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CITY SALARY INCREASE



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HEADLINES



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BY TERRY ROGERS

On Dec. 16, Marissa and Zack King, owners of EasySpeak and Penney Square, announced that they recently purchased the former M&T Bank building in downtown Milford. The bank, which M&T closed in 2015, has remained vacant since it was purchased by Touch of Italy in 2016 and their plans to open a restaurant in the location fell through.

“We have made Milford our home,” Marissa said. “We invest in Milford continuously, hoping to help make others love the town and people in it as much as we do. Myself & two of my best friends actually toured the bank and really liked it for one of our business plans we had been discussing for a long time. It’s something we all have wanted to do for years, and this just seemed like the right decision.”

In December 2020, the Kings purchased Penney Square and recently were approved for a conditional use to renovate the top floors of that building for five apartments. Recently, the couple announced they “made a decision” about what they wanted to do with Penney Square but were keeping that information under wraps for now.

FORMER M&T BANK UNDER NEW OWNERSHIP

Initially, the building was the location of The First National Bank which opened in 1876 and was founded by Col. Henry Fiddeman. The building was originally built by Abner Dill as a one-story tavern around 1790. After Mr. Dill’s death, Benjamin Washams, a merchant, converted the building to a home and store. When Mr. Washams died, the building was the location of Peter F. Causey and Nehemiah Davis’ business interests. After his election, Gov. Causey sold the building to Col. Fiddeman who lived in one side of the building and operated a business on the other. He added the third floor to incorporate the bank.

In 1912, First National Bank was acquired by Wilmington Trust, a bank founded by T. Coleman DuPont who was then the president of the DuPont company. DuPont opened the bank on 915 Market Street in Wilmington, converting the parlor and dining room of a residence for the bank’s operations. On Nov. 1, 2010, Wilmington Trust announced that it was merging with M&T Bank. When M&T announced the closing of the downtown branch, they explained that banks are moving away from transaction-based locations and were now being used primarily for consultation and advice. All services that were at the downtown location will be moved to the West Milford branch, located on Route 113, which also offered Saturday hours, something the downtown location did not.

“We have big plans for this building which we are choosing to keep quiet until the details are worked out,” Marissa posted on social media. “It will be a few year project, so stay patient!”

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CULTURE



PHOTO BY TERRY ROGERS

MILFORD COUPLE TO CELEBRATE 50TH ANNIVERSARY WITH RIDE THROUGH TOWN

BY TERRY ROGERS

Sudler and Joan Lofland, owners of the Vinyard Shipyard and prominent members of the Milford community will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Dec. 28. According to Joan, the couple decided they did not want a big celebration party to commemorate the event.

“Sudler’s mother died around Christmas last year,” Joan said. “We just weren’t feeling a big party.”

The couple, who married at St. John’s Catholic Church on Seabury Avenue, still own the car they drove away from the church that day, a 1929 Lincoln Town Car. They felt it would be fun to decorate the car as it was after their ceremony and ride through town. On their wedding day, they took the car from the church to their reception at the Blue Coat Inn in Dover.

“We plan to arrive at St. John’s around noon,” Joan said. “We actually still have the original Just Married sign, but Sudler is creating one that says “50” on it to put on the back of the car. We are tying cans to the bumper and riding around town just as we did 50 years ago.”

There is not a set route for the couple to travel through Milford. Joan stated they have been friends with the Dave Burton family for many years so hope to ride past their home. Joan spent many years as a Milford Museum commissioner, and they plan to travel past there as well. They want to ride by the Prettyman house at 210 S.



Walnut Street as well. The Loflands called that house home for many years. They will travel past City Hall where the Vale Mansion was located for many years.

“The Lincoln has only had two owners,” Joan said. “The original owner was Ruby Vale who donated the land where City Hall now sits. Sudler bought it in 1963.”

They are also hoping to ride to Old State Road in Lincoln where Joan grew up.

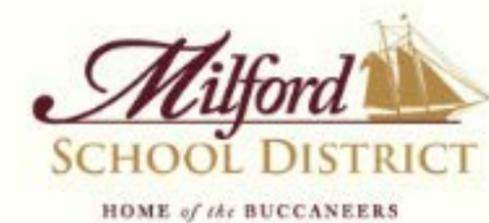
According to Joan, the couple went on their first date in the car in 1966 and they were married on her 22nd birthday. Both were born in Milford and have lived in the town the entire time of their marriage.

“The route is dependent on weather,” Joan said. “We are not doing any type of reception or gathering because of COVID.”



THANK YOU!

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.





BY TERRY ROGERS

Classes are ready to go for January through June 2022 at the Mispillion Art League (MAL). They offer classes to participants of all skill levels and abilities, starting at age five and up. You can find and register for classes on our website www.mispillionarts.org. They also post on Facebook page and on www.delawarescene.com.

For all of the Urban Sketchers in the state, MAL has a special class coming in March with British sketcher Pat Southern-Pearce. Her class was a big success in 2020 and is filling up fast for 2022. Be sure to sign up soon to get a seat!

