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BUD & BUG FESTIVAL IS BACK



BILL TO CUT REALTY TRANSFER TAX



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APRIL 12, 2022
VOL. 12 · ISSUE 15

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PHOTO BY SCOTT EVERS

HEADLINES



PHOTO BY MARCIA REED

BUG AND BUD FESTIVAL RETURNS

PRESS RELEASE

One of Delaware's most popular festivals is finally back! The Annual Bug & Bud Festival takes place on Saturday, April 30, from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Hosted by Downtown Milford, Inc., this rain or shine event takes place along Walnut Street, Park Avenue and the Mispillion Riverwalk in historic downtown Milford.

The festival will be a little smaller than in years past and will include the always popular Spring Costume Parade featuring adults, children and pets dressed as ladybugs and trees. This year, the ladybugs and trees have graciously invited the bees, butterflies and flowers to join in the parade as a show of springtime solidarity! Arts and crafts vendors will line the streets. There will also be a preview of DMI's Farmers Market. You will find diverse local entertainment throughout the day; food vendors including funnel cakes and cotton candy; a "KID ZONE" with games and activities; art and nature-related hands-on activities for the young at heart, seedling tree giveaways and a petting zoo.

Many thanks to our partners: Bayhealth, The Milford Chronicle and WSFS Bank. Anyone wishing to sponsor this or any other Downtown Milford, Inc., event should contact the DMI office at 302-839-1180. More info is available at www.downtownmilford.org or contact director@downtownmilford.org. Merchants, non-profits, or community groups which would like to register for a 10×10 spot, please submit an inquiry [HERE](#).



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CULTURE



PHOTO BY MARCIA REED



BREAST CANCER POP-UP GIRLS' DRESS RESALE RAISED \$1,000

BY TERRY ROGERS

A girls dress sale at the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition raised \$1,000 for its young survivors program. “Most women who are diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age also have young children,” said Mackenzie Blithe, who arranged the pop-up shop. “We felt like this was a great way to raise money and help people with children choose cute clothing at a low price.”

The April 1 and 2 pop-up sale at Great Stuff Savvy Resale in Wilmington included a curated collection of boutique and designer dresses from around the world.

Blithe called the sale a huge success and said that the organization may hold another in the future, although one is not planned at this time. “Over 100 dresses were sold and the shop attracted many first-time visitors,” she said.

Other events are planned through DBCC to support the Young Survivors in Action group. On April 13, May 11 and June 8, a virtual cookbook club will be held from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. Each attendee receives their own cookbook in the mail and they meet virtually once a month to indulge and share cooking tips, healthy ideas and inspiration for cooking healthy. Anyone interested can RSVP to aperdue@debreastcancer.org and space is limited.

Other events include Healing Meditation, Sleepytime Yoga, FUNctional Fitness and Belly Dancing. To learn more about events planned for DBCC, go to www.debreastcancer.org/dbcc-events/.

For more information about Young Survivors in Action, go to www.debreastcancer.org/programs/young-survivors-in-action.

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2022-2023 School Year

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March 14 (Monday)	8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
March 29 (Tuesday)	4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
April 6 (Wednesday)	4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
April 12 (Tuesday)	4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
May 4 (Wednesday)	4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
May 19 (Thursday)	4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
June 1 (Wednesday)	4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
June 7 (Tuesday)	4:00p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Important notes:

- Please call 422-1650 to schedule a date and time
 - Please indicate if you will need an interpreter
- Child must be 5 years old by August 31, 2022 to begin kindergarten
- You must bring your child for screening on your scheduled date and time to assist

Documents required for registration include:

- State Issued Birth Certificate (with raised seal)
- Proof of Residency (utility bill, lease agreement, mortgage papers) within the Milford School District
- Guardianship/custody information if applicable
- Immunization (shot) record
- Physical Exam
- Tuberculosis Risk Assessment or PPD results
- Lead test result

*Please note: Any family who is interested in being considered for the 2022-2023 Spanish Immersion Program lottery will need to register on or before June 7th. Any late registrants will be added to the waiting list.

JOHN MOLLURA

- PHOTOGRAPHY -

BEAUTY PORTRAITS - HEAD SHOTS
- FAMILIES -

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BUSINESS



Q2 PHOTO BY MARCIA REED

CITY OF MILFORD AWARDED SITE READINESS FUNDS



PRESS RELEASE

The city of Milford recently received approval for its Site Readiness Fund application from the state of Delaware Council on Development Finance. The application totaled \$100,000.

