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NEW POLICE CARS FOR MILFORD



TREE LIGHTING NOV. 27



PARSLEY-BLOCKER LEADS LIBERTY

NOV. 23, 2021 · VOL. XI · ISSUE 46

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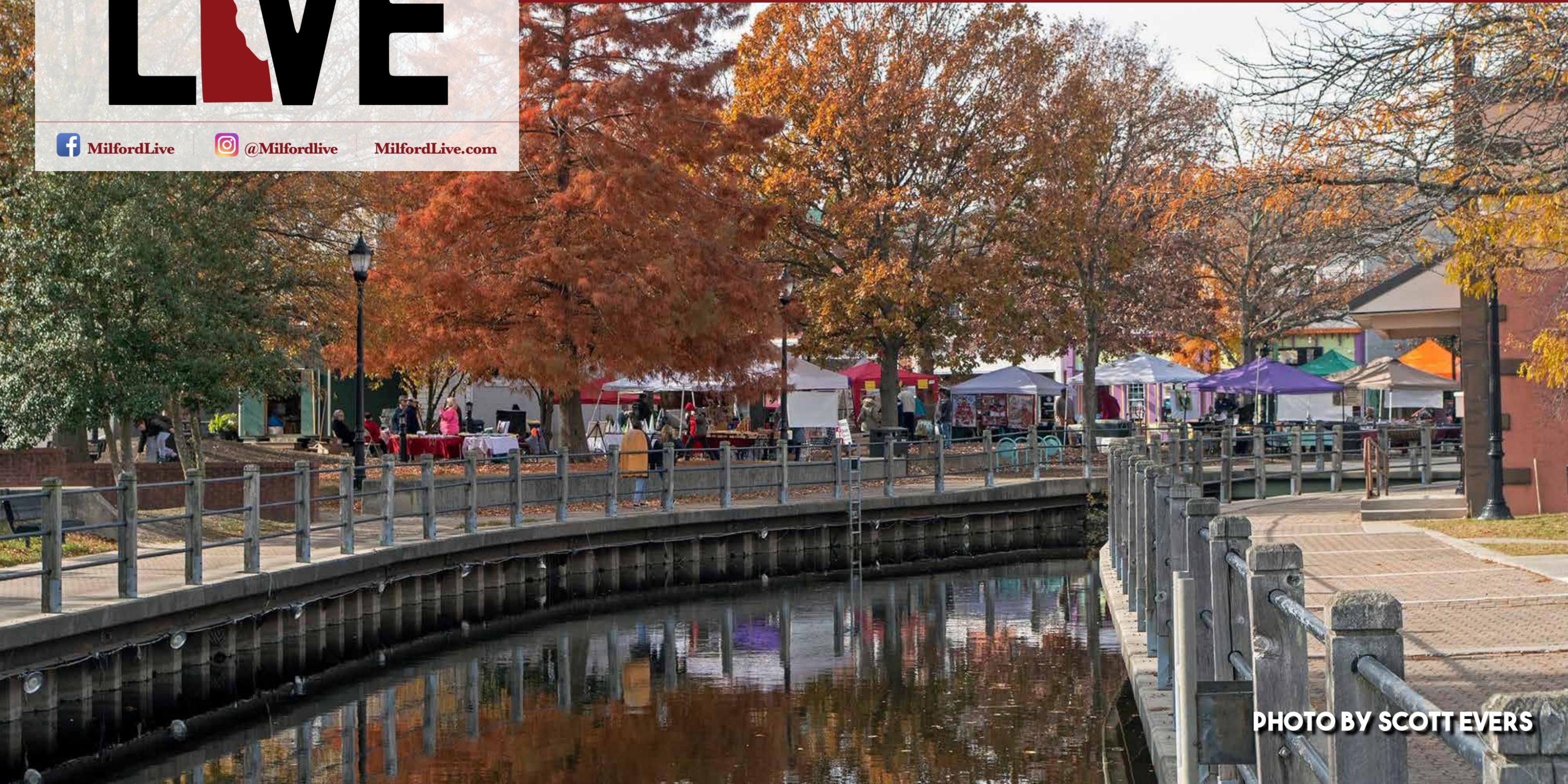


PHOTO BY SCOTT EVERS

HEADLINES

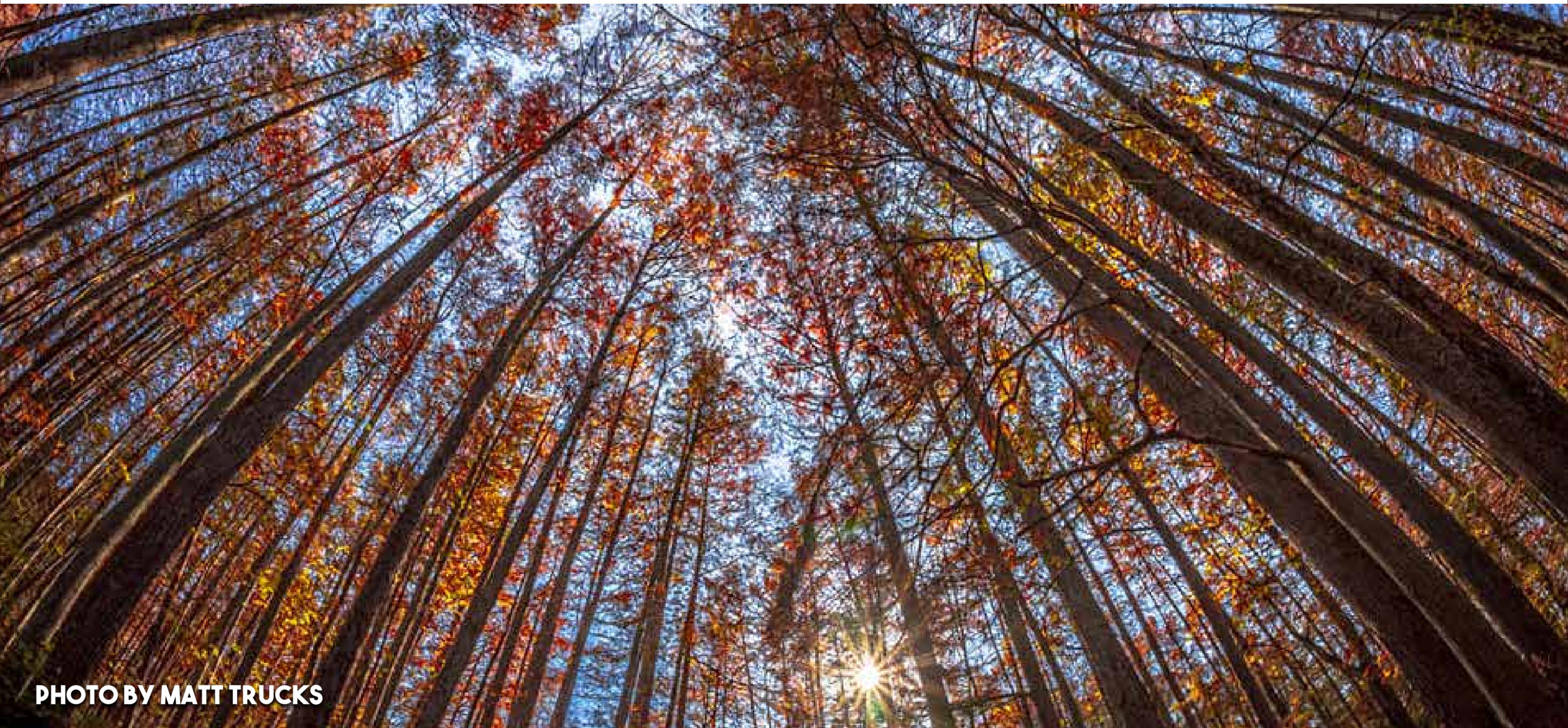


PHOTO BY MATT TRUCKS

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MILFORD APPROVES PURCHASE OF ADDITIONAL POLICE CARS



BY TERRY ROGERS

The city of Milford, at their regular council meeting on Nov. 8, approved the purchase of 15 Ford Hybrid Police Interceptor vehicles. The purchase will allow Milford police officers to take vehicles home with them once they are placed in service.