Have a favorite artist you follow on social media? Send them an email and they will look into the possibility of teaching a class at MAL. They have also hosted Lorrie-Marie Jenkins, a California mixed media artist for a fantastic altered book class in 2019.

On offer for January through June is the ever-popular Kid's Creativity Club, pottery, painting (oil, acrylic,

MISPILLION ART LEAGUE'S 2022 CLASSES

watercolor, pastel), stained glass, jewelry, fiber, drawing, and a few outliers as well. Something for everyone to enjoy. The Art League will be closed from Dec. 31–Jan. 17 for their annual cleaning and maintenance, so most classes are starting in February. But don't wait to sign up—there is a minimum of four people per class, otherwise, it will be cancelled.

Located at 5 N Walnut Street in Milford, the Art League is open Tuesday–Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm. Currently, all participants are required to wear a mask during class and the Art League is following CDC guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting.

The Mispillion Art League is an exempt organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

This organization is supported in part by a grant from the Delaware Division of the Arts, a state agency, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. The Division promotes Delaware arts events on www.DelawareScene.com.

For further information contact Sonja Frey, Operations Manager, mispillionarts@gmail.com, 302-430-7646.



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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



PHOTO BY ANN LEBENGOOD

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EMPLOYEES RECOGNIZED BY CITY COUNCIL

BY TERRY ROGERS

In 2018, the city of Milford began an Excellence Award Program, establishing the Reward and Recognition Committee. The committee accepts submissions from staff that are then used to recognize those employees for performance above and beyond their regular duties. Winners are able to choose either an Amazon or Walmart gift card in the amount of \$50. At a recent City Council meeting, employees who received the Excellence Award were recognized.

The first employee recognized was Katrina White, Deputy City Clerk. “Katrina will be with the city eight years on Dec. 23,” Jamesha Williams, human resources director said. “She reports to the City Clerk Terri Hudson. Katrina won the Excellence Award for her preparation in the mailing of 2,400 letters, even coming in on Saturdays, for the police referendum on Jan.26. She fielded election questions, handled non-stop voter registrations and made sure all the items were delivered to Public Works before 7 a.m. the day of the election.”

The second recognition was Sandra Peck, an accountant with the city who has been employed for three years. She reports to Lou Vitola, finance director. Sandra was recognized for her hard work in the execution of the FY2022 Capital Improvement Plan and operating budget. Both were approved unanimously by City Council as an attest to the importance of Sandra’s role in the process.



Katrina Wilson was recognized for going above and beyond for the police referendum.



Sandra Peck was recognized for her assistance with the Capital Improvement Project and the annual budget

See **EMPLOYEES** on page 10



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EMPLOYEES from page 9

“I appreciate the recognition and my coworkers on the committee for recognizing the work on the budget,” Peck said.



City Council recently recognized Victoria Love for her excellence as a Billing I Clerk

Victoria Love, a Billing Clerk I who reports to Cash Operations and Revenue Supervisor for Customer Service Suzannah Frederick was recognized after the city received a lengthy letter from the comptroller of a developer for Winward on the River.

“They expressed their gratitude and appreciation for her effective communication and making sure everything was properly set up which made life easier for everyone,” Williams said.

See EMPLOYEES on page 11

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Denham Dodd, an IT tech with the city, was recently recognized for his work with the Customer Service Department

The final recognition was for Denham Dodd, a network technician who reports to the IT Director Dale Matthews. Dodd has only been with the city for six months.

“Denham was recognized twice as we actually received two submissions for him for exhibiting performance excellence, teamwork, productivity and efficiency with the system in the Customer Service Division with software and outages,” Williams said. “I think there were some issues with training and bills and all those things and Denham set up to help them. He’s been doing a great job since he’s been here with the city.”




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SALARIES INCREASED FOR COUNCIL AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Photo by cottonbro from Pexels

BY TERRY ROGERS

On Monday, Dec. 13, Milford City Council voted to increase compensation for City Council and Planning Commission members. The council increase will not be effective until May 2023 while the Planning Commission increase takes effect Jan. 1, 2022.

City council members will now receive \$100 per meeting while the mayor will receive compensation of \$600 per month. Planning Commission members will now receive \$75 per regular or special meeting which they attend. A public hearing was held for both ordinances with no members of the public speaking for or against the increases.

“I do have a question,” Councilman Mike Boyle said. “Section 2 says salary shall be modified annually based on the Consumer Price Index beginning on Jan. 1, 2023. I do have a problem. I think this is a case where we are the beneficiaries of this. I believe the council should stand before the electorate and approve this, not just let it automatically occur. In that way, you walk away from it. You have no accountability. We approve every dollar that is spent on salaries in the city. Either union contract or through the city payroll department and we ought to do the same thing here. I think we’re escaping responsibility by just allowing this thing to kind of roll from year to year. It doesn’t look a direct.”



David Rutt, city solicitor, explained that council could change the wording as increases to council compensation was a policy decision. He suggested that an amendment be made to remove an automatic escalator from the policy. Councilman Todd Culotta asked if changing the policy would make it more difficult for city staff and City Manager Mark Whitfield stated that it would not.

