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WATERSHEDS WORTH MILLIONS



LOCAL ARTIST GILBERTO RODRIGUEZ



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HEADLINES



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STATE FAIR OPENED THURSDAY WITH HONOR-SYSTEM COVID MASKING

BY CHARLES MEGGINSON

It's that time of the year: The Delaware State Fair returned to the Harrington Fairgrounds Thursday, bringing eclectic foods, rides, music, and more.

This year's event, dubbed 'Your Passport to Summer Fun,' will run until Saturday, July 31.

The ten-day event has been hosted annually at its current location for 102 years. Only four times was the fair canceled—between 1942 and 1945—due to World War II.

In order to maintain that record, state fair officials resisted efforts to cancel last year's event in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The show went on, albeit as a shell of its pre-pandemic self.

Concerts were canceled, mask and social distancing mandates were implemented, and attendance was so low that organizers declined to release attendance statistics.

Two years ago, however, the fair saw an all-time record attendance of more than 328,000 fairgoers.

This year, fair organizers promise to bring Delawareans an event that is "bigger and better than ever."

According to the fair's website, everyone is "on the honor system" with regard to COVID-19 safety regulations.

Fairgoers who are fully vaccinated are not required to wear masks at the fairgrounds, and unvaccinated individuals are "strongly encouraged" to socially distance and mask up.

The original concert schedule, which featured big names like Sam Hunt, TobyMac and Hank Williams Jr.,

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had to be scrapped due to uncertainty surrounding COVID restrictions. Some hallmark events remain, including the demolition derby. The updated lineup can be found here.

General admission tickets for the fair cost \$9.50 for individuals 13 years and older. Tickets for children between the ages of 6 and 12 years old are \$4.50 and children under 5 years old are free. Carnival wristbands and concert tickets are sold separately. Parking is free, but VIP parking can be purchased for \$20 per day.

Fairgoers can save 50 cents on their tickets by purchasing them online in advance.

Temperatures are expected to average 90°F the week of July 25, so it will be important to bring lots of water and sunscreen.

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CULTURE



PHOTO BY MARCIA REED

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BY BETSY PRICE

Delaware's Mispillion River and Cedar Creek watersheds—two of Delaware's last biggest undeveloped tracts of undisturbed land—are worth millions in terms of leisure, recreation and wildlife viewing alone, a Pew Charitable Trusts study says.

But they are also under pressure from coastal development and increasingly strong storms, the study says, and should be protected.

The report did not estimate the overall economic impact that the area's natural resources generate, but said Pew used "ecosystem service valuation that estimates the intrinsic and nonmarket value people place on nature."

Those things are not always measured in typical eco-

MISPILLION, CEDAR CREEK WATERSHEDS WORTH MILLIONS FOR NATURE ALONE, STUDY SAYS

nomic indicators such as spending or revenue, but should be, the study by Joseph Gordon and Caitlin Lang said.

The watersheds are directly or indirectly responsible for 1,251 jobs in the region, across 83 businesses dominated by restaurants, bars, hotels, campgrounds, a zoo and an aquarium, but also include other marine- and coast-dependent industries, such as shipping and warehousing.

It cited examples among tourism.

The Delaware Nature Society's recreation- and tourist-centered [Abbott's Mill Nature Center](#)—which offers hiking, wildlife viewing, and family-centered activities—is valued at between \$313,000 and \$6.3 million. Leisure activities at [Mispillion Riverwalk Greenway](#) have values of \$465,000 to \$1.19 million. These ranges are so wide because recreational activities may have vastly different ecosystem service benefits associated with them.

The Marvel Saltmarsh Preserve Boardwalk, popular for shorebird viewing, was valued at \$428,000, but the study said that's likely low because it was measured during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also said the Mispillion Harbor Reserve, DuPont Nature Center and Slaughter Beach, which support wildlife, shorebird and horseshoe crab viewing, and bay beach recreation would top \$1 million combined.

The study estimated values of \$574,000 to \$1.15 million from day trips and overnight stays for shorebird viewing, and \$458,000 for Slaughter Beach recreational activities.

In addition, it said, Slaughter Beach's and Milford's salt marshes and wetlands provide storm protection valued at between \$7,800 and \$125,200 per extreme weather event, according to an examination of flood insurance records.

Dan Bond, part of a group that wants to buy the Vinyard Shipyard, which sits on the Mispillion River in Milford, and continue its historic and education mission, says a report like this will be invaluable while the group tries to raise money to take the site public.

Ideally, he said, Vinyard would become part of Milford's parks, but the city has been reluctant to take on such a large project.

Owners Joan and Sudler Lofland are willing to sell for about \$2 million, but plan to return some of that as an endowment, Bond said.

Already, \$800,000 was set aside in this year's Community Redevelopment Funds, which are projects picked by legislators for their areas, to be given to Downtown Milford Inc., an umbrella organization for the Vinyard Shipyard Task Force, for the acquisition and renovation of the shipyard.