“I think my earlier presentation came in with an estimate around \$960,000,” Chief Kenneth Brown said. “When we actually got down to the nitty gritty, we are at \$883,551.27. That’s for purchasing 15 vehicles and equipping 17 vehicles. The reason for that is, we already have two vehicles on order through the normal process and our pool fleet. So, those are already coming out of the budget. But, because we would have used the equipment from the cars we would replace those with, we are now keeping them under this program, so this price reflects the purchase of 15 cars and equipping 17 cars.”

Chief Brown also pointed out that there would be a continuing \$26,154 per year cost for four years under the camera contract. The proposal before council repre-

sented the first year, but there would be an additional cost for the next four years for the cameras.

“The good part of that is we should be able to expect some type of refund for the body camera monies we are putting out as the state has already made that into law that all police must have them,” Chief Brown said. “They are working on the funding now and just how that will be rolled out. It should include some reimbursement to us, not for previous but for the future which would be a savings and it may be a significant savings. I don’t know when that is going to happen.”

Some of the funds for the new police cars could come from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds allocated to the city. In addition, Councilman Jason James pointed out that the police are currently under budget and that the city was working on finding other funds to cover the cost of the new behavioral health unit. With the potential reimbursement for body cameras, the budget would allow for the purchase of the police cars.

Councilman Dan Marabello asked what the timing was for the purchase of the cars and Chief Brown stated that he was told by the dealership that it could be at least nine months before the cars were available.

“The procurement of vehicles, even if they are saying nine months, it could be longer than that because there are delays at the manufacturer,” Councilman Andy Fulton said. “We ordered vehicles where I work six months ago, and they promised six months. We were just contacted and told they are delayed another six months. So, I mean, getting them ordered, you’re locked at the price you ordered them, so you’re actually at a cost savings. If I can just add a comment, we know how important this program is in keeping the viability of keeping our police officers. I think we’ve already agreed how important this program is to do that. Right now, we’re finding the cost savings within the budget for covering most of this. I think it is a great time to do this program.”

Mayor Archie Campbell stated that when he and Chief Brown met, there was discussion of only those that ranked corporal and above would be eligible to take cars home.

“I don’t want to make that decision now,” Chief Brown said. “Regardless of when we get the vehicles, we need to have them there.”

Councilman Todd Culotta agreed with Councilman Fulton that this program was necessary.

“I understand the availability of vehicles, that is everywhere right now,” Councilman Culotta said. “That will eventually take care of itself. I have three points I want to make here. The first point is the flexibility and the availability of officers that they can be on the clock

See **POLICE** on page 4

POLICE from page 3

as soon as they leave their home, instead of coming to work, getting dressed and getting on their shift that was just used, this makes a little more flexibility. It also extends the life of the resource, the car itself over time. We won't be replacing cars as often as we would."

The second point Councilman Culotta made was that this program would protect the health of the officers.

"They are not sharing a car that someone has just done a 12-hour shift in," Councilman Culotta said. "Somebody else comes in, hops right in it, it could be spreading something, we don't know. So, this is really why I see a value in that. Third is job satisfaction. We all know that this is a competitive environment in law enforcement and in many businesses, but most importantly law enforcement with job satisfaction which leads to officer retention. I think it is a great bargaining chip. We have to attract talent to the city of Milford at a time when cities are talking about defunding the police. I think we are showing right here that we support them, that we back the blue and that's very important."

City Financial Director Lou Vitola stated that his interpretation of ARPA funds was that 100 percent of the cost of the vehicles could be covered by those grants, but he would need to reach out to the Treasurer's Office to confirm how much of the cost of the cars could be covered.

Council voted unanimously for the measure.

"Thank you for doing this," Chief Brown said. "It will go a long way toward our recruitment and retention."



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CULTURE



PHOTO BY SCOTT EVERS

ANNUAL CITY HALL TREE LIGHTING SET FOR NOV. 27

BY TERRY ROGERS

The city of Milford will welcome the holiday season on Saturday, Nov. 27 at 5 p.m., with its Annual City Hall Tree Lighting.

The Milford Central Academy Chorus will lead the crowd in singing holiday favorites, as well as provide a sneak peek to a few of their own winter choral pieces before Santa himself will flip the switch to light up the city.

“We are excited to have the Milford School District, Santa and the community join us for this tradition each year,” said Sara Pletcher, Economic Development & Community Engagement Administrator. “It’s a wonderful family-friendly way to kick off the holiday season and we thank our Public Works and Electric crews for making our city shine!”

This event is the capstone to Small Business Saturday, always held the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Milford’s small businesses will be open to welcome shoppers and Santa will arrive in his house in Downtown Milford at 11 a.m. Santa will be at his house on Saturdays from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. through Dec. 18. Due to COVID-19, Santa will not arrive via fire truck as he has in years past. Other COVID precautions will include Santa behind plexiglass meeting children at the house front door. Families are welcome to take their own photos of their children standing next to Santa and children are welcome to bring Santa a letter.

City Hall is located at 201 S. Walnut St. and free parking is available behind the building or throughout the downtown area.

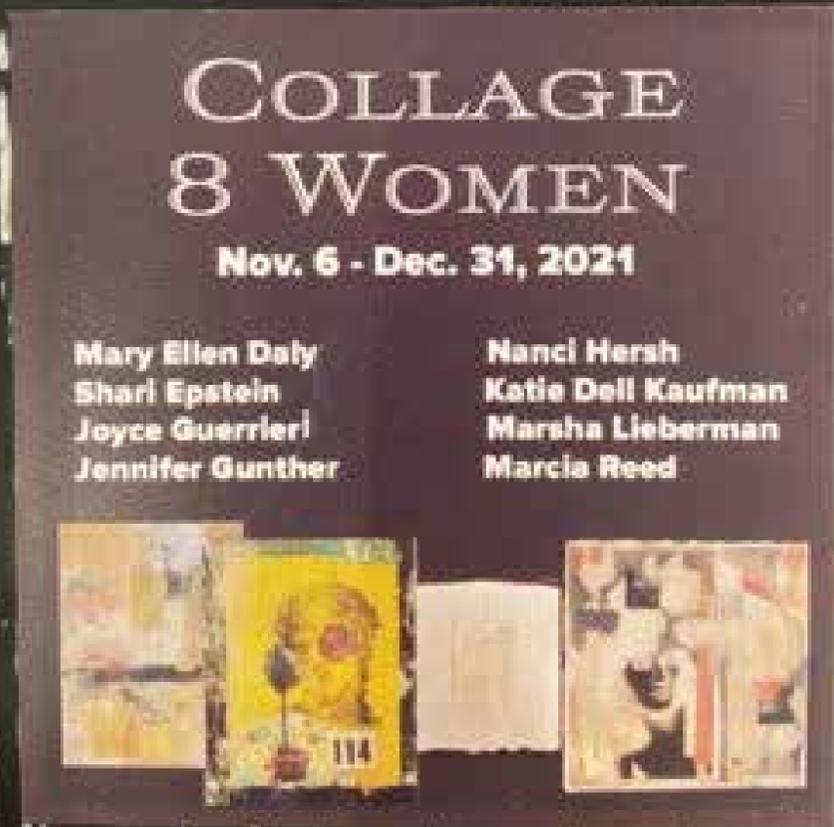
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GALLERY 37 PRESENTS COLLAGE SHOW BY 8 WOMEN ARTISTS

its own place as a language in the visual arts. Beyond the literal objects in the work, collage reveals symbolic representations, inspired by every day objects.