Because the city charter requires that any compensation increases to council cannot be implemented until six months after an election, the new payments would not begin until May 2023. However, because Planning Commission members are appointed, their increase will begin in January 2022.



CARRYING FIREARMS MAY BE PROHIBITED FOR CITY EMPLOYEES

BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent workshop prior to the regular meeting, Milford City Council discussed a proposed change to the city's personnel manual that would prohibit employees from carrying weapons while on the job. The discussion was necessary as Jamesha Williams, Director of Human Resources, had been approached by city staff about the issue. Upon researching the matter, she found that the city did not have a policy covering the issue.

"Of course, as noted in my memo, gun control is a controversial, complicated and delicate topic," Williams said. "But our recommendation for the weapons-free workplace, there's a few items there. A safer work environment and the ability to maintain control over city facilities. We also did a review, just to take a look at what the Milford School District had and the Greater Milford Boys and Girls Club as our employees are on those premises often. And they do prohibit firearms on their premises. Also, our Parks and Recreation Department would be defined as a safe recreation zone because they do have programs for children on their athletic fields. That's why we came to the determination to have a weapon free workplace. We just want to have a discussion to get your feedback and thoughts since this item isn't addressed in the city code."

Councilman Todd Culotta thanked Williams for providing extensive information to council prior to the meeting but stated that he had some issues with the recommendations. He pointed out that of the other municipalities she surveyed, only Smyrna had a gun-free policy while others either had no policy or allowed employees with concealed carry permits to have them in the workplace.

"It's my belief that the individual has a right to protect themselves," Councilman Culotta said. "If they so choose to do that with a concealed carry permit, then we should allow that. And I don't believe we need a policy when there isn't one. To argue the safer work environment, anytime weapons are prohibited in a public setting or any setting, that becomes a gun-free zone. And most mass shootings happen in gun-free zones. Just look at history and I'll use a statistic here that's a little old, but from 1993 to 2015, almost 93 percent of mass shootings happened in a gun-free zone. In the time that you would need to defend yourself from a threat, we're talking seconds. While the police do a great job, they can only be there in minutes. So, something we need to consider here instead of just a blanket policy of no weapons."

See FIREARMS on page 14

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FIREARMS from page 13

Councilman Culotta then explained the process for obtaining a concealed carry permit in Delaware. He stated that an individual must take a class on the proper firearm safety rules and regulations as well as fire 100 rounds to demonstrate they can properly operate a weapon, have an FBI background check, five references from people in their county who will vouch for them and announce that they are getting a concealed carry in the paper. They must also pay a fee to get the permit. Councilman Culotta pointed out that the state does a good job of vetting those who can carry a concealed weapon and that adding the policy was going overboard.

“I actually agree with Todd,” Mayor Archie Campbell said. “Almost every mayor in Southern Delaware carries. I think if you go through a concealed carry class and you scrutinize that they have concealed carry, I think it will be okay.”

Councilman Mike Boyle disagreed with both Councilman Culotta and Mayor Campbell.

“I don’t think the workplace is a place for a gun,” Councilman Boyle said. “It is not the place for it. I find it confusing some of these weapons-free zones allowed concealed weapons. It doesn’t make sense to have a gun, concealed or not. It would be used to intimidate some people. You don’t know what the spark might be with somebody that would set somebody off. And yes, I agree that you don’t know what’s going to set somebody off and they couldn’t come back. But as an excuse, walking around with a gun, it’s just too many people are intimidated by that.”

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BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent workshop, Milford City Council discussed a recommendation from City Manager Mark Whitfield and Human Resource Director Jamesha Williams to deny city employees the ability to obtain a medical marijuana card. Because the city receives federal funding, they are required to have a drug-free workplace policy. Since marijuana is not approved for medical use by the federal government, the city could lose federal funding without implementing this policy.

“An employer cannot discriminate against an individual getting a medical marijuana card unless the card would cause the employer to lose a monetary or licensing benefit under the federal law or regulation,” Williams said. “In addition, we do have commercial driver’s license holders, those are our Public Works employees. So, those are employees in solid waste, electric, water and sewer. They are required under Department of Transportation to undergo drug testing, which includes they cannot

CITY CONSIDERS MEDICAL MARIJUANA RESTRICTION

test positive for the substance in marijuana. In addition, the Delaware State Police still prohibits employees and applicants from using marijuana, even if it is legalized through the state. And so, what we want to do with this change is prohibit employees from being able to obtain this Delaware registry card and test positive as an accommodation to having that card.”

Councilman Andy Fulton asked if there was documentation that the city would lose federal funding if they permitted employees to have a medical marijuana card. Whitfield stated that the policy had been reviewed by the city solicitor’s office and because the police receive federal funding, the city was required to adjust its policy.