See **WATERSHEDS** on page 6

WATERSHEDS from page 5

Bond said Rep. Charlie Postles, R-Milford, and Rep. David Wilson, R-Lincoln, helped secure those funds.

The Vinyard is specifically named in the Pew study as one of the sites that benefit from the interest in natural resources and so contribute to the watersheds’ value.

The Pew study says a broad coalition is working to establish a nature-based investment strategy to increase economic opportunity while simultaneously conserving coastal habitats and boosting the communities’ resilience to sea level rise.

The study was released Wednesday by the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Maryland. It was funded by the Waterways Infrastructure and Investment Network, which focuses on the Mispillion and Cedar Creek areas, and is an offshoot of the Delaware Resilient and Sustainable Communities League, a consortium of 22 organizations helping Delaware communities improve how they respond to changing environmental conditions.

“This project helps communicate the benefits nature provides to the economies and people living in and visiting the communities profiled,” EFC wrote. “The values help support broader statewide planning to implement, invest in, and enhance nature-based solutions and ecotourism opportunities in the city of Milford and town of Slaughter Beach, their respective counties of Kent and Sussex, and potentially other Bayshore towns.”

Other entities involved with the work included the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, the Delaware Nature Society, Dela-

See WATERSHEDS on page 7

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WATERSHEDS from page 6

ware Sea Grant, Kent County, Milford, the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, Slaughter Beach, Sussex County and the finance center.

Pew plans to continue the study, focusing next on land-use decisions.

The study said that at 60 feet, Delaware has the lowest mean elevation of any U.S. state, so areas within it experience a rate of sea level rise twice the international average, according to Delaware Sea Grant.

Researchers plan to identify community assets and natural resources at risk of flooding, sea level rise and changes in land use. This phase will be funded largely by a competitive grant recently awarded to the coalition by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's National Coastal Resilience Fund.

Researchers said they wouldn't attempt to establish the precise value that a healthy coastline provides to the area but noted, "The monetary value of storm protection by marshes and barrier beaches is increasingly urgent to quantify. Notably, the increasing intensity of storms will make this protective value essential in planning future land use."

Healthy salt marsh beds and wetlands generally reduce the cost of damage that communities sustain from weather events by about 10%, the study said.




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BY CHARLES MEGGINSON

One Delaware student appears to have a jump on a career as a lobbyist, as evidenced by his successful efforts to make the Delaware State Fair more friendly to fairgoers with disabilities.

Jarrett Butler, a student at the John S. Charlton School in Camden, gathered local elected officials and fair management to discuss ways the event could be more accessible to individuals who face challenges with mobility.

State Fair general manager Bill DiMondi, Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, and Butler initially met in 2019 at the John S. Carlton School, which is designed for students in Kent County with special needs, according to a press release issued Friday by the House Republican Caucus.

“Out of that discussion were two concerns that Jarrett Butler raised,” DiMondi said. “One had to do with the need for the fair to have some form of specialized ADA

STUDENT ACTIVIST CONVINCES STATE FAIR TO BUILD MORE ACCESSIBLE BATHROOM

shuttle transportation. And the second was the need for appropriately sized ADA-compliant family restrooms—neither of which the fair had at that time.”

The project would be a difficult and expensive one, but Butler persisted.

Further meetings took place between Butler, Yearick, Sen. Dave Wilson, R-Cedar Creek Hundred, and state fair officials to refine what was needed, how much it would cost and how the funding could be secured.

“Jarrett was very specific with his requests,” Yearick said. “Like any good lobbyist, or someone taking an active role in something they believe in, he had a plan, he had ideas, he had suggestions, and he was very, very thoughtful in what he was recommending. And I need to stress that he undertook this not to help himself, but to help other people that he saw were in need. Jarrett is an excellent example that one person can make a positive difference.”

Yearick credited majority leader Valerie Longhurst, D-Delaware City, for her support in securing state funding for the improvements.

In an email sent to the chairs of the Bond Bill Committee, Longhurst said the \$110,000 appropriation would be an investment that would result in more access to the Delaware State Fair and increased visitation by persons

with disabilities.

The new ADA family restroom and shuttle were dedicated at an event Thursday.

Butler said his goal was to help people with developmental and physical disabilities enjoy the state fair as much as he does.

“The fair is very important to me,” Butler said. “Every time I come down here, it’s like my second home.”

The restroom facility, located just north of the Kent Building, includes a plaque honoring Butler for “his tireless advocacy supporting fair patrons with physical disabilities and reduced mobility.”

Butler was presented with a duplicate.

The new amenities were to have been officially dedicated last year, but the occasion was delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

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HOUSE PAINTER BY DAY, ARTIST BY NIGHT—ELLENDALE ARTIST CAN'T PUT DOWN BRUSH

BY DANIEL LARLHAM JR.

The first person to ask Gilberto Rodriguez for one of his art works was his kindergarten teacher, right after she scolded him for drawing in class.