One of the pioneers of this kind of work was Kurt Schwitters, the German artist of the 1920s. He created beautiful assemblages of found objects by repurposing them onto paper, and producing beautiful compositions from what others thought of as “garbage in the streets”—pieces of wood, old newspaper clippings, lost coins, torn photos, remnants of cloth, etc. Many other famous artists were inspired by him, including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Romare Bearden.

Continuing this tradition in art, these 40 works of art will be on display at Gallery 37 in Milford from Nov. 6 through Dec. 31. For more information, contact Gallery 37—A Destination for Artful Living by visiting them at 8 South Walnut Street, Milford, or calling 302-265-2318 or 413-297-2690.



BY TERRY ROGERS

Gallery 37 in Milford, voted Best Downstate Gallery: Reader’s Choice, for a number of years by *Delaware Today Magazine*, is proudly exhibiting a collage show by eight women artists. There will be an opening reception to meet and greet the artists on Dec. 11, 3–6 p.m.

The artists are Mary Ellen Daly, Shari Epstein, Joyce Guerrieri, Jennifer Gunther, Nanci Hersh, Kati Dell Kaufman, Marsha Lieberman, and Marcia Reed.

The fine art of collage has been around for over 100 years. In the great tradition of modern art, collage has



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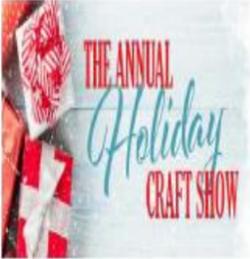
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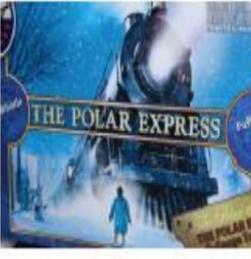
<https://www.gopaintceramics.com/product/carlisle-fire-company-fun-raiser/1701>




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BUSINESS



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PAID MEDICAL LEAVE WON'T PLACE ONEROUS BURDEN ON BUSINESS

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

A bill to give Delaware workers up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave has earned the support of some lawmakers, business owners, medical professionals and nonprofit advocates.

But some business leaders fear a state-run paid leave program would be overly burdensome on already-struggling small businesses.

Senate Bill 1, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, would create a statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program that workers could access for qualifying events, including addressing a serious illness, welcoming a new child or helping adjust to a recent military deployment.

Workers benefitting from the program could receive up to 80% of their average weekly wages, insofar as that amount does not exceed \$900 per week.

The program would be funded with a 0.8% contribution from an employee's weekly pay, to be split evenly between the employee and employer.

For a worker making \$1,000 per week, for example, the employer and employee would each contribute \$4.

McBride and others talked about the need for paid leave during a roundtable on Nov. 18.

In its current form, Senate Bill 1 exempts small businesses with less than 20 employees from the employer contribution, though the employee would still have to pay their share.

That's not enough, says Bob Older, president of the Delaware Small Business Chamber. He believes that small businesses should be entirely exempt from the law.

"They're going to lose business," Older said. "If a customer is used to dealing with a certain employee, and that employee is not there for a good period of time, it's proven fact that they're going to go somewhere else."

Asked why that would be any different from an employee being out of work without the protections provided under Senate Bill 1, Older said, "It depends,

because if it's left to an employee and employer they might work something out, such as three weeks or four weeks—not 12 to 16 weeks."

During an earlier interview, Older said he fears that dishonest employees could seek many periods of paid leave within a year, providing employers no recourse under the law.

But during the roundtable discussion, McBride pushed back, said Older's statements contained factual inaccuracies.

Employees may not take multiple 12-week paid leave periods within a single year, she said in an interview with Delaware LIVE News/Town Square Delaware.

"Let's say you give birth and you take 12 weeks of leave, and then within a year of giving birth, you're diagnosed with cancer," McBride explained. "There is an exception in the bill that if you have multiple different qualifying events across different pillars of the bill, such as parental leave and medical leave in this example, you could take a total of 16 weeks."

After using 16 weeks of paid leave within a year, employees cannot seek further paid time off, even with a different employer. "You can't job-hop to job-hop" hoping to claim multiple paid leave periods, she said.

The bill requires an employee to work at a company for 4 months before they are guaranteed job protections, including the promise of continued employment and company-provided insurance benefits.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE](#)



BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Kent County Levy Court has approved a \$5 million grant program for small businesses and hospitality companies affected by the pandemic.

The measure, which passed unanimously during a Nov. 9 meeting, is Kent County's first use of the \$35.5 million it received in American Rescue Plan Act funds.

The grant program includes \$3 million in grants for businesses with less than 100 employees to pay for employee wages and other business expenses and \$2 million for hotels, event venues and other tourism hospitality industry companies.

Judy Diogo, president of the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce, said it's important to remember that many small businesses had to close during the pandemic by no choice of their own.

She doesn't know exactly how many small businesses were forced to close permanently because not all of Kent County's businesses are members of the chamber, but she is aware of 58 member businesses having closed because of COVID-related impacts.

KENT COUNTY APPROVES \$5 MILLION IN GRANTS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES, HOTELS

"Small businesses are desperately trying to come back now," Diogo said. "They're desperately trying to get themselves back up and running, and they're having a difficult time getting employees. For many of them, they have used all of their capital to keep themselves open through this time."

Under the program, at least 633 small businesses would be able to qualify for aid, Diogo said.

County administrator Michael Petit de Mange said grants can be used for any type of business expense that would otherwise be paid for with the revenue that has been lost.

"It's going to be spelled out in the grant application, but it could be paying bills, it could be covering payroll or business supplies or other expenses related to the business utility expenses," he said.

Grant applications will be processed by Dover accounting firm Faw Casson to check for compliance and eligibility.

They will then be reviewed by the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce and Kent County Tourism Corporation, who will send their final recommendations to the Levy Court for approval.

Once the applications are determined to be accurate and complete, they will be referred to the Levy Court, which will vote on their approval. Payment will be issued directly by the county.

Kent County Tourism Corporation president Pete Bradley said the grants for hotels, event facilities and banquet halls will help an industry that was "enormously" impacted by the pandemic.

The best measure of the impact on the hospitality industry, Bradley said, is the county's accommodations tax. In the 12-month period ending in March 2021, tax revenues were down 42% year over year.

Hospitality grants will likely be allocated with a priority given to smaller businesses, he said, though for the hospitality grant program there is no specific cap on the number of employees a company can have to qualify.

There are close to 35 hotels in Kent County that could qualify for the grant and a handful of event and banquet halls.

Kent County Tourism Corp. and Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce have drafted a couple of different proposals for other types of businesses, Diogo said. She's hopeful that if this program is a success they will be able to bring those ideas to the county for consideration.

New Castle and Sussex Counties have not yet implemented similar programs.

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LIVE



STATE TO INVEST \$2 MILLION IN FARMERS, LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Delaware will spend \$2 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds to establish a seed fund aimed at stabilizing and strengthening small and mid-sized farmers and local food supply chain operations.

The First State Integrated Food System Program, announced Thursday by Gov. John Carney, will be paid for using funds the state received from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Delaware received \$925 million from the federal stimulus bill, which is designed to hasten the economic recovery from the pandemic.