“The police, I understand the police and federal funding being tied to some of the things,” Councilman Fulton said. “But your standard employees have the right to take Percocet, codeine, cough syrup with codeine or if they have to take some other type of pain reliever or some other type of analgesic which will cause them some other type of symptoms or some other type of condition. Some of these people, they have nothing else to turn to and a medical doctor, not a state agency, has said this is what you need to take for your MS, your cancer, for this or for that. And you’re about to say you’re no longer allowed to be employed in Milford because you don’t get to have that card and be employed. That’s what you are about to say.”

Whitfield explained that although he shared Council-

man Fulton’s sentiments, because the city received federal funding, they were required to have a policy in place that prohibits the use of marijuana. Mayor Archie Campbell pointed out that he recently went through a medical issue with his wife and, although she did not use medical marijuana, had she not had medication available, she would be “in a fix today.”

“There are people on methadone, not because they are heroin addicts, but because of the pain they experience on a day-to-day basis,” Councilman Fulton said. “They’re not heroin addicts but they’re taking methadone and methadone, you used to see methadone and you said ‘Oh, you’re an addict?’ No, it’s treated as a pain treatment. I really can’t believe the federal government has tied the hands and said every city, an entire bank of city employees, are not allowed by federal mandates, you can’t have a medical marijuana card. And I find that really hard to believe. And I’d really like to see written documentation before I would ever want to put something that looks like this into our Milford bylaws. I understand the police, I really do. I understand this guide for police, and I understand because, you know, until they change the way people look at it, it’s a serious issue. Police departments, because it is against federal law, and you have to uphold our laws, federal laws as well.”

Chief Kenneth Brown stated that when he signs any grant documentation, some of which have as many as

See MEDICAL on page 16

MEDICAL from page 15

14 pages, he must initial each one because they include items the city must comply with and one of them includes a drug free workplace. He also agreed with Councilman Fulton's sentiments but explained that complying with federal law is something that is heavily tracked with federal grants. Councilman Fulton stated that he understood this rule with the police to which Chief Brown stated that the police department was not separate from the city. Mayor Campbell asked if there could be a clause that forbid the use of marijuana during working hours for those with a medical marijuana card.

"We wouldn't be able to do that, Mayor, because all employees are in the random drug testing pool," Williams said. "And so, what will happen is when they get pulled, they will test positive for marijuana even if they did not consume it during work hours."

Councilman Fulton stated that there were other medications that could show up on a drug test that may make it appear an employee is using something they should not. Williams explained that when an employee goes for a drug test, they provide information on any prescriptions they are taking. The lab can then contact the doctor to confirm that the drug that appeared in their sample was prescribed and the issue only arose if there was no prescription to match a substance in their system. Whitfield also explained that Department of Transportation rules for CDL drivers require them to notify their employer ahead of time if they are prescribed any type of narcotic for pain.

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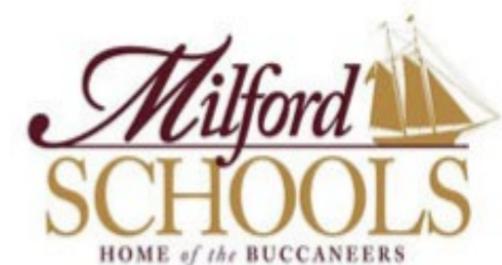
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BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent workshop, Milford City Council heard details regarding changes to the city's right-of-way codes for wireless facilities as well as sidewalks and curbs. City Planner Rob Pierce and University of Delaware Fellow Melody Barger provided information on the code changes.

"You can imagine there are some communities that have been dealing with, let's just say undesirable structures that have been placed within the rights of way and this occurs when you do not have any types of control," City Manager Mark Whitfield said. "We are not trying to limit the use of our rights of way but having some control over those rights of way and how wireless facilities are installed, where they can be installed and also some type of income that can come back to the city of the use of our right-of-way for those wireless facilities. The other item is our street ordinance which really just needs an upgrade."

Whitfield also stated that the city currently had no permitting system should someone want to use a city right-of-way. Therefore, if another utility, such as a gas

CITY TO UPDATE RIGHT-OF-WAY CODES

company, wanted to use a Milford right-of-way, there is nothing in the code that limits what can be done or where they can go. This also means that if any damage occurs, it would be difficult for the city to recover any costs since there is no permitting process in place. Pierce began the presentation by explaining the different types of wireless facilities.

"Tower-based facilities are what you traditionally think of, the old-time, old-fashioned cell towers," Pierce said. "Their structures support one or more antenna that includes self-supporting lattice towers, guy towers and monopoles. Non-tower WCFs are antenna facilities that are not supported by towers and not considered small wireless communication facilities either. Those could again be placed on top of a taller structure, like a water tower or a tall building like the hospital or another building that has excessive height. The small wireless facilities would include antennas and support structures that are generally 50 feet in height or less."

Pierce explained that the code would allow tower-based facilities by conditional use within the business park, lands that are highway commercial, both types of industrial zones and the institutional service district, which would include the Bayhealth Sussex Health Campus. The minimum distance from the base of the tower to the property line would be at 110 percent of the tower height.