Rodriguez, who lives in Ellendale and has an exhibit at the Mispillion Art League, has been creating since he was in a Mexican elementary school, doing more drawing than studying.

One day, his kindergarten teacher caught him sketching and asked him to stay after class.

“She goes, ‘Lemme see again?’ and then she goes, ‘This is story class, not art class. Stop doing that in class,’” Rodriguez remembers. “I said okay, and then she said, ‘Can I have it? Very good.’”

The sketch was of his teacher. She also asked him to sign it.

As he aged, he turned to painting and now an exhibit of Rodriguez’s work runs until Aug. 7 at the art league in Milford. It features portraits, landscapes, and painted mannequins.

The artist moved from Veracruz, Mexico, to California in 1995. There, he worked for his sister’s movie rental business, but he didn’t like California. Then a cousin invited him to come to Delaware.

“I said, ‘What is Delaware?’ In Mexico we have a tall drink called Delaware Punch. That’s all I knew,” he said.

See RODRIGUEZ on page 10


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RODRIGUEZ from page 9

Rodriguez decided to move because of the First State’s proximity to New York. When he arrived, he worked a landscaping job.

At the time he didn’t know any English, which made working with people who knew only English difficult. He said coworkers were kind, helpful and taught him some English. Eventually he decided to take English courses at DelTech, biking from his house to the Georgetown campus three times a week for two years.

Today Rodriguez speaks English well, but his heritage shines through in an accent and sentence construction.

He rarely stops painting. He even considers it somewhat of an addiction.

During the day, he works as a house painter. Nearly every day when he gets home from work, he goes to his small studio and paints his own works.

“You can see me painting around 3 o’ clock in the morning. That’s all I got,” Rodriguez said. “Almost every day. I can’t stop.”

While Rodriguez is inspired by his surroundings, his identity as a Mexican American and Delawarean shine through.

His Mispillion Art League exhibit features two painted mannequins. One mannequin represents Delaware, with depictions of common Delaware wildlife covering the body. The other represents Mexico, featuring cultural symbols and artistic stylings from different locations all over Mexico.

“I want to show the people that we’re not here just to work. Just like me. I’m not here just to work. I’m here to show the people, everybody, what I’m doing,” Rodriguez

See RODRIGUEZ on page 11





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said. “There’s a lot of people doing a lot of stuff and we don’t see them, or they’re the afraid to show us.”

Rodriguez recalled feeling nervous the first time he entered the Mispillion Art League because he was the only Latino person there. He’s now been a member for five years.

“I like that he does everything,” said Winifred Way, a Dover artist who specializes in watercolors. “I also like that he’s not doing typical Delaware art. He’s doing what he was raised around. I think he’s a true artist.”

The way Rodriguez speaks of painting reveals a deep love for it. He reads about art and artists and collects original works from artists that he loves.

Rodriguez says that he feels most connected to Vincent van Gogh but also very much loves the work of Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and the Wyeth family.

His house is filled with paintings, mostly his own. There are so many that he gives paintings away to friends.

“I’ve been painting for too many years. I’m not the best. I don’t wanna be the best,” he said. “I don’t really care. I’m just doing what I like.”

Rodriguez hopes to one day see his favorite work of art in a museum.

That piece was created on a large floor covering he had used at work to protect floors from paint droplets. The canvas was covered in paint, then circles were painted on it to represent his daughters’ love for old records. Finally, the likeness of Frida Kahlo was painted in the center.

This piece was draped on Rodriguez’s home as a decoration for his daughter’s 15th birthday celebration.

An image of it does not do it justice.

While Rodriguez’s paintings vary in style, form and subject, one thing remains the same: three dots on each painting, representing his three children.

Most recently Rodriguez has taken on a large mural project in Seaford, 100 feet by 40 feet, which he says will take him months to finish. He has done other murals around the area, including one on the outside of the Arenas in Milford and another inside the Georgetown library.

His advice for budding artists is simple: “The thing is don’t stop doing it, just keep doing it.”



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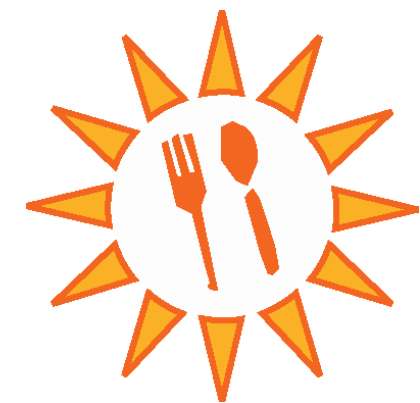
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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



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\$80 MILLION CLEAN WATER ACT SETS UP TRUST TO DIRECT CASH INTO PROJECTS

BY CHARLES MEGGINSON

A bipartisan bill aimed at addressing wastewater and drinking water issues in Delaware's underserved communities was signed into law by Gov. John Carney Thursday after six years in the making.