In a press release announcing the investment, Gov. Carney said the seed fund will provide a “coordinated approach” to improving local access to affordable and nutritious Delaware-produced foods while supporting

Delaware farmers.

“We know the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted small-scale food businesses and Delaware families’ access to food,” Carney said. “That’s why the Council on Farm and Food Policy will work with partners to develop and administer a diverse portfolio of grants and loans to improve the availability and accessibility of local produce, animal protein, value-added products, and other foods, promoting overall economic growth here in Delaware.”

The First State Integrated Food System Program focuses on three main channels in the food supply chain, including:

- Production: small and mid-size farmers.
- Processing and distribution: commercial kitchens,

processing facilities, storage/hub facilities, incubators.

- Retail/consumer outlets: convenience stores, groceries/markets, restaurants, farmers’ markets, food trucks, food kiosks, and mobile markets.

Michael Scuse, Delaware’s agriculture secretary, said the seed fund will allow the state to make a “strategic investment” in how families access food in their communities, all while bolstering the local food supply chain.

“Neighboring states, like Maryland and New Jersey, have reaped the benefits of food financing programs,” Scuse said. “The First State Integrated Food System Program will make similar opportunities available to bolster Delaware’s capacity. These efforts will go a long way in improving local access to local food.”

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BUSINESS OWNERS ASK STATE TO DELAY NEW TRUCKING REGULATIONS

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

With a July 2022 deadline looming that will change how much weight can be hauled in agriculture and construction company trucks, some business owners are seeking a three-year extension until new rigs are available to purchase.

A 2010 [law](#) sets the maximum weight allowable for tandem axle vehicles at 65,000 pounds. However, an exception allows operators to haul up to 70,000 pounds by paying the state an additional \$100 per vehicle during registration.

With that exception expiring in 2022, companies that rely on trucks for their business will have to either haul less or buy new tri-axle vehicles.

Skip Jones, owner of Atlantic Concrete in Milford, said his mixers are 20 years old and have been operating at 70,000 pounds for as long as they've had them.

Factoring the weight of the truck, fuel and passengers, a 70,000-pound weight limit allows Atlantic Concrete to haul about 10 yards of concrete.

“Up to now, we’ve been able to pay an extra \$100 for 70,000 pounds, which is what we need to carry ten yards of concrete,” he said. “So it would dramatically affect our performance and our ability to operate.”

But Jones and others are having a hard time buying trucks with a higher weight limit in any reasonable time frame because of [supply chain shortages](#) slowing down automobile manufacturing.

In an earlier interview with Delaware LIVE News/Town Square LIVE, Tushar Patel, regional vice president of Hertrich’s Family of Automobiles, said delays anywhere in a vehicle assembly process can bring production to a standstill.

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The computer chips cars and trucks use to operate their electronics are responsible for today’s decreased supply, but Patel notes that it could be any number of other components causing delays tomorrow.

“When COVID first hit manufacturers tried to reduce the supply not knowing that it would affect demand,” he said. “So chip manufacturers switched from making car chips to make phone chips and chips for computers because people were staying home and doing work and school from home.”

Even if chip manufacturers returned to pre-pandemic production capacity today, Patel said it would take six to nine months to alleviate the pressure on the vehicle manufacturing supply chain.

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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



PHOTO BY ANN LEBENGOOD

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CITY APPROACHED ABOUT TINY HOUSE PLACEMENT

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent council meeting, City Manager Mark Whitfield mentioned in his monthly report that he, Councilman Jason James and City Planner Rob Pierce met with Sylvia Carson of Positive Points regarding the placement of tiny houses in Milford. The program would provide tiny homes built by vocational students and young adults in Milford.

“We received a proposal from Positive Points where they were using vocational and young adults to build tiny homes and wanted a place to put them,” Whitfield said. “They met with us and were going to give us the homes, but before we can accept them, we need a place to put them. We continue to have some dialogue with them. One of the things we have to work through is the zoning regulations as these come on wheels, so at the moment, it is a mobile home. Where you can place them, the electric hookups, there are a lot of details that need to be worked out.”

Councilman Andy Fulton pointed out that council recently discussed RV hookups and that council had made the stipulation that if something was on wheels, it counts as an RV. Because many tiny homes are on wheels, he felt that allowing this type of structure would be in direct opposition to that discussion. Councilman James stated that the tiny homes were directed toward the homeless and under-privileged.

“I’ve seen a lot of programs on public television and in other communities in the Midwest about how this has

worked out,” Councilman Fulton said. “I’ve seen where communities have come together, and people have actually earned the right to own their tiny home in a community by doing this. It has paid benefits for surrounding communities as well. So, something like this is actually beneficial and not something to be hindered.”

Councilman James provided more insight as an attendee at the meeting between Positive Points and the city.

“Mark and Rob did agree to look at our code and see what we can do,” Councilman James said. “Currently, it is just not allowed. We also communicated to Positive Points, and they had a builder in the meeting as well, what could you do in your design to make these tiny homes meet code. Right now, the way they are designed, could they go on a foundation and no, not the way they are built. Can you change them so they can sit on a foundation? They are looking at that. There are some things I would like to see, such as a full workshop, because others may have questions. It wasn’t no, it was just that it was not allowed in the current code.”

Councilman Fulton commented that he thought a project like this would be great for the city.

“I think, not just in a homeless situation, or low income, but even young folks with a low cost of entry have done this all over the country, especially in more expensive cities out west,” Councilman Todd Culotta said. “I think this is something we should take a look at, not just as a homeless solution, but as a low-cost entry



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solution.” Councilwoman Katrina Wilson suggested it be viewed as a housing solution.

Councilman Culotta pointed out that tiny houses are often put on wheels because that helps get around local ordinances regarding how small a home can be.

“An RV would not comply,” Councilman Culotta said. “We have in our code you cannot live in an RV within city limits. I think that is something we need to look at, even if we fine tune that language to say it cannot be an RV on a lot or something. A tiny house, a movement, is part of the appeal and they are not cheap. They cost \$50,000 to \$60,000 to build, but that is a lot less than \$250,000 to \$300,000.”

Councilman Dan Marabello stated that he had seen a program on a tiny home project where the home could not be more than 50 square feet.

“They have basic water and a community shower in an enclosed group,” Councilman Marabello said. “The reason they are so good for these people is that it provides them with a safe place to stay while they are trying to transition to go to work. They can get dressed to go to an interview and they even feed them three times a day.” Councilman Culotta explained that the national building code has changed requirements, reducing the size of the main room in a home from 150 square feet to 70 square feet to allow for the tiny home movement.

Whitfield stated that the city would continue to work with Positive Points on the tiny home project and would bring more details back to council at a future meeting.



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PARKS & RECREATION TO RECEIVE DNREC GRANT

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent City Council meeting, Brad Dennehy, director of Milford Parks & Recreation, presented council with the opportunity for recreational grants for the city. The funding would be for a new playground and pickleball courts alongside the Mispillion River in Memorial Park.

“This is kind of a no brainer. We got some funding from the state bond bill,” Dennehy said. “We also applied for an Outdoor Recreation and Trails program grant through DNREC. We applied for the maximum grant of \$150,000 and they came back and said “We’ll give you \$175,000, contingent upon the adoption of a resolution. So, basically, you just have to say yes to free money from DNREC and we have to move forward with building a new playground and pickleball court.”

Councilman Andy Fulton pointed out that the city would also need to commit \$58,334 from General Fund reserves in order to secure the grant.

“Yes, there is a match component to that, but not to dig into the weeds too much, we would still commit funding to it,” Dennehy said. “This was agreed as part of the Capital Improvement Plan. They are giving us more money and we can reduce the amount we have to fund as part of the match to it.”