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EDUCATION



MSD CHOOSES CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT COMPANY

BY TERRY ROGERS

At the November meeting of the Milford School District Board of Education, the board approved a request from Mike Sharp, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds, to send out a request for proposal for a construction manager for the district. The construction manager would be responsible for managing the demolition and remodeling of the former Milford Middle School as well as several projects throughout the district.

“I am making a recommendation that Richard Y. Johnson and Son, Inc. be selected for the construction management contract subject to the negotiation process set forth in Section 6982 of the Delaware code,” Sharp said. “If that negotiation process is not successful, the district can come back to the board after negotiating with successor ranked applicants.”

Sharp explained that the renovation and construction portion of the agreement was for the former Middle School. HVAC renovations at Milford High School and an elementary school were also covered under the proposal. Other smaller projects may also be included in the contract.

“I am curious,” School Board member David Vezmar said. “It says the committee. Who is the committee?” Sharp stated that the committee consisted of himself, Dr. Kevin Dickerson, Superintendent, Dr. Sara Croce, Chief Financial Officer, School Board President Jason

Miller and Duane Hendrix, a maintenance employee who is also a union member.

Board Vice-President Rony Baltazar-Lopez asked what base ranking was used to choose Richard Y. Johnson and Sons.

“We ran through the top three,” Sharp said. “Their reputation is stellar, other projects, they came in a couple million dollars less than the competitors that were brought to the board and just the overall process. It was a unanimous decision.” Dr. Dickerson also stated that the company expertise and experience with several other projects weighed heavily in their favor as well. Sharp confirmed that the company had performed construction management for the Milton and Lewes Elementary schools, both projects that were similar in nature to the middle school project.”

The board approved Richard Y. Johnson and Sons to act as the construction manager for projects in the district unanimously.



SCHOOL BOARD SEEKS RFPS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

BY TERRY ROGERS

Dr. Kevin Dickerson, Superintendent of Milford School District, requested that Milford School District Board of Education seek requests for proposals (RFPs) from vendors who could help the district create a strategic plan. Dr. Dickerson explained that there were several reasons why the district felt the need to seek outside assistance to create the plan.

“We do think it is time here at this point in time, especially where we are right now in education expressly with the impact the pandemic had with not having students in on a routine basis last year to really look at our needs again and develop a comprehensive student plan that really guides our day-to-day operations,” Dr. Dickerson said. “We’d like to engage our stakeholders and district community to make sure it’s a diverse representation for input. We are looking at a plan for three-to-five years that guides us, and we do feel like it’s necessary for us to continuously improve for all our students as we go forward.”

Dr. Dickerson explained that this was also a way to look at the district systems holistically. He stated that there had been plans over the years but felt it was time to develop a comprehensive plan moving forward. He also felt it was important to have the plan done professionally.

“Before we get to the motion, I just want to thank you, Dr. Dickerson, as well as your leadership team for preparing and outlining the roadmap for what is essentially the revamping of the 20-year-old board policy

60-101,” Board Vice-President Rony Baltazar-Lopez said. “In October 2020, I brought to the attention of this board the need for updating this policy to ensure that we are meeting our goals and holding ourselves accountable. Having a strategic plan that reflects our modern day environment, really outlines objectives, outputs, inputs, outcomes and other variables into a condensed document will improve or provide a sense of direction for our district.”

Baltazar-Lopez asked how the plan would engage diversity and stakeholders for input. Dr. Dickerson explained that those questions would be addressed through the planning process. Baltazar-Lopez also asked if the strategic plan would be updated regularly, explaining that he didn’t want to go another “20 years without updating it again.”

“I think if I read it right, it will be updated continuously,” Dr. Dickerson said. “We’d have to come back and continue looking at our plan and looking at progress and then obviously looking at places we may have to revise as we go forward.”

When Baltazar-Lopez asked if he could be part of the process, Dr. Dickerson stated that there would be families, community members, businesses, students and board representation throughout the process. School Board President Jason Miller asked if the strategic planners would be a private industry or part of a university.

“University of Delaware does have some,” Dr. Dickerson

said. “The University of Virginia and Dr. Amory has been in contact with them in the past when looking for some desired plans and those types of things. So we have various vendors. We do have a list like that who have done this in other districts.” Dr. Dickerson stated he felt the district should focus on vendors with strong educational backgrounds.

Board Member Jean Wylie asked what metrics would be used to identify areas of improvement and growth.

“That’s where we’ll have the vendor lead us and help us identify our priorities,” Dr. Dickerson said. “They’ll help us identify what key metrics to look at. We have a lot of areas there as well that we can draw data on. We can also draw some conclusions on those places where we can improve and get better.”

When asked by Miller what funding source would be used, Dr. Dickerson stated there was a contingency fund that could be used, but since this would be an ongoing expense, it would need to be built into the base budget for the following year. Dr. Sara Croce, Chief Financial Officer, stated that the cost would probably be a few thousand dollars.

The request to send out RFPs for a strategic plan was approved unanimously.