House Bill 200, the Clean Water for Delaware Act, creates a framework and funding source which lawmakers say will improve the quality of Delaware's water supply and waterways.

The fund includes \$50 million in state funds allocated by the bond bill with an additional \$30 million coming from federal grants.

The \$50 million originally outlined in Carney's FY 2022 budget includes \$22.5 million for safe drinking water, \$22.5 million for water pollution control and \$5 million for resource conservation and development.

The bill was initially introduced in 2019 but was scrapped out of fear that its hefty price tag would present too big a burden on the state budget in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four-page bill addresses water concerns of all kinds, from aging water infrastructure to coastal flooding.

Tasked with implementing the legislation's wide-ranging imperatives will be a new seven-member committee composed of the secretaries of the Departments of Natural Resources and Environmental Control; Health and Social Services; Finance; Agriculture and Transportation; as well as the two co-chairs of the General Assembly's bond bill committee.

The trust is designed so that it does not run out of funds or require new legislation to replenish its war chest. The money in the Clean Water Trust account will be a revolving fund, replenished year after year by interest from project loans.

The committee will be required to publish an annual report detailing how funds are used for wastewater, storm water and drinking water infrastructure, beach preservation, and waterway management.

Lawmakers say the Clean Water Trust will:

- Improve flood resiliency and drainage in our most flood-prone communities
- Repair failing sewer pipes and septic systems
- Improve drinking water quality and expanding access to safe drinking water
- Remove decades-old pollution from our waterways
- Increase conservation funding for Delaware's agriculture community
- Issue low-interest loans and grants for low-income and underserved communities

Co-sponsor Sen. Ernie Lopez, R-Lewes, said HB 200 will "protect the rich natural heritage of Delaware for future generations of Delawareans."

Lopez emphasized the importance of bipartisanship in drafting the legislation. "When it comes to feeding

See **CLEAN WATER** on page 15

people, clothing people, housing people and getting them clean water—those are not partisan issues. Those are our issues. Those are Delaware issues,” Lopez said.

House majority leader Rep. Valerie Longhurst, D-Delaware City, called access to clean water “a right, not a privilege.” She was the bill’s prime house sponsor.

“Today we are saying that Delaware cares about our water,” Longhurst said. “We’ve got \$80 million to clean our water – from New Castle with their development to Kent with their agriculture, to down here in Sussex with the beaches.”

DNREC secretary Shawn Garvin said that his agency has been working on identifying areas most in need of clean water investments since 2018.

The newly formed clean water committee will create a list of priorities for the trust ranked in order of importance. The list will be based on recommendations from the legislature, experts in the affected cabinet agencies, the Water Infrastructure Advisory Council, and county and municipal governments. Members of the public will be able to make their own recommendations by connecting with their state legislators.

Carney said that the main issue preventing significant clean water investments throughout the past 30 years has been a lack of available funds.

“We are incredibly fortunate to have two things this year,” he said. One is House Bill 200 and the other is the millions included in the bond bill in a year with an unexpected \$1 billion surplus.

The Delaware Nature Society was one of the bill’s biggest advocates. The organization created an advocacy

group called Clean Water Delaware, which shepherded the legislation from infancy to its signing Thursday.

“Water is an essential part of all living things on this planet, however in Delaware 90% of our waterways are polluted from legacy toxins and excess nutrients, while 40% of Delawareans report that they experience flooding at some point each year,” the Nature Society says on its website.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, federal funding for water infrastructure projects has declined by 75 percent since 1977. Officials estimate Delaware has a \$700 million backlog of necessary clean water investments.



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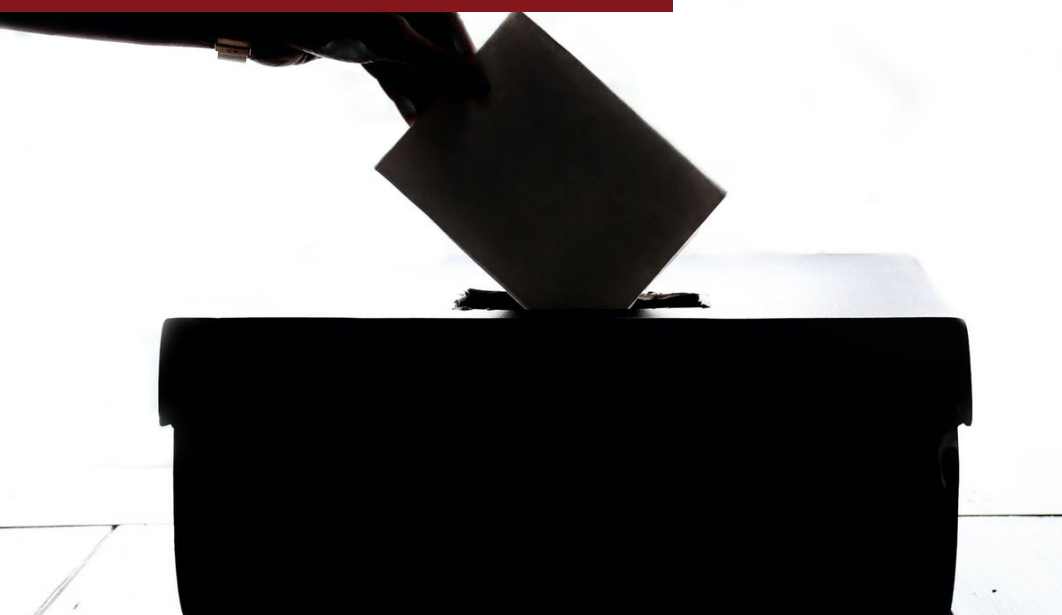
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To learn more, volunteer, or to donate to support DBCC’s work in our communities visit: debreastcancer.org