City Finance Director Lou Vitola compiled a spreadsheet showing how the grant funds would save the city money, even with the match component. According to

the document, council approved the spending of \$250,000 for pickleball courts, land acquisition and a downtown playground. These projects were also approved in the budget. With \$216,000 in bond bill funding and the \$175,000 in grants from DNREC, the city would save \$291,000 in 2022 and \$150,000 in 2023 for the projects.

Council voted unanimously to accept the grant funding and to commit to the match funding.



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MILFORD DEALING WITH OVER \$1 MILLION IN PAST DUE ACCOUNTS

more important, as hard as we try to stay professional and as professional as our reps remain, we may not always be able to curry forgiveness for each and every caller or visitor, leaving some dissatisfied tax and utility customers at the end of the day. The good news is that there is light at the end of the tunnel with Pinnacle and the company that bought them coming to full operation. The latest bills went out so that should improve going forward.”

According to Suzannah Frederick, Cash Operations and Revenue supervisor, after March 2020, past due balances spiked in excess of \$500,000, but residents and businesses seemed to respond well and recover quickly. By the middle of summer, past due utility balances were back to normal. Frederick explained that the current spike in past due utilities is directly related to operational challenges faced by the city’s third-party bill processor which caused delays in delivery of bills which led to the spike.

“We are no less than a week behind, but we’re about there,” Vitola told council. “Pinnacle is back in full force so after the last several thousand bills were printed, folded, stuffed and mailed in-house, there were no more

BY TERRY ROGERS

The city of Milford currently has almost \$1.1 million in past due accounts. The past due property tax balance is \$475,000 while the past due utility balance is \$623,000.

“October was a chaotic month for the customer service division,” City Finance Director Lou Vitola told council. “Our third-party bill printer, which prints, folds, stuffs and mails for us, came to a grinding halt, [and we’re] continuing to have challenges of our own, so the result was late billing, delayed due dates, late fee waivers, reduced cash flows, increased credit risk in the form of more accounts past due and greater outstanding balances, higher call volumes, increased call times which resulted in longer hold times, high demand on our IT resources and high demand on communications. Even

See **ACCOUNTS** on page 20

Cancer isn't waiting for COVID-19 to be over.

One in three Delawareans will get cancer. Unfortunately, many have put off their cancer screenings in the past year. Screenings detect cancer early, when it's most treatable. If you've skipped or canceled a screening due to the pandemic — for breast, cervical, colon, lung, or prostate cancer — don't wait one more day. **Call your health care provider to schedule your cancer screenings today.**

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ACCOUNTS from page 19

after that. So, we should be completely caught up by the end of November.”

Vitola also explained that the city had seen 12- or 13-month lows in delinquent accounts. Due to the billing issue, however, the city doubled the previous 13 months in terms of dollars.

“It just goes to show how quickly, if you are not engaged and do not stay on top of it and execute those four monthly billing cycles like clockwork every week and stay on top of calls and payment processing, it can quickly deteriorate,” Vitola said. “We couldn’t do disconnections either and that’s another thing. Disconnections can be viewed as the ugly necessary component of the utility business, but you can see the value in them as a payment inducer in their absence. We’ve spiked like nothing I’ve seen in 14 months here in just a period of five weeks, so it is unbelievable how important it is to stay on top of that.”

Frederick explained that service interruption for past due accounts continues regularly pursuant to the city code. Disconnection is always preceded by a message on every billing statement as well as a disconnection notice mailed on brightly colored materials.

“Disconnections were deferred recently for billing cycles impacted by the bill printing delays, but all billing cycles are now current,” Frederick said. “Past due notices for due dates the first week in November were mailed on Nov. 10. Utility customers should always continue the practice of paying for services on time to avoid service interruption. Certain weather conditions may preclude

See ACCOUNTS on page 21

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ACCOUNTS from page 20

service interruption, but if an account remains unpaid, it is subject to disconnection on the next day, weather permitting, and will remain in the city's workflow until payment is made."

The city has also invested in a variety of resources to help residents and businesses ensure continuous access to critical drinking water, electricity and sanitary sewer services. The city has enabled their customers with tools to save money by reducing consumption, budget for utilities by providing equal monthly bills, pay bills on time with automatic payments and by viewing consumption before paper bills arrive, Frederick explained.

Budget billing allows customers to spread their average annual cost of utilities evenly each month over a year to better prepare for utility costs. Through the city's Advanced Metering Infrastructure, customers can access their account online to review historical use and patterns, current usage during the month and to react to high usage which can reduce costs. Those who are unsure how to reduce power consumption can take advantage of the city's Efficiency Smart program. This no cost program offers cash incentives to electric users who switch to more efficient appliances. They will also conduct a home energy review upon request.

"Customers can choose to receive paperless bills, which results in more time to make payment by reducing delivery time," Frederick said. "Customers may enroll in automatic payment to avoid missed payments. The city of Milford and seven other public power cities and towns in Delaware represented by the Delaware Municipal Electric Corporation (DEMEC) made \$250,000 avail-

able to assist utility customers facing hardships related to the pandemic. The city of Milford also partners with several third-party government agencies and nonprofit groups to assist residents with utility programs."

Some of the third-party agencies that may help residents and businesses with energy costs include Delaware State Service Center, and Catholic Charities and First State Community Action. Anyone who is having difficulty paying their utility or property tax bill should contact the city of Milford Customer Service Department by visiting their office at 119 South Walnut Street or calling 302-422-6616.



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THE MILFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT WOULD LIKE TO SINCERELY THANK OUR DISTRICT-COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE REFERENDUM VOTE. WE ARE VERY EXCITED AND APPRECIATIVE FOR OUR DISTRICT-COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT AND SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME. THIS PROJECT WILL SIGNIFICANTLY BENEFIT OUR STUDENTS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, AND ENTIRE DISTRICT-COMMUNITY. WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE NEXT STEPS LEADING TO THE RENOVATION OF THE SCHOOL AND REVITALIZATION OF THE SITE.



JUDGE ISSUES GAG ORDER OVER MCGUINNESS CASE



BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Those involved in State Auditor Kathy McGuinness's criminal proceedings will no longer be able to comment publicly on the case after Superior Court Judge William Carpenter issued a gag order on Nov. 4.

The order prevents both defense and prosecution from making extrajudicial statements to news media or publicly commenting on the case.

McGuinness in October was **charged** with two felonies and multiple misdemeanors alleging conflict of interest, felony theft, non-compliance with procurement law, official misconduct and felony witness intimidation.

She's accused of arranging public payments to a cam-

paign consultant to avoid regulator scrutiny, firing workers in her office to hire her daughter, who she allowed to use a state car and kept paying while the daughter was in college and not working, and attempting to intimidate employees who might help investigators looking into her conduct.

If found guilty, McGuinness could face up to 13 years in jail. She has **pleaded** not guilty on all charges and will face **trial** in May 2022.

Last month, McGuinness unsuccessfully sought to have the **public** pay for her legal representation at a cost of \$550 per hour. The auditor also unsuccessfully sought

sanctions against Attorney General Kathy Jennings, arguing that she threatened McGuinness's right to a fair trial with comments she made during her announcement of the indictment.

Meanwhile, the General Assembly has retained former Delaware Supreme Court Justice **Randy Holland** as "special advisor."

Holland will help the legislature determine its constitutional authority under **Article III, Section 13** of the Delaware Constitution, which provides that the governor may "for any reasonable cause" remove any officer of the state government, except the lieutenant governor and members of the General Assembly, upon the request of two-thirds of all the members elected to the House and Senate.