MILFORD
LIVE



BY TERRY ROGERS

At the November meeting of the Milford School District Board of Education, the board voted in a three-to-three tie not to send a letter, drafted by Board member Dr. Adam Brownstein, in response to a recent National School Board Association (NSBA) request for federal assistance related to school board protests. Because there was not a full board seated during the vote, School Board President Jason Miller placed the letter on the agenda for December as an action item.

“First, we have to have a motion and pass a motion to reconsider this,” Miller explained. “I am seeking a motion to reconsider our response to the NSBA letter introduced by Dr. Brownstein at our last meeting.”

Vice-President Rony Baltazar-Lopez pointed out that this matter would not be up for debate and asked that, moving forward, these types of reconsiderations not be

BROWNSTEIN LETTER TABLED INDEFINITELY

added as an action item on the agenda.

“Having the NSBA letter response on the agenda for this meeting as an action item implies that an action has to be taken,” Baltazar-Lopez said. “As indicated in our new approved meeting minutes for last month, this board failed to move forward with the motion to release the letter to NSBA and there was no other motion after that. If any member of the board wishes to ask the board for reconsideration, including Dr. Brownstein’s letter, he or she should prescribe to the Robert’s Rules of Order for having that reconsideration which, as a reminder, is our board policy 8502. Doing otherwise is impractical, not supporting transparency and possibly a violation of the Freedom of Information Act.”

Baltazar-Lopez then asked Miller to postpone the question of Brownstein’s letter indefinitely, something that would only require a simple majority vote. Board Member David Vezmar asked Baltazar-Lopez to clarify his motion. Baltazar-Lopez responded that it was another way to say they were not going to vote on moving forward with the motion to send the letter.

“Essentially, Mr. Lopez is asking us to kill the conversation,” Miller said. The motion to postpone the discussion indefinitely was approved with Baltazar-Lopez, Kris Thompson, Vezmar and Jean Wylie voting in the affirmative while Brownstein and Scott Fitzgerald voted against the measure. Miller abstained from the vote.



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HEALTH



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BAYHEALTH TO EXPAND HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN DOVER



BY TERRY ROGERS

As the regional healthcare leader, Bayhealth is committed to meeting the growing needs of the communities we serve. Among its latest plans for strategic expansion, Bayhealth has entered into an agreement to purchase a large portion of the Blue Hen Corporate Center in Dover. This acquisition will provide an additional 185,000 square feet for Bayhealth to efficiently grow its patient-centered care model while improving access to care for central Delaware residents.

This real estate transaction is expected to close before the end of 2021. The acquisition will add to the space Bayhealth already operates at Blue Hen Corporate Center. It will bring an expansion of Bayhealth clinical services, including primary and specialty care practices and diagnostic services, to the property.

“We are excited about the ability to repurpose this landmark facility by reimagining it as a central location for healthcare services to benefit the people of Kent

County,” said Bayhealth President and Chief Executive Officer Terry Murphy, FACHE. “This acquisition will give us the room to further grow our organization and the services we offer in fulfilling our ongoing mission to strengthen the health of our community.”

With the goal of improved access and one-stop availability of services, Bayhealth is finalizing the design for the clinical offerings to be provided at the Blue Hen Corporate Center. Renovation will begin in early 2022 with opening scheduled for spring 2023.

What is now the Blue Hen Corporate Center opened in 1969 as the Blue Hen Mall. At the time, it was the only enclosed shopping mall in Delaware. J.C. Penney and Woolco were original anchor stores in the mall. When Sears could not reach an agreement with the Blue Hen Mall, they moved to the newly constructed Dover Mall which opened in 1982. Slowly, stores began moving to the new mall and the Blue Hen Mall began to fade.

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In the 1990s, the Blue Hen Mall became the Blue Hen Corporate Center and retail space was converted to office space. Bank of America opened a call center there and Aetna opened an office in the building. Both businesses left the center in 2009. Bayhealth has been renting space in the mall since 2013.

Visit www.Bayhealth.org to learn more about the healthcare services Bayhealth provides in central and southern Delaware.

MILFORD
LIVE

DELAWARE CONFIRMS 4 CASES OF OMICRON; 1,079 NEW COVID CASES FRIDAY

BY BETSY PRICE

The Delaware Division of Public Health has found the first four cases of the Omicron variant among Delaware residents, it announced Friday. The four cases involve two adults in their 30s, a teenager and a child under the age of 10, all residents of New Castle County. Two individuals were fully vaccinated and two were unvaccinated. None of the individuals had a known history of travel.

Those close to the people who were infected are being monitored in an attempt to slow the spread of the much more infectious form of COVID-19.

Across the country, health officials have warned there will be tsunami of cases coming because the variant, first discovered in Africa, is so infectious. It already has been discovered in surrounding states and the number of cases in New York and New Jersey are multiplying quickly.

Also Friday, the Division of Public Health reported 1,079 new cases of COVID, with 359 people in the hospital and 42 in critical condition. The day before,

Thursday, Dec. 16, it had reported 677 new cases. The state usually measures COVID stats from Friday through Thursday each week to compare with the week before.

For the week ending Thursday, the average number of daily new cases was 677, up from 596.6 the week before. The seven-day average for percentage of positive tests was 9.8%, up from 9.3% the week before. On Friday, the percentage of new positive cases was 38.2.