BY BETSY PRICE

It's alive! It's alive!

The bill that would allow absentee ballots to be used for any reason will not die, but will be able to come back before the Delaware House of Representatives in 2022, thanks to some little used political machinations.

Because House Bill 75 would alter the state's Constitution, it must be passed in two separate sessions of the General Assembly. It passed easily in 2019 in the 150th session. But when it came up for a vote last week—now in the 151st session—it failed.

House Republicans voted it down, even though the bill had bipartisan support in 2019. Several Republicans said that removing the ballots from the Constitution would mean that absentee ballot rules could be changed by a simple majority vote in the legislature. That could mean the ruling party could make changes that would favor its party in elections, they said.

ABSENTEE BALLOT BILL SAVED SO IT CAN BE VOTED ON AGAIN IN 2022

When the bill did not pass, House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, switched her vote from yes to no. Then she asked Speaker of the House Peter Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, to end the session with three Republican bills left on the agenda.

Longhurst's switch put her on the prevailing side of the vote—the nos—and gave her the right to ask for the bill to come back up instead of letting it die.

On Thursday, Longhurst did that.

When Schwartzkopf allowed the bill to come back, Longhurst tabled it.

That will allow it to be heard again during this session, which continues in 2022, which is still the 151st session of the Delaware General Assembly because its sessions are spread over two years.

“By restoring it, rescinding the vote and tabling it, it resets the bill and stops the clock,” said Joseph Fulgham, communications officer of the Delaware House of Representatives Republican Caucus. “It will be eligible to be worked through the 2022 legislative.”

The three Republican bills that were not heard on last week's agenda have not shown up on a House agenda this week.

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DELAWARE TECH



BY TERRY ROGERS

Milford City Council approved a request from Walter and Sharon Feindt to annex vacant property on South Rehoboth Boulevard and to change the zoning from AR1 to C1 residential. The property is currently under contract for purchase by the developers who are constructing the Winward on the River residential community and the Deep Branch Plaza retail facility.

“The Annexation Committee approved the annexation but were opposed to changing the zoning to C1 by a vote of two to one,” Rob Pierce, City Planner, said. “The Planning Commission voted to approve the annexation as well as the zoning change with a vote of four to zero.”

Cliff Mumford, Civil Engineer with Davis, Bowen & Friedel, explained that the request for C1 fit with the 2018 Comprehensive Plan for the area and provided details on what could be placed in a parcel with C1 zoning. Permitted uses included studio workshops, beauty and barber shops, retail, restaurants, but not fast food, convenience stores, banks and business offices.

COUNCIL APPROVES ANNEXATION AND ZONING CHANGE REQUEST

“Many of these uses are already approved for the adjacent Deep Branch Plaza,” Mumford said. “The proposed site will allow ingress and egress from Rehoboth Boulevard and there will be sidewalks. Other properties nearby that are zoned C1 include Liquor Stop, Mispillion Realty and a bait and tackle shop. The residents of South Milford will benefit from this zoning as it would offer additional shopping options. It would also reduce congestion on Northwest Front Street and would be convenient to the residents who will be living in the Windward complex as they could walk to retail locations.”

Councilman Michael Boyle asked if there was a plan for the parcel at the present time, expressing concern that the code allowed for a convenience store. Mumford stated that, at the present time, there was not a concept plan and that the main reason for the zoning was to eliminate the need for an easement from the Feindt’s for the entrance to the retail location.

“Initially, the plan was to just issue an easement on the property to the Feindt’s,” Mumford said. “They filed an extension for Deep Branch Plaza because they realized it may be better to just purchase the property, have it annexed and zoned commercial in order to create a better

See ANNEXATION on page 18

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entrance.” Pierce also explained that the annexation and zoning change would provide additional land for an entrance as well as expansion of the retail area.

After the motion to change the zoning and to annex the land, the measure passed with a vote of four to three.

“I think this is out of character with the residential nature of the community,” Councilman Dan Marabello said. “It is a one lane road, and I don’t think it can sustain the traffic.” Councilman Boyle agreed, stating that the zoning was “wide open,” voting no because he did not feel he had enough information on what could go on the parcel. Councilman Brian Baer also voted no, stating that he was concerned about residential property owners in the area.