According to the Delaware Division of Small Business, the Site Readiness Fund, established through Senate Bill 127, “promotes economic growth and stability by investing in the development or improvement of commercial and industrial sites to attract job-creating businesses.”

The city of Milford will utilize its funds to support planning for the development of the 182-acre proposed industrial/business park on the corner of Rt. 14 and Rt. 15 (Canterbury Road). Funding will be used to offset costs related to master plan development, a traffic impact study, and engineering design.

“The state of Delaware’s Site Readiness Fund provides opportunities to expand economic development within the state,” stated Mark Whitfield, city manager. “We are pleased that Delaware Division of Small Business shares the vision of Milford City Council in the creation of the Milford Corporate Center and has provided this funding.”

The FY 2022 Bond Bill included \$10 million to support the Site Readiness Fund. Grantees were either awarded \$100,000 (Level 1) or \$1 million (Level 2). The city of Milford intends to apply for a Level 2 grant in

See FUNDS on page 10



FUNDS from page 9

FY23, which will offset some of the infrastructure costs.

“By investing in these projects, we can ensure that Delaware remains competitive in attracting and retaining vital businesses that create opportunities for employment,” said Jordan Schulties, director of the Division of Small Business. “In today’s competitive economy, it is more important than ever that we have tools like the Site Readiness Fund to help expand and sustain economic growth in our state.”

The addition of an industrial/business park will centralize such businesses and fulfill the current and future needs of manufacturing, light industrial, warehousing and employment in the greater Milford area. The property, which is adjacent to the present Milford Business Park, will also be evaluated for potential drinking water wells and possible water tower for the northwest section of the city. The creation of an industrial park was included in the 2018 Strategic Plan.

About the city of Milford: (www.cityofmilford.com) The city of Milford, incorporated in 1807 and located in Kent and Sussex Counties along the Mispillion River, is home to 11,000+ year-round residents, 500+ retail businesses and non-profits, local restaurants, parks, trails, small town events, major healthcare providers, an historic shipyard, and its own school district. Known throughout the state as River Town, Art Town, Home Town, the city celebrates the beauty of its natural resources, the ingenuity of its people and its commitment to quality of life.



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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



PHOTO BY ANN LEBENGOOD

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CITY APPROVES CHANGES TO STREET AND SIDEWALK ORDINANCE

BY TERRY ROGERS

Milford City Council recently approved changes to its sidewalk ordinance. The changes included the addition of rules for right-of-way, sidewalk excavation as well as the abandonment of streets within the town. One of the reasons for the update was to deal with “paper alleys” that are on the books as streets in Milford.

“This is my second municipality dealing with alleys,” Mark Whitfield, city manager, said. “I think I could write a book on what to do. I will tell you the general rule of thumb is 20 years. So, in other words, if someone has closed it off and it has not been used for more than 20 years, then there’s almost an implied vacation of the alley that the municipality may no longer have a claim to that alley. What happens is more likely, you have alleys that have never been improved and never been opened. That’s where we get most of our complaints. If it’s never been improved, it’s never been open, so it was nothing

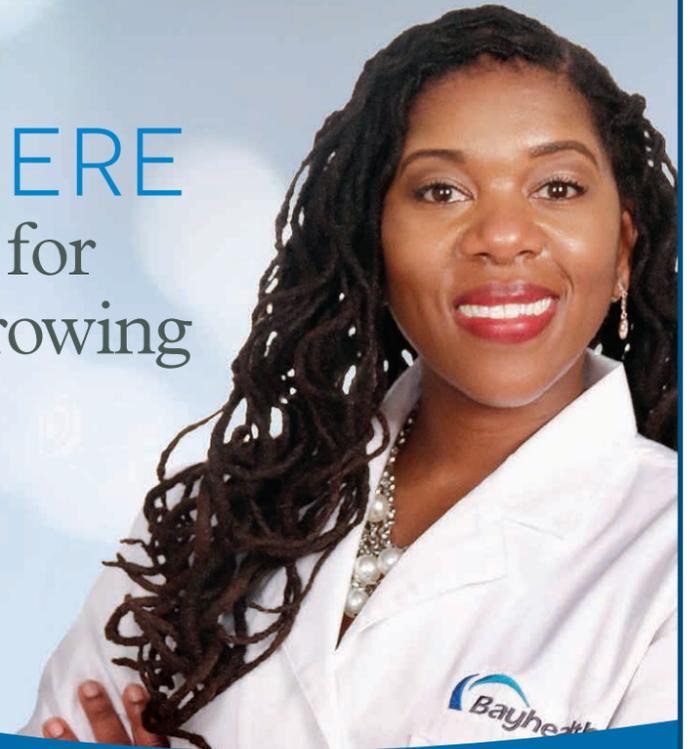
more than a paper street. The rule of thumb there is that people own to the center of the right-of-way. So, if it was a right-of-way that was never open, it’s an extension of the lots into the center of that right-of-way. So, if a tree falls or a tree needs to be taken down and its on what had been the alley right-of-way, it really belongs to the property owner that abuts that.”

