdated school buildings — which are 60 years old on average — and athletic facilities which have been in poor condition for years.

COLONIAL REFERENDUM PASSES ONE DAY AFTER RED CLAY'S SUCCESS

Statement from Superintendent Jeff Menzer

“WE did it!

Thank you to all who voted to support our operating and capital referendum. WE are truly grateful for your support of the work that we do and commitment to the importance of investing in education. Our students deserve it.

This outcome means our aging campuses will see some much needed improvements and we can continue

providing innovative, engaging programming for our students. WE can support and retain our dedicated and talented staff. When our schools thrive, our communities thrive.

Our tomorrows look brighter than ever, thanks to your vote!”



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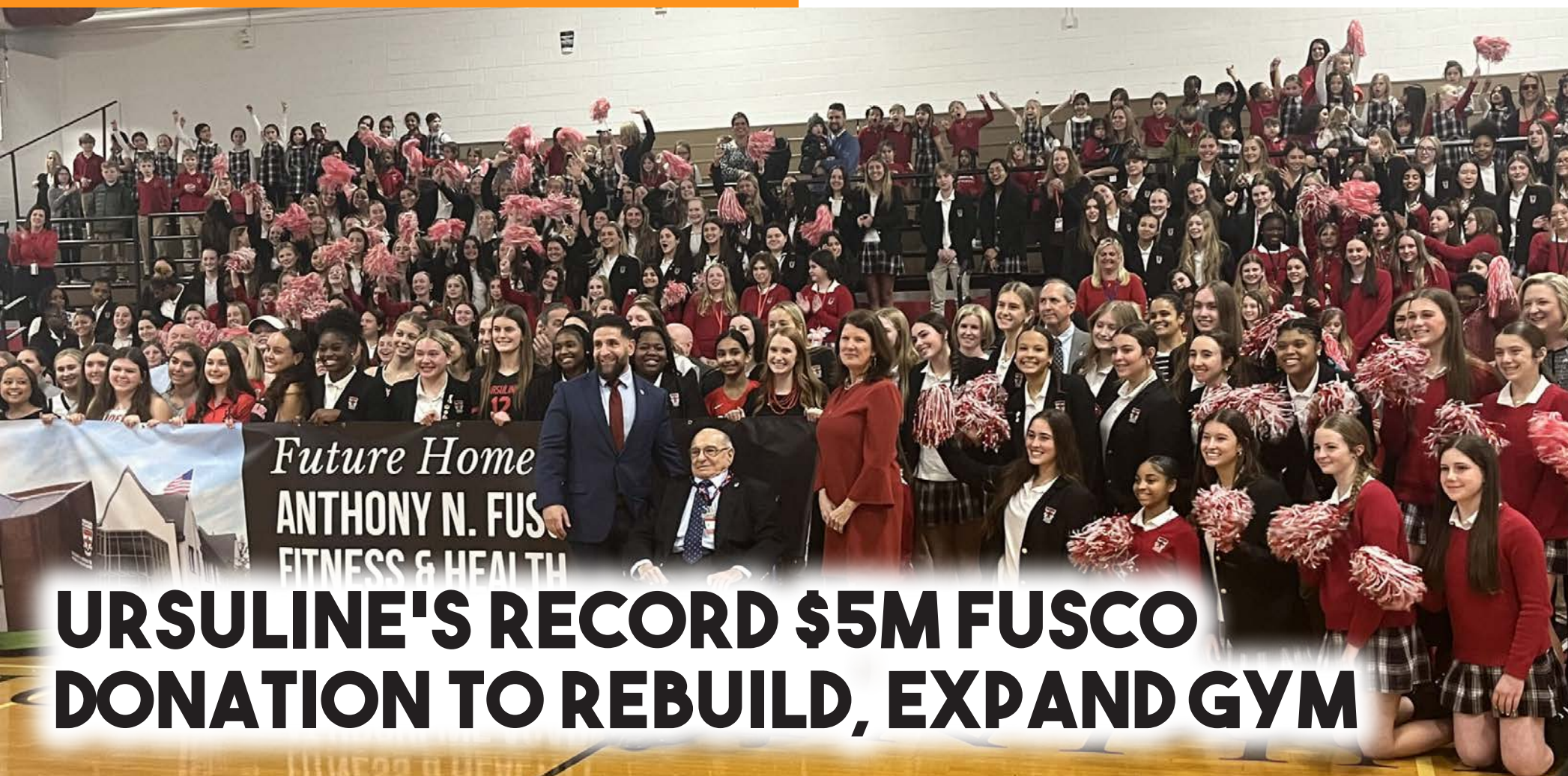
Elevate Education: Support Delaware Referendums