Councilman Andy Fulton voted yes for the zoning change and the annexation.

“The residents moving into that area need the convenience other areas of the city have,” Councilman Fulton said. “People over here need the same amenities offered throughout the city.”

Councilman Todd Culotta agreed with Councilman Fulton.

“I have always thought Rehoboth Boulevard was a commercial access to the city,” Councilman Culotta said. “It has some residential built close to it, however, I think we need to promote the commercial use as well.”

Councilman Jason James also voted yes, stating that Rehoboth Boulevard is primarily commercial until the very southern portion of the road. He felt that the annexation and zoning would become part of an existing development that already had similar zoning and that it

would help the access into the developments.

“Our strategic plan means something,” Councilwoman Katrina Wilson said. “When we approve certain areas, we always need to think about that plan and that area is definitely commercial. I agree with Councilman Fulton. We need to evenly disperse our commercial and residential sections and make it, so it is not one-sided. With all the growth in that area, they are going to need and they are going to appreciate those stores.”





“

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KENNY ELECTED TO BOARD OF REGIONAL SCHOOL ACCREDITATION GROUP



BY CHARLES MEGGINSON

Delaware LIVE's owner has been elected to serve on the board of one of the nation's largest higher-education accreditation organizations.

Chris L. Kenny, who also owns A Better Delaware, will serve for three years as a public member on the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's board of commissioners.

Middle States is a non-governmental organization tasked with issuing accreditation to colleges and universities in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I am extremely honored to accept a commissioner position on the Middle States Commission on Higher Education," Kenny said. "I look forward to being a part of this historic institution and their mission to assure students and the public of the educational quality of higher education and to ensure institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement and innovation through peer review and the rigorous application of standards."

Kenny is a lawyer and the CEO of Delaware Supermarkets Inc., which owns and operates six ShopRite supermarkets in Delaware. The company, which has been in business for over 25 years, generates \$300 million in annual revenue and employs over 1,000 associates.

Kenny also is a Board Leadership Fellow with the National Association of Corporate Directors; president of the St. Thomas More Society of the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington; founder and inaugural chair of the Delaware Society, an affinity club with the Union League of Philadelphia; and a former member of the Goodwill of Delaware & Delaware County Board of Directors, and the Valley Forge Military Academy Board of Trustees.

He attended three schools accredited by Middle States: Valley Forge Military Academy, the University of Delaware and Delaware Law School at Widener University.

Kenny called his election to the board of commissioners an opportunity to "give back to an organization that has

facilitated my continued education over the years."

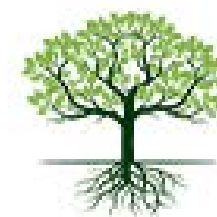
In a press release issued by Middle States, the organization said, "As current and former board member for over a dozen non-profits, Kenny offers unique insights into business, entrepreneurship, the food industry, Delaware issues and the state's community."

Also joining the Board of Commissioners are New York accountant John P. Schiavone of Lumsden & McCormick, and George J. Sullivan, who is the head of enterprise services at Qualtrics in Washington, D.C.

Their term will begin Jan. 1, 2022, and end on Dec. 31, 2024.

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NEW DAILY COVID-19 CASES MORE THAN DOUBLE IN THE LAST FOUR WEEKS

BY BETSY PRICE

Thanks to the Delta variant, the number of new COVID-19 cases each day in Delaware has more than doubled in the last month.

On June 25, the state Division of Public Health said the average daily number of new cases had dropped to 20.6 cases a day.

On Friday, July 23, Public Health said the average of new daily cases has increased to 49.9 as of Thursday.

The state now has seen 110,638 cases of COVID-19 reported among Delaware residents since March 11, 2020.

The average for the percentage of total tests also is rising, up to 2.5% this week, an increase from 1.8% as of last week and from 1.1% on June 25.

The rises come after Gov. John Carney let his COVID-19 emergency order lapse on July 13. He asked those who are not vaccinated to wear masks.

Public Health also said Friday that 36 people are hospitalized due to COVID-19, down one from last

week and up from the 23 hospitalized a month ago. Four of the hospitalized are in critical condition.

One new death was reported in the last week. That person was not fully vaccinated, the state said.

There is continuing good news on the vaccination front: 71.6% of those eligible for vaccines have received at least one shot, meaning 54.4% of the total population has had at least one dose of vaccine.

The Delaware Division of Public Health will be administering the Pfizer vaccine (for persons 12+) and the J&J vaccine (18+) at the Delaware State Fair. They will be in the Delaware Building, across from the M&T Grandstands from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. through Saturday, July 31.

For a list of places to get vaccines, go to www.de.gov/getmyvaccine.

