

TOWN SQUARE LIVE

photo link: Brandywine Creek State Park
photo by Selena Martinez

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Macbeth Comes to Rockwood



Christina Votes to Stop Graduations at UD



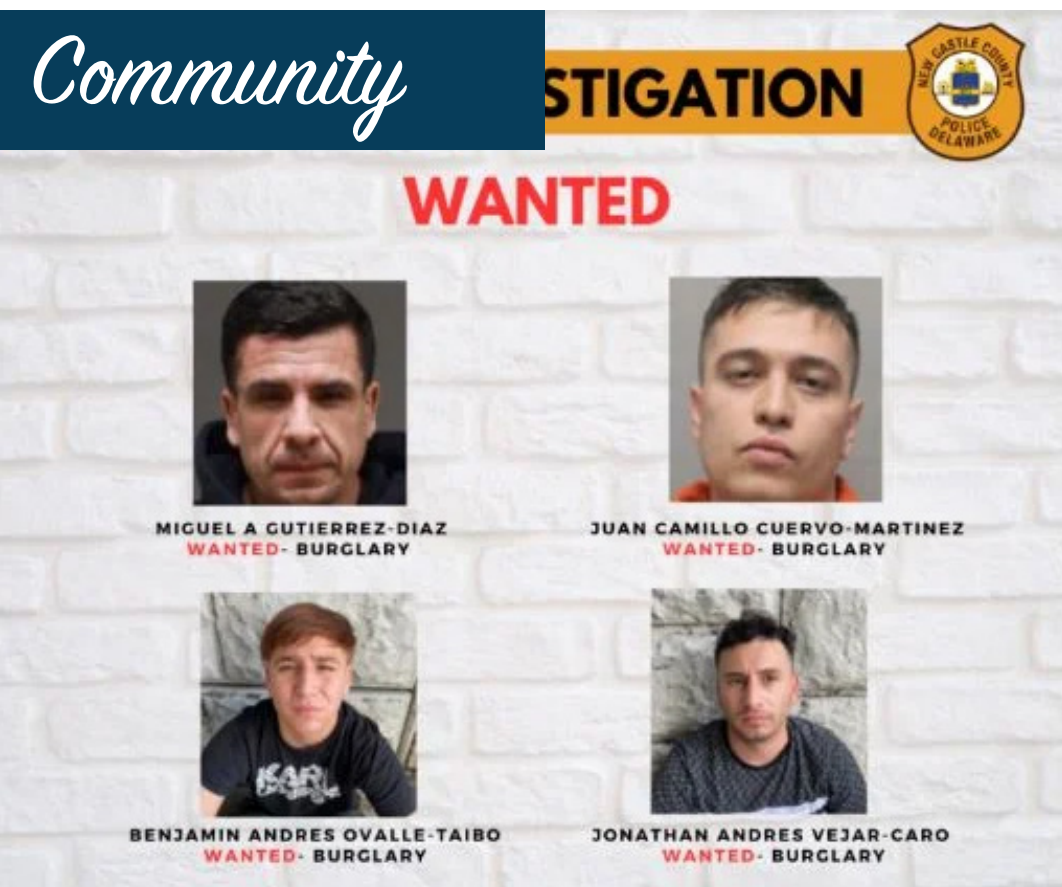
Former Blue Hen Whitehead Earns Spot on Bucs

photo link: Delaware Greenways



Community

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



NEW WORRY: 'CRIME TOURISTS' WHO TARGET EXPENSIVE HOMES FOR THEFTS

They typically ship the stolen goods back to their home countries or try to sell them before they leave the country. New Castle Police have made several arrests of people in these groups but are still seeking some people wanted for outstanding warrants.

The theft rings often are composed of Chilean or Columbian nationals, the release said. The groups are targeting expensive homes and homes owned by Asian Americans, the press release said.

THEFT PREVENTION TIPS

New Castle Police recommend that home owners take additional steps to secure their property and personal belongings:

1. Consult with your homeowner's association on the installation of automated license plate readers at the entrance/exit of neighborhoods.
2. Secure doors and windows. Install solid exterior doors with deadbolt locks and reinforced frames. Use high-quality locks on all doors and consider upgrading to smart locks for added security. Install window locks on all accessible windows and reinforce glass with security film or laminates.
3. Install a comprehensive home security system that includes burglar alarms, motion sensors and security cameras. Display signs or stickers indicating the presence of a security system, which can act as a deterrent.
4. Install motion-sensor lights around the perimeter of your home, particularly near entry points. Ensure

that pathways, entrances and dark areas are well-lit to minimize hiding spots for potential burglars.

5. Join or establish a neighborhood watch program to create a sense of community and collective security. Communicate with your neighbors, report suspicious activities and look out for one another.

6. Keep valuable items, such as jewelry, cash and important documents, in a secure safe or lockbox. Avoid leaving valuable items in plain sight through windows or in easily accessible areas.

7. Maintain a well-kept appearance to deter potential burglars. Use timers for lights and electronic devices to create the illusion of occupancy when you're away.

8. Avoid sharing vacation plans or posting about being away from home on social media. Burglars can exploit this information to target unoccupied houses.

9. Install security bars or grilles on vulnerable entry points, such as basement windows or sliding doors. Consider reinforcing doors with door jammers or security plates to prevent forced entry.

10. Be aware of your surroundings and report any suspicious activities to local authorities. Consider installing surveillance cameras to monitor and record activities around your property.

11. Report suspicious persons and vehicles to 9-1-1.



BY BETSY PRICE

Leaving home? Keep it to yourself.

In the modern turmoil of daily life, there's another worry: South American Theft Groups who target upscale homes. The [New Castle County Division of Police](#) and other law enforcement partners are warning Delaware residents about a nationwide trend of residential burglaries by groups known as "South American Theft Groups" or "Crime Tourists," according to a Friday [press release](#).

The highly organized criminals travel from state to state burglarizing homes and stealing from them. They use radios, disguises, lookouts and surveillance to case potential homes and neighborhoods. Once they act, the group moves fast, stealing jewelry, watches, designer merchandise, cash and gold bars, the press release said.



LIFEGUARDS SHOW OFF SKILLS IN REHOBOTH'S REGIONAL COMPETITION

BY RACHEL SWICK MAVITY

University of Delaware student Meredith Lockwood has lifeguarding in her DNA. Her father, Don Lockwood, was a **Rehoboth Beach Patrol** lifeguard from 1985-88 and after being a lifeguard elsewhere last year, Meredith followed him into the patrol this year. So during Wednesday's Mid-Atlantic Regional Lifesaving Championships in Rehoboth, Meredith came to win. And have fun, of course.

As she warmed up her legs during the United States Lifesaving Association event, held for the past 27 years in Rehoboth Beach, her dad and supporters watched and encouraged her. They weren't disappointed.

In the first women's 90-meter sprint, Meredith qualified among the top times. In the finals for the sprint, she came in second, earning her big hugs and a smile from dad.

Meredith was among 20 female beach patrol lifeguards and about 50 male guards from the Mid-Atlantic region

to compete in a variety of speed and skill races. Events include the 90-meter sprint, 2K beach run, 4 x 90 soft-sand beach relay, 400-meter surf swim, swimmer rescue race, landline rescue race, paddleboard rescue race, run-swim-run, surf dash and beach flags.

Finishing just ahead of Lockwood in the final 90-meter spring was Sophia Gulotti, a four-year Rehoboth Beach Patrol lifeguard.

"The level of local and regional talent competing will put on a show not to be missed," says Gulotti. "We performed well last year, and everyone is excited to see who has what it takes to win a championship and qualify for nationals in Virginia Beach."

That's what all the competitors were aiming for—a spot among the top guards from the region. They will travel together as a team to the national competition.

L.J. Sengphachanh, 19, of Delaware State Beach Patrol, says he was excited to compete during his first year on

beach patrol.

"I was a lifeguard at pools before, but beach patrol and this competition are new to me," Sengphachanh said. "I hope to make it to nationals. The beach patrol is like one big family and I like the relationships I have built here."

Konnor Knarr—a Cape Henlopen alum like Meredith Lockwood—has been a lifeguard for two years, but this year joined Rehoboth Beach Patrol. His mom came out to support him during the competition.

Knarr is not new to competition. He played boys volleyball for Cape and was a sprint runner on the track team. Knarr recently finished third in the state at New Balance Nationals. He led the beach patrol team to success during the 90-meter sprint and was the anchor runner for the patrol in the relay.

In the girls relay, the team to watch was Bethany Beach Patrol, which performed well last year. This year was no different with the four relay runners digging it out in the sand for a top finish. Gulotti, Lockwood and the Rehoboth team also excelled in the relay.

During the 400-meter surf swim, the men lined up in two heats and the top 10 then competed in the finals. The females competed in a single heat with the top finishers gaining points.

LIFEGUARD RACES

In the first men's heat, Steve McDonald of the Town of Hempstead, NY, was first out of the water and through the checkered finish line. In the finals, however, McDonald was bested by several swimmers, landing in fifth place. Top finisher was Mitchell Cullen of Avon by the Sea, NJ.

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DELAWARE SHAKESPEARE'S 'MACBETH' COMES TO ROCKWOOD THIS MONTH

BY BETSY PRICE

Delaware Shakespeare returns to Rockwood Park this month with the three witches taking on a more central role than usual.

“The witches enjoy chaos as a tool for learning,” said AZ Espinoza, who returns to DelShakes to direct the Scottish play, in a press release. “They lean into the power of the natural world to seek balance and to remind us that we have more to learn from making choices than passively accepting fate.”

DelShakes’ annual productions in the back yard of the Rockwood Mansion are one of the cultural touchstones of summer in Wilmington. “Macbeth” will be its 21st Shakespeare production under the summer stars there.

Last staged by DelShakes in 2010, “Macbeth” is the story of a triumphant general who doesn’t resist the lure of rising to king via murder.

One of Shakespeare’s most popular plays, includes many phrases that theatergoers are familiar with: “Is this a dagger which I see before me,” “double, double toil and trouble,” “Out! damn spot,” “knock, knock. Who’s there?” and “something wicked this way comes,” the latter a comment made by one of the Weird Sisters as Macbeth approaches them.

‘MACBETH’S’ WITCHES

The three witches will be portrayed by a mix of returning and new DelShakes performers. Rachel O’Hanlon-Rodriguez was an audience favorite as Stephano in “The Tempest.” Kimie Muroya began her professional career as a DelShakes performance apprentice in 2015’s “The Taming of the Shrew” and returns after performances with the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, InterAct Theatre Company and Theatre Exile.

Rounding out the three witches is DelShakes newcomer CJ Higgins, who is the operations and programs coordinator for Theatre Philadelphia and has played Puck in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and Algernon Moncrieff in “The Importance of Being Earnest.”

DelShakes Artistic Squad member Mariah Ghant takes to the stage as Macbeth. Ghant played Titania for DelShakes in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” at Rodney Square and has directed and produced many of the company’s “Beyond Shakespeare” and “Social Shakespeare” events over the last two years. She is also the artistic associate for Wilma Theater and an improviser with ComedySportz Philly.

“I feel like I’m training for a marathon,” said Ghant. “Macbeth is constantly battling with his mind, his heart and the forces of the natural (and supernatural!) world. Keeping up with that emotional push and pull is enough, but then there’s more! Upholding this titan of a classical figure in Shakespeare’s canon can get heavy.”

The cast also features Ciera Gardner as Lady Macbeth, who returns to DelShakes after serving as text coach for “The Tempest.” Gardner also has performed with Arden Theatre Company, Theatre in the X and Shakespeare in Clark Park.

Patrons may bring their chairs or blankets as well as their own food or drink, or buy from the DelShakes concessions tent, which features wine from Swigg, beer from Wilmington Brew Works and light fare from Janssen’s Market, plus soda and snacks courtesy of Kenny Family Shoprite.

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VETERANS CAN FILE FOR NEW BENEFITS AT JULY 14 FAMILY FUN DAY

BY JAREK RUTZ

A new Veterans Affairs family fun day is organized around a serious tent pole: Getting 150 or more Veterans to file claims for new federal benefits.

The Wilmington Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Veteran Benefits Administration hope the July 14 event will bring the additional resources available through the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act to service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers and surviving spouses. The PACT Act was signed into law Aug. 10, 2022, and expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic substances.

There's a reason why the VA wants Veterans to sign up now: Under the PACT Act, if someone files a claim before Aug. 10, 2023, they will be back-paid to Aug. 10, 2022.

"But if they apply after, they'll only get back-paid to the date they apply, so it's a nice little caveat if they do it before Aug. 10 of this year," said Valerie Harwood, public affairs officer for the Wilmington VA Medical Center. "So the fair is to show appreciation to families and support for Veterans, but also to recognize and help the Veterans get these claims done before Aug. 9 so they can get back-pay for a whole year."

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DE RANKS 8TH AMONG STATES FOR OUTDOOR EXERCISE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Delaware is No. 8 on a new list of best states for outdoor exercise, a fitness website has concluded.

Total Shape measured 16 factors: national parks; weather; coastline; parks; temperature; boats and water sports facilities; beaches; sports camps and clinics; kayaking and canoeing attractions; ski and snowboarding facilities; surfing, windsurfing and kitesurfing facilities; outdoor activities; hiking trails; biking trails; golf courses; and adrenaline and extreme sports facilities. Results were adjusted by state area.

In releasing the top 10 states, the site cited only Delaware’s surfing potential, not the growth in **trails** nor Rehoboth Beach’s status as “**the nation’s summer capital**”. The list was dominated by states known for their attractive coasts, with Hawaii and California at the

top. But the top 10 also included the landlocked Utah, Arizona and Colorado. At the bottom was Alaska, known for a cold climate that discourages many from outdoor activities.

Lists like this are intended to generate barroom discussions and publicity for the sponsor, but their conclusions can fairly easily be countered.

IS EXERCISE THE SAME AS ADVENTUROUS?

For instance, **Men’s Health** in 2017 considered America’s most adventurous cities and put Wilmington 96th out of 100. The magazine and website measured these factors: percentage of people participating in various sports in the past 12 months (GfK MRI); percentage of people meeting activity guidelines, percentage of people who engage in vigorous activity



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five or more days a week (CDC); ratio of parkland to city size (The Trust for Public Land); recreational business counts percentage (U.S. Census Bureau); recreational household expenditure percentage, recreational Consumer Price Index (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Its number crunching was only for “the 100 most populous cities in America,” but that really refers to the metropolitan areas, which for Wilmington includes all of New Castle County, plus Cecil County in Maryland and Salem County in New Jersey.





WEEKLY CONCERT SERIES STARTED WEDNESDAY AT NEW AMPHITHEATRE

BY BETSY PRICE

A weekly Wilmington series of free concerts designed to help bring the community together through live music debuted Wednesday, July 12. **DuPont Brass** will headline the first of weekly 6:30 p.m. concerts, designed to be family friendly, at the Urban Artist Exchange Amphitheater, created on the site of the city police’s former stables. Wilmington hip-hop artist **Young Seda** will open at 6:30 p.m.

The Wednesday night concerts will continue into mid-October. The series is dubbed the Levitt AMP Wilmington Music Series, after the nonprofit that gave the city a \$90,000 matching grant to pay for three years of concerts.

“The Levitt AMP Wilmington Music Series offers a diversity of artists and genres that amplify the Levitt

Foundation’s mission, which aligns with the core mission of the Urban Artist Exchange Amphitheater and Mayor Mike Purzycki’s promise to provide Wilmingtonians and visitors with a vibrant place to live, work and play,” said Tina Betz, director of Wilmington’s Office of Cultural Affairs and Cityfest Inc.

“All concerts will be free and open to the public to experience the power of live music,” she said. “In addition to the Levitt AMP Wilmington Music Series, UAE Amphitheater audiences will also enjoy other unique and creative live performance offerings such as the Saturday, July 15th, SQUONK! Opera.”

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CHILL OUT

photo link: Longwood Gardens



Business

TOWN SQUARE LIVE

DRBA DETAILS MILLIONS GOING TO BRIDGE, AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Delaware’s infrastructure stole the show in Wednesday’s State of the County for New Castle County. Stephen Williams, deputy executive director of **Delaware River Bay Authority**, told an audience of about 200 that the Authority is focusing on the importance of replacing aging infrastructure and investing in the Delaware Memorial Bridge, which links the First State to New Jersey. Some of the authority’s priorities with old infrastructure, he said, include bridges, I-295, ferry vessels and airports.

“Over \$300 million for the next five years is to be spent on bridge initiatives alone,” he said.

Williams was one of more than a dozen speakers at the New Castle County Chamber of Commerce meeting held at the University of Delaware. It focuses largely on government, business and development, not social issues.

After an introduction from County Executive Matt Meyer, the conference was split into four sections: real estate development, infrastructure improvement, innovative ecosystem and a panel with the mayors of Middletown, Newark and Elsmere.

While the other portions contained information on community partnerships, newly-built apartment complexes and stores, renewable energy, internet access and more, the 30 minutes on infrastructure offered the most meat.

The Authority is in year nine of a 12-year rehabilitation process for the Memorial Bridge, Williams said. So far, it’s completed tower elevator replacement, pier rehabilitation, cable preservation, and tower pin and link replacement.

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STATE OKS ENSTRUCTURE TO OPERATE PORT OF WILMINGTON

BY BETSY PRICE

The Diamond State Port Corp. announced Wednesday that Enstructure LLC has been approved as the new operator at the **Port of Wilmington** and that it will invest as much as \$65 million in the facility. Enstructure is a U.S. marine terminal and logistics company with a network of 21 marine terminals.

The company will take over in a matter of days after the deal was approved by legislative leaders designated by the state's Joint Capital Improvement Committee.

House Speaker Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, and Senate President Pro Tempore David Sokola, D-Newark, along with Joint Capital Improvement Committee Co-Chairs Rep. Debra Heffernan, D-Bellefont, and Sen. Jack Walsh, D-Stanton and Controller General Ruth Ann Miller gave their approval Tuesday on the unanimous decision by the board of the port corporation to replace GT USA Wilmington LLC.

PORT AGREEMENT

As part of the approval, Enstructure secured an agreement to work closely with the International Longshoremen's Association as well as a project labor agreement with the Delaware Building and Construction Trades Council. ILA and Trades Council representatives spoke in support of Enstructure and their proposal at the July 7 DSPC Board meeting.

Enstructure is also partnering with the state on the potential expansion at Edgemoor, where Gov. John Carney has committed \$50 million from American Rescue Plan Act funds.

"The Port of Wilmington and its workforce are critical to Delaware," Longhurst and Sokola said in a joint statement. "Thousands of Delaware families rely on the good-paying jobs that come from our port. We look forward to working with Enstructure as the new long-term operator and investor in one of Delaware's most important assets."




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photo by Engin Akyurt / Pexels



Food & Dining

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



MIDDLE-AGED DAD JAM BAND BRINGS CALAGIONE FRIENDS TO TOWN

BY PAM GEORGE

Sam Calagione has friends in all the right places. His former roommate is Ken Marino, an actor, comedian, director and screenwriter, who, with fellow thespian David Wain, was on MTV's "The State." The duo is also known for "Wet Hot American Summer" and its spinoffs.

Admittedly, Calagione is no slouch. The James Beard Foundation Award winner and his wife, Mariah, are the founders of Milton, Delaware-based **Dogfish Head Craft Brewery**. But in the early '90s, the roommates were just starting. They lived in a third-floor walk-up apartment in New York that was so large Marino and Wain's comedy sketch group could rehearse in it.

Calagione, meanwhile, brewed his first beer, Cherry Pale Ale, in the space and it was there that he declared to all involved that he was going to own a brewpub.

On Wednesday, July 19, the old friends will reunite at **Dogfish Head Brewings & Eats** in Rehoboth Beach. But this is no typical burger and beer-belly reunion of

men in midlife. Marino and Wain will perform with their band Middle Aged Dad Jam Band, a free show beginning at 9 p.m. And, of course, there will be comedy.

Calagione and Marino met via their third roommate, Joe Deluca. Calagione wasted no time experimenting with beer.

"Back then, Sam had these two small kegs, and he was constantly trying new recipes," recalled Marino, who took the time with Wain for a quick interview Wednesday. They wrote the movie "Wanderlust" starring Paul Rudd and Jennifer Aniston.

"If he succeeded, it was great; we drank it. If it wasn't good, we got rid of it and started again. That's how he came up with so many awesome flavors," said Marino, a Long Island native.

Wain agreed. "I remember sipping all his ales and feeling like this guy has the magic touch."

Meanwhile, The State perfected their skits in the

apartment. "We would hang out, and while we wouldn't ask for Sam's approval, we'd look out of the corner of our eye to see if Sam was laughing," Wain said.

The friends stayed in touch to the point that Wain and Marino loaded a van with video equipment and shot promotional material for Dogfish Brewings & Eats in Rehoboth when it opened in 1995.

"I wish I still had the footage," Calagione said.

Marino looked for opportunities to plug Dogfish Head in his films and TV shows whenever possible.

"I would try to sneak it in there anyway I could possibly do it," said Marino, who wore a Dogfish Head baseball cap for his recent Zoom interview. "And for that, Sam gives me half-priced fries whenever I'm in town."

THEY'RE WITH THE BAND

Wain, meanwhile, sought the chance to play drums whenever possible.

"Most of the music I've played over the years happened when I hired myself to play the drums in a TV show or movie," said the writer and director, who had played in high school bands.

But during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, he started recording his playing and asked friends to sing or perform other musical parts. They had so much fun that a group met in Wain's Los Angeles garage to play when people began socializing again.

"It evolved very organically," Wain said.

"We looked forward to doing it all week," Marino added. "Anytime we got an email from Dave about rehearsing, we immediately responded."

Many rehearsals were truly jam sessions, with artists dropping in to join the core group, who are all in the entertainment business.

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MILTON'S ZAVA ADDS DINNER; ALFRESCO BEACH DINING HEATS UP

BY PAM GEORGE

Now that the Fourth of July is in the rearview window, it's time to truly celebrate summer.

Dining outside and enjoying live music, sipping vino in a vineyard and bubbles on a farm, enjoying fresh produce and preparing delicious dishes at home all have their place.

DINNER IS SERVED

Zava Café in Milton, which opened as a breakfast and lunch spot, now serves dinner Wednesday through Saturday. Expect creative entrees—co-owner/chef Danio Somoza also owns **Harvest Tide Steakhouse** in Lewes and the Mexican-influenced **Zocca** in Bethany Beach.

Zava's dinner menu includes crispy skin salmon with velouté sauce, bouillabaisse, pepper-crusted ribeye and assorted seafood over pasta. The restaurant takes reservations, but make sure you call the Milton location, not the original coffee shop in downtown Rehoboth Beach.

ALFRESCO DINING

Music and food create a harmonious marriage, and that's especially true when you're dining outside at a concert. **The Rocking the Docks** concert series at the Cape May-Lewes Ferry terminal is adjacent to **Grain on the Rocks**, and concertgoers can order from Grain's food stand, which also sells beverages—including bottles of wine.

Many outdoor events have food trucks or allow you to bring your meal. Don't want to cook? Kate Applebaum, who owns **Cajun Kate's** with her husband, Don, suggests popping into the Philadelphia Pike restaurant before attending the free Thursday and Sunday concert series at Bellevue State Park. Nothing goes with the blues like a po'boy.

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Government

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



KITCHEN TABLE ISSUES EXPECTED TO BE FOCUS OF 2024 ELECTION

BY SAM HAUT

With three Democrats already announcing a run for statewide offices in 2024, politicians say they expect the election’s main issues to be familiar to most voters.

“It’s the cost of things going up and kind of wages being stagnant,” said Sen. Brian Pettyjohn, R-Georgetown, minority leader in the Delaware State Senate.

“More and more I’m hearing from people, especially our increasing elder population that we have here in Sussex County, concerned about the price of their groceries going up, things that they have to spend money on every week where their Social Security kind of stays stagnant or their pensions stay stagnant,” he said.

Julianne Murray, chair of the Delaware State Republican Party, predicted that education and crime will be big issues, especially in the race for governor. Gov. John Carney is ending his second four-year term and won’t run for re-election.

“Where we are on test scores, not even getting into curriculum and things like that,” Murray said. “Crime is still going to be an issue that people are going to be talking about.”

What Murray doesn’t want to see is a focus on identity politics. “Where I think we should be going is talking about issues instead of...getting into the weeds of identity politics,” Murray said. “We should be talking about what’s affecting people’s day to day lives,” Murray said.

Matt Meyer, the New Castle County executive who announced June 6 that he’s running for governor, said there are several areas of concern such as ChatGPT and the healthcare system that he expects to come up.

“Everything from the struggles getting a doctor’s appointment that I hear across the state and are particularly acute in Sussex,” Meyer said. “The challenges of getting a quality public school education across our state.

The challenges of things like ChatGPT and a rapidly changing economy. How do we best position the state to address those issues, as well as various issues involving the environment and climate change.”

Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester **announced** June 21 that she is running for Sen. John Carper seat. He has announced he is retiring. In turn, Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, **announced** on June 26 that she is running for Delaware’s lone congressional seat. Blunt Rochester and McBride did not respond to requests for an interview. Neither did the Delaware State Democratic Party.

One more sign that an election year is coming: Scott Walker banners—many painted on what seems to be pieces of material—are hanging from trees and other perches up and down Delaware. It’s unclear exactly what he’s running for.

While the state’s presidential primary is on April 23, the state primary is still set for Sept. 10, 2024. A bill in this year’s General Assembly that would have moved the state primary to the same day as the presidential one failed.

While no Republicans have yet announced for state office, Murray said the party plans to run candidates for all state offices. Murray believes voters tend to prefer outsiders.

“The electorate likes the idea of somebody that’s not a career politician...even at the federal level, when you see like any of the polling or anything like that,” Murray said.

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COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND GETS HALF OF PREVIOUS YEAR

BY SAM HAUT

The 2024 fiscal year **community reinvestment fund** allocates \$45 million to 153 different organizations, a big drop from the \$90 million allocated for 2023 fiscal year and the \$70 million allocated in 2022. The fund is part of this year’s bond bill and comes from **Senate Bill 160**, sponsored by Sen. Jack Walsh, D-Stanton, which allocates \$1,409,448,938 to address capital improvement projects across the state.

The money in the fund is used for various 501(c)3 organizations and towns across the state to help with capital improvement projects. Rep. Ronald Gray, R-Bethany Beach, who worked on allocating the money for the fund, said that they initially received \$250 million in requests that they had to whittle down to \$45 million.

“You can’t do it all. You’re doing not even a quarter of it that was available...But overall, I just felt just wonder-

ful,” Gray said. “I mean, this is my fourth year on the bond committee and one year we started out with 10 and we ended up getting \$20 million on this redevelopment fund, and this year it’s over double what that was. So we’ve been able to do a lot the last three years for a good bit of the 501(c)3s.”

Legislators work with the Office of the Controller General to make sure the money gets distributed properly and to avoid any overlap in funding, so none of the groups get more than they requested.

The reason for the \$45 million decrease in funds this year compared to last year, Gray said, is just based on how much money is available and what else the governor and controller general’s office are trying to get funding for.

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DELAWARE STILL WORKING ON 32,000 TAX REFUNDS, NEW SYSTEM

BY SAM HAUT

Less than 10% of Delawareans who were due refunds when they filed their taxes are still waiting on them.

Since the beginning of 2023, the Delaware Department of Finance has received more than 387,000 requests for a 2022 tax refund. Its completed 355,641 of those requests, which totaled about \$230 million. The number of outstanding tax refunds is about the same number due this time last year, said Kathy Revel, director of the Division of Revenue. Most of what the state is dealing with now are returns received in the past two months, she said.

Refunds moved more slowly this year than the state is known for, however. Complicating matters is the Division of Revenue's new tax filing system. A new system finished coming up to speed in 2020 for business taxes. The second phase, focused on personal taxes, didn't

come online until October 2022, taking 22 months to complete. The third and final phase will involve corporate filings, said Revel. That should take about 18 months to return to a more seamless processing season.

Revel said that the Division of Revenue hired 12 seasonal staff to help deal with the 2022 tax season and the department is still working on some issues.

"We're working to resolve all issues as quickly as possible. We are dedicated to getting refunds out as quickly as we can," Revel said. "We know this tax season has been a little challenging for some individuals."

While the state received 387,000 requests for a refund, they've received a total of 570,000 tax returns. Those include people paying the state because they didn't pay enough in taxes.



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The benefit of the new system, Revel said, is that they will be able to reduce the amount of manual work state employees have to do by replacing it with more automation. Right now, the average time for an automated return to be completed is about eight days, while manual returns take an average of 44 days.

"The first year, because you're being so cautious, you seem to stop a lot more returns," she said. "So long term, we're going to program the system to follow more business rules and less manual intervention. That's our goal. It'll take us a little bit of time to get there. But that will mean faster processing times and faster refund times for taxpayers."



photo credit: William Penn High School

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CHRISTINA VOTES TO STOP GRADUATIONS AT UD AFTER STUDENT ARREST

BY JAREK RUTZ

Christina School District will no longer hold its graduation at the **University of Delaware**. The Tuesday night decision by the school board came after a recent incident in which UD police arrested an 18-year-old star student on graduation day.

Holding graduation on UD's campus has cost Christina \$98,129. That includes access to a campus building and parking lot as well as hiring UD security for the ceremony.

"I plan to bring this issue back on the agenda until this issue is resolved and in each meeting we'll progressively sanction UD," said board member Naveed Baqir, who has been leading the charge to punish UD. He plans to demand a refund for the 2023 graduation from UD at Christina's August board meeting "for failure to provide appropriate and compassionate event security leading to a violent arrest."

The board voted near the end of a five-hour plus board meeting to move its graduations out of UD's Bob Carpenter Center unless UD admits their treatment of the Mohammed Sanogo was wrong and drops the charges against him.

"We are waiting for the results of the case to determine possible additional actions or steps," said board President Don Patton.

Dozens of community members have spoken out against UD police with accusations of police misconduct, excessive use of force, and racial and religious bias. Sanogo, a student with a grade point average above a 4.0 and plans to attend the University of Maryland to pursue aerospace engineering, was arrested at UD June 15. It happened less than 45 minutes after receiving his diploma during Newark High School's graduation.

Sanogo was charged with resisting arrest and reckless driving and accused of trespassing. The incident began when officers approached a handful of people including Sanogo who were engaging in a Muslim group prayer in the parking lot. A UD police officer told them they had to leave.

Three cars of teenagers were on their way out of the parking lot, but as Sanogo's car left, his car made a screeching noise, which witnesses blamed on new tires. Two police cars "boxed in" Sanogo. Sanogo opened his car door at an officer's request and officers dragged him out and pinned him against the car after Sanogo was struggling and slightly resisting, according to witnesses who are friends of Sanogo. An officer picked up Sanogo and slammed him into tall grass. Sanogo has asthma and kept repeating that he couldn't breathe. He was arrested and held overnight, released at 4 a.m. with a \$200 unsecured bail.

Baqir, witnesses and dozens of public commenters characterized the event as an abuse of power, excessive force and driven by religious or racial biases. The university has adamantly denied any allegations that its police officers acted with racial or religious bias.

UD has not released police body-cam footage. It did issue a statement saying UD Police applied appropriate de-escalation techniques in dealing with a suspect who was resisting arrest in order to ensure the safety of all who are involved, including the suspect.

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TEACHER ABSENTEEISM CALLS FOR STAFF FLEXIBILITY, STRATEGIES

BY JAREK RUTZ

A human resources director for the largest school district in Sussex County shocked a House Education Committee hearing in April when she told them about 300 of its 1,000 educators are off on any given school day. About 800 of those educators are teachers, and their absenteeism rains down problems for the district, said Celeste Bunting, director of human resources at Indian River School District.

They may be off because they are sick themselves, they need to care for a sick child or spouse, they have a doctor's appointment, or other reasons including a vacation day. But the district must then scramble for substitute teachers or find another way to take care of their classes.

"We do have paraprofessionals who aren't certified teachers who can fill in," Bunting told the committee.

"We may have in a seven-period day, seven different teachers who are willing to give up their planning period to fill in during that time. Or, we combine classes and sometimes kids have to go into the gym to have a larger space."

Indian River is not the only district dealing with that issue, but not all districts are. Colonial School District in New Castle County and Milford School District in Sussex County have the same problem, but Caesar Rodney School District and Capital School District say it's not a problem for them.

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SEVEN DELAWARE STUDENTS RECEIVE \$2,500 MOUNTAIRE SCHOLARSHIPS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Seven Delaware high schoolers will save \$2,500 in college tuition thanks to **Mountaire Farms**, the nation's fourth largest chicken company. The company awarded a total of \$80,000 to 32 students in the Delmarva region and North Carolina in its latest round of scholarship funds given out to children and grandchildren of employees, growers and grain producers.

"We are proud of this program because it embraces everything that we care about—our employees, our growers, our grain producers and their families," said Phillip Plylar, president of Mountaire Farms. "These students have all demonstrated a commitment to their education, and to their communities, which we believe should be celebrated."

Delaware's recipients are:

Ryan Baker, Lewes, is a freshman at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, where he plans to study mechanical engineering. His father, Mark Baker, is a grain producer for Mountaire for the Millsboro location.

Ethan Patey, Delmar, is a sophomore at Delaware Tech Community College where he studies agribusiness

management. His grandfather, Howard Webb, is a grain producer for Mountaire.

Alexis Buckley, Millsboro, is a sophomore at Wilson College in Pennsylvania studying veterinary nursing. Her father, Paul Buckley, works in IT at Mountaire and her mother, Jennifer, works in accounting in Millsboro.

Mindy Blevins, Selbyville, is a junior attending Wilmington University studying organizational leadership. Her father, Charles Blevins, is a feed mill superintendent in Frankford.

Sofia Lopez, Harrington, will attend the University of Delaware in the fall to major in engineering. Her father, Federico Lopez, is a shipping manager in Selbyville.

Jillian Collins, Selbyville, will attend Delaware Valley University in the fall to study animal science. Her father, Scott Collins, leads the security team in Selbyville.

Camille Bello, Millsboro, is a junior at the University of Delaware majoring in health behavior science. Her mother, Lily Bello, works in purchasing in Selbyville.



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SMYRNA HIGH SHINES AT NATIONAL EVENT FOR FUTURE EDUCATORS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Smyrna High School shined in the **Educators Rising National Conference** in Orlando, FL, as 11 individuals or teams of the school earned top 10 finishes in competitions. Delaware had 18 individuals or teams total that landed in the top 10 of events.

Throughout the four-day conference, which ended July 2, students engaged in professional and personal development opportunities, networking and competitive events. The competitions are performance-based events in which aspiring educators demonstrate their knowledge, skills and leadership in education.

Delaware Teacher Academy students and advisors from across the state attended the conference, and the state was represented by students from Appoquinimink High School, Concord High School, Cape Henlopen

High School, Sussex Central High School, Laurel High School, Howard High School of Technology, McKean High School, Seaford High School, Smyrna High School and Delaware Technical Community College.

Here are the Delaware winners of the junior varsity division competitions:

Mekenzie Square-Ward of Smyrna High School finished first place in the job interview competition.

Alexandra Passero of Smyrna High School finished first place in the exploring non-core teaching careers competition.

Brianna Kalb of Smyrna High School finished fourth place in the exploring student support services competition.

Malika Opelogo of Concord High School finished fourth place in the creative lecture (TEDTalk) competition.

Delaware winners in the varsity division are:

Gala Meseguer-Molina of Laurel High School finished first place in the children's literature—Spanish competition.

Madison Retzlaff of Smyrna High School finished second place in the exploring education administration careers competition.

Hailey Ennis of Smyrna High School finished second place in the exploring student support service careers competition.

Alexi Steele of Smyrna High School finished third place in the creative lecture (TEDTalk) competition.

Taylor Colman of Smyrna High School finished third place in the educators rising moment competition.

Emma Kate Reist of Cape Henlopen High School finished third place in the exploring student support service careers competition.

Zachary Naar of Cape Henlopen High School finished fourth place in the exploring non-core teaching careers competition.

Olivia Marzullo of Sussex Central High School finished fourth place in the job interview competition.

Marlayna Pennington of Smyrna High School finished fifth place in the job interview competition.

Abigail Long of Smyrna High School finished sixth place in the impromptu speaking competition.

Leah Bonsignore of Smyrna High School finished sixth place in the public speaking competition.

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10 FIRST STATERS WIN NATIONAL AWARDS IN TECH CONFERENCE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Ten Delawareans won awards at the 45th annual **Tech- nology Student Association Conference** in Louisville, KY, last week. 130 First Staters participated in individual and team events among a crowd of more than 8,000.

Competitions gauged their skills in: architecture, podcasting, biotechnology, board game design, career prep, coding, cybersecurity, data science and analytics, video production, dragster design, extemporaneous speech, fashion design and technology, flight endurance, foundations of information technology, future teacher, manufacturing prototype, microcontroller design, photographic technology, solar sprint, software development, STEM animation, structural engineering, system control technology, technology problem solving,

VEX robotics, video game design, virtual reality visualization, website design and more.

Achievement awards were given to:

- Samhitha Vallury, MOT Charter School, for service as secretary of Technology Student Association.
- Samra Iqbal, Caesar Rodney High School, for service as reporter of Technology Student Association.
- Roger Seedorf, MOT Charter School, recognized as High School Teacher of the Year.
- Laura Barnas, Postlethwait Middle, recognized as Middle School Teacher of the Year.
- Mike Fitzgerald, Delaware Department of Education, recognized as the National State Advisor of the Year.

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Sports

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



FORMER BLUE HEN WHITEHEAD EARNS SPOT ON BUCS

BY NICK ALESSANDRINI

Former Middletown Cavalier and Delaware Blue Hen football star Kedrick Whitehead will be sticking around Tampa, FL, this summer. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers signed the Delaware native to their 90-man offseason roster on May 15 after the rookie minicamp tryout period. Whitehead was one of three players signed by the Bucs after the rookie mini camp, alongside East Central (OK) wide receiver David Moore and Charlotte outside linebacker Markees Watts.

Whitehead was undrafted out of the University of Delaware and will play safety for the Bucs, the same position the All-American played so well for the Blue

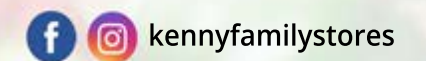
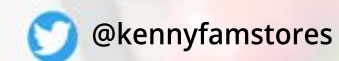
Hens. Whitehead “stood out” during the rookie mini-camp after being on a tryout contract with the team. Whitehead will now have a chance to show what he can do during the NFL preseason and hopefully make the 53-man roster come late August. Whitehead was a former 9x All-American, 4x All-CAA Defensive Back, and 3x team captain with the Delaware Blue Hens while recording 295 career tackles, ranking 21st all-time in program history and sixth among DBs.

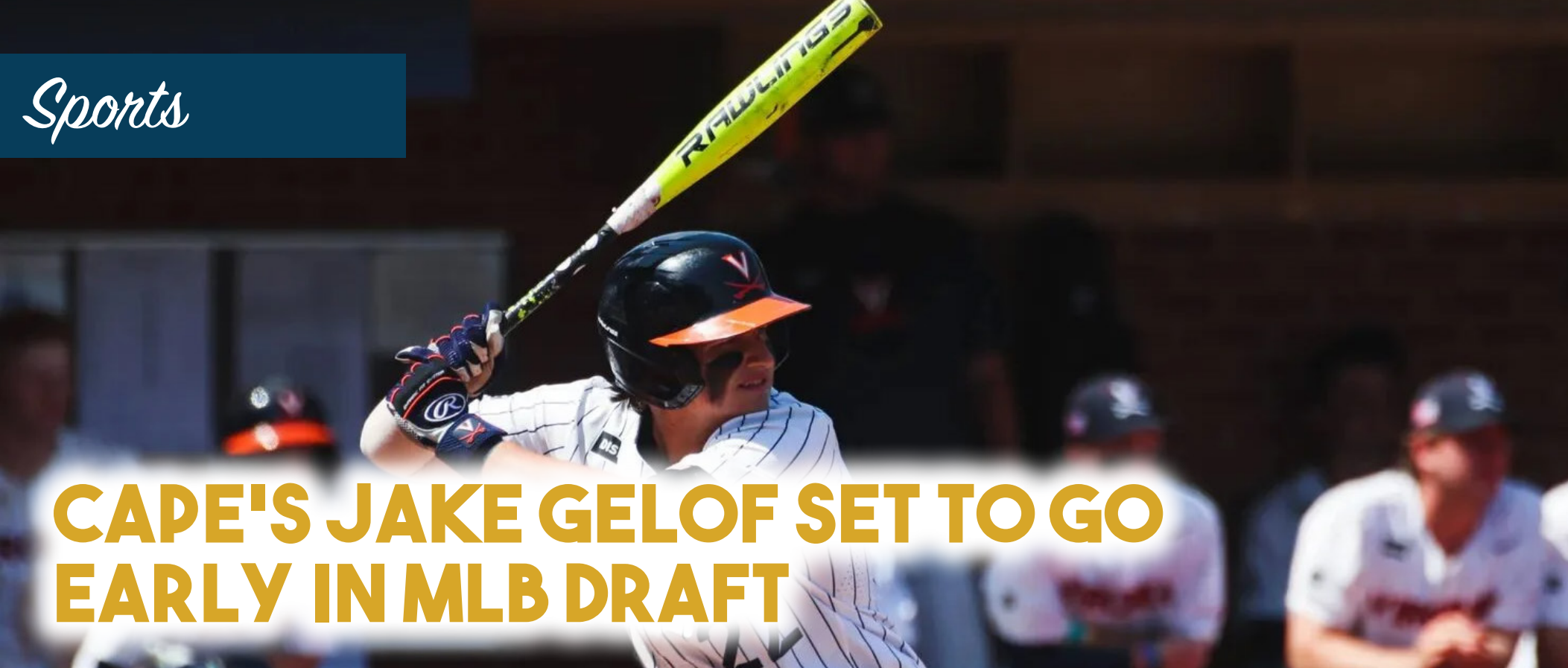


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CAPE'S JAKE GELOF SET TO GO EARLY IN MLB DRAFT

BY PATRICK GARYANTES

Jake Gelof ended his collegiate career as Virginia's all-time home run king, slugging 48 homers in his three seasons with the Cavaliers. He passed E.J. Anderson's (1995-1998) mark of 37 home runs back in April, on his way to batting .321 on the season with 23 bombs while driving in 90 runs. During his career, Gelof played in 161 games and aside from the home runs, he hit 46 doubles and seven triples, while batting .329 with a .429 on-base percentage.

That level of production has Gelof listed as MLB.com's number 35 overall prospect for the 2023 MLB Draft. They have the 6'1" 195-pound third baseman described as:

"A right-handed-hitting corner infielder, Gelof does not get cheated at the plate. He has an aggressive approach, looking to do damage and tap into his huge raw power, especially to the pull side. Gelof takes big swings,

but he showed an ability to get to his power in 2022, limit strikeouts, draw walks and make adjustments, even if some think he'll be power-over-hit when all is said and done."

Scouting grades are a metric used to describe a player's physical tools. In baseball, the scale used to measure a player is from 20 (being very poor) to 80 (being Hall of Fame worthy, can't miss elite). Very rarely do you see players rated on the ends of the spectrum. As an example, baseball's number one prospect currently, Jackson Holliday of the Orioles, is listed as a 65-overall grade.

MLB Pipeline has Gelof's scouting grades as follows: Hit: 50; Power: 60; Run: 40; Arm: 55; Field: 50; OVR: 50

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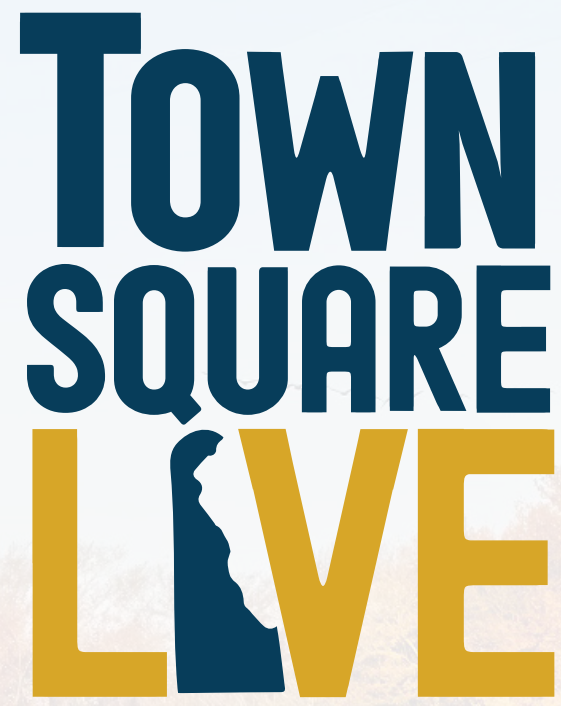
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