Having never exercised its authority under that clause, members of the General Assembly are seeking to determine the Constitutional options at its disposal and how removal **proceedings** might work across both chambers.

Some legislators have floated the idea of **suspending** the auditor or having her take a leave of absence until the court rules on her charges.

Others have argued that the General Assembly should **stay out** of it altogether so as to not muddy the waters relating to McGuinness's right to a fair trial.

With legal counsel now barred from speaking publicly about the McGuinness case, the rare political spectacle may go quiet for a while—at least until Holland and the House and Senate Judiciary Committees share their findings at the beginning of the legislative session on Jan. 11.

MILFORD
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EDUCATION



MSD BOARD VOTES NOT TO SEND BROWNSTEIN LETTER

BY TERRY ROGERS



At the October meeting of the Milford School District Board of Education, Dr. Adam Brownstein proposed that the district send a letter in support of the

Delaware School Board Association (DSBA) who responded negatively to a letter sent to President Joe Biden on Sept. 25 by the National School Boards Association (NSBA). At the November meeting, Brownstein read the letter he hoped the Milford board members would approve and send to the state association in support.

“At the recent DSBA meeting executive meeting, there was some very lively conversation, most of it was centered on our additional most recent conversation at our last board meeting about NSBA and the letter they had sent,” Board President Jason Miller said. “I believe after our last meeting they had retracted what they said and had done so quickly. They also have gone so far as to remove the executive director of the NSBA and are searching for a replacement and some of the staff and some of the staff has also left. This brought the conversation to occur at the Delaware State School Board level what, as the DSBA and its members, What do we do? How do we react to the NSBA’s kind of gaff?”

Miller went on to say that many states, including Pennsylvania and California, states who pay a signifi-

cant amount of dues, have left the NSBA, something Miller called a “knee-jerk reaction.”

“The thought process that some of those at the executive level is for Delaware to have more of a sit and wait and see what happens, because there are some advantages to being in NSBA if they choose to change direction on how they have operated over the past few months,” Miller said. “One of the things DSBA has done is asked the districts to let them know where we stand on that.”

The letter from the NSBA stated that local school boards are under “immediate threat” and respectfully asked for “federal law enforcement” to step in and deal with a “growing number of threats of violence and acts of intimidation.” The letter continued, pointing out that social media threats as well as threats sent through the postal service along with physical threats at meetings were increasing, stating that “classification of these heinous actions could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism and hate crimes.”

“This was drafted in response to the National School Board Association’s response and ensuing events,” Brownstein said, reading the proposed letter. “On Sept. 29, the National School Board Association wrote a letter to President Biden seeking federal assistance regarding protests that had taken place at school board meetings across the country.

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MSD OFFERS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO FAMILIES

BY TERRY ROGERS

At the regular November meeting of the Milford School District Board of Education, Dr. Brittany Hazzard, supervisor of Equity and Support Services, provided details on the mental health services provided to district students and families. Dr. Hazzard explained that the district not only offers internal mental health supports but also external supports as well as training.

“In September, it was requested that we provide some feedback on mental health services,” Dr. Hazzard said. “In addition, September was Suicide Prevention Month which brought this to light. In each building, we have at least one school psychologist and one school counselor. Some of our schools have more than one counselor. We also have behavioral specialists, school nurses and others who are aware of mental health supports.”

Dr. Hazzard explained that the district has two new behavior interventionists this year as well as behavior support paraprofessionals. At Morris, there is a school psychologist, a counselor and a nurse, as well as a behavior support paraprofessional. Banneker, Ross and Mispillion each have a school psychologist, student and family interventionist, behavior support and school nurse. Banneker has one school counselor while Ross and Morris each have two.

At the Milford Central Academy, there is a school psychologist, student and family interventionist and school nurse. There are also three counselors and two behavior support paraprofessionals. Milford High School

has a school psychologist, student and family interventionist and school nurse as well as four counselors and two behavior support paraprofessionals. In addition to these in-house supports, the Visiting Teacher also assists with mental health issues.

“We also have external mental health resources that we can access,” Dr. Hazzard said. “We work with Delaware Guidance Services, People’s Place, Courageous Hearts and Lifelines. Our Wellness Center supports students in grades 8 through 12. We also have access to external family crisis therapists. Recently, we had suicide risk training for psychologists, nurses and counselors. We are always working diligently to be sure our students have the support they need. We recognize mental health as a high priority, and we provide services at the highest level.”

Vice-President of the Board of Education, Rony Baltazar-Lopez, commended Dr. Hazzard on the mental health services offered to families in the district.

“I want to commend you and your staff for all you do, especially after the pandemic, as we have seen a rise in students with mental health problems,” Baltazar-Lopez said. “Do you track the number of calls we get for assistance and has there been a rise in our district?”

Dr. Hazzard explained that they do track the number of students seeking help and noted that it is a concern nationally that more students are seeking mental health assistance. Baltazar-Lopez also asked if HB100, which

could increase the number of psychologists in elementary schools in Delaware would impact Milford.

“We believe that HB100 would impact us in a very positive way,” Dr. Hazzard said. “it would allow us to increase our mental health services.”

MILFORD
LIVE





MILFORD BOARD RECOGNIZES FFA ACHIEVEMENTS

BY TERRY ROGERS

At their regular monthly meeting, the Milford School District Board of Education recognized the achievements of the district's Future Farmers of America (FFA) members. Chapter officers presented their achievements to the board.

"We are very proud of all the success we have had in our competitions," Hannah Hague, MHS FFA president, said. "We had 43 members compete in state CDE/LDEs this year and eight students were awarded FFA jackets from the Delaware Farm Bureau. Three received state

proficiency awards and four received Delaware FFA state degrees. We also had a Living to Serve grant recipient and took the first place National Chapter Award in the state."

Natalie Armstrong, FFA Secretary, talked to the board about the community events the group participated in over the year.

"We participated in the Riverwalk Freedom Festival," Armstrong said. "This is absolutely my favorite. I love the looks on children's faces when they see live animals and

See FFA on page 27

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FFA from page 26

I get the chance to teach children about live animals.”

In addition, over 80 awards were presented to Milford FFA members at the Delaware State Fair, including the first ever awarded Delaware Fantastic Fair Award. In addition, Anya Phillips was awarded the William H. Abbott Memorial Plaque Award. Thirteen FFA members also participated in the Livestock Showteam, showing 17 animals.

Phillips provided the board with details on the National FFA Convention.

“We had eight students attend the National Convention,” Phillips said. “Our Marketing Plan Team won silver while our Food Science Team won bronze. We had two American Degree Recipients and we were ranked a National FFA 3-star chapter. It was a really good experience to have. We got to see the new national officer team elected. One is from Delaware, Jackson [Sylvester], so that is a great honor for a team as small as Delaware. With the crazy year and a half we have had, we could not have done any of this without the support of the board.” Sylvester, a graduate of Lake Forest High School and a student at the University of Delaware, was elected National Secretary of the organization.

Superintendent Kevin Dickerson commended the organization for their success.

“We are very proud of what our FFA chapter has done this year,” Dr. Dickerson said. “We congratulate all of you on your accomplishments.”



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BY TERRY ROGERS

Milford School District Board of Education voted to issue Requests for Proposals (RFP) for construction projects the district has planned over the next few years. The proposals are looking for one organization to oversee multiple projects in the district.

“This will be for multiple projects but mainly for the Milford Middle School project,” Mike Sharp, supervisor of Buildings and Grounds, said. “It will also be for some HVAC projects at the high school and Banneker as well as a few other things that may come along with that funding down the road. This will go out the 22nd and will be publicized through Delaware Contracting procedures.”

