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May 2, 2024  
Vol. 5, Issue 17



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Kayla Kosmalski Shattering Barriers



Jones-Potter Running for Wilmington Mayor



Smyrna Tops DMA



*Community*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**



# PLAN COULD REMOVE CHRISTINA, COLONIAL SCHOOLS FROM WILMINGTON

BY JAREK RUTZ

Some students residing in the city of Wilmington who attend Christina and Colonial school district schools would be transferred mostly to Red Clay and a few to Brandywine, if a redistricting plan championed by the Redding Consortium comes to fruition. The move would essentially remove Christina and Colonial from the city.

“We believe this is a big first step,” said Rep. Nnamdi Chukwuocha, D-Wilmington, and a member of the Redding Consortium. “Our biggest challenges that we have...We created these high-need, high-poverty schools that are racially-identifiable, so we have a magnitude of needs within our schools.”

The interim plan posted front and center on Redding’s website has not been officially voted on. It is being

considered by the consortium and was proposed by Chukwuocha and Councilman Jea Street. The Redding Consortium is continuing its process of developing a plan and the proposed interim plan could be significantly changed before making its way to the state Board of Education.

Splitting the city schools up into different districts occurred in the aftermath of desegregation in the 1970s.

The Redding Consortium for Educational Equity, created in 2019, recommends policies and practices to the governor and legislators to improve education equity and outcomes in the city of Wilmington and northern New Castle County. The consortium defines educational equity as something that “requires safe, secure and student-focused learning environments where every

student is intentionally provided access to the support, resources and opportunities they need to reach their full academic and social potential, in and out of the classroom.”

A final redistricting plan will be presented to the state Board of Education no later than October 2025. Until then, the plan will be adjusted with feedback from the state board, public hearings and stakeholders like those directly impacted by the redistricting like school boards, the teacher’s union, parents and parent organizations, local elected officials and more.

The report will contain boundary shifts, immediate support for city schools, a timeline and engagement process to develop a final redistricting plan, and ideas to address systemic and systematic change for Wilmington students. It is not expected to affect the Wilmington Learning Collaborative.

“In order to begin to concentrate and focus our efforts on the needs of our students in our schools, we believe that having one or two district partners to support our city will be better,” Chukwuocha said, “and then we can greater align in having a true urban education model that meets the needs of these students.”

He said that includes before-school and after-school programming, intense reading and math supports inside of the school’s and parent councils where parents are involved and given a role to play in their students’ education.

“And the biggest thing, I really believe that, is again having the city of Wilmington itself be an investor partner in this process,” he said, noting that the city lost its school district in the late 1970s.

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# BRANDYWINE LIBRARY REOPENING DELAYED; WORK TO RUN INTO JUNE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The reopening of the Brandywine Hundred Library, closed since Feb. 1 for repairs, has been delayed, New Castle County announced on Facebook.

“Due to unforeseen circumstances related to the extensive replacement of equipment, Brandywine Library will not be reopening on Monday, May 6,” the county wrote. “As soon as we have a confirmed date, we will let you know.”

“Until then, Claymont Public Library and Woodlawn Public Library will continue with expanded hours to serve your library needs. Thank you for your patience during this renovation project. The Brandywine Library staff misses you too!”

The same wording was repeated the next day on the library’s [home page](#).

The Foulk Road building had been closed to replace its roof and its heating, ventilating and cooling system.

“HVAC repairs are not completed,” a county spokesman said. “Hopefully install complete in early June, with testing, etc., done mid-June.”

“This project has been needed for some time,” the county said on the library’s home page when it announced the closing. “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.”

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# KAYLA KOSMALSKI SHATTERS BARRIER BY WINNING MISS DELAWARE TEEN

BY BETSY PRICE

No one was more surprised than Kayla Kosmalski to hear her name called as Miss Delaware Teen USA 2024 Sunday night. Now the Middletown cheerleader, swimmer and honor student will become the first contestant with Down syndrome to participate in the national pageant when it's televised Aug. 1 on the CW Network.

She said Tuesday that she's wearing the crown for everyone with Down syndrome and disabilities. "Everyone can do anything if they dream big and achieve goals," she said.

Despite this year being a busy one—Kosmalski turns 18 next week, will graduate from Middletown High, is participating in the spring musical, going to prom and making plans to attend Wilmington College, one of the 11 colleges including Penn State who accepted her—she was determined to participate in the pageant, too.

A pageant veteran, she had participated in the pageant once before, but wasn't able to last year. Her family was too involved in the care of her grandmother, Nancy Baker, who has battled two different cancers and then had a stroke. But Kosmalski's mom, Amy, had promised Kayla they would make time for her to compete again this year. She and her husband, Rick, and grandma Nancy were in the crowd when Kayla made it to the top 6.

"It was down to Kayla and the first runner-up, and I thought, well, first runner up. This is fantastic. No one

with Down syndrome has ever been able to do anything like this," Amy said.

Then the other teen was named first runner-up and Kayla was crowned. Amy said she couldn't speak, she couldn't scream, she couldn't even stand up.

"My legs were shaking," she said.

Kayla hadn't been able to spot her parents during the pageant, but as she walked across the stage wearing her crown, she found her sobbing mother in the audience and with a dazzling smile pointed at her. Her mom, Kayla joked, "has been crying my entire life."

Also crowned Sunday night was Alysa Bainbridge, Miss Delaware USA 2024.

Bainbridge is a speaker, host and social media specialist who founded the non-profit "Tyler's Triumph," which provides support for people in recovery from mental illness and addiction. It's named for her brother, Tyler. She will compete for the national title of Miss USA in the televised pageant Sunday, Aug. 4.

## KAYLA AND THE SPOTLIGHT

When Kayla was born, Amy said the diagnosis of Down syndrome crushed all of her dreams for her little girl. "I would cry in the shower for the first couple of weeks," she said.

All of the books she read about the syndrome basically said what her child would not be able to do.

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# BROADWAY IN WILMINGTON: WOMEN, WOMEN, WOMEN, AND 'EVAN HANSEN'

BY BETSY PRICE

Women, women and more women are the focus of the 2024-15 Broadway in Wilmington season, which will count “Tina—The Tina Turner Musical,” Mean Girls” and “The Cher Show” among the titles heading to the Playhouse on Rodney Square.

Skip Pennella, executive director of The Grand, said the season will be one of the most exciting in years, with all five making their Playhouse debuts. Among them, they’ve won 17 Tony Awards and two Grammy Awards.

Here’s a look at what’s coming:

### Broadway’s ‘Tina’

Opening the season Oct. 11-13, the musical follows the life of singer Tina Turner as she breaks barrier and be-

comes the Queen of Rock n’ Roll, set to the soundtrack of her most beloved hits.

One of the world’s best-selling artists of all time, Turner won 12 Grammy Awards and her live shows were seen by millions, with more concert tickets sold than any other solo performer in music history.

“‘Tina’ is a smash West End and Broadway hit that has electrified audiences all over the country—and we know audiences in Wilmington will love it,” Pennella said. “The book is written by Pulitzer winner Katori Hall, and the show features dozens of Tina’s most popular songs. I can’t think of a better way to celebrate the late, great Tina Turner.”

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photo credit: Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce



*Business*

TOWN SQUARE LIVE





# IS THE PARTY OVER FOR DELAWARE LIQUOR STORES?

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Liquor stores that boomed during the pandemic, when so many Delawareans were sheltering at home, are now reporting declines in revenue.

“Everyone I’ve talked to is down” in revenue, said Edward Mulvihill, who networks a lot as president of the Delaware Small Beverage License Council and a board member of American Beverage Licensees. He’s also the fourth-generation owner of **Peco’s Liquors** in North Wilmington.

“That’s more alarming because we know costs have gone up,” he said.

Bill Galbraith, owner of **Tim’s Liquors** in Hockessin and the **Wine & Spirit Co. of Greenville**, crunched some revenue numbers for DelawareLive. Sales at Tim’s in the first 3½ months of 2024 are down 5% from the same period in 2023, he said, and those sales are down 10% from 2022.

“Everything costs more, but less is coming in,” he said. “I’m definitely having problems. Ours is a slow death, and I hope it revives.”

Mulvihill brought up the sorry state of package stores in an April 23 House committee **hearing** on **Senate Bill 166**, which will allow Delawareans to have home delivery of wine, beer and mixed cocktails from restaurants, brewpubs and taverns. That law, if passed, would offer another reason not to patronize liquor stores, he said.

During the lockdown, the state Legislature changed Delaware’s laws to allow customers to take out alcohol with food, a key measure designed to keep the state’s restaurants afloat in the early part of the economy-roiling pandemic.

“The rocket fuel that was the pandemic has burned out and all of those trends have gone back to far more realistic growth (or decline) rates,” said Marten Lodewijks,

an executive with IWSR, which analyzes the industry. A 2023 IWSR report predicts steady declines for beer and wine.

“The spirits industry held its market share edge over beer and wine for the second straight year in 2023,” CNBC **reported**. “U.S. spirits revenue grew only a modest 0.2% last year to \$37.7 billion, according to the **Distilled Spirits Council** of the U.S. annual economic report. Although the industry gained little total revenue, it outpaced beer and wine sales by 0.4% and 26.1%, respectively.”

Delaware’s “package store customers want the convenience of delivery, too,” said Edward Cooper, a spokesman for Total Wine, Delaware’s largest liquor retailer. “Package stores know this because their patrons have been asking them for delivery. Maryland and NJ both allow package stores to deliver to their customers (either by the retailer or third party delivery companies).”

“We’re just trying to figure out where the customers are going,” Mulvihill said, suggesting first that consumers are cutting back because of inflation. Or maybe they’re concerned about the health effects of alcohol. Or maybe they’re turning to newly legalized recreational marijuana.

## BEYOND LIQUOR STORES

Whatever the reason, the competition is intense in Delaware. The state has about 330 package stores, Mulvihill said, “one of the highest, if not the highest number of liquor stores per capita of any state.”

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# WORKFORCE TRAINING GRANT