Councilman Jason James asked if the property owner gained a title to that center line if the alley was never improved and Whitfield explained that would only happen if council took action to formally vacate the alley. A property owner has the right to ask council to do that, but council also has the ability to take action on its own, something Whitfield would like to see happen. He stated that was where issues arose when property owners were unaware that they may be responsible for the problem.

“We’ve run into issues where it’s both sides,” Councilman Todd Culotta said. “You’re giving somebody something saying we are extending your property and they say ‘well, you guys have taken always taken care of it.’ I think previous administrations may have set a precedent that we will take care of it, so at least this way it

See **SIDEWALK** on page 13

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SIDEWALK from page 12

becomes clear one way or the other.”

City Solicitor David Rutt explained that a private citizen could not claim adverse possession. Whitfield stated that a lot of times an alley is never improved which meant that the city could not go in and take over an alley that had never been open without getting approval while property owners could not claim adverse possession.

“It does get very complicated,” Whitfield said. “That’s why we’d really like to get a lot of these things cleared up, so it is very clear to people what the city owns, what the city doesn’t and when they are going to make a change.”

Councilman Andy Fulton pointed out that if a tree falls and damages a neighbor’s property, it would be an insurance issue. Councilman Mike Boyle asked if the tree was dead or alive to which Councilman Fulton stated it would not matter.

“Actually, it does,” Councilman Boyle said. “My neighbor’s tree came down, took out my fence and every one of my trees. His insurance company would not cover the cost because it was a live tree and considered an Act of God. If it was a dead tree, he was responsible for not maintaining it properly.”

Whitfield explained that the new ordinance made it much easier for the city to begin cleaning up the paper alley issues.

“The existing procedure would be to have to file in Superior Court for abandonment and have to get Del-DOT approval,” Rutt said. “You have to go through a whole process. We did that several years ago with a

See SIDEWALK on page 14



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SIDEWALK from page 13

street that goes across SeaWatch property. The entrance to SeaWatch. There was a paper street next to that. And then we also had to do it at the end of West Clarke Avenue, there's a section maybe 100 feet and we took it down. We had to go through the adjoining landowners, then paid after we got it all in place, paid for the cost of what expense was and they now own to the center of that land. It is a messy process. This takes care of it so you can do it."

There was no public comment during that portion of the meeting and the ordinance passed unanimously.

In addition to the sidewalk ordinance, council also passed changes to the wireless ordinance that would require permits for internet or cellular companies to install towers. This ordinance was prompted by an issue that Dewey Beach dealt with when cell towers were placed along the beach. There was no public comment during that discussion and the ordinance also passed unanimously.