- **Empower Teachers:** Our educators deserve the best tools and support to nurture the next generation of leaders.
- **Invest in Students:** Every child deserves high-quality education regardless of background or zip code.
- **Foster Innovation:** By investing in education, we're investing in innovation, creativity, and a brighter future for Delaware.

Vote YES for high-quality teaching and learning conditions in Delaware!





URSULINE'S RECORD \$5M FUSCO DONATION TO REBUILD, EXPAND GYM

BY JAREK RUTZ

A downtown Wilmington Catholic girls school has received the largest donation in its 130-year history and students rocked its gymnasium in delight Thursday.

Anthony N. Fusco Sr., a Delaware philanthropist and real estate developer, has made a \$5 million commitment to [Ursuline Academy](#). The donation will pay for the total renovation of Laffey McHugh Gymnasium, originally constructed in 1980; create an expanded fitness center for students and faculty; improve accessibility for those with disabilities; install new locker rooms and athletic offices; and add tech that will support student academic and athletic experiences.


To honor the gift, Ursuline will name its new facility the Anthony N. Fusco Sr. Fitness & Health Center.

“These funds will support the long legacy of Ursuline’s superior athletic programs by transforming spaces focused on health and wellness so that our students can continue to grow, learn and thrive,” said Trisha Medeiros, Ursuline’s president.

Anthony Pullella, Ursuline’s director of operations, said Fusco’s generosity has not only propelled Ursuline Academy’s facilities and programs forward by decades but has also left an indelible mark on the athletic landscape.



School Choice is Open!



The families of 18,455 students made the charter school choice for the 23/24 School Year! Next year's choice window is open through Jan 10, 2024.

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“This transformative gift will elevate our athletic facilities to unprecedented heights, matching the caliber of our exceptional student-athletes,” he said. “The Anthony N. Fusco Sr. Fitness & Health Center is a testament to his rare gem of philanthropy, enriching the Ursuline community and the greater Wilmington area.”

Fusco also had donated millions for athletic facilities at Salesianum School and Delaware Military Academy.

His connection with Ursuline spans back to when his granddaughter, Picara Vassalo, Class of 1997, attended and he has donated to Ursuline before.

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VOTE



Yes

No

BY JAREK RUTZ

The referendum for the Red Clay Consolidated School District, the largest school district in Delaware, has passed. The district’s residents have voted for both the operating and capital component of the referendum that will increase their taxes \$404 on average over three years. It would include \$242 more in fiscal year 2025, \$81 more in fiscal year 2026 and \$81 more in fiscal year 2026.

For the operating component, 6,954 voted ‘yes’ (70.6%) and 2,893 voted ‘no.’ For the capital component, 7,060 voted ‘yes’ (71.4%) and 2,826 voted ‘no.’

Operating referendums are for funding that will help the district maintain its day-to-day operations, whether it be transportation expenses, supporting extracurricular programs, updating technology, giving teachers raises, hiring constables or more.

An operating referendum is noncontingent on the state. A capital referendum typically is tied directly to

RED CLAY REFERENDUM PASSES WITH LARGE SUPPORT

state funding. School districts annual submit a certificate of necessity to the state appealing for money for capital projects, including building maintenance. If the state approves the request, it will provide some funding for the projects.

Statement from Superintendent Dorrell Green

“We are excited to announce that the operating and capital referendum has been successfully passed today, which marks a historic victory for our students and the Red Clay community.

The passage of the operating and capital referendum is incredibly meaningful for our students as it ensures they have access to the resources, facilities, and opportunities needed to succeed.

For the Red Clay Consolidated School District community, this achievement represents a collective commitment to investing in our children’s future and building a stronger, more vibrant community. Let’s celebrate this historic moment and continue working together to empower our students and strengthen our community!

We are deeply grateful to everyone who supported the referendum and contributed to this success.”



Celebrating National School Choice Week

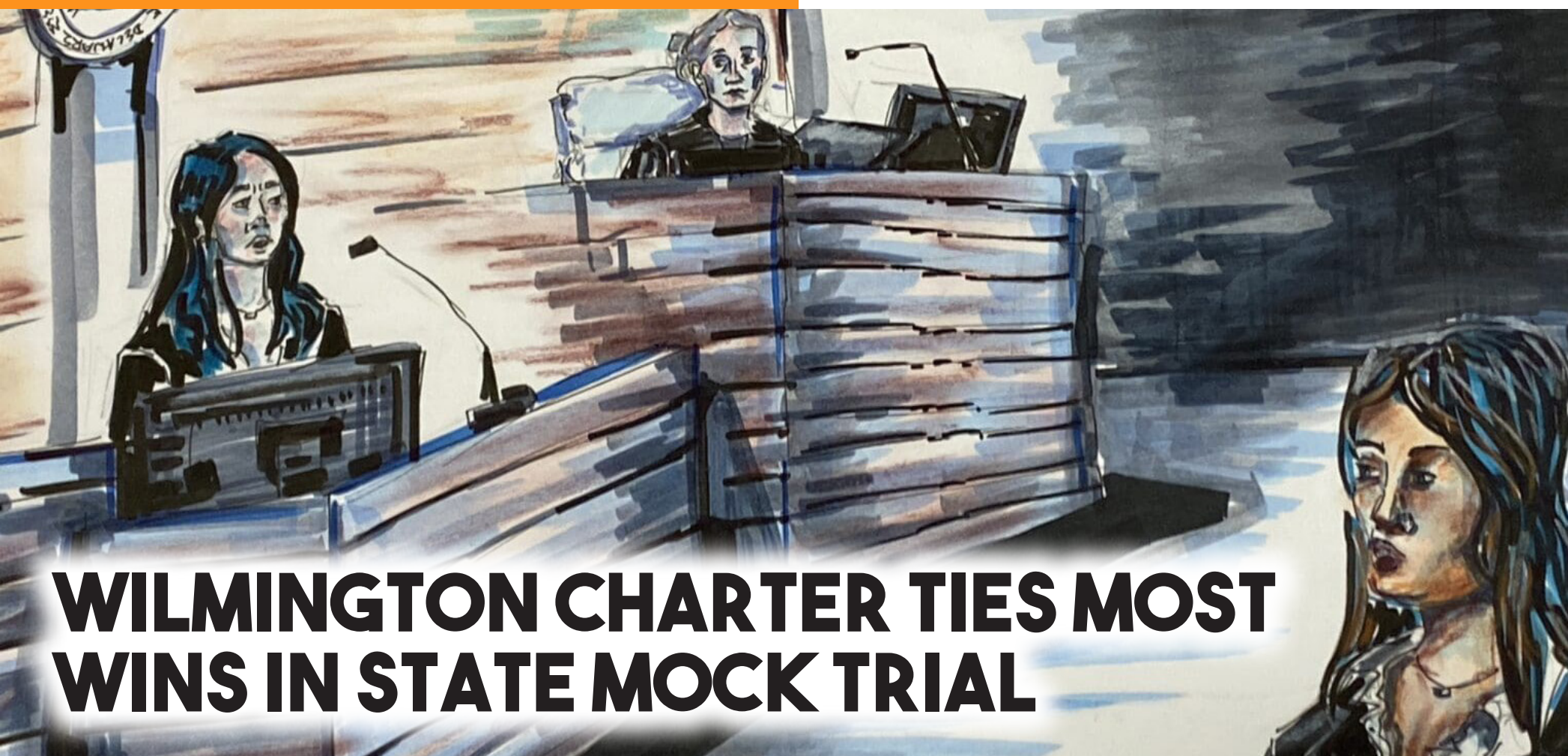
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WILMINGTON CHARTER TIES MOST WINS IN STATE MOCK TRIAL

BY JAREK RUTZ

After the state's young prospective lawyers battled it out in the courtrooms for five rounds of competition over two days, the [Charter School of Wilmington](#) has gone back-to-back, winning the 2024 Delaware High School Mock Trial.

With March Madness creeping up, the mock trial is structured like a tournament bracket, with round-robin style knock-out rounds. This year, Wilmington Charter beat [Newark Charter School](#) in the final round, marking Newark Charter's first time ever making it to the championship round.

Teams earn points for a variety of factors such as witness believability, trial composure, time management,

knowledge of the case and courtroom procedures and more. Each round takes place in a different courtroom in the [Leonard L. Williams Justice Center](#) in Wilmington.

With its win, Wilmington Charter is now tied with [St. Mark's School](#) for the most wins in the Delaware competition's 33-year history, as both now have 11 titles. The competition typically includes about 200 students, 50 coaches, and 115 Delaware bench and bar members, who serve as presiding judges or scoring judges throughout the two days.

Judges, who have decades of experience in law, give the students feedback on what they did well and how to

improve their performance in the courtroom.

This year's competition wrapped up Saturday and included 22 teams from across the state. One change this year was that novice teams were paired with one another in the first round.

"The whole point of the competition is to foster learning through firsthand experience," said Betsy Renzo, executive director of Delaware Law-Related Education Center, the organizer of the state's mock trial competition.

Renzo said the change helps the center's goal of giving more students access to feel the empowerment of demanding a courtroom's attention and the confidence to pursue a career in the law.

Each year, the two finalist teams are assigned either a criminal or civil case, which alternates back and forth each year. This year was a criminal case involving the death of an alleged loan shark, who was shot and pushed off the top of a parking garage during a meeting with a client who owed him money.

Witness accounts of the crime, however, were contradictory and teams took turns arguing each side of the case during the competition. For example, if in the first round, students argued the side of the prosecution, they then had to argue the side of the defense during the second round.

Final verdicts are not rendered in each round — there was no finding of guilt or innocence. Instead, each team was judged based on their presentation of the case and knowledge of the law.

Students presented opening statements, closing arguments and questioned other students who played witnesses or experts in the case.

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photo credit: Eric Donato

Sports

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ST. ELIZABETH HOLDS OFF MOUNT TO ADVANCE

BY NICK HALLIDAY

The No. 1 seeded St. Elizabeth Vikings hosted the No. 17 Mount Pleasant Green Knights Thursday in the second round of the Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association (DIAA) boys basketball state championship.

The two teams didn't play each other during the regular season, but the two teams are very familiar. It set up the return of the Lawrence twins Jayden and Justin, who played for the Vikings the last three seasons. They transferred to Mount over the summer to play their senior season for the Green Knights. That added a lot of hype to this game which was evident by the game and the fans who sold out the St. E's Center.

From opening tip to the final buzzer the game was action packed with fans on their feet the whole game. This game did not seem like a game between a No. 1 and a No. 17 seed, but I think that the story within the game helped. The game was primarily led by St. Elizabeth the whole game, but the Green Knights were always within striking range.

The Vikings led by one point after the first quarter, and six points after the second and third. The game was never out of reach which is what made this game so intense since each bucket mattered.

In the fourth quarter, Mount stepped up its defensive intensity and brought the game to within one score. However, the fire power of the Vikings prevailed. With about two minutes left in the game after a big turnover and layup for Mount which brought the game to within three points the Vikings went to their leader Aiden Tobiason.

The Vikings ran a play to get Tobiason open with a clean look at a three-pointer which he drained to push the lead to six. St. E's went on to defeat the Green Knights 47-41. Tobiason led all scorers with 20 points, while Julius Wright added 15 for the Vikings.

Mount was led offensively by Cyril Stewart with 13 points and Jayden Lawrence who scored 10.

The Vikings advance to the quarterfinals as they host the Howard Wildcats Saturday night at 7 p.m.

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DOVER ADVANCES BEHIND DOMINANT THIRD QUARTER

BY GLENN FRAZER

The Dover Senators found themselves in a tight game at home Thursday night in the DIAA second round of the boys' basketball state tournament. Lake Forest responded to a Dover 8-0 run to start the night, tying the second seeded Senators at 20-20 at the end of quarter number one. The 15th seeded Spartans had the lead at 31-29 with less than a minute to go in the first half, but Dover regained the lead when Dorell Little converted the "and-one" at 32-31. That's how the first half ended.

Dover head coach Stephen Wilson made adjustments in the locker room that paid off in the decisive third quarter. "I told the team, we are winning. No panic, we're winning. We figured out who they were trying to get the ball to and we made adjustments." The Senators certainly tightened up on leading scorer Darius Miller, denying him the ball in the paint. Miller was held scoreless in the third quarter. In fact, Dover took control of the game by out-pointing Lake 25-3 to take a lead of 57-34 into the final quarter.

As a team, the Senators made five long-range shots in that third frame. Perkins had two, Jay'Vion Dennis also made two, while Noah Allen provided the fifth make beyond the arc. Dover rode that momentum into the

fourth quarter, increasing the lead to 28 points at 67-39 as Coach Wilson removed the remaining starters from the game with three minutes left.

The Spartans finished the season with an overall record of 16-6. Jackson Starkey paced Lake with 14 points, while Seth Young added 11. Miller was limited to nine points following his 26-point performance against Laurel on Tuesday.

Dover's balanced offense was led by Little with 15, Perkins added 14, Tarrance Williams contributed 11, and Jay'Vion Dennis scored 10 points. The Senators improved to 20-2 and will host the 10th seed St. Georges Tech Saturday with tip scheduled for 2 p.m. The Hawks eliminated Seaford 67-61 to advance to the quarterfinal matchup with Dover.

The other games Saturday will feature St. Mark's at Middletown at 1 p.m., Sanford at Salesianum at 3 p.m. and Howard at St Elizabeth at 7 p.m.





DIAA STATE WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS BRACKET BREAKDOWN

BY BENNY MITCHELL

106 POUNDS

This may be the most wide open bracket in the tournament. Top seed Austin Gueirrieri (Cape Henlopen) is the favorite with wins over all top seeds, but he will see eighth grader Dominic Spennato (Red Lion) who he had the narrowest margin of victory over this year, a 3-2 decision back in January. The top bracket is loaded with Cole Perrin (Delaware Military) at the four seed and Ben Donato (Caesar Rodney) the fifth seed.

2023 state finalist Clif Bakhsh (St. Mark's) is the number two seed and has a quarterfinal looming with the bracket's lone senior Louis Zitofsky (St. Georges). A pair of returning state placers fill out the rest of the bottom bracket with third seed Mason Catania (Salesianum)

facing a rematch with sixth seed Austen Decker (Sussex Central). Decker pinned Catania a few weeks ago.

Bracket Landmine: Louis Zitofsky (St. Georges) has had an injury-riddled career. He may be healthy and ready to make a run.

Sleepers: Ben Donato (Caesar Rodney) seeded fifth has come on late in the season.

113 POUNDS

Freshman Dominic Lucian (Salesianum) moves up from winning a state title at 106 last year and has spent a large portion of this season at 120 pounds. A semifinal looms with Tommy Arms (Conrad), the two have not met this season.

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BY JASON WINCHELL

Delaware Military Academy's boys basketball team averaged nearly 61 points per game this season, but at halftime of the 13th-seeded Seahawks' opening-round DIAA tournament game against No. 20 Smyrna on Feb. 27, they had just 13 points and trailed the Eagles by seven.

But in front of a spirited and emotional crowd inside the dome, DMA mounted a fourth quarter comeback and moved on to the second round with a 49-48 victory. The last time the Seahawks reached the tournament was 2021, the COVID-shortened season, when just two spectators per player were allowed in the building. That certainly was not the case on Tuesday.

DMA RALLYS FOR COMEBACK WIN TO ADVANCE

Early on, however, DMA could not find the range at all, trailing, 20-10, until Amir Massey hit a three-point-er with 13 seconds remaining in the half.

Smyrna, however, scored the first two buckets of the second half, the first on an alley oop to Obi Coleman, the second on a steal and stuff for Coleman. They held a double-digit lead with 5:20 to go in the third after a three by Logan Shaw, but DMA's Antonio Allin answered immediately with an NBA-range triple.

DMA got it to 30-28 late in the third, but the Eagles responded with the next four points. Allin hit again from distance with about 30 seconds left in the third, cutting the Eagles' advantage to 34-31. Smyrna, hurt by turnovers in the final minutes of the third, could not add to the lead.

Lennon got free underneath to open the fourth with a layup, and a defensive rebound led to yet another Allin triple to put the home team on top, 36-34, sending the student section into a frenzy. The Eagles needed a little more than three minutes for their first points of the fourth, but they were big ones. Marice Kilgoe drained a corner three to put them back on top by a point, and the teams were off to the races.

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MOUNT PLEASANT WINS OPENING ROUND THRILLER IN OT

BY GLENN FRAZER

The Mount Pleasant Green Knights hang their hat on defense to keep them in close, low-scoring games. Eight times this season they have been involved in games decided by five points or less. In the opening round of the DIAA boys basketball tournament Tuesday night, the ‘Knights were again involved in a close-defensive ball game with Odessa. Neither team led by more than four points as there were a multitude of lead changes in the final quarter. Odessa held a 20-17 advantage at the half, but Mount outscored the Ducks 24-21 in the second half to send the two into overtime.

In the extra frame, the ‘Knights patiently held the ball to run clock, eventually winning at the foul line as Jayden Lawrence scored six of his team’s seven points in “OT” for a dramatic 48-45 victory. Lawrence was named our First State Ortho player of the game with 30 points including 8-for-10 at the line.

Mount Pleasant has a “knack” for holding their opponents below their scoring average. Odessa came into the tournament averaging 62 points per game. We asked Coach Brian Hines about his approach to the game. “We practiced nothing but defense the last two days. Defense has kept us in every game we’ve played and when you look at our season, we hold teams below their average.”

The Green Knights’ defensive effort was on full display in the third quarter as they held the Ducks scoreless for the first seven minutes. The exciting fourth quarter featured several lead changes as both teams came up with “clutch” shots. With 1:09 to go, Jordan Earl calmly drained a corner “three” to put the Ducks up 40-39. Following an Odessa free throw by Henry Nysagare, Jaden Lawrence was fouled with 18 seconds left and he made both shots to send the game into overtime. The Knights then leaned on the ball-handling ability of junior Cyril Stewart to “shorten” the game, as they edged Odessa 7-to-4 to get the win and advance to the second round. Thursday night the Green Knights will face top seed St. Elizabeth. It will be a return for the Lawrence twins to their former school as Justin and Jayden played for the Vikings before transferring to Mount Pleasant.

Odessa finished an historic season by qualifying for the school’s first tournament under first-year coach Andre Wilburn. Jordan Earl led the Ducks with 14 points, Nysagare added 13 and Jaylen Bernikow finished with eight points.



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