According to documents presented to the board, the deadline for any questions about the RFP must be submitted by Dec. 2 and there is a mandatory pre-bid meeting on Dec. 8 at 3 p.m. with responses to questions posted on Dec. 9. Proposals must be received by Dec. 14

SCHOOL BOARD VOTES TO SEEK RFPs FOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

at 3 p.m. and it is estimated that notification of the award will be on Dec. 21.

“Sometimes small mistakes can be very costly so folks who can help eliminate any mistakes we may make will save us money in the long run,” School Board President Jason Miller said. “Even though we must put some money out initially, this will save us down the road.”

Board member David Vezmar pointed out that although this includes renovations for the former middle school building, it will also include other projects.

“I think it is important to let the public know that referendum funds will only go to the Milford Middle School project, not any of the other projects listed here,” Vezmar said. “The other projects are simply normal projects that we must do periodically.”

The measure to send out for RFPs was approved unanimously.



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 DELAWARE TECH



BY BETSY PRICE

All 16 state school districts have approved for Veterans with a 100% disability rating a tax credit equal to their non-vocational school district property tax.

House Bill 214 with House Amendment 1, which was signed into law Aug. 10, authorized the Disabled Veterans School Property Tax Credit to eligible disabled veterans. Districts were required to opt in for it to take place.

“Many of our disabled veterans struggle physically, mentally and financially,” said Josh Matticks, director of the state Office of Veterans Services. “Providing them an exemption from school property taxes will alleviate a financial burden.”

To qualify, applicants must:

- Receive 100% disability compensation due to service-connected, permanent and total disability based on individual unemployability or a 100% disability rating

DISABLED VETERANS CAN NOW SIGN UP FOR SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX CREDIT

from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

- Have held legal domicile in Delaware for the past three years.
- Pay their property tax bill in full by the end of each tax year to qualify for this credit in a subsequent property tax year.

Credit applications are due by April 30, 2022, to receive credit for the 2022 tax year.

To apply, qualified disabled veterans must fill out an application on the Delaware Department of Finance’s [website](#).

Applicants must provide:

- A valid driver’s license or official state ID.
- Documentation of disability.
- A copy of their Social Security Card.

For more information, go [here](#) or the Disabled Veterans School Tax Credit Frequently Asked Questions [page](#).

Individuals may also contact the county office in which they live: New Castle County at (302) 395-5520; Kent County at (302) 744-2401; and Sussex County at (302) 855-7871.

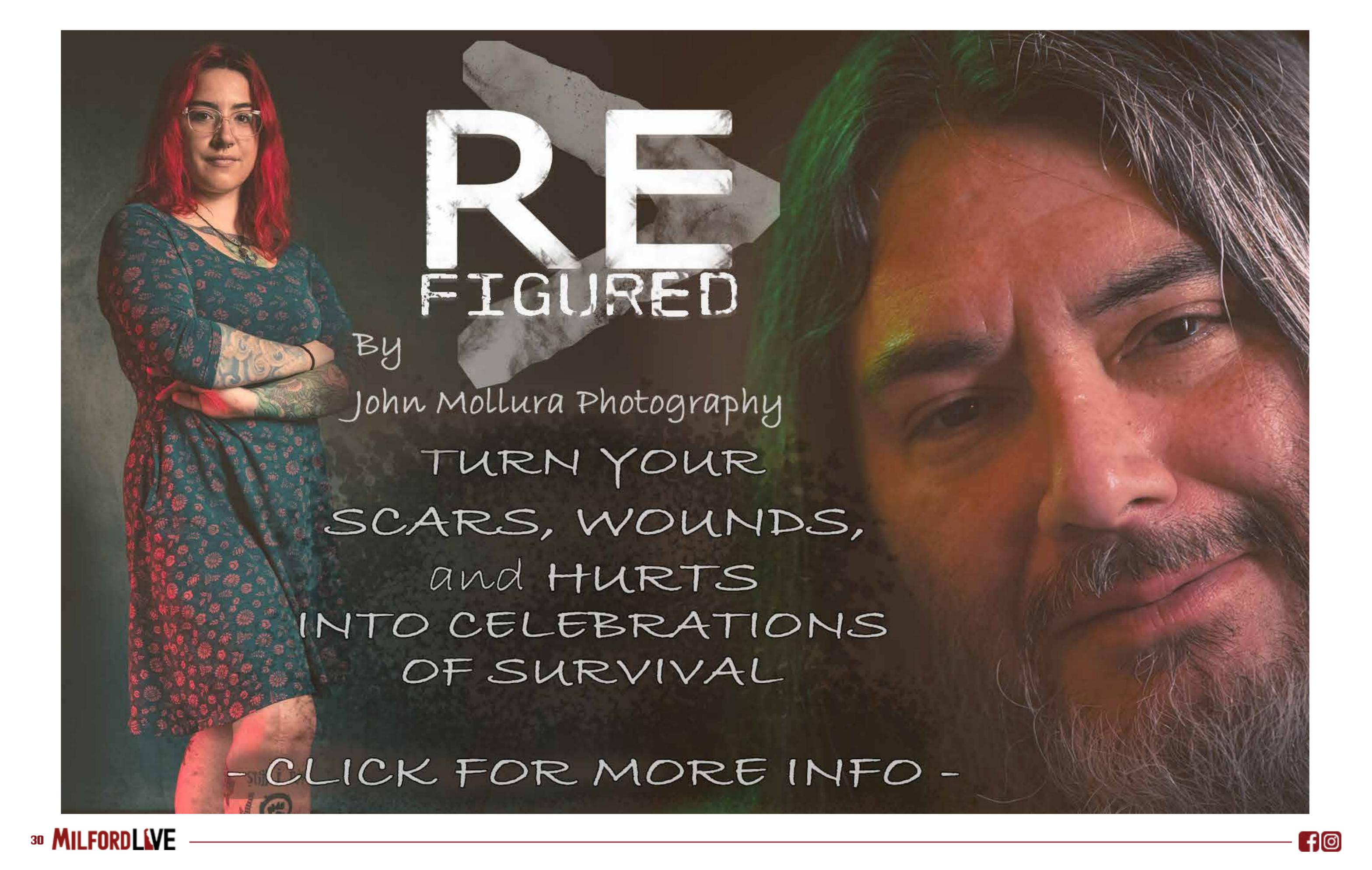


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HEALTH



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OPIOID SETTLEMENT COULD RESULT IN \$2.1 MILLION TO MILFORD

BY TERRY ROGERS

As part of a settlement agreement with pharmaceutical distributors of opioids, the state of Delaware agreed to participate in the settlement. City Manager Mark Whitfield explained that several months ago, Milford was contacted about participating in the settlement.

“At the time, I thought, well, sure, why not, there may be some money it for us,” Whitfield said. “I thought it might be a couple hundred thousand dollars, but the settlement is roughly \$100 million for the state of Delaware. The city gets roughly 2.1 percent, or about \$2.1 million. I asked the Chief if he could use that money and it took him about two seconds to respond. So, again, I have already stated that we are interested in participating. I would like to get council’s authorization for either the Mayor or I to execute all agreements and documents pertaining to the opioid settlement agreement.”

According to Whitfield, the settlement identifies 10 political subdivisions in the state with Milford included. The settlement requires that the funds be used for services that remediate the harm caused by opioids as well as to reduce the harm caused by opioids. Funds may be used to purchase naloxone or other FDA-approved drug to reverse opioid overdoses, medication-assisted treatment distribution and other types of opioid treatment, services for pregnant and post-partum women, treatment for neonatal abstinence

syndrome and expansion of “warm hand-off” programs and recovery services. Warm hand-off programs may include the hiring of social workers or other behavioral health workers.