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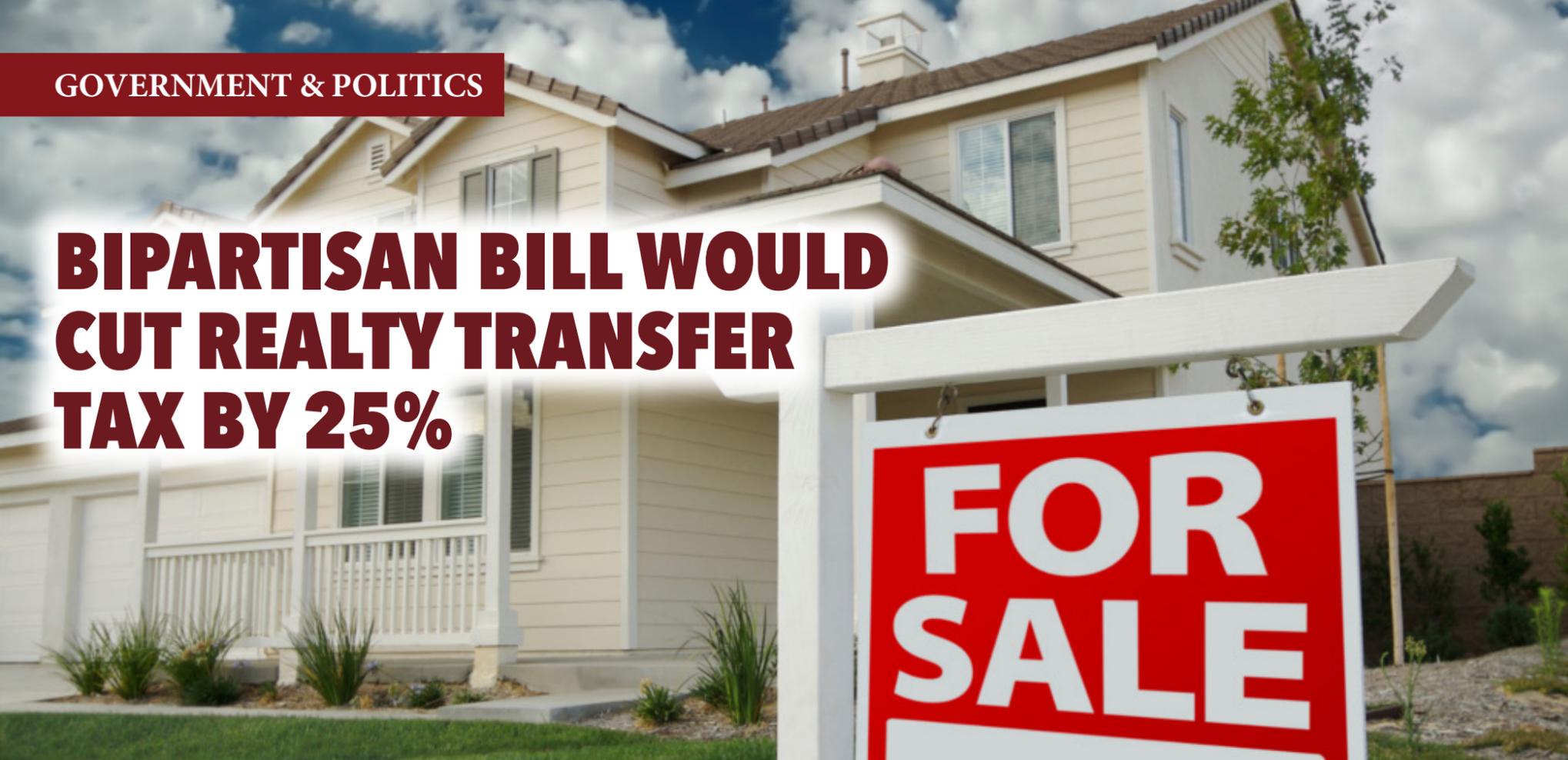
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BIPARTISAN BILL WOULD CUT REALTY TRANSFER TAX BY 25%



BY BETSY PRICE

A bill introduced into the state House of Representatives would cut by 25% the taxes paid because of the sale of a home.

Introduced by Rep. Bill Bush, D-Dover, House Bill 358 would make law of something Rep. Mike Ramone, R-Pike Creek South, has been preaching for years: reducing the cost of Delaware’s real estate transfer tax after it was increased during financially difficult years.

The realty transfer tax is levied on the purchase price of the home and is usually split between the buyer and seller, unless otherwise negotiated.

“Right now, in most cases, Delaware has a functional realty transfer tax of 4%,” said Rep. Kevin Hensley, R-Townsend, who works in the real estate field. “Typically,

this cost is split between buyer and seller. However, in the current competitive housing market, prospective buyers are often paying the entire tax to convince sellers to accept their offers.”

In 2017, Delaware’s realty transfer tax was effectively raised from 3% to the present level of 4%. The move was made as part of a revenue-generating package to bridge a major budget gap. “This realty transfer tax hike was supposed to expire two years after it was imposed, and that was three years ago,” Ramone said. A member of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, he is one of the sponsors of House Bill 358.