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DELAWARE WILL SPEND \$100 MILLION OPIOID WINDFALL ON TREATMENT, PREVENTION

BY CHARLES MEGGINSON

Most of the \$100 million Delaware is getting in an opioid lawsuit settlement will be spent on treatment and prevention of drug abuse.

Attorney General Kathleen Jennings talked Thursday in a press conference about how the state will deal with its share of a \$26 billion settlement with Johnson & Johnson, Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen, who were accused of creating and accelerating the opioid crisis.

Delaware will get \$20 million of that settlement in the first year, with the rest coming over 17 years.

“Claims against other defendants—including Purdue Pharma, Endo Pharmaceuticals, and Walgreens—remain ongoing,” a press release said.

Jennings and other state attorneys general had refused an earlier settlement offer, which would have been \$4

billion less than the final agreement.

“No amount of money can make whole the families who have paid the true costs of the opioid epidemic,” Jennings said. “Delawareans from Selbyville and Seaford to Middletown and Claymont have suffered enormously, all because the world’s largest drug dealers were insatiable in their pursuit of profit.”

Senate Bill 166, passed last month by the General Assembly, would establish the Prescription Opioid Settlement Fund and Prescription Opioid Settlement Distribution Commission to “receive opioid settlement money and ensure that settlement dollars are spent repairing the harm done by the opioid crisis.”

Jennings said the question now is not whether or not “big pharma” will pay its debts to our communities, but how the state will handle the significant settlements

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OPIOID from page 23

Delaware has already received and will continue to receive.

“This legislation answers that question by setting up the guardrails Delawareans need and deserve and ensuring that these funds go exactly where they are intended to go: into the fight against addiction,” Jennings said.

The AG’s press release said money from settlements will be placed in a fund that could only be used to remediate the past harm caused by opioids, reduce the present and future harm caused by opioids, and must be in keeping with the specific terms of individual settlements.

Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen collectively will pay up to \$21 billion over 17 years. Johnson & Johnson will pay up to \$5 billion over nine years with up to \$3.7 billion paid during the first three years.

Each state’s share of the funding has been determined by agreement among the states.

The agreement with the drug companies also requires significant industry changes designed to help prevent this type of crisis from happening again. The agreement will result in court orders requiring Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen to:

- Establish a centralized independent clearinghouse to provide all three distributors and state regulators with aggregated data and analytics about where drugs are going and how often, eliminating blind spots in the current systems used by distributors.
- Use data-driven systems to detect suspicious opioid orders from customer pharmacies.

- Terminate customer pharmacies’ ability to receive shipments, and report those companies to state regulators, when they show certain signs of diversion.
- Prohibit shipping of and report suspicious opioid orders.
- Prohibit sales staff from influencing decisions related to identifying suspicious opioid orders.
- Require senior corporate officials to engage in regular oversight of anti-diversion efforts.

The 10-year agreement will also result in court orders requiring Johnson & Johnson to:

- Stop selling opioids.
- Not fund or provide grants to third parties for promoting opioids.
- Not lobby on activities related to opioids.
- Share clinical trial data under the Yale University Open Data Access Project.

Last year, nationwide opioid overdose deaths rose to a record 93,000, a nearly 30 percent increase over the prior year. In recent years, Delaware has experienced the second-worst rate of overdose deaths in America, after West Virginia.

From 2006 to 2012 alone, opioid manufacturers, distributors and pharmacies shipped 276 million prescription opioids—more than 100,000 a day, with the potency of 5.5 tons of morphine into Delaware.

In that period, more than 2 million prescription pills were shipped into Selbyville, a community which is home to only about 2,000 residents.



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POLICE & FIRE



MILFORD

MPD TO HIRE FULL-TIME BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

BY TERRY ROGERS

Milford City Council voted to approve the hiring of a full-time Behavioral Health Specialist for the Milford Police Department. The full-time position was a request from Chief Kenneth Brown who has been using a part-time specialist to assist the department for the past year.

“We need to expand this from a part-time person to a full-time person,” Chief Brown said. “We also need to add additional staff. This program has helped immensely but they are not there enough. Bringing in one full-time and hiring a few part-time to fill in additional hours will make a huge difference.”

Chief Brown explained that the new full-time person would not only work with behavioral issues that officers encounter but would also act as a victim’s advocate and

would be trained in grant writing to try to obtain grants for additional funding for the unit.

“I believe after long talks with Lou [Vitola, Chief Financial Officer], this could be covered completely over the next two years using ARPA funding,” Chief Brown said. “We want to hire this person at \$85,000 per year with full benefits and are asking for \$50,000 in additional funding for part-time staff for the Behavioral Health Unit.”

Councilman Andy Fulton asked what the full cost would be with salary and benefits. Vitola stated that benefits increase the cost of employees by about 50 percent.

“Does this have to be full time?” Councilman Fulton asked. “When you figure benefits in, this is a \$130,000 position. If we could do part-time, you could hire more

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people and have them work 30 hours per week, allowing you to have more coverage.”

