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January 18, 2024
Vol. 5, Issue 3

photo link: Delaware Art Museum



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Children's Theatre Marks 50 Years



Bill to Allow Citizens to File Ethics Complaints



Smyrna Volleyball DSBA Team of the Year

photo link: [White Clay Creek State Park](#)



Community

TOWN SQUARE LIVE

DSO GUEST CONDUCTOR CHOSE A LIFE OF THE BATON IN HIGH SCHOOL



BY BETSY PRICE

The guest conductor who will lead the Delaware Symphony Orchestra Friday plunged into music after a grammar school test showed he had an aptitude for it. A native of Durham, NC, André Raphel said the schools then gave students a test to determine if they had a musical aptitude and an aptitude for playing a musical instrument.

“It was discovered that I did and I chose the trombone because it was the instrument that no one else wanted to play,” he said. Raphel also sang in the choir at his grandmother’s church.

He went on to play in his middle school, junior high and high school bands.

“It not only was a great entry point for me musically, but also socially,” he said. “I think that’s very important,

the way it helped me to develop as a person and just the social aspect of being able to play together.”

In high school, he was the band’s drum major and the band director gave him chances to conduct.

“I remember this feeling of curiosity, really, about what conducting was all about,” Raphel said. “And this great feeling that I could influence the sound through my gesture. I think it was then that I knew eventually I would like to become a conductor.”

Even so, he started his collegiate musical education focusing on the trombone, first at the University of Miami. There, the band director there also allowed him to conduct student compositions and he became assistant conductor of the college orchestra. A conductor, he said, is meant to inspire musicians, bring the intentions

of the composer to life and underline the structure of the music as it’s printed so it speaks to the audience.

He earned his master’s degree from Yale University, then studied with Yale Professor Otto-Werner Mueller at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and finally attended the Juilliard School in New York City, where he earned an advanced certificate in orchestral conducting.

He and his wife split their time between Philly and Connecticut.

Last year, the Boston Globe named his Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts with Uri Caine to the “10 Memorable Classical Music Moments from 2023.” It was a glorious weekend of concerts, Raphel said.

CONDUCTOR’S PROGRAM

Raphel’s appearance Friday, Jan. 19, to direct “From Home to Rome,” a program featuring music by West Chester, Pennsylvania’s Samuel Barber as well as Ottorino Respighi’s “Pines of Rome” will be his second conducting stint for the DSO.

That first time, he said, predated Music Director Laureate David Amado’s 20-year reign. The symphony is relying on a lot of guest conductors this year as it seeks a replacement for Amado, who conducted the first classical concert of the season and will conduct the last.

The music for Friday’s performance was chosen by Raphel and symphony CEO J.C. Barker. They’ve known each other since attending Juilliard together, Barker for clarinet. The music will include Verdi’s “Overture to La forza del destino,” and Beethoven’s “Violin Concerto.”

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CHILDREN'S THEATRE SEEKS ITS TRIBE TO HELP MARK 50 YEARS

BY BETSY PRICE

If you ever performed with **Delaware Children's Theatre**, helped get shows on to the boards or brought grandkids to enjoy a performance in the historic Victorian building, your tribe is hunting for you.

On Jan. 27, the theater will celebrate its 50th season, the stewardship of John and Marie Swajeski and decades of bringing theater to families with the 50th Anniversary Wonderland Gala. The theme is taken from the Children's Theatre's last show of this season, "Wonderland: Alice's Rock & Roll Adventure."

"We've done 'Alice' many times throughout our 50 years here, so it just felt appropriate," said Donna Swajeski, John and Marie's daughter. "We're kind of giving a fun party for the adults since we're always doing fun things for the kids."

The 3 to 9 p.m. event will cost \$65 and include dinner,

a Wonderland dessert buffet, a video of the history of the theater and a musical review featuring favorite songs from over the years.

Donna, who now runs the theater, and her brother, David, chairman of the theater's board, are hoping acting alumni and patrons will join with them to mark a half century of their parents' theater. "It's a big milestone for us," said Donna, a television writer.

THEATRE POWER

Their mother, who devoted her life to the theater, hasn't been able to work there for about a decade and now lives at North Foulk Manor.

"She really carved out this whole thing with the Children's Theater, when no one was really doing just children's theater," Donna said.

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SANFORD USES GIFT TO CREATE 4-YEAR SCHOLARSHIP

The first Mitchell Family Scholar was admitted to Sanford’s class of 2027 in the fall and a new scholar will join Sanford’s Upper School each of the next three years. The school declined to name the recipient.

The spread of the scholarships will ensure that Sanford’s Upper School will perpetually host four Mitchell Scholars, creating a lasting legacy of the Mitchell family’s generosity while changing the lives of generations of future Sanford students.

“Because we have a robust group of candidates in any given year who are coming to us through our own financial assistance programs, we’re identifying potential scholars through that group,” Anderson said. “We offer over \$5 million in financial assistance school-wide, and that’s in grades preschool through 12.”

Kenny Mitchell said in a press release that if it were not for the generosity of the Sanford School, he would not have been able to afford an education there, and he’s grateful to be able to pay that forward. Mitchell said attending Sanford helped form his personal and professional lives.

“I look back at my time as a Sanford student with tremendous gratitude for the educators, coaches, staff, parents and Sanford community members who encouraged and fostered my early talents as a student, athlete and leader,” he said.



BY JAREK RUTZ

The **Sanford School** has just received the largest individual gift in its 93-year history. The private school in Hockessin will use the \$1.5 million donation from alumni Kenny Mitchell, a 1993 graduate and current trustee, and his wife Heather, to launch the Mitchell Family Scholars Program. Mitchell is the global chief marketing officer at **Levi Strauss & Co.**

The scholarship fund is designed to advance the school’s commitment to affordability and diversity.

“We are a school that supports all kinds of families and we readily recognize that affording an independent school tuition like ours isn’t easy for a lot of families,” said Mark Anderson, head of the school, which serves pre-K through grade 12.

The scholarship will be awarded to one student each year and will pay for all four years of their Upper School experience. Tuition for the Upper School is \$31,000 per year. Anderson pointed out that the school offers a **variety** of merit-based scholarships and financial aid.



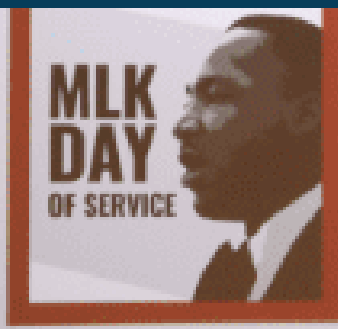
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January 16, 2023
URSULINE ACADEMY



URSULINE HONORS MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WITH DAY OF SERVICE

BY JAREK RUTZ

More than 100 parents and students of **Ursuline Academy** spent their day off Monday volunteering in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This is the fifth year the Wilmington private Catholic school has organized a day of service to honor MLK Day.

“I feel like since our motto is ‘Serviam’ [I will serve], today’s volunteering connects our values with his [Martin Luther King Jr.],” said Elena Matthews, an eighth grade student.

After a morning song and prayer that lasted about 10 minutes, school leadership made remarks about the intersection of Dr. King’s community service, driven through his faith in God and Ursuline’s commitment to Christ and contributing positively to society. Then the students, parents and several employees broke off into stations to volunteer for about two hours.

The stations included making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the **Emmanuel Dining Room**, which

provides Delaware’s hungry with free meals. Participants gloved up and got to work smothering jelly and peanut butter onto bread while others prepared the brown paper bags with trail mix, fruit and water bottles.

Back in the kitchen, the smells of fresh pasta dough and sauce would make any Italian grandmother proud, as volunteers prepared a lasagna dinner for residents of **Sojourner’s Place**, a homeless shelter in Wilmington.

A few were able to bear the freezing temperatures and participated in a park clean-up at the nearby reservoir. Others made handmade cards for cancer patients to be delivered on Valentine’s Day via **Send a Smile Today**.

There was also a place to make and design wreaths as well as a grave blanket assembly to lay out at the grave sites of Veterans to show respect and gratitude for those who served. Another station included packing pet treats to deliver to the local **SPCA**.

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WORK TO CLOSE BRANDYWINE LIBRARY FOR THREE MONTHS

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The Brandywine Hundred Library is closing for three months to replace its roof and heating, ventilating and cooling system. New Castle County is planning to close the library from Feb. 1 through May 1. During that time, it will open the Claymont and Woodlawn libraries seven days a week, with extended hours.

“This project has been needed for some time,” the county said. “BHL’s current HVAC system, which is over two decades old, is no longer capable of providing adequate heating and cooling. The new system is more energy-efficient and will improve airflow throughout the building. Simultaneously, ductwork will be cleaned and removed where necessary to ensure healthier air quality. The project will also encompass roof replacement; areas that have experienced damage from ongoing leaks will be repaired and repainted.”

During the work, the **Claymont Library** will be open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 1-5 p.m. Sunday. During the work, the **Woodlawn Library** will be open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Friday and 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

OTHER CHANGES AT THE LIBRARY

Holds filled for Brandywine Hundred patrons after Feb. 1 will automatically be redirected to Claymont or Woodlawn library. Patrons can select a different location at the **Delaware Library Catalog**. From Jan. 24 to May 1, patrons will not be able to select the Brandywine Hundred Library as their hold pickup location.

Brandywine’s book drop will be closed and checked-out materials can be returned to any New Castle County library. Brandywine staff will continue to order new

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TWO HOURS TO BRING A SMILE

materials. These will be housed at other libraries until Brandywine reopens. Brandywine staff will work out of other libraries for programs. Wi-Fi access will still be available in the **parking lot**.

“The Brandywine Hundred Library is a cornerstone of the community,” Diana Brown, the county’s library manager, said in a news release. “While a temporary closure is necessary for these essential upgrades, we are making every effort to minimize disruption for our patrons. We appreciate the community’s understanding and support as we work towards creating an even better library experience for everyone.”





Business

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



EDGE GRANTS GIVE DE ENTREPRENEURS MONEY AND ADVICE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

When businesses run by Kathy Collison and Donny Legans won **EDGE grants** from the Delaware Division of Small Business, they got more than a lot of money. They got a lot of good advice.

“The biggest takeaway is that the application process forces you as a new business owner to think through a lot of things that you didn’t even think about,” Collison said. “Even if we had not won it, it was a win-win. We got five years ahead on our business plan.”

Legans was similar in his praise. “Don’t delay,” he said to other entrepreneurs about the program, which is taking applications for the next cycle from Feb. 1 to March 1. “It was the first domino. Other grants knew we were serious, based on the strength of it.”

Encouraging Development Growth & Expansion is a competitive program that twice a year awards up to \$100,000 to five STEM-based companies and up to

\$50,000 to entrepreneurs. The funds are provided as a \$3 (state) to \$1 (business) match. Businesses must have been in operation for less than seven years, employ 10 people or fewer, be majority-located in Delaware and impress the judges.

Collison and her husband Joe co-own **Pink Electrical Services**, a Clayton-based electrical company. Legans and his wife Kim co-own the **Rail Haus**, a beer garden in downtown Dover.

EDGE AND PINK ELECTRICAL

Joe Collison has been an electrician for more than 25 years, Kathy said, and “he always wanted to be in business for himself. He wanted to have conversations with customers, see their needs, work within their budget and help them make better choices.”

They began the business paperwork for Pink Electrical in 2020 and booked their first customer in 2022.

They now employ two electricians and serve all of Delaware, with Kathy, who retired in 2023 from her state job as a public health administrator, handling the back office.

Pink Electrical is using the \$50,000 EDGE grant to buy a work truck, a utility trailer and other equipment.

Beyond the capital expenditure, the grant benefits included an online tool that helped them “drill down” into what Delawareans were paying for electrical services and what Delaware companies were paying electricians. That sort of research led them to focus on homeowners and small businesses.

Kathy also praised the guidance they got from Anastasia Jackson, Kent County regional business manager with the Delaware Division of Small Business.

Pink Electrical has also been helped out with in-kind Equitable Entrepreneurial Ecosystem grants from the Pete du Pont Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit founded by the former governor. In the first round, they were mentored by Gregg-Brooke Koleno from IA Business Advisors. In the second phase, the E3 grant paid for their website.

EDGE AND RAIL HAUS

The Leganses were inspired to create the Rail Haus by seeing how Frankford Hall helped transform Philadelphia’s Fishtown section (where they had been living), and they want to do the same for downtown Dover. “We want to make downtown Dover awesome,” Donny said.

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Application Period Re-Opens: FEB. 1 - MARCH 1, 2024!

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Government

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



LAW WOULD CREATE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS TO HAVE ATHLETIC TRAINER

BY JAREK RUTZ

Extracurriculars ruled the day in Wednesday’s House Education Committee meeting. **House Bill 244**, sponsored by Rep. Mike Smith, R-Pike Creek, would provide funding for every public high school in the state to have a full-time athletic trainer. The funding would be phased over the next three fiscal years. Both the state and local districts would allocate money for the athletic trainer. Here’s the cost split:

Cost:	State Cost	Local Cost	Total Costs
Fiscal Year 2025:	\$673,459	\$220,971	\$894,429
Fiscal Year 2026:	\$1,373,855	\$450,780	\$1,824,636
Fiscal Year 2027:	\$4,593,257	\$1,507,109	\$6,100,366

“They promote student safety and wellness, they enhance the entire school community,” Smith said. “They bring health equity and cost reduction, they increase improvement and retention, with this bill, to keep folks in our state who are trained in our state.

Smith also pointed out athletic trainers can save families money from trips to the hospital. They also promote and can walk students through ways to be mentally healthy, he said.

“One shared with me that he has not only treated athletes’ physical ailments, but has also been there for their mental health needs as well as guidance in preventing substance abuse issues,” Smith said. “That’s why you also see a lot of colleges going to sports psychologists and hiring them to help.”

Several legislators gave personal anecdotes of either themselves or their children participating in athletic events and needing the expertise and availability of an athletic trainer.

Smith also pointed to two recent incidents in sports, in which Buffalo Bills’ safety Damar Hamlin collapsed last year due to cardiac arrest in the middle of a nation-

ally-televised Monday Night Football game. Smith also cited Bronny James, the son of basketball legend LeBron James, who also suffered a cardiac arrest in the middle of a practice late last year. Both Hamlin and James have credited the athletic trainers several times for caring for them and bringing them back to health during an emergency that could have ended their lives.

There were some questions around what schools would get the first round of funding, since the bill says nine schools will get funds in year one of the rollout.

Smith said that the schools with the highest participation in sports would get preference. This means the actual number of students participating in a sport, not just the number of sports programs a school has.

Rep. Ed Osienki, D-Newark, suggested the bill clarifies that all students can take advantage of the athletic trainer’s services, not just athletes. For example, if a student in marching band tears a ligament, that individual would be able to consult with the trainer.

The bill was voted for unanimously and was released by committee. It now heads to the full House floor for consideration.

Sticking to the theme of extracurriculars, **House Bill 263**, sponsored by Rep. Sherry Dorsey Walker, D-Wilmington, would ban schools from suspending students from school-sponsored extracurricular activities on the basis of an outstanding debt for unpaid school meals. The bill lists extracurriculars as: band, clubs, homecoming, interscholastic sports, prom and student government.

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FINANCIAL BURDENS CAUSE OPPOSITION TO PENSION BILL

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that would adjust the pension calculations for Delaware’s police officers and firefighters faced opposition from those very groups in Wednesday’s House Judiciary Committee meeting.

House Bill 266, sponsored by Rep. Cyndie Romer, D-Newark, would add wages earned as a result of required additional work hours to the definition of “compensation” for purposes of calculating pensions in the county and municipal police and firefighter pension plan. Under the current system, mandatory overtime earnings are not included in the pension calculation. Romer clarified that this would not take into consideration volunteer time.

“When a firefighter or police officer volunteers for overtime...that pay does not go towards their pension plan and that does not change with this bill,” she said. “However, there are times when they are ordered to work due to lack of staffing, and if they refuse, they are

subject to disciplinary action and could be terminated. So this is not optional work, but it is also not paying into their pension plan.”

Nationally, police departments have been hit with staffing shortages. Last year, **House Bill 39** was introduced. It would pump an extra \$20 million into local police departments, and several officers testified that it would help with their marketing and advertising initiatives to help recruit more officers. That bill is awaiting consideration in the House Appropriations Committee.

In Wednesday’s hearing, Romer also explained that the final average compensation rate for pensions is calculated by taking the average of the highest paid 36th consecutive month of a person’s career to determine the base pay.

“There is no cost to the state because this is not a state plan,” she said. “We just administer it, but the cost will be shared across the agencies.”

Captain Joe Malloy, a firefighter in the city of Wilmington, said the employees are overworked and provided stats stating that the average state employee would have to work an additional 63 days a year to match the hours he and his colleagues work, which is more than 2,400 hours a year.

“We’ve always asked for more manpower and every year we go to the city through budget appropriations, asking for more manpower,” he said. “Since I’ve been on the job, we have never added additional manpower, we’ve only removed it.”

Malloy said there’s a rotating list of employees that will be selected to work mandatory overtime.

Several committee members said the bill needs some clarification on what mandatory overtime is.

“The county municipal police and firefighters pension plan is a very rich pension plan — that means that the minimum number of years to retire is lower and the benefit calculation is higher,” said Joanna Adams, the pension administrator for the state. “For example, the FY25 normal costs portion of this pension plan rate is 12.74% compared to the state employees pension rate, which is 6.15%.”

If House Bill 266 were to be signed into law, she said, the normal cost component of the pension rate would most definitely be increased by several percent, which could have a major impact on the finances of the 40 employers participating in the pension plan.

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REPUBLICANS PUSH BILL TO ALLOW CITIZENS TO FILE ETHICS COMPLAINTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

A proposed law that intends to hold state legislators accountable for unethical behavior was showcased in the second of a series of press conferences each Wednesday by the Republican Party.

House Bill 261, sponsored by Rep. Mike Smith, R-Pike Creek, would establish the Office of Legislative Ethics for the General Assembly to ensure that valid allegations of wrongdoing by state legislators are thoroughly investigated. The goal is to hold legislators accountable.

While there are already ethics committees in the House and Senate, only fellow lawmakers, and sometimes legislative staff, are allowed to submit complaints. Smith's bill would broaden the accessibility of filing complaints and allow all Delaware residents to do so. Allowing any member of the public to request an investigation if they believe a legislator has engaged in unethical or illegal conduct holds lawmakers accountable,

Smith said.

"There needs to be an open process where citizens can call them out when they believe something inappropriate has occurred," he said. "A system where only lawmakers can initiate an investigation against other lawmakers does nothing to further public trust."

Smith said Wednesday that there's natural concern that there could be an overabundance of complaints and the office could be overworked, but that is a concern for any public office.

"I think there's always going to be an intake process, and one of the things that I've been preaching...is the state of Delaware needs to get a lot better with their IT infrastructure," he said. "And one of the things we have to get better at is our CRM [customer relationship management] software."

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BUSINESSES: ACLU LOITERING LAWSUIT COULD AFFECT OUR SALES

BY PETER OSBORNE

Sometimes you don't know what you don't know.

Take the lawsuit filed July 7, 2023, by [ACLU Delaware](#) against Attorney General Kathy Jennings and the city of Wilmington over the state's solicitation and loitering statutes and Wilmington's loitering ordinance. The ACLU claims the lack of specificity in the current statutes opens the door to selective enforcement.

At the same time, some businesses and property owners worry the ambiguity of the laws or a decision to stop prosecuting violations of the current statutes, could allow homeless people and others to move within five feet of their front doors to solicit.

Scott Kidner, vice chair of legislative affairs for the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce and a Dover-based lobbyist, said a lack of specificity on this issue could have a significant impact on private property owners, small or large business owners, retailers and even multi-family property owners.

"It is fundamentally wrong to have the control of your private property superseded by the state for individuals who are not customers or residents or with any connection to the property or the business," Kidner said.

Store owners already battling retail theft and loss of sales to online shopping also worry about customers having to walk through people panhandling or loitering near their store entrance.

Since the suit was filed last July on behalf of Food Not Bombs — with the Delaware Continuum of Care, Friendship House and NAACP Delaware added in October — there has been little movement, says ACLU of Delaware Legal Director Dwayne Bensing.

"At this point, there have been no settlement negotiations," he said last week. "The Attorney General has denied the allegations and the city has issued a partial motion to dismiss the charges."

At the heart of it, the ACLU is concerned about selective enforcement of the existing statutes and targeting of minorities and the homeless.

In October when it added the new plaintiffs, the ACLU said the practices are being "carried out primarily by the Operation Safe Streets program [and include] a history of Fourth and Fourteenth Amendment violations such as unreasonable stops, searches and arrests, as well as racially biased policing."

"The devil is in the details," Bensing said, conceding that the statutes as they stand today lack specificity.

"It's an easy out for law enforcement to intimidate and harass people who are unhoused or are people of color," he added. "If the AG was to say the state won't prosecute, that would make our argument moot. I'm disappointed that they've dug in their heels."

LOITERING RESOLUTIONS

He said there are three ways the issue could be resolved:

- The state and city settle and publicly agree not to enforce the statutes.
- The judge declares the statutes unconstitutional.
- The General Assembly changes the laws.

The General Assembly is considering a so-called Homeless Bill of Rights ([HB55](#)) that provides rights for individuals experiencing homelessness, including protections from discrimination while in public and while seeking access to housing, employment and temporary shelter. The current version of HB55 is silent regarding concerns by businesses and property owners as to whether the legislation could be revised to specifically allow homeless people and others to move even closer to their establishments and properties.

Rep. Sean Lynn, a Democrat who represents the Dover area in District 31, is the lead sponsor of HB55. He did not respond to multiple requests for comment that included specific questions about the issue.

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DELDOT HAS NO PLANS TO END ITS HUMOROUS ROAD SIGNS

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

It wasn't considered funny when the feds told the states that their road signs can no longer be humorous. The new standard, described on page 519 of the 11th edition of the [Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways](#), made the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* on Jan. 11. Ever since, writers have generally been asking "Can't they take a joke?"

No. Here's how the rule reads: "A CMS should not be used to display a traffic safety campaign message if doing so could adversely affect respect for the sign. Messages with obscure or secondary meanings, such as those with popular culture references, unconventional sign legend syntax, or that are intended to be humorous, should not be used as they might be misunderstood or understood only by a limited segment of road users and require greater time to process and understand."

Say what?

They're talking about the changeable message road signs that riff off of movies and other elements of pop culture, use puns or crack dad jokes to draw attention to messages about safe driving.

"The Federal Highway Administration declined to comment on specific road signs and whether they pass muster," *The Wall Street Journal* wrote.

"A spokeswoman for the agency said in a written statement that states should follow five principles. Traffic-safety messages should 'fulfill a need; command attention; convey a clear, simple message; command respect; and provide adequate time for proper response.'"

The Delaware Department of Transportation gave this response to [WDEL](#) about the new rule: "Our position is that the messaging we use has a safety theme and therefore is appropriate for use."

The federal government is giving the states two years to comply. If they don't, the states could lose money or

face the consequences in court. Or as the [Federal Highway Administration](#) explains: "The MUTCD is the law governing all traffic control devices. Non-compliance with the MUTCD ultimately can result in the loss of federal-aid funds as well as in a significant increase in tort liability."

"Studies conflict on the humorous signs' effectiveness," *The Wall Street Journal* wrote. It cited a 2020 [study](#) conducted for Virginia's DOT that found humorous signs "commanded the most cognitive attention." Another study found "a 'significant proportion' of drivers didn't understand messages with humor, wit or pop-culture references."

Noncompliance with the MUTCD also has its own [Facebook](#) page, posting signs that "there is NO way that is MUTCD-compliant."

WIT WITH ROAD SIGNS

DelDOT started showing its funny side in 2017 road signs and since then has come up with hundreds of the signs, which it calls "variable messages." A website shows where they are and what they say. From DelDOT's [map page](#), look in the upper left corner and click on the arrow that follows "map layers." Then select "variable message." Click on a sign to see what it says.

They use a [#MessageBoardMondays](#) hashtag for variations (sometimes enhanced with emoji) on their Facebook page.

"DelDOT's Facebook page began to get positive feedback from Delaware residents immediately, according to a 2022 posting on [DelawareRetiree.com](#). "Some people have even submitted their own suggested messages."

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)



STATE SHOULD CONSIDER DROPPING PLAN FOR TUNNEL, DESIGNERS SAY

BY BETSY PRICE

Designers involved in the construction of a \$22 million parking garage across from Legislative Hall have recommended the state cancel plans to build a private underground tunnel connecting the structures.

The tunnel originally was estimated to cost \$2 million, but will be closer to \$3.7 million, partly because its base would lay only 6 feet above sea level in an area that also is affected by the St. Jones River and has to routinely deal with rising water. The tunnel cost will be nearly double the original estimate and will require ongoing maintenance that will mount up over the years, said Philip Conte with [StudioJAED](#) during the Jan. 12th meeting of the [Legislative Building Committee](#).

The garage and tunnel are part of a larger plan that includes a 57,000-square-foot addition to Leg Hall.

They were expected to cost \$113 million, but now are projected at \$122 million, Comet said. The pedestrian tunnel is designed to only be used by legislators and staff, to allow them to safely walk to and from private restricted parking on the first floor of the planned three-story garage.

Research already has found three buried power lines, which may feed nearby streetlamps, that will have to be dealt with. The tunnel itself would require power for air circulation, pumps, lights and sprinklers, he said.

The amount of earth moved would need to be much larger than the tunnel itself to allow workers to maneuver, and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard would have to be closed or have reduced access during construction, which would include the January-June legislative session.

Comte suggested the committee consider whether the cost-benefit ratio is worth the price of construction and maintenance, especially compared to the amount of time it would be needed and used.

TUNNEL OR DEATH?

In addition, he pointed out, the narrow nature of the tunnel may bother some people. He showed a diagram depicting two people walking through the tunnel.

Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, asked how the firm had handled tunnel projects for hospitals and schools. He was told that virtually all of the plans ended up being some kind of elevated walkway, but designers stayed away from that option for Dover because they don't want to interfere with the historic look of Legislative Hall, which was built in 1931.

"So you build tunnels or you build bridges," Yearick said.

Another committee member asked whether it was feasible to put the legislator-only parking on the third floor and build a walkway. She was told that it would interfere with the historic brick look and that Delaware Tech had concerns with the walkways on their Wilmington campus.

Comte told the committee that designer didn't need an immediate answer but would need to know as the design work continues.

"Anything is doable," he said, but he wanted the committee to be fully informed.

One committee member asked whether the company had contacted DelDOT to ask whether some kind of traffic-calming work could be done on MLK, which is where the street parkers will have to cross.

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STATE WORKER HEALTH INSURANCE TO RISE 22%, ADD \$50M COST

BY BETSY PRICE

The state of Delaware will need at least an additional \$50 million dollars in fiscal 2025 to pay for increases in the cost of employee health insurance, which is expected to see premium rises of up to 22%. Ruth Ann Miller, controller general, said the program will have a shortfall of \$15 million by April 1 and will need \$22 million by June 30, the end of Delaware’s fiscal year 2024.

Miller on Jan. 11 told the **Legislative Council**—a group comprised of the leadership of the House and Senate—that the insurance hike is just one example of an extra “door-opener” expenditure that will eat up the state’s ability to raise its annual budget 5.9%. Other examples include \$80 million from the Medicaid program in the Department of Health and Social Services and \$40 million from the Department of Education.

“So very quickly all of those costs will eat up that allowable growth,” Miller said.

Her office is waiting on Gov. John Carney’s proposed budget, which will be released Jan. 25, and then will send that to the Joint Finance Committee, a bipartisan committee of legislators who allot state money using the proposed budget as a base.

INSURANCE SPLIT

The state splits health insurance costs with its employees. An employee’s personal cost for a premium could increase anywhere from \$91 to \$887 per year, while the state’s split may be anywhere from \$2,171 to \$5,857 per employee.

The expected costs were calculated by the State Employee Benefits Committee, Miller said.

Miller said she and Cade Cerron, director of the state Office of Management and Budget, would be coming back to the Legislative Council with some suggestions

on how to solve the insurance problem in this fiscal year.

Delaware’s annual budget limit is determined through a process called benchmarking, which allows Delaware to budget a specific amount to spend after first steering other monies into places such as the Rainy Day Fund.

Miller also said:

- Hearing notices for the agencies requesting money from the Joint Finance Committee have gone out. Those meetings start Jan. 30 and will be held every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for four weeks, starting at 10 a.m. The public is welcome to attend in person as well as to listen in or testify by Zoom.
- The state needs to do a mini bond bill this year. The bond bill committee will meet Thursday, Jan. 18, to discuss that.
- The Community Reinvestment Fund will open grant applications Feb. 15 and close May 15. Awards will be contingent on available funding.
- The Grant-in-Aid application period has ended, with the state receiving 356 applications. That’s up from the usual 310-315.

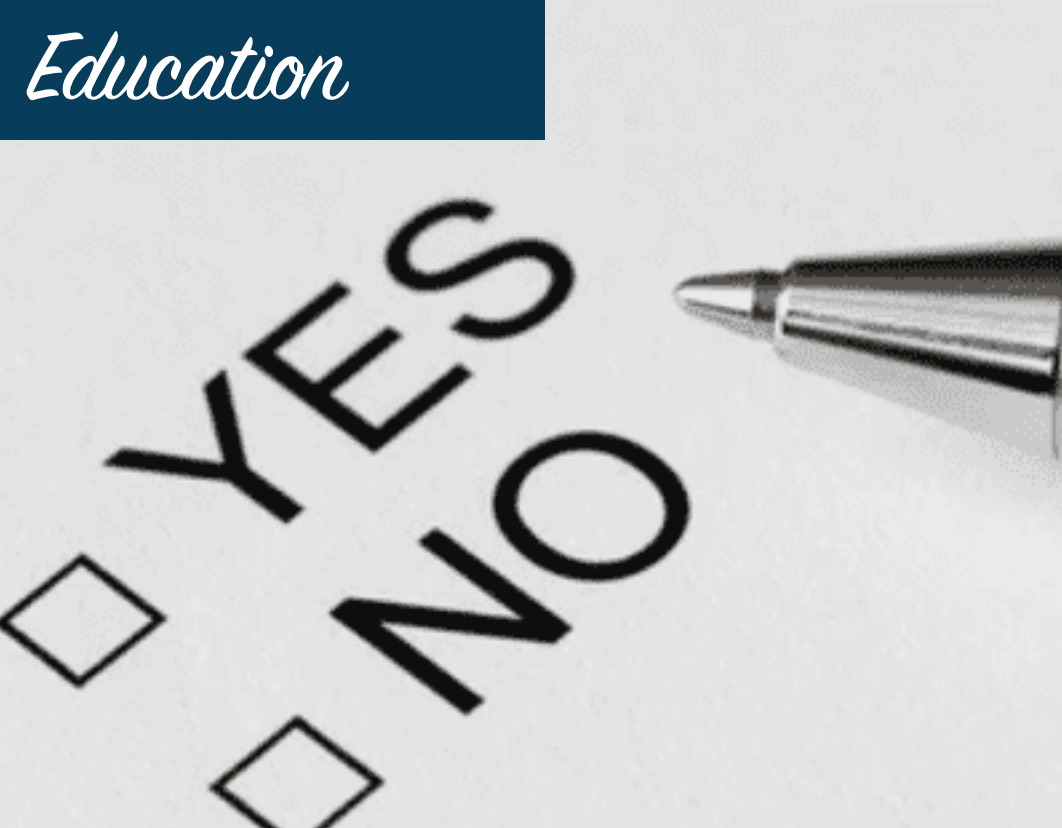


photo credit: Cab Calloway School of the Arts



Education

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



FIVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO HOLD TAX HIKE REFERENDA IN 2024

School districts annually submit a certificate of necessity to the state appealing for money for capital projects, including building maintenance. If the state approves the request, it will provide some funding for the projects. This is typically about a 65% state, 35% local share. So, if a capital project costs \$100 million, the state would provide \$65 million while the district needs to muster up the remaining \$35 million with local funds.

BY JAREK RUTZ

Five of Delaware’s 19 school districts are asking their residents to head to the polls in 2024 and vote for a local tax increase. They include the Brandywine, Red Clay Consolidated, Colonial, Smyrna and Appoquinimink.

In the First State, districts must hold referendums if they want to increase their local school tax in order to increase local revenue. Schools get funding from both the state and from local residents, and the referenda are for increasing that local stream of money to cover operating or capital expenses, or both.

Operating referenda is for funding that will help the district maintain its day-to-day operations, whether it be transportation expenses, supporting extracurricular programs, updating technology, giving teachers raises, hiring constables or more. An operating referendum is noncontingent on the state. A capital referendum typically is tied directly to state funding.

The split is sometimes more or less. For example, Colonial School District has a 60% state/40% local divide for its capital projects.

These funds could be for a new school building, a sports facility, playgrounds, parking lots, replacing roofs or HVAC systems or more. The tricky part about capital referenda, however, is the district loses the state money if the district can’t come up with a local match. It essentially will go to another district in the next round of requests.

The Appoquinimink School District could be facing that problem.

Its December referendum failed when it sought a tax raise of \$435 to help build three new school buildings at the cost of \$289,841,52.

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BY JAREK RUTZ

Just days before Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the president of a top-ranked Historically Black College and University condemned remarks from one of the richest men in the world, Elon Musk. **Delaware State University** President Tony Allen Jan. 11 stated that the tweets from Musk — the owner of X, formerly known as Twitter — were “unoriginal in their amplification of antiquated racial tropes, signify little of objective consequence and strike any learned ear as attention-seeking noise.”

Many online are claiming a tweet from Musk put into question the IQ and intelligence of students who attend HBCUs. Musk replied to a tweet that stated that the graduates of the HBCU partners of United Airlines have a lower IQ than the average IQ of United States Air Force pilots. Allen took particular exception to this, especially since DSU’s aviation program has been significantly growing in recent years.

DSU PRESIDENT ISSUES STATEMENT CONDEMNING ELON MUSK TWEET

“You can only imagine the kind of concern and outrage that I personally had when I saw the attack not only on the university, but on those fine students in that program,” Allen said Friday.

“It’s an outstanding program,” Allen said Jan. 12. “I’ve said many times, we produce more pilots with color than any other place in the country and we are the high-quality, low-cost provider for all aviation schools east of the Mississippi.”

The DSU Aviation Program currently has 110 Professional Pilot students and 47 Aviation Management majors. Established at the institution in 1987, the Aviation Program owns a fleet of 26 airplanes. They are maintained at Delaware Airpark in Cheswold, the program’s base of flight training operations.

Allen said Friday that the partnership with United Airlines has been fantastic.

“Their Aviate Program is world class,” he said Friday. “We’re proud to be a significant partner in that regard and understand them and our other airline partners as uniquely committed not only to preparing the aviation industry for what is the significant shortage in pilots,...

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EDUCATOR PAY REPORT GETS MOSTLY WARM WELCOME FROM LEGISLATORS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Delaware state senators and representatives didn't revolt when they got their first bite at recommendations for higher educator pay that would cost the state hundreds of millions in coming years. But questions did arise in the Jan. 11th joint House And Senate Education committees meeting that lasted about 1¼ hours.

They included concern about poorer districts' ability to pay their 30% share of salaries, whether incentives should be created for high-performing teachers, whether the state was chasing arbitrary salary numbers from other states, and whether the state also should look at other issues such as classroom discipline that affect teacher morale and retention.

The salary recommendation came from the final report of the 15-person Public Education Compensation Committee, which met all year. Secretary of Education Mark Holodick and Kim Klein, associate secretary of operations at the [Department of Education](#), presented

the final report of the Public Education Compensation Committee to the joint meeting.

"What I see here in terms of compensation looks good to me...with minimal study so far, but I like the concept of what you're doing," said Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro. There are other issues in education he worries about, including teacher attendance. Superintendents have told him many take off Fridays for a three-day weekend.

"We ought to consider some sort of incentive program through this," he said. He believes teachers don't want to be in the classroom because of the lack of discipline for misbehaving students.

"If we look at a comprehensive package to solve our fundamental problems, I would think this would be the ideal place to try and address it to some extent," Collins said. "In other words, give the teacher a better working environment combined with higher pay."

He also wants the state to keep taxpayers in mind, especially because of inflation and with property reassessments taking place in New Castle and Sussex counties.

"I would think it would be reasonable to at least look at any other area we could to see where we might be able to find cuts, to try and keep the burden on the taxpayers to something that they can afford," Collins said.

PAY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The pay committee evaluated the five education groups in Delaware Code, as well as two employee groups that are not listed: teachers, custodians, nurses, bus drivers, administrators, secretaries, information technology workers, paraprofessionals and food service workers.

The committee was formed to make Delaware regionally competitive with salaries to strengthen its educator pipeline and ensure the recruitment and retention of school employees. Notable pressure came from neighboring Maryland, which passed a law that would increase the starting salaries of teachers to \$60,000 by 2026.

"You're setting up districts to be challenged to keep good teachers because they're going to be competing against other districts that can afford it," said Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, a former teacher and coach.

He wanted to see data on how other states are raising revenue as well as cost of living.

"I need to really know what the apples to apples are, because if you don't, you start chasing other people's budgets and that gets dangerous," Buckson said. It's an opinion he's expressed before.

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WILMU: \$1M LONGWOOD GRANT TO FUND TWO BRANDYWINE BUILDINGS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Brandywine campus of **Wilmington University** will soon expand by 200%. Thanks to a \$1 million grant by the **Longwood Foundation**, WilmU’s Brandywine Campus—located at 10 Beaver Valley Road in Wilmington—will go from one building to three. The grant will help pay for the construction of a law school building and a convocation center.

According to WilmU, Longwood cites that the awarded grant links the limited diversity within Delaware’s legal profession and Wilmington University’s long tradition as an open-access, accredited and inclusive institution. The full cost of the building was not disclosed, but Longwood generally requires matching funds, often ponying up the last of the money, not the first.

The Delaware Business Times **reported** in May 2023 that WilmU will also use \$45 million in bonds to fund the two buildings.

The private, nonprofit university serves traditional students starting their college careers, non-traditional students and working adults seeking advancement through higher education.

“We have fostered a caring environment and offered convenience, flexibility and affordable tuition to students from all walks of life since we were established 56 years ago,” said President LaVerne Harmon, president of WilmU.

The convocation center will be an 85,000-square-foot building and will feature a 2,000-seat auditorium, a sizable stage for graduation ceremonies and events and a new home for the **Wilmington University Criminal Justice Institute**. The law school building will be three stories and will span 52,000-square-feet. It will showcase an expansive atrium, classrooms, library, private study rooms and office space.



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Harmon said the law school mirrors WilmU’s philosophy of convenience, flexibility and affordability “by establishing admission pathways to all qualified students, including underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and by educating future attorneys who will reflect the populations they serve.”

The law school had its inaugural class in August 2023, operating at Brandywine’s current single-building location, which also houses classrooms, labs and offices.



photo credit: Ben Fulton



Sports

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



COURTSIDE VIEW – WEEK 5 GIRLS' BASKETBALL TOP 10 RANKINGS

BY JASON WINCHELL

The girls' basketball season saw a strange week as games were postponed due to a storm that provided heavy rain and winds. The forecast this week is for snow and very frigid temps so check the schedules before heading to the gyms.

The Ursuline Raiders and Caravel Bucs continue to succeed against some of the better out of state competition they are facing. These two teams will meet at Caravel in February, but in the meantime they both have some tough games coming up.

The conference races are heating up and that includes the Diamond State that has four teams in a tight battle for the championship. Archmere, DMA, Conrad and St. Elizabeth will start facing each other in the coming weeks. St. Elizabeth beat Conrad.

The Independent Conference has a pair of young teams that are looking to make a run to the state tournament in Tower Hill and Wilmington Friends. Both teams meet on Friday night in a rare prime time game. They play at Tower Hill at 7 p.m.

Here are the top 10 for this week voted by our Delaware Live Crew.

No. 1 Ursuline (9-1) (LW No. 1) The Raiders defeated AI DuPont. They face Saint Mark's on Thursday.

No. 2 Caravel (9-1) (LW No. 2) The Bucs picked up a pair of wins against out of state teams. They play at Paul VI (NJ) on Sunday.

No. 3 Sanford (4-4) (LW No. 3) The Warriors faced Tower Hill on Wednesday.

No. 4 St. Elizabeth (7-1) (LW No. 4) The Vikings defeated Conrad last week. They host Wilmington Charter on Thursday

No. 5 A.I. DuPont (9-3) (LW No. 6) The Tigers went 1-1 last week, losing to No. 1 Ursuline. They are at Glasgow on Thursday..

No. 6 Dover (8-1) (LW No. 5) The Senators beat Sussex Tech last week. They travel to Milford on Thursday and No. 7 Padua on Saturday.

No. 7 Padua (7-2) (LW No. 8) The Pandas beat Saint Mark's last week. They traveled to Wilmington Friends on Wednesday and host Dover on Saturday.

No. 8 Saint Mark's (8-2) (LW No. 7) The Spartans went 1-1 last week with a win over Red Lion and a loss to Padua. They host No. 1 Ursuline on Thursday and travel to No. 10 DMA on Saturday.

No. 9 Cape Henlopen (4-4) (LW No. 9) The Vikings defeated Milford last week. They host Polytech on Thursday night.

No. 10 DMA (6-3) (LW 10) The Seahawks won a conference game against Newark Charter. They host Archmere on Thursday and Saint Mark's on Saturday.





SMYRNA VOLLEYBALL TEAM IS DSBA TEAM OF THE YEAR

BY GLENN FRAZER

The Smyrna high school volleyball team has been selected as the Delaware Sportswriters and Broadcasters (DSBA) “Team of the Year” for 2023.

Head coach Daniel Wandless guided the Eagles to the state championship at the Bob Carpenter Center in November. Wandless has coached the team since its inception 19 years ago. He told Delaware Live, “We are extremely proud and honored to be selected for the DSBA team of the year.”

The trail-blazing title is the first for any program south of the canal, first ever for a Henlopen Conference team, and the first for a traditional public school since Concord in 1992.

Smyrna Athletic Director Bill Schultz said the varsity volleyball program and the Athletic department are very exciting by the award. “It is great to see the athletes and coaches be honored by the DSBA Team of the Year award. The players and coaches worked extremely hard

and it was fun for our community to enjoy the first ever volleyball championship for Smyrna High School and the Henlopen Conference.”

The Eagles recorded an overall record of 19-1, including 14 match “sweeps”, dropping just 10 sets all year! Their tournament run featured 3-0 matches against Delmarva Christian, Newark Charter and Caesar Rodney before winning the title three sets to one against Ursuline. The team featured three DIAA All State players in Elise Carter, Eliza Schneider and Delaware player-of-the-year Anna Richardson.

Smyrna’s team will be honored at the annual DSBA banquet and luncheon on Presidents Day, Feb. 19, at the Riverfront Events Center. The Center is located at the Hyatt Hotel, 760 Justison Street in Wilmington. Tickets may be purchased [HERE](#).



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DELAWARE TO PLAY AN ENTIRE FCS FOOTBALL SCHEDULE IN 2024

- 10/19 – at Richmond *
- 10/26 – UAlbany * (Homecoming)
- 11/9 – Rhode Island *
- 11/16 – Campbell *
- 11/23 – at Villanova *

The 2024 schedule will feature seven home games at Delaware Stadium and just four away contests. The season will begin on a Thursday night, Aug. 29, in Newark, as the Blue Hens will welcome in the Bryant Bulldogs, a team slated to join the CAA in the upcoming year. Delaware will play eight conference game, but none of the games will count for the Hens toward the CAA standings due to jump to FBS next season. Though the games will count for their opponents. Delaware officials also said they would be open to adding a 12th game, as the schedule allows if the right opportunity surfaces. If not, the team will have off weeks on Sept. 7 and Nov. 2 this season. Delaware will be ineligible for a conference championship or playoff opportunity in the 2024 season due to the impending jump to FBS and Conference USA. Delaware is coming off back-to-back trips to the round of 16 in the FCS playoffs under head coach Ryan Carty.

*CAA game



BY NICK ALESSANDRINI

On Wednesday morning, the University of Delaware football program along with the CAA (Coastal Athletic Conference) announced the 2024 schedule for the upcoming season. This will be the final year that Delaware will be in the Coastal Athletic Conference, formerly the Colonial Athletic Conference, which it joined back before the 2001-2002 school year.

2024 Delaware Football Schedule

- 8/29 – Bryant
- 9/14 – at NC A&T *
- 9/21 – Penn
- 9/28 – Sacred Heart (Parents & Family Weekend)
- 10/5 – at Monmouth *
- 10/12 – Maine *

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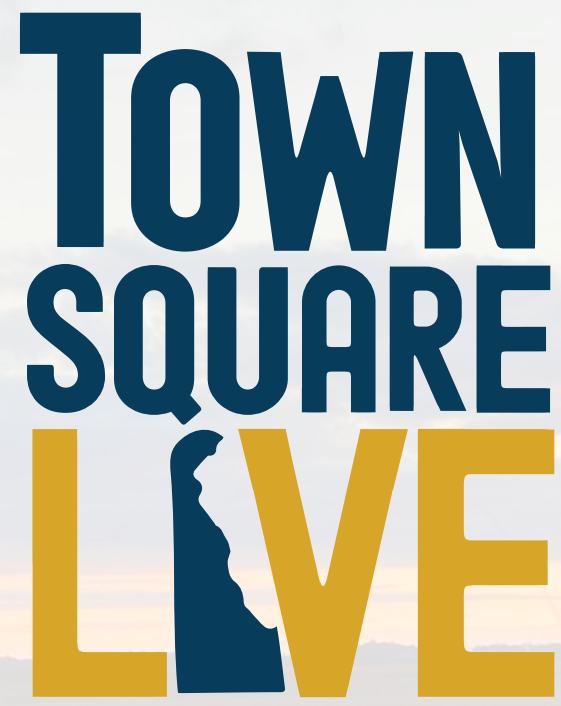
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