Hospitalizations during the week were up by 42 and critical cases by nine. During the week, 23 new deaths were recorded, bringing the total to 2,234.

The New Castle County Omicron cases were detected through random routine genomic sequencing of test specimens that are done by the Delaware Public Health Laboratory. Genome sequencing is a public health surveillance tool used to monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 variants; it is not used to diagnose individuals with a specific strain of COVID-19, as treatment recommendations do not differ based on variant strains.

COVID-19 tests will say whether you have a COVID-19 infection, but not which variant of the virus the individual might have. “With cases of the Omicron variant detected in our surrounding states, it was only a matter of time until we detected this variant in Delaware,” said Dr. Karyl Rattay, Public Health director. She noted that many people who have it have reported milder symptoms than other strains have caused.

“We still have a lot more to learn about Omicron,” she said. “Therefore, we need to do what we know works to combat all strains of COVID-19: get vaccinated, get tested when appropriate, wear a mask in indoor public settings, socially distance from others and wash your hands regularly.”

The state expects an increase in demand for testing in the next several weeks because of the holiday and the new Omicron cases, but it hasn’t seen statewide testing being affected. “However, in general, we are not seeing major issues meeting testing demand currently, given there are multiple testing options in Delaware,” said Jennifer Brestel, a Public Health spokeswoman.

Those options included Curative testing trailers, state service centers and freestanding clinics—Canby Park, University Plaza, Blue Hen and Georgetown Plaza, state-sponsored Walgreens testing sites, other retail pharmacies, health care clinics, and the school testing program, she said.

In addition, she said several over-the-counter at-home tests are available from a variety of locations such as Walgreens, CVS, Rite Aid and Amazon. “We expect supply of those tests to increase as well,” she said.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE](#)



BY TERRY ROGERS

Bayhealth hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for Bayhealth Total Care, a new and innovative approach to providing healthcare in Sussex County. Strategically located at the intersection of Lewes-Georgetown Highway (Route 9) and Hudson Road in Milton, Bayhealth Total Care will be the first healthcare facility of its kind in Delaware. It will be home to a hybrid emergency and walk-in center, imaging and lab services, as well as primary and specialty care offices. The 48,500 square foot, modern healthcare facility is slated to open in a little more than a year in early 2023.

“This is a very exciting day as it marks a milestone in our commitment to providing southern Delaware access to top-quality healthcare, close to home,” said Bayhealth President and CEO Terry Murphy, FACHE. “The opening of Bayhealth Total Care is the next big step in a well-thought-out plan to invest in healthcare across Sussex County. As our community will recall, nearly three years ago we opened Bayhealth Sussex

BAYHEALTH IMPROVES ACCESS TO ADVANCED CARE

Campus, our new, state-of-the-art hospital along Route 1, which has allowed us to better care for this community in a beautiful, well-equipped space using the latest technology.”

Bayhealth Total Care will add to the local area five primary care clinicians with the ability to cover thousands of patient visits every year. It will also offer community members convenient access to specialty care doctors like neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons, cardiologists, oncologists, and more. The addition of emergency facilities may also relieve some of the pressure from area emergency departments, including Bayhealth Sussex.

“This model will transform emergent and urgent care access for southern Delaware,” said Chief Medical Officer Gary Siegelman, MD, MSc. “Instead of guessing what level of care they need, patients can walk in the door and our trained medical professionals, including emergency certified physicians, will determine it for them.” Visit www.Bayhealth.org/Total-Care to stay informed on the project.



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PHOTO BY KEVIN EICKMAN

STRICKLAND TO COACH BLUE-GOLD

BY KEVIN EICKMAN

The Delaware Foundation Reaching Citizens (DFRC) has been helping to bring enlightenment and inclusion for those facing intellectual disabilities since 1956. During that time, the DFRC has impacted the lives of countless students throughout Delaware. A big part of the year-round fundraising effort is the annual Blue-Gold football game. The game is unique, in that it doesn't just take the best football players and put them on the field. The DFRC screening process is unique in the fact that they don't just take top-tier football talent, those individuals selected to play in the game undergo a rigorous screening process, which takes in their academic achievements, but to an even greater degree, the DFRC and sponsoring schools look into the individual's character.

The 2022 incarnation of the game is hoping to get back up to the grounds of the University of Delaware in June of next year, with the traditional week of preparation and bonding that goes with it. Milford head coach Shaun Strickland has been given the honor of coaching the Gold squad this year. While the list of coaches usually grows, as of now the assistant coaches are Milford's Nick Brannan, Sussex Tech's Eston Ennis and Appoquinimink's Brian Timpson and Francis Clark. "I am very excited to have these coaches on board for this year. They are all class individuals and that is what we look for in our coaches as well as our athletes when it comes to participating in this fantastic event," Strick-

land said.