See TAX on page 16

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TAX from page 15

The move to cut the tax comes after two years of raging sales in the housing market, leading to tax windfalls for state and local governments. The market is also facing rises in interest rates with the Federal Reserve saying it will hike the base borrowing rates several times, partly to slow inflation in an overheated economy. That has some real estate experts expecting a slowdown in sales, partly because of the lack of new housing.

The revenue from the 4% realty transfer tax is split between state and local governments. The state currently gets 62.5% of the proceeds, with the local presiding government collecting the remaining 37.5%.

The new bipartisan bill would reverse the state's 2017 tax hike, restoring the effective combined realty transfer tax to 3%. Under the measure, only the state's share of the revenue would be impacted. The revenue flowing to local governments from home sales would be unchanged.

"Our high realty transfer tax is impacting two groups that can least afford it—millennials and seniors," Ramone said. "If we can do something to both facilitate homeownership among young people while giving our older citizens a less costly opportunity to gracefully transition into their golden years, I think we have an obligation to do it."

According to Long & Foster Real Estate, the median price of a home sold in Delaware as of February was \$335,000. HB 358 would reduce the transaction cost for the sale of such a home by almost \$3,400. Based on the latest estimates from the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council, HB 358 would allow home-

See TAX on page 17

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TAX from page 16

buyers and sellers to collectively retain more than \$100 million annually.

Ramone stressed that he believes the tax cut is both responsible and sustainable. Delaware's surplus revenue is expected to exceed \$1 billion for the second consecutive year. So far 13 Democrats and 15 Republicans are sponsoring or co-sponsoring the measure.

The legislation is pending action in the House Administration Committee. If enacted, the tax cut would take effect July 1.



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HOUSE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES \$300 RELIEF REBATE BILL

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

The Delaware Relief Rebate Program, which will use state surplus funds to offer every Delaware resident taxpayer a one-time direct payment of \$300, passed in the House of Representatives April 7.

House Bill 360 will result in the issuance of a one-time payment to every Delaware resident taxpayer who filed personal income tax returns for tax year 2020. It also will be paid to adult residents who did not file a 2020 tax return, including those who are on Social Security and disability.

Sponsors say the bipartisan bill is designed to help offset residents' recent hardships and ease the financial burden many are facing in light of record inflation and rising gas prices.

Payments to the 600,000-plus tax filers could be distributed as soon as six weeks after the bill is signed into law and will be made to each taxpayer, including those who jointly filed.

No action on the part of a taxpayer will be required to receive the \$300.

The bill also requires the Department of Finance to establish a process to provide the relief rebate to resident adults who did not file a 2020 state income tax return by identifying adult residents through existing databases held by other state agencies, such as the Division of Motor Vehicles.

The Department of Finance will then work with the Department of Technology and Information to implement a process by which eligible residents who have not been identified by other means can apply for and receive the relief rebate, subject to verification of their identity and eligibility.

Only one lawmaker spoke critically of the bill.

Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, R-Clayton, who ultimately voted to pass it, said he would prefer to see a proposal to automatically return excess funds to taxpayers when the state has surpluses over a certain amount.

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“This [surplus] happened last year. It was an unprecedented thing, and now we’ve got a second unprecedented year and two is enough for a pattern to me,” he said. “I’d very much like to work with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work on some sort of mechanism so that in the future, if we do have a surplus of this magnitude that we don’t necessarily have to get this creative...and instead it automatically happens.”

The bill passed by an overwhelming 35 yes votes. Three people voted no, and three were absent. The bill will now advance to the Senate for a committee hearing and vote.

MILFORD
LIVE

EDUCATION





BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that requires the state to establish a curriculum aligned with the science of reading is on its way to the state House after being unanimously supported by all 21 senators. Senate Bill 4, which passed out of the Senate Education Committee April 6, will now move to the House Education Committee.

Not only did all 21 senators vote to pass the bill, they all sponsored or co-sponsored the bill.

During the April 7 session, Sen. Colin Bonini, R-Dover, shared a letter written by his wife, Melissa Harrington. She is a neuroscientist with a PhD in neurobiology from Stanford University—and she fully supports the legislation. Her letter said research shows our brains are hardwired for spoken language, but reading language is a relatively new phenomena in mankind’s existence.