Councilman Jason James asked if the funds could be used towards Milford Police Department’s newly formed Behavioral Health Unit. Whitfield answered that certain aspects of that unit would qualify for the funds.

“I’ve had a chance to look through the available uses and what not, what will be required, and I think a lot of these are great,” Councilman Todd Culotta said. “You know, drug treatment is an ongoing thing. It is not something we just throw money at. It is an activity, and it takes a community. Funding like this definitely helps. I got to see it for myself, and I am very happy about this.”

Council voted unanimously to allow the Mayor (Archie Campbell) and city manager to execute any agreements related to the settlement.



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BY BETSY PRICE

The state of Delaware said Nov. 19 that all Delawareans 18 and older should get a booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Early this week the state also offered guidelines to have a healthy Thanksgiving gathering as the pandemic continues and new cases and hospitalizations creep up slightly.

First, of course, was to be vaccinated. Right now, 60% of eligible Delaware residents are fully vaccinated. That equals 542,663 people.

On Nov. 19, the Federal Drug Administration said anyone vaccinated six months or more ago should get a booster. That's a change from previous recommendations that only those 65 and older or those who had health issues should get a booster.

Studies show that boosters don't just top off immunity, but elevate beyond the peaks it had reached before, the state said in a press release.

STATE SAYS ALL OVER 18 AND OLDER NEED COVID-19 BOOSTER SHOTS

Boosters were recommended after the Delta variant showed that immunity wanes over time.

“Having this tool in our arsenal can help us in holding off another winter surge that could come with people gathering inside more often as the weather turns colder,” said Dr. Karyl Rattay, director of the Division of Public Health.

Vaccines for first, second, third and booster doses are widely available throughout Delaware at pharmacies, hospitals and more. For more information about how to find one, go to www.de.gov/getmyvaccine.

The state warned this week that testing and vaccination site hours will change next week for the holiday:

All Public Health clinics that offer vaccinations will be closed Nov. 25, which is Thanksgiving, and Nov. 26.

Walgreens will be closed for COVID-testing starting Wednesday, Nov. 24.

Standing vaccine sites at the Blue Hen Corporate Center in Dover, Canby Park in Wilmington, Georgetown Plaza in Sussex and Oxford/University Plaza in Newark will be closed for vaccinations from Wednesday through the weekend.

However, those sites will be open for testing on Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Appointments can be made at www.de.gov/gettested.

The state COVID-19 Call Center will be closed on Thanksgiving and Black Friday, but will answer e-mails

to DPHcall@delaware.gov beginning Friday, Nov. 26. The Call Center will resume answering both e-mails and calls to 1-866-408-1899 on Monday, Nov. 29.

As of Nov. 18, more than 83% of the state's adult population has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, according to CDC data. In contrast, unvaccinated persons continue to drive case rates and hospitalizations.

During the week of Nov. 1–7, 82% of Delaware's hospitalizations were among unvaccinated and partially vaccinated people, the state said.

Getting children, especially those ages 5–11 who are newly eligible for the vaccine, vaccinated with their first dose prior to the Thanksgiving holiday is a good way to ensure they are protected, the state said.

The state also recommended people:

- Get tested for COVID-19 before celebrating with multiple households or people from different parts of the country.
- The unvaccinated should be tested before attending events.
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19, or had close contact with someone who has it, stay home. Do not host or attend a gathering.
- Smaller gatherings are better than larger gatherings to enable you to social distance from those who are not vaccinated.

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PHOTO BY KEVIN EICKMAN

PARSLEY-BLOCKER LEADS LIBERTY TO NCAA DIVISION I FIELD HOCKEY FINALS

BY KEVIN EICKMAN

On Friday, Nikki Parsley-Blocker, a graduate of Milford High School, led Liberty University to the NCAA Division I field hockey finals. Liberty won in a thrilling double overtime game. The team played Northwestern on Sunday which is ironically

Parsley-Blocker's alma mater, with Northwestern coming out on top with a score of 2-0 to take the championship.

For most people, finding your place in the world can take quite a bit of time. For some lucky people however, you know your calling very early in life. In the case of Parsley-Blocker, she knew very early on that she wanted to be involved in athletics. "I have always loved competing, it runs in my family. By the time I was in high school I knew that I was going to be involved in coaching," Parsley-Blocker stated.

During her field hockey career at Milford, Parsley-Blocker was an All-State selection on multiple occasions. She parlayed her success into an athletic scholarship to Northwestern University. While attending Northwestern, Parsley-Blocker excelled both on the field and in the classroom, earning Big 10 All-Academic honors three years.

It was not just on the college level in which she excelled; Parsley-Blocker also excelled on the international

stage as well. She was part of the U.S. National under-21 team in 2012, after being on the under-19 team the year before.

"It was so fantastic to be able to play on a stage like that, against such high-quality competition," Parsley-Blocker added. "It was great to meet people from all around the world, playing a sport that God gave me the gift to use. It has been my faith that has led me to this point in my life, I owe it all to the blessing's he has bestowed upon me."

It was her strong faith in the Lord which led Parsley-Blocker to make one of the most difficult decisions in her life. A successful assistant coach at Yale University, she was approached by Liberty University to join their staff. The renowned, faith-based college wasn't offering her a promotion, nor a lateral transfer, she was being asked to actually take a step down on the coaching ladder.

"It was one of the most difficult decisions of my life. I was very happy at Yale and there was a lot of hesitancy on taking a step down in the coaching ranks," Parsley-Blocker added. "When it came down to it, I listened to what I was feeling in my heart and what my faith in God was telling me when I made the decision to come to Liberty."

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POLICE & FIRE



MPD SEES BENEFITS FROM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH UNIT

BY TERRY ROGERS

Recently, the city of Milford hired two behavioral health specialists to create the first Behavioral Health Unit working with the Milford Police Department. Currently, the unit has one full-time and one part-time member. A second part-time person will join the unit in the next few weeks.

“I just want to point out the number of diversions that have been performed by Jenna, our behavioral health specialist,” Councilman Mike Boyle, chairman of the Police Committee, said. “As a direct result of her work, nine incidents that could have been more serious, people were taken to the emergency room, she was able to calm them down. We are already seeing the benefits of this position and this program.”

According to a document provided by Chief Kenneth Brown at a recent meeting, behavioral health specialists were able to divert four people from arrest, five from the emergency room and assisted 34 people with follow-up visits. The diversions included runaway juveniles, disorderly conduct, welfare checks and other reports that would have been handled by police officers prior to the establishment of the unit.

“I also want to add that what you are seeing in that spreadsheet is only Jenna, the full-time behavioral health person,” Chief Brown said. “It does not reflect the part-time person we have. From now on, it will reflect the whole unit and not just Jenna.”

Councilman Jason James, who suggested the establishment of a behavioral health unit in Milford, commended the chief for its success.

“I’m very happy that from the time I introduced this, it hasn’t been a long time in establishment from introduction,” Councilman James said. “From the chief grabbing it by the horns and getting someone hired to getting it funded. When I looked at the proposal, I can see that the idea was we would free up police time and would cut down the police officers time and the time a police officer had to sit in an emergency room with someone and getting them help quicker. So, this was a proposal for economic benefit as well and I think this is starting to point that out.”

During the meeting, City Manager Mark Whitfield also provided information on an opioid settlement that could result in Milford seeing \$2.1 million in funding that must be used toward preventing opioid addiction or dealing with those who are addicted. During that discussion, Councilman James asked if some of the funds from the settlement could be used to offset costs incurred by the Behavioral Health Unit. Whitfield stated that his understanding was that some funding from the settlement could be used toward behavioral health.



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PHOTO BY HILLEL BRANDES

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