Being selected to coach is quite an honor. Strickland went through a screening process and was selected by the DFRC based on the qualities it seeks, the honor of being selected to coach the Gold squad both thrilled and humbled Strickland. "Words can't begin to explain how much this means to me. I mean, I get it coaching football is what I love to do, but this is something special. We are talking about the flagship event of the DFRC, and just being a part of it and all the great things they do, is very humbling."

Milford has always had close ties to the DFRC and this year is no different. The Buccaneers will be represented by at least one graduated player and possibly one or two more depending on the nomination process. While the game is fun, this is more about the friendships that the players make amongst themselves, but more importantly their buddies. Milford's Justin Haggerty has been a player's buddy going back to at least 2008. One thing is for certain, it is a big thing to have a buddy who is a star football player. "The buddies really look up to the football players that they are matched with. In their eyes, these guys are rock stars. The funny thing is, that the players usually get more out of it than



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See **STRICKLAND** on page 29

STRICKLAND from page 28

their buddy. They inevitably make a new friend, from a place they never expected. And often, those friendships stand the test of time,” Strickland stated.

When asked about the challenges of putting together a team with just one week of preparation, Strickland shared his plan of action. “These young men are all talented and smart. They simply wouldn’t be playing if it were any other way. The major obstacle is getting everyone used to the terminology we use. With everyone coming from different systems, they all run the same plays they are just called differently. The key is to keep it simple,” Strickland said.

We also had a chance to talk with Coach Ennis to get his thoughts on being named to the staff. “It has always been a blessing to be able to coach our great young men all around the state in their last official high school football game! This game has an inspiring cause and has provided a great opportunity to align children of all backgrounds for the betterment of their lives moving forward. As a player in the 2003 game, to coaching now in the 2022 game, it brings me joy and appreciation on a whole different level. Again, I am honored to be on the staff and a part of DFRC,” he said.



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POLICE & FIRE



CHIEF UPDATES COUNCIL ON NEW POLICE FACILITY



BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent City Council meeting, Milford Chief of Police Kenneth Brown provided information on the new police facility progress. According to Chief Brown, the Citizen Police Facility Advisory Committee has been working with Becker Morgan to narrow down options for the new facility.

“Becker Morgan brought in three versions of the front of the building,” Chief Brown said. “They reviewed the façade and the brick and picked Delta brick. There were really only two choices, a darker one and a lighter one, but everyone seemed to like the darker one. I’m happy about that. That’s what I liked.” Chief Brown stated that the front of the building would also have an area where an emblem could be added.

Councilman Jason James asked if there were plans to do another presentation before council and Chief Brown stated that they had plans to do so in January.

“I was going to ask the exact same thing,” Councilwoman Katrina Wilson said. “I mean, I’ve been sitting here a very long time, and this is probably our third go around and never getting this far. I definitely want to feel we are part of the process.”

Chief Brown explained that most of the work done so far has been related to permitting and other items that were chiefly the responsibility of the engineering group. He also explained that they have been working on spacing needs and were able to use computer software to plug in where certain furniture would go in certain rooms. No final decisions have been made by the committee according to Chief Brown, although Mayor Archie Campbell mentioned that the committee was leaning toward windows that were slightly lower than those at Troop 7 but higher than normal in order to provide some protection for officers.

“And that’s all wonderful,” Councilwoman Wilson said. “But we are the elected officials. Therefore, people are going to come to us and want an update and I just think it would be wise for us to be included.”

Councilman Andy Fulton asked if there had been any changes due to the new policy allowing officers to take vehicles home. “Well, I first proposed that, since that time, most of council advised me they don’t want to take that out,” Chief Brown said. “Just leave it the way it was. However, when we heard a substantial price increase of about \$2 million for inflation, we had to cut some things. So, one of the things we did do is shrink the locker room. It is still adequate, especially with take home cars, but it is also still there. We did condense that down to cut square footage.”

In addition to cutting down the size of the locker room, Chief Brown explained that the offices planned in the new building were based on the number of police that were currently on the force and they did not plan to eliminate any offices.

“What we did is to shrink some of them,” Chief Brown said. “Even the hallway, by inches and believe it or not, that saves a lot of money. They are also working on the parking lot now, condensing that some as that would be a cost savings. The community room had an angle wall to it. They squared that up to save some room. It can still seat over 100 people, so we still have a large meeting room.”

Mayor Campbell stated that one dealership told the city that they might need to go elsewhere to purchase the additional police cars.

“Chevrolet has stopped taking orders for cars and you know that is what we have been using for several years,” Chief Brown said. “And I’ve just gotten word that Dodge

See FACILITY on page 32

FACILITY from page 31

is doing the same thing; I think as of the 16th. But anyhow, we ordered the Fords. They're the hybrid that doesn't require plugging in, when the engine runs, it charges the battery. In town, it should give us 23 to 25 miles per gallon in town. That is a projected savings of \$3,400 in gas per car per year, so although the purchase is costing you money, there are some benefits to it."

Chief Brown stated that the change to allow officers to take cars home has already begun to show benefits. "We have two more certified officers since we've added that benefit," Chief Brown said. "So, that's up to three and there is another officer currently with us who told us he was leaving and has now decided to stay."



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