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SPRINKLER VOTE POSTPONED



MCKENZIE GETS NATIONAL
RECOGNITION



TWO COMPANIES JOIN MARKETPLACE

HEADLINES

A photograph showing a woman from behind, looking into a shop window. Inside the window, there is a large, light-colored, fluffy sculpture of a cat's head and upper body. The sculpture has a textured, fur-like appearance. Below the sculpture, the words "Artful Living" and "Sculpture Wearable" are visible in a stylized font. The woman has long brown hair tied back with a black scrunchie. She is wearing a light green t-shirt with vertical stripes in orange, purple, and pink. The shop window is set into a building with a red brick sidewalk and a colorful striped awning above.

PHOTO LINK: MARCIA REED

HEADLINES

COUNCIL POSTPONES VOTE ON SPRINKLER REQUIREMENT

BY TERRY ROGERS

Despite several workshops on the matter over the past few months, Milford City Council voted to table a vote that would require sprinkler installation in all newly constructed homes in the city. During public comment, council heard from several contractors who claimed the requirement would be too expensive and could make it more difficult for lower income families and first time homebuyers to afford a newly constructed home. City Planner Rob Pierce state that discussions involved several stakeholders and included presentations from the Delaware Fire Sprinkler Coalition and in discussions with the State Fire Marshal's Office and chief of the Carlisle Fire Company, all of whom were in favor of the new ordinance.

"I had information that having sprinkler systems versus not having it, that the number of fires have not decreased if you do have a sprinkler system," Council-

woman Katrina Wilson said. "I mean, it does not mean that if you have a sprinkler system, it doesn't mean that you're going to have more fires or less fires." Pierce explained that this was true as a sprinkler system does not prevent a home from catching fire, but that there was evidence that a sprinkler system would provide additional time for the fire department to arrive, reducing property loss and injury or death.

The new ordinance would only apply to newly constructed single-family homes as apartments, town-homes and multi-family structures were already required to have sprinkler systems. It would also not impact renovations or rehabilitations of properties unless the project affected more than 50 percent of the home. Pierce explained that if the interior of the home

See SPRINKLER on page 4

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would be stripped to the studs, a sprinkler system may be required under the new ordinance. Councilwoman Wilson asked if homeowner's insurance companies offered any discounts for homes with sprinklers. Pierce stated that he had not spoken to insurance companies but that he had been made aware that some did offer reduction in premiums for sprinklered homes.

"I actually spoke to insurance agents this week. The feedback I got was there essentially wouldn't necessarily be a savings for you on your policy," Councilman Todd Culotta said. "However, there are insurance companies that won't insure you unless you have a sprinkler system on a new build."

The ordinance would have an effective date of Jan. 1, 2023, in order to allow builders time to adapt to the new requirement. During the public comment section of the discussion, several members of the community spoke about the ordinance.

"I have built several new homes in the city of Milford that I own the last several years. I am also a home builder. I've built seven or eight homes in Maryland, where sprinklers are mandated so I have a little bit of experience with this," Derrick Parker said. "I can tell you the vast majority of the homeowners that I've built homes for in Maryland where it's mandated did not want them, nor did they especially want to pay for it. I've heard some numbers that have been tossed around. I have actual numbers that we've dealt with. On the construction side, the average cost for a sprinkler system is \$4 to \$5 a square foot. If you take a 2,200 square foot home, you're looking at approximately \$10,000.

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Parker explained that he has been told by some of his clients that their home insurance costs actually increased because some of the insurance companies have now realized that their home is at a greater risk of a claim due to water damage.

"Another thing to consider real estate appraisals. Sprinklers give no additional value. If your home has sprinklers, that makes it even harder, especially for first time homebuyer to be able to qualify for a mortgage," Parker said. "There are already additional items that are going to be adopted that are going to add additional cost aside from the sprinklers. So, if affordable housing is a concern for the city of Milford adding the cost of a mandated sprinkler system will only make it more difficult for all new homebuyers, especially first-time homebuyers."

Jeff Bowers, a contractor and investor in Milford, explained that Sussex County voted against requiring sprinklers several years ago due to the high cost of engineering the systems. He pointed out that newly constructed homes were already very safe and that it was older homes that were more at risk from fire. In Bowers' opinion, smoke detectors saved lives, not sprinklers. Nina Pletcher pointed out that there were concerns about response times with the fire company and her concern about how closely homes were being built in new developments, including Simpson Crossing.

My primary concern is what you actually have in your house that is going to immediately catch fire and then extend to the structural components. And these days, polyester covered polyurethane foam type furniture

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and such burns hotter, and it burns faster. The content of a residential fire sprinkler system is flat out for life safety and the design of these systems takes into consideration certainly costs and basically similarly designed around where fire fatalities take place," Paul Eichler, a volunteer firefighter with the city of Dover and chairman of the Delaware Fire Sprinkler Coalition. "I stand before you tonight in an environment where Delaware has suffered 15 fire fatalities so far this year. For all of 2021, we only had 10. I'm not going to try to pitch this that all 15 people would have been saved by sprinkler systems. However, it definitely would have made a difference in some of them."

Eichler also pointed out that although smoke alarms are wonderful devices, they are there for notification of an event only if they are properly maintained. He stated that there are numerous reports that include information about smoke detectors not being in working order. There is also no other suppression reaction which is what sprinklers are designed to do.

"As the parent of a 27-year-old in search of his first home. I definitely sympathize with the cost issues. At the same time, while it's minuscule in conversation, think about the backside of an expenditure into a dwelling in that as long as the interest rate is reasonable, the cost in the overall mortgage will be low," Eichler said. "Also, with regards to the insurance conversation. I have talked to the State Farm which is one of the larger property insurances throughout the state. And basically, it is a seven percent discount off of your homeowner's policy. The prices that are being charged these days are only

going to come down with a level of competition that increases with those contractors out there vying for that business."

Duane Fox, past chief of Carlisle Fire Company and a fire marshal, explained that part of his job as a fire marshal is designing sprinkler systems. He stated that he could only base his comments on what his clients told him and they reported around \$2 a square foot for a tank with a 250 gallon pump. Fox pointed out that just like any other water structure in a home, sprinklers require maintenance such as making sure pipes do not freeze in the winter.

"There's a lot of stuff up here about how much its going to cost the builders and they are not going to make as much money and the impact on first-time homebuyers, but my kids are invaluable, my grandkids are invaluable," Fox said. "I don't know how you put a price on that. It is true about older homes, but new homes burn as well. They burn from unattended cooking. They burn from other things. Talk to someone who lost their brother and grandchildren in Anne Arundel because a live Christmas tree caught fire. They had smoke detectors and it didn't mean anything. You have to think about the longevity of the town and the safety that goes with it. Like Paul said, there's not a lot of kids beating down the door to become volunteer firefighters. You guys are aware of that, so that is stuff you have to think about."

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CULTURE



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CCGM RAISES FUNDS TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD HUNGER



BY TERRY ROGERS

The Chamber of Commerce for Greater presented the Harry K. Foundation with a \$6,000 check from a portion of the proceeds from the 2022 Annual Girls Night Out (GNO). The event, held each year as a fundraiser for various charitable organizations as well as daily operations of the chamber, also features the Marvelous Man of Milford contest.

"This year our Marvelous Man is Chris Lovenguth from Milford and Harrington NAPA," Jo Schmeiser, executive director of CCGM, said. "He will represent the chamber at various events this year."

At the event, guests danced to Plead the Fifth band while enjoying tastings at several local restaurants and

sampling signature cocktails at the Milford Elks Lodge.

The Harry K. Foundation, established by Harry Keswani, has vowed to raise money and donate 100% of these proceeds to help alleviate the problem of food insecurity in its local community. They are working to defeat childhood hunger throughout Delaware.

According to the Food Bank of Delaware, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were approximately 105,000 people in Delaware dealing with food insecurity. At the height of the pandemic, that number rose to more than 140,000. Unfortunately, even though the state is beginning to recover from losses during the pandemic, food insecurity has not dropped to the level it was before and

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CHAMBER from page 9

there are more than 114,000 people in Delaware who will not have enough to eat.

Statistics also show that 71 percent of Delaware households must choose between paying for food and paying for utilities while 66 percent must choose between their rent or mortgage and food. Of those suffering from food insecurity, 30 percent have a parent who is serving in the military or have served. In order to manage their food budget, almost 70 percent of food insecure people purchase grocery items that are inexpensive and unhealthy.

"Research shows that children who eat more nutritious meals are less likely to miss school, have fewer behavioral problems and perform better in school," the Harry K. Foundation website reads. "Working with the Food Bank of Delaware, the H4 initiative will be addressing childhood hunger on all fronts—hunger after school, during the summer and on weekends."

For more information on the Harry K. Foundation, please give them a call at 302-226-0675 or via email karenfrancis@harrykfoundation.org. For information concerning the Chamber of Commerce for Greater Milford call 302-422-3344, visit our website www.milfordchamber.com or find us on Facebook.



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BANNERS RECOGNIZING MILFORD'S MILITARY AVAILABLE FROM DMI

BY TERRY ROGERS

Downtown Milford Inc. (DMI) revived their banner program throughout downtown and along the Riverwalk. The revitalization began around Christmas 2021 with colorful holiday themed banners. According to Joseph Phillips, chairman of the banner project, the city of Milford installed new hardware in order to attach the banners.

"In the middle of the initial order and installation, we were contacted by a Milford resident who suggested we do banners for veterans," Phillips said. "Of course, we thought this was a great idea. We researched printers and set up the timeline and here we are. We are all very excited."

According to Phillips, a veteran himself, there are currently about 80 locations where the banners can be hung, some of which already have banners attached.

The Milford Salutes banners recognizing military veterans will replace what is displayed currently. All banners and hardware are attached to black light posts around downtown, in the parks and along the Riverwalk. An additional 20 sets of hardware can be added for overflow, Phillips explained.

"The deadline for ordering a banner is July 29. Banners will not be printed until payment is received and a printing proof approved by the purchaser," Phillips said. "We are asking that banners be ordered as early as possible. The printer promised these would be delivered by Aug. 29 and we want to get them up by Sept. 1. They will remain up until around Nov. 15 when the holiday banners will replace them."

Hanging of the banners is included in this year's cost, Phillips stated but for \$10 per year, they can be replaced

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Q2 PHOTO BY MARCIA REED

DMI RECEIVES 2022 MAIN STREET AMERICA ACCREDITATION



BY PRESS RELEASE

Downtown Milford, Inc. is excited to announce that it has been designated as an Accredited Main Street America™ program for meeting rigorous performance standards. Each year, Main Street America and its partners announce the list of accredited programs to recognize their exceptional commitment to preservation-based economic development and community revitalization through the Main Street Approach.

"We are extremely proud to recognize this year's 863 nationally Accredited Main Street America programs that have worked tirelessly to advance economic vitality and quality of life in their downtowns and commercial districts," said Patrice Frey, president & CEO of Main

Street America. "During another incredibly challenging year, these programs demonstrated the power of the Main Street movement to respond to the needs of their communities. I am inspired by their steadfast leadership and innovative solutions to drive essential local recovery efforts, support small businesses and nurture vibrant downtown districts."

In 2021, Main Street America programs generated \$5.76 billion in local reinvestment, helped open 6,601 net new businesses, generated 30,402 net new jobs, catalyzed the rehabilitation of 10,595 historic buildings

See DMI on page 14

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DMI from page 13

and leveraged 1,427,729 volunteer hours. On average, for every dollar that a Main Street program spent to support their operations, it generated \$19.34 of new investment back into Main Street communities.

Downtown Milford, Inc.'s performance is annually evaluated by Delaware on Main which works in partnership with Main Street America to identify the local programs that meet rigorous national performance standards. Evaluation criteria determines the communities that are building meaningful and sustainable revitalization programs and include standards such as, fostering strong public-private partnerships, supporting small and locally owned businesses and actively preserving historic places, spaces and cultural assets.

Downtown Milford, Inc. is a volunteer driven 501c3 nonprofit. "Our volunteers have worked hard this past year to promote Milford, Delaware's historic riverside business district in very challenging times. By the end of 2021 Downtown Milford, Inc.'s volunteer force proved themselves by bringing back one of their hallmark festivals that had been previously cancelled by the pandemic.

"The annual Holiday Stroll and Christmas Market was held on Walnut Street with a record number of attendees to the delight of our downtown businesses!" said executive director, Janne Collins, "Volunteers are also working on the popular Ladybug Music Festival scheduled for Saturday, July 30 and are planning activities and events for 2023 like the annual Pub Crawl and so much more in Milford! We are excited to be an accredited member of Main Street America that gives

DMI so many great resources and tools to help us in the task of revitalization of our downtown."

Main Street America leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. For more than 40 years, Main Street America has provided a practical, adaptable and impactful framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization through the Main Street Approach™. Their network of more than 1,200 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, who share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Since 1980, communities participating in the program have leveraged more than \$95.33 billion in new public and private investment, generated 161,036 net new businesses and 717,723 net new jobs and rehabilitated more than 314,431 buildings. Main Street America is a nonprofit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, visit www.mainstreet.org.



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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



PHOTO BY ANN LEBENGOOD

**BY TERRY ROGERS**

The last traffic light between I-95 near Wilmington and Route 9 in Lewes will be a thing of the past once a grade-separated intersection is completed at Route 1 and Route 16 in Milton. Ground was broken for the project on June 21 after comments from Gov. John Carney, DelDOT Secretary Nicole Majesky, Sen. Dave Wilson and Rep. Steve Smyk.

“Since 2009, the department’s completed seven grade separated interchanges along the Route 1 corridor south of Dover and this project is another step in our work to limit the number of access points for vehicles to enter and exit the highway as part of our commitment to safety and a part of our corridor capacity preservation program,”

GROUND BROKEN FOR MILTON OVERPASS

Majesky said. “Safety is also something that we talk about every single day and this project is going to enhance safety. This intersection has one of the highest crash rates along this entire Route 1 corridor. So, the improvements that we’re going to be doing here are going to be critical.”

Majesky continued that the project would consist of elevating Route 1 over Route 16 with new dual bridges to provide access, free flowing movements, northbound and southbound entrance and exit ramps as well as new turn lanes and the realignment of Route 1 and Deep Branch Road. She also pointed out that Fiscal Year 2023 would begin in two weeks and the department had the largest capital project plan in the history of DelDOT at \$610 billion with over \$1.3 billion worth of work planned for Sussex County. Majesky joked that an “orange barrel would be coming to a road near you.”

“Back in March, I made a bet with Gov. Hogan over in Maryland that the University of Delaware women’s basketball team would beat the University of Maryland women’s basketball team. I don’t know how many of you saw the game, but the Blue Hens didn’t do so well. We lost the game and just a week or so ago, on a Sunday, I went down to Dewey Beach to pay off my bet to Gov. Hogan and bought him a crab cake. That is what the stakes were, either a Delaware crab cake or Maryland crab cake and so we bought him one at Woody’s,” Gov. Carney said. “We had a really good time, but as I was sitting there, I was reminded about what an attraction our Atlantic and Delaware Bay beaches are to folks from out of state. Gov. Hogan got more attention at Woody’s than I did. Most of the people there were from Maryland or from out of state. And we know that folks focus on how long it takes them to get from Baltimore, Washington, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey to get to our wonderful beaches and that’s why we have this wonderful SR route one which increasingly has very few red lights and little in the way of getting our tourists to the beach communities during the summer and actually year round.”

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OVERPASS from page 16

Gov. Carney pointed out that the time it took to get to the beaches was not as important as getting there safely.

"This will make it possible for our visitors to get to the beaches even quicker. More importantly than that, of course, is that this project will address safety issues, some of the biggest safety issues along the Route 1 corridor with the accidents that occur here at the light and obviously very important to the economy of our state," Gov. Carney said. "And so, I want to thank all the partners all the folks at DelDOT, Secretary Majersky mentioned our project manager or chief engineer, all the folks that make it happen, certainly our federal partners, as was pointed out, these kinds of projects are 80% federally funded. Sen. Carper, Sen. Coons and Rep. Blunt Rochester are part of that. One of the things that we're able to do in Congress for the six years that I was there were these kinds of projects where their infrastructure is important to every congressional district across the country, one where an issue where Democrats and Republicans are able to work together to get things done."

Currently, Delaware's General Assembly is finalizing the 2022-23 budget, one that is larger than any in the history of the state. Passing the budget will be a challenge in itself, but once it is passed, Gov. Carney pointed out that there will be an additional challenge to find the engineers and planners to complete all the projects in the bond bill. He pointed out that the Route 16 overpass was not scheduled to be completed until 2025. Sen. Wilson pointed out that, once the grade-separated intersection was completed, it would be safer

for those traveling to and from Broadkill Beach, into Milton and for the fire department and ambulances.

"You know this is a big deal and we need to move forward. You know, when we look at our budget, the money we spend, 80% of this is federally funded and anytime we can get money out of Washington to make something happen in Sussex County, I'm all in favor of it," Sen. Wilson said. "So with that, I'd like to say our second industry in Delaware, number one is agriculture, number two is the resort area. And we need to be able to get people to the beaches faster and safer. It's not about how fast you get here, but how safe you get here. And we want people to have a great experience coming to the First State. Our beaches are wonderful, what we have here in Sussex County, and I just want to see this continue."

Rep. Smyk reminded everyone that it was the state employees that made projects like this possible, explaining that they complete many of these projects in workdays that are much longer than eight hours.

"We ask them to do more with less constantly, and these people are treasures to all of us. Thanks to all the state employees that are here today. Thanks to the governor who we must recognize that of all the many things that could be in his schedule, the very many important things, especially in our time of June, the most important time of the year, that he comes down here and he must he wants to make sure that you know how important this is," Rep. Smyk said. "Because this is actually going to save lives. This intersection, I have ac-

See OVERPASS on page 18

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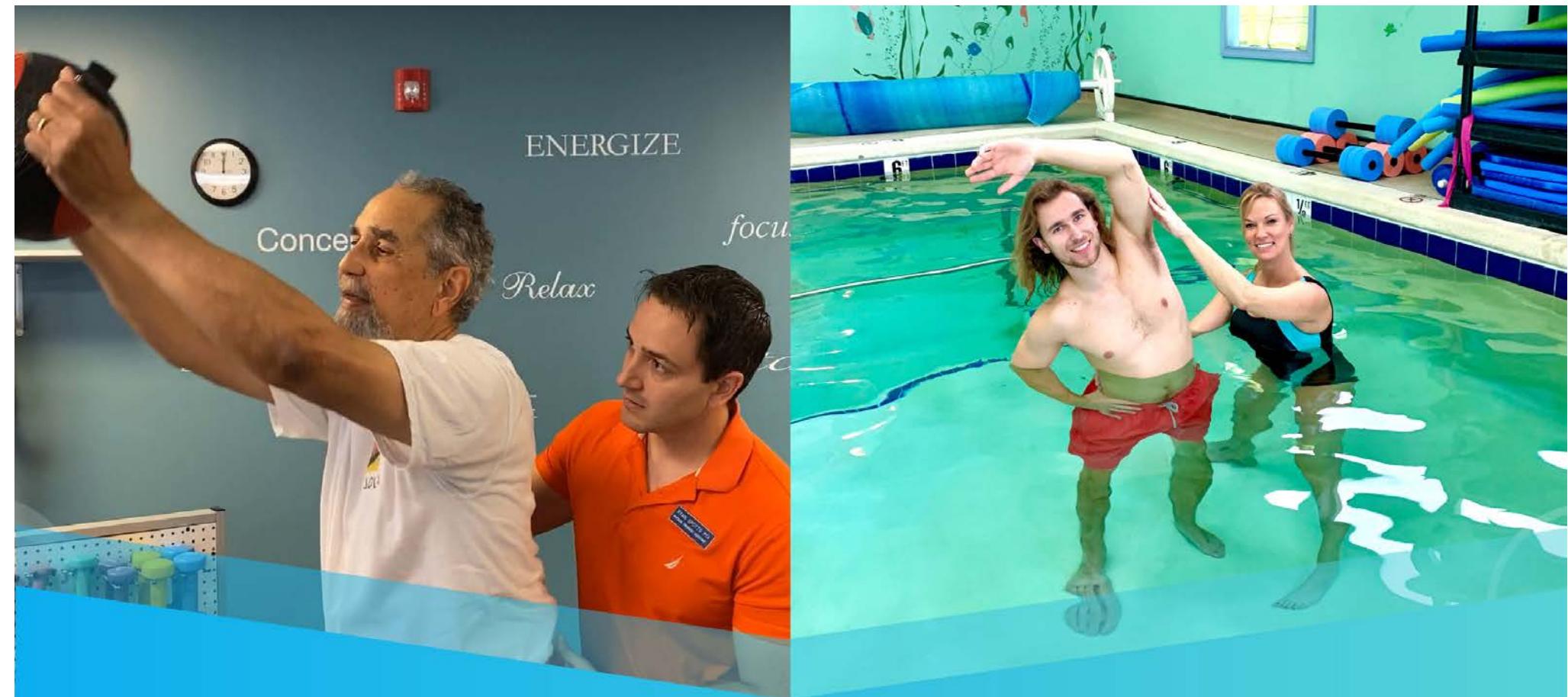


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OVERPASS from page 17

tually investigated the safety of this intersection and how many people here in crashes have died, it's sad how many that occur at traffic lights. This is a great step forward for safety for everyone that comes here and goes through this intersection. A lot of people come through here, so thank you very much to the DelDOT employees that had the wherewithal to make this happen. We have contacted our emergency services, we had Milton Fire Company and other fire companies in the surrounding area coming out and talking about how their apparatuses that they currently have and any future apparatuses and how they can get through these mazes of highways. And it's very important that they know that they have a voice in our state legislature."



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EDUCATION





MCKENZIE RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

BY TERRY ROGERS

Lulu Ross Elementary School Principal Cindy McKenzie was recently recognized as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Principal of the Year for Delaware. The award recognizes excellence in achievement, character and climate for students, their families and staff as well as the community.

"Mrs. McKenzie is an exemplary school leader and highly deserving of this great honor," Superintendent Dr. Kevin Dickerson said. "She has been instrumental in Lulu Ross Elementary School's continued success, including being recognized for exemplary performance

multiple times throughout her tenure. She is highly respected throughout the Milford School District community. Mrs. Mackenzie always strives to best serve and support students, as well as to enrich their overall educational experiences and she genuinely cares for students and has the ability to consistently work well with staff, families and community to foster an engaging positive and student centered school environment. This award further embodies her professionalism and work ethic as well."

McKenzie has been with Milford School District for 29 years, starting as a fifth and sixth grade teacher at Milford Middle School. She transferred to Benjamin Banneker Elementary School where she taught first and second grade before moving to Ross to teach second and third grade. She also served as a Basic Skills teacher and a Gifted and Talented teacher. McKenzie served as assistant principal at Ross for two years before becoming the principal.

"Ross has been a very important part of my life," McKenzie said. "Both of my daughters went to school at Ross. Some of the children I once taught are now a part of the teaching staff."

McKenzie earned her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from the University of Pittsburgh and her Master of Instruction from the University of Delaware. She also earned a School Leadership certificate from Wilmington University. Her favorite subject to teach was science and she worked extensively with the Delaware Science Coalition, instructing other teachers in the use of Smithsonian and Foss Science Curriculum kits.

"I feel very fortunate to be part of the Ross family," McKenzie said. "I am also very fortunate to work with the students, staff and parents to improve achievement here at the school."

McKenzie will now compete with other state award winners for the title of National Principal of the Year.

MILFORD
LIVE

TEACHER ACADEMY STUDENTS RECOGNIZED BY BOARD OF EDUCATION

BY TERRY ROGERS

The Milford High School Board of Education recognized three students in the Milford High School Teacher Academy at a recent meeting. The program prepares high school students for careers as educators and is led by Mrs. Molly Chorman.

"Before the Teacher Academy, there really was no other pathway that students could pursue. There was maybe a club for future teachers but no other pathway that students could pursue, who wanted to become a teacher," Dr. Jason Peel, director of Human Resources and School Climate, said. "As a pathway that started in the state of Delaware, we thought it was a good idea to adopt the pathway and that was back in the 2016-17 school year. So since then, we've had over 150 pathway completers and that number has tripled since the start

of the program. Mrs. Chorman has gone through training, has implemented all the courses and has worked with colleagues throughout the state to make this program viable and really, really thrive here in Milford."

According to Dr. Peel, there have been over 60 students as part of their capstone take the test required to become a paraprofessional, allowing them to immediately begin employment in that capacity. In addition, students who complete the program are given a certificate that guarantees them an interview in Milford after they have completed college and get their teaching degree. Three students who were hired by the district to work with students over summer school were present at the board meeting and Dr. Peel commented that he

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hoped they would return after they earned their teaching degree to become teachers in the Milford School District.

"I am honored to be here with these three ladies. They are the epitome of Teacher Academy. I have Mystery Villa, Haley Thompson and Anna Hatfield. I call them the trio here that is going to make our district grow even more and beyond from what we have ever thought it could be," Chorman said. "They are all aspiring in elementary ed. They have passed the [para test] in March with flying colors and they are now employed by us this summer through summer school."

Chorman explained that Villa had been instrumental in the Spanish immersion program and that parents in the program told her that Villa had been a mentor to their children as she was someone who spoke their native language.

"They also have won the Gold State Medal three consecutive years in a row. They are going to be so hard to replace," Chorman said. "But we have a club called Educators Rising and I scooped them up as freshmen. I saw them at 14 and I thought, 'you are coming with me.' And they have won every single year in K through three literature. They have written and illustrated three times and have national ranking for scoring not only gold, but scoring the highest out of any other school in Delaware in this event, so they are rock stars all the way."

The three students interned at Ross Elementary, rotating classrooms and obtaining a clear picture of what it will be like when they accept positions as teachers.

"Ms. Chorman, thank you for your excellent leadership to the program. We are really the leader with Teacher Academy across the state and if you've been on this campus for the past four years, or the last seven years, you have seen the phenomenal students here are very active in our events," Dr. Dickerson said. "They are high achieving students academically, just role models for others, across our district as far as academic achievement, just well-rounded individuals and they have very bright futures. Thank you for being such great students here in the Milford School District."

A photograph of a woman with short brown hair, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, driving a red Mahindra tractor. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The tractor is working in a field of green leafy vegetables, likely lettuce or cabbage, in rows. The background shows a dirt road and some trees.

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A portrait of a young woman with curly black hair, wearing a yellow ribbed sweater. She is smiling broadly and making a heart shape with her hands near her chest. The background is a plain, light color.

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BALTAZAR-LOPEZ RECOGNIZED FOR SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

BY TERRY ROGERS

On what was to be his last meeting as a school board member, Rony Baltazar-Lopez was recognized by the Milford School District Board of Education for his three years of service to the district. Baltazar-Lopez did not run for reelection and his seat will be taken by Matt Bucher who won election

in May, defeating Jalyn Powell. The meeting held on June 20 was to be the last for Baltazar-Lopez, but the board voted to hold a special meeting on June 27 to discuss the tax rate for the upcoming year.

"Before I ask for adjournment this evening, prior to this evening this was to be our last meeting," Board President Jason Miller said. "We would normally convene in July and, at that time, a new board would be sworn in for 2022-23. But, I will just get on my soapbox for a second. The position of a school board elected position is very challenging. It can sometimes be difficult, the decisions we are asked to make require quite a bit of thinking and pondering. And we also are challenged morally in how we are going to best serve our city. With that being said, we are very lucky to have

input that provides a constant commentary that makes us think and is thought provoking. And this evening, Mr. Baltazar-Lopez would have been sitting in his last meeting but we have one more, so we are not letting him off that easy. But it is our pleasure, my honor, to present him with a plaque for his distinguished recognition for his service to the board of education for the Milford School District."

Baltazar-Lopez, who served as vice-president of the board, agreed that he thought the meeting would be his last meeting so he had prepared a statement.

"It has been a privilege and honor to serve as a school board member representing the school district at large. Three years ago, a young 24 year old who had just returned to Delaware from working in our nation's capital to enroll in graduate school came before this board to make the case as candidate with a seat left vacant by a former member," Baltazar Lopez said. "Out of eight other qualified candidates. I was nominated to serve a one-year term making me the youngest as well as the first Hispanic to serve on this body. A year later, in 2020, the community entrusted me to be their voice for the next two years as I won reelection to this governing body. That same year, I became the vice president of the board."

Serving as a board member has been both challenging

See BOARD on page 25



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BOARD from page 24

and rewarding, Baltazar-Lopez stated. He explained that as Miller alluded to, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced upon the board a complex responsibility of ensuring the safety and health of students while continuing to provide them with some type of education.

"As a board, we were tasked with decisions such as whether to start the 2020-2021 school year in a remote or hybrid format. Most recently, deciding whether to continue wearing face masks in schools," Baltazar-Lopez said. "At times, each of us might have had differences of opinion on the best course of action for certain decisions, but I know that each of us was guided on the same principle of ensuring that each student receives the best public education possible. Our mission on this board was to ensure that there was increased transparency and accountability in our governing process as well as to strengthen our community-school relationship, particularly with our Black and Brown families whose needs may go unheard. So, to that end, as a board, we've been able to make progress on some of those goals."

The board upheld the rights and privacy of students by passing policies that protected them, Baltazar-Lopez continued. They strengthened external communications by creating a public information office and the board committed themselves to addressing racial equity and improving disparities in the education system by creating a Supervisor of Equity and Support Services position, Baltazar-Lopez commented.

"We began the process of re-visioning our district goals and objectives by working with stakeholders to create a strategic plan, which will ensure our account-

ability moving forward. We committed ourselves as board members from engaging in improper behavior a conflict of interest policy," Baltazar-Lopez said. "We establish a graduation advisory committee to address graduation and dropout rates and, equally as important, we successfully passed the much needed Milford Middle School referendum with 67% of the vote. Though we have made strides there's still more work to be done, especially as we fully recover from the pandemic. This board must continue to address disparities caused by the pandemic, particularly as it relates to social and emotional components of a student's education. It must also ensure that students and families feel represented on the board as well as in leadership positions within the district."

The board must continue to empower teachers and staff who are on the frontlines and have been since the start of the pandemic, Baltazar-Lopez stated. In addition, Baltazar-Lopez believes that the board must recognize that a positive learning environment can only be fostered when all students, families and staff, regardless of socioeconomic status, are able to thrive.

"Our schools must continue to be free from any political influence, whether it is in leadership or at the bottom of the hierarchy. The board's allegiance should only be to the well-being of every student," Baltazar-Lopez said. "And, as I conclude, Marian Wright Edelman once said, 'service is the rent we pay for living on this Earth.' So, being a school board member may not be a glamorous title, and it is a thankless job that we don't receive any financial compensation. For the

countless hours we spend outside of these official meetings, we are rewarded by knowing that we made a difference in the lives of students. That's what has made this journey worth it. I'm grateful personally and professionally to each and every one of you as a result of this experience. So, thank you to my friends and family who continue to empower me even when I'm at my lowest. Thank you to Superintendent Dr. Dickerson for your leadership these past few years. Thank you to each and every one of my colleagues for rewarding me with your perspectives at each board meeting. And thank you to the community for trusting me to be your champion."

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HEALTH



PHOTO BY ROBERT J. NEARY PHOTOGRAPHY

TWO COMPANIES TO JOIN HIGHMARK IN OFFERING MARKETPLACE PLANS

BY BETSY PRICE

For the first time since 2017, Delawareans this year will have more than one company's plans to choose from in the [Delaware Health Insurance Marketplace](#).

AmeriHealth Caritas and Aetna CVS Health will offer plans along with Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware, which has been going it alone.

That will mean an additional 35 plans offered through the marketplace, said Insurance Commissioner [Trinidad Navarro](#).

"It's a great day because now there's competition for the ACA marketplace and with competition consumers always, always benefit," Navarro said. "Today's announcement is a testament to both the needs of Delawareans who have increasingly signed up for coverage, and to the strong regulatory environment we have built, which has helped insurers go from taking losses to being able to cover their expenses and consumers' coverage needs."

Inflation may play a role into keeping the rates from dropping as much as they normally would, he said. "It's hard to put a number on where the rates will go this first year," he said.

MARKETPLACE HISTORY

Aetna once sold plans in the Delaware marketplace, but dropped out of Delaware, and then every other state as federal support for the [Affordable Care Act](#) program was attacked by the Trump administration.

"A lot of the original architecture the ACA was being chipped away," Navarro said, "things like risk corridor payments and cost sharing that was part of the agreement that the federal government would help offset the losses."

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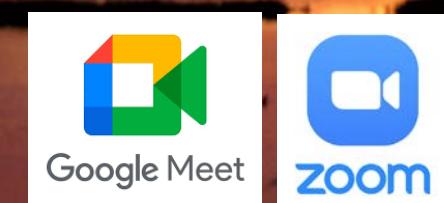


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