“The most effective way to teach children is to help their brain connect letters with the way they sound—phonics,” Bonini read, “which then connects the words

READING BILL SAILS THROUGH SENATE, HEADS TO HOUSE

to brain systems for the coding of speech sounds, which the brain puts together to determine what the word means.”

If passed, SB 4 would require the Department of Education to curate and maintain a list of recommended resources and materials related to the science of reading. By the 2027-28 school year, districts and charters would be required to create a curriculum from that list and make sure all reading teachers are trained to teach it.

Schools will be required to submit an annual report to the Department of Education about the implementation of their new curriculum. The department will be responsible for publishing a summary of these reports.

Sponsor Sen. Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin, said on the Senate floor April 7 that professional development is a crucial part to the implementation. The materials don’t mean much if teachers don’t know how to effectively use them, she said. The bill calls for around 10-20 hours of professional development to train reading teachers, depending on their familiarity with the material.

Someone with some background in the science might need less training, while another unfamiliar with the science is going to need about 20 hours of training, said Sturgeon, a former teacher. This is about three full days or six half days of training.

See **READING** on page 21



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READING from page 20

Local districts will be asked to provide substitutes for teachers to fulfill their training requirements. There are at least six days built into the school calendar for professional development days.

“This could replace the regular curriculum training that’s given at the beginning of every school year and over the summer,” said Sturgeon. The bill doesn’t specify who will train the teachers. Sturgeon says that was intentional. Teachers trained in the science already could potentially coach others, she said. School administrators designated to oversee the program also should be trained and so qualified to coach others, she said. Districts could also can hire outside agencies to train them.

The science of reading takes into account six components of learning: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension and oral language.

The letter from Bonini’s wife cited a neurological research study that asked a group of participants to learn new words in a made-up language. In the study, some readers were first taught which symbols correspond with which sounds, while the other group of readers were asked to memorize whole words. The first group was much more successful in learning the phony language.

“Readers who were taught to connect letters to sounds, a.k.a. learning phonics,” Bonini said, “and then sounds to meaning were able to read aloud more quickly and correctly, had better recall for the correct meanings of words and could transfer their knowledge to new words.”



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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS LEARN ABOUT BAYHEALTH RESIDENCY PROGRAM



BY TERRY ROGERS

At a recent Milford Conversation, held on the first Thursday of each month at the First Presbyterian Church of Milford, several community organizations and city officials learned about the Bayhealth residency program and discussed challenges the residents faced when they arrived to begin their program.

“We are very excited about our undergraduate and graduate medical education programs, specifically our residency program,” Lindsay Rhodenbaugh, D.Min., president of the Bayhealth Foundation, said. “Last time

I was here, we spoke about our Bayhealth Sussex Campus which has been open over three years now, it is hard to believe so much time has gone by.”

Rhodenbaugh introduced Dr. Brintha Vasagar, director of the Family Medicine Residency Program, and Dr. Joseph Deutsch, director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program. Vasagar explained how to “grow a doctor,” stating that it takes years and years of not only education, but also hands-on learning. Residency is designed to give medical students hands-on experience

See **BAYHEALTH** on page 24



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under the supervision of an experienced doctor. Bayhealth currently has three residency programs up and running, in internal medicine, family medicine and surgery. They are currently seeking approval for an emergency medicine program that they hope to start in the next year. After both Vasagar and Deutsch provided details about how the residency programs worked, they opened up the discussion to questions. Janne Collins, executive director of DMI, asked what the community could do to help the new residents.

“I think the number one issue has been, of course, the effects of the pandemic,” Vasagar said. “But the most challenging they are telling us is housing. They are telling us they are spending half their paycheck every month on housing, so it’s less than ideal.”

One of the issues the residents and the hospital have is that all residency matches are now virtual. Vasagar explained that the entire residency match process was “archaic and mildly abusive.”

“Students all over the country apply to as many programs as they are interested in attending,” Vasagar said. “They can apply for family medicine or only internal or they can say they want to keep the net really wide open to see what they get. Certain specialties are much more competitive, like radiology and dermatology. So, maybe you have some backup choices. So, it’s a little bit of a game really. You cast your net and you get offers for interview from various programs. We are not allowed to ask why they are applying to Bayhealth and we cannot see where else they are applying. We get electronic applications and we set up interviews from there.”

Prior to the pandemic, medical students would be required to come to the hospital for an interview, but now the entire process is virtual. This can make it difficult for those who have never been to the area. Vasagar said they often receive applications from people who have never even visited Delaware. Once the interviews are over, the students rank their top choices and the hospital rank theirs.

“If they’re on your list, and you match their list, that’s a three-year commitment,” Vasagar said. “So, if you really hated it, your choices are not putting it on your list and risk going unmatched and not becoming a doctor this year. So, it is a huge risk and why I say it is mildly abusive. In the old days, we should go to the schools and give talks, go to recruiting conferences and try to interact with as many humans as possible, but COVID. So, we’ve done some virtual webinars, some virtual recruitment fairs, but that makes it difficult for a new program. This year, it has finally started to open back up and we just did a recruitment fair in Washington, DC.”

Dr. Mitch Edmondson and his wife, Dr. Loretta, who operated a practice in Milford together before retiring recently, offered additional information related to difficulties faced by residents.

“There are a couple challenges,” Dr. Mitch said. “One is the cost of medical education for medical students is extremely high. The average debt for physicians, when they go into practice, they are already \$200,000 to \$300,000 in debt and that’s before a place to live or anything else. And that’s a challenge across the country

and really a challenge here in Delaware because the loan repayment programs compared to other areas are weak. The other challenge is there is a crisis in payment in primary care in Delaware. It’s changed a bit due to some legislation, but traditionally, Delaware has been at the bottom for reimbursement for primary care. That has got to change and that’s an issue that’s bigger than Milford or Dover. It’s an issue for state legislature and our national leaders.”

Another area where Bayhealth is expanding is with a new Total Care facility on the corner of Route 9 and Hudson Road. The new facility will be a hybrid emergency department, open 24-hours, seven days a week.

“It’s not duplicated anywhere in Delaware or this immediate area,” Rodenbaugh said. “When folks fall ill or are hurt, it sometimes does not happen during convenient hours. It doesn’t happen when your doctor’s office is open. They happen on the weekends or overnight. I, myself, have had two heart attacks. Receiving emergency care is vitally necessary. That is where I needed to be when I was in the midst of having a heart attack. It was an urgent need, and I was likely to die if I did not get some care quickly. But lots of people present at our emergency department because they don’t have a primary care doctor and they often do not need immediate, urgent care. ED treatment is the highest level care and the most expensive care you can receive. But you may not need something like Level 3 Trauma Care.”

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PHOTO BY BRYAN SHUPE

MILFORD LITTLE LEAGUE CELEBRATES OPENING DAY

STAFF REPORT

Families lining the streets in downtown Milford were excited to watch over 350 ballplayers walk with signs, chant their team name, and yell “play ball!” Milford Little League opened its 2022 season this year with the Annual Parade and Opening Day Ceremonies on Friday, April 8.

Once at the Major League Field, Milford Little League President Kelly Greenly welcomed families. “We could not have a season without our families, coaches, volunteers, sponsors and community,” she said.

After the National Anthem was sung by Madison Brown and the Little League Pledge was recited by players Tenley Lord and Mason and Ryan Farissier, the annual award was announced in front of the home crowd.

The Bill Morris Award was given to Bill Walls for his over 40 years of dedication to the Milford Little League community. Walls has coached a team in each of the last five decades including tee-ball, pitching machine, minor league softball, and minor and major league baseball. He could be seen the next morning helping coach his grandsons on the tee-ball and pitching machine fields.

The Jack Allen Award, which was presented by his family, was given to Rob Ward for his contributions to the Milford softball program. Ward started as a player in Little League in the 1980s, coached both softball and



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baseball teams and served on the Milford Little League Board of Directors. Most recently, Ward created a movement to rehabilitate the softball concession stand, which was in bad repair.

The two gentlemen were also honored by throwing out the first pitches of the season for baseball and softball, respectively. Milford Little League also took the opportunity to recognize the 10-year anniversary of the Junior League Delaware Champions.

President Greenly announced that a grant this year from the Milford Lions Club and donations from Fur Baby

Pet Resort and the Shupe family will purchase and install a new scoreboard at the Boys' Major League Field.

Future fundraising events for the Milford Little League this year include a vintage car show at the softball fields and ongoing sales of Milford Little League hats at the concession stands in both adult and youth sizes. To stay connected with the organization, families can visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Milford.Little.League>.



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