Chief Brown explained that there were issues with using part-time staff for the Behavioral Health Unit.

“Finding someone who is qualified for this position is pretty tough,” Chief Brown said. “Second, when they work part-time, they often have another job so the time they can come in is very limited. We also would not be able to use them as a victim advocate or to write grants.”

Councilman Jason James stated that he had a scenario that would put this in perspective.

“A few weeks ago, we were returning home from vacation in Ocean City, and I saw all kinds of police lights in Bicentennial Park,” Councilman James said. “I walked over there and saw maybe four or five police officers addressing a man with mental health issues. They called the crisis unit, and they were told the counselor was on the way. In the meantime, while they waited, these resources were tied up dealing with this gentleman. After some time, they called again and were informed that the counselor was coming from New Castle. After this was over, as a council person, not a regular citizen, I asked them how this would have gone had there been a Behavioral Health Unit on staff. They told me this would have been resolved much more quickly as the counselor would have arrived, gotten the man where he needed to be with no need for stops at a hospital or a half dozen officers tied up at a scene for hours. This handles mental health issues much more efficiently.”

Councilman James also agreed that there is more of a push for mental health specialists in police agencies today and that he expects there to be more funding available over the next few years as more departments begin seeing benefits to these units. With the person hired also writing grants, Councilman James felt that there could funding available that would fund the entire unit outside of the city budget.

“I think we have talked about this before, making this a priority,” Councilman Todd Culotta said. “Having this resource available really takes the workload off the individual police officer and we are short-staffed as it is. There are considerations for long-term funding. This makes complete sense.”

The motion passed with a vote of six to zero as Councilman Doug Morrow was not present at the meeting.



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BY CHARLES MEGGINSON

Delaware has become the eighth state in the country to mandate the statewide use of body cameras by police officers.

Gov. John Carney was joined by members of the House Black Caucus, the state Police Chiefs Association and the Fraternal Order of Police when he signed House Bill 195 Wednesday.

HB 195 requires police officers and some employees of the Department of Correction and Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families to wear cameras and record their interactions with the public.

The bill requires state agencies to implement the state body-worn camera program through the procurement of cameras, development of a data storage program, and provision of necessary personnel as funding is available, according to the bill's Senate sponsor, Sen. Darius Brown, D-Wilmington.

BILL TO MANDATE POLICE BODY CAMERAS SIGNED INTO LAW

Rules for the use of body cameras will be established by the Council on Police Training.

The bill garnered unanimous support in both the House and Senate when it was passed in June, largely because the legislation had the backing of Delaware's prominent police groups, including the Police Chiefs Council and the Fraternal Order of Police.

Carney's budget, which the legislature authorized in June, allocates \$5.2 million to be spent on the statewide implementation of body cameras.

The bulk of the expense goes to data storage and review capabilities.

Patrick Ogden, who is the chief of the University of Delaware Police Department and heads up the Delaware Police Chiefs Council said in a statement at the time of the bill's passage that all of Delaware's police chiefs are committed to implementing the policy.

"They are an invaluable evidentiary tool in prosecuting criminal cases, as well as resolving internal affairs investigations and improving police performance, when utilized for supervisory review and training purposes," Ogden said.

Before signing the bill, Carney said that this bill will help create a trusting relationship between police officers and the communities they serve—particularly communities of color.

"I know this will make a difference," Carney said. "Most importantly, in improving that level of trust, for all of

us to be safe and for law enforcement to be successful."

House sponsor Rep. Sherry Dorsey Walker, D-Wilmington, thanked law enforcement personnel for supporting the bill, noting that in addition to forging trust between law enforcement and communities of color, body cameras would protect police officers from false allegations.

"I don't want officers having stories told about them that aren't true," Dorsey Walker said.

Sen. Brown said that this bill was the hallmark of the House Black Caucus's "Justice for All" agenda which was introduced last June in light of the George Floyd shooting in Minneapolis.

Brown lauded the law enforcement officers who are "willing to run toward danger" while "many of us run away from it."

Nate McQueen, the state's secretary of the Department of Safety and Homeland Security, said his agency would "work with all of our partners to fully implement the statewide body-worn camera program and ensure safety and security in all of Delaware's communities."

Attorney General Kathy Jennings called Delaware a "national leader in transparency in our country."

She also thanked Delaware's nearly 50 police chiefs, all of whom she says support the policy.

Laura Giles, chief of the Elsmere Police Department, said that her department would not have been able to

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POLICE from page 29

implement body-worn cameras without this bill and the state funds that come along with it.

“This is something that law enforcement has wanted for many years,” Giles said. “I can tell you that even being from a small department this was cost-prohibitive for us.”

Carney dedicated the signing of the bill to Cpl. Stephen Ballard of the Delaware State Police and Lt. Steven Floyd of the Department of Corrections, both of whom were killed in the line of duty in 2017.

The bill was signed in the same room where the killings of the two law enforcement officers were announced in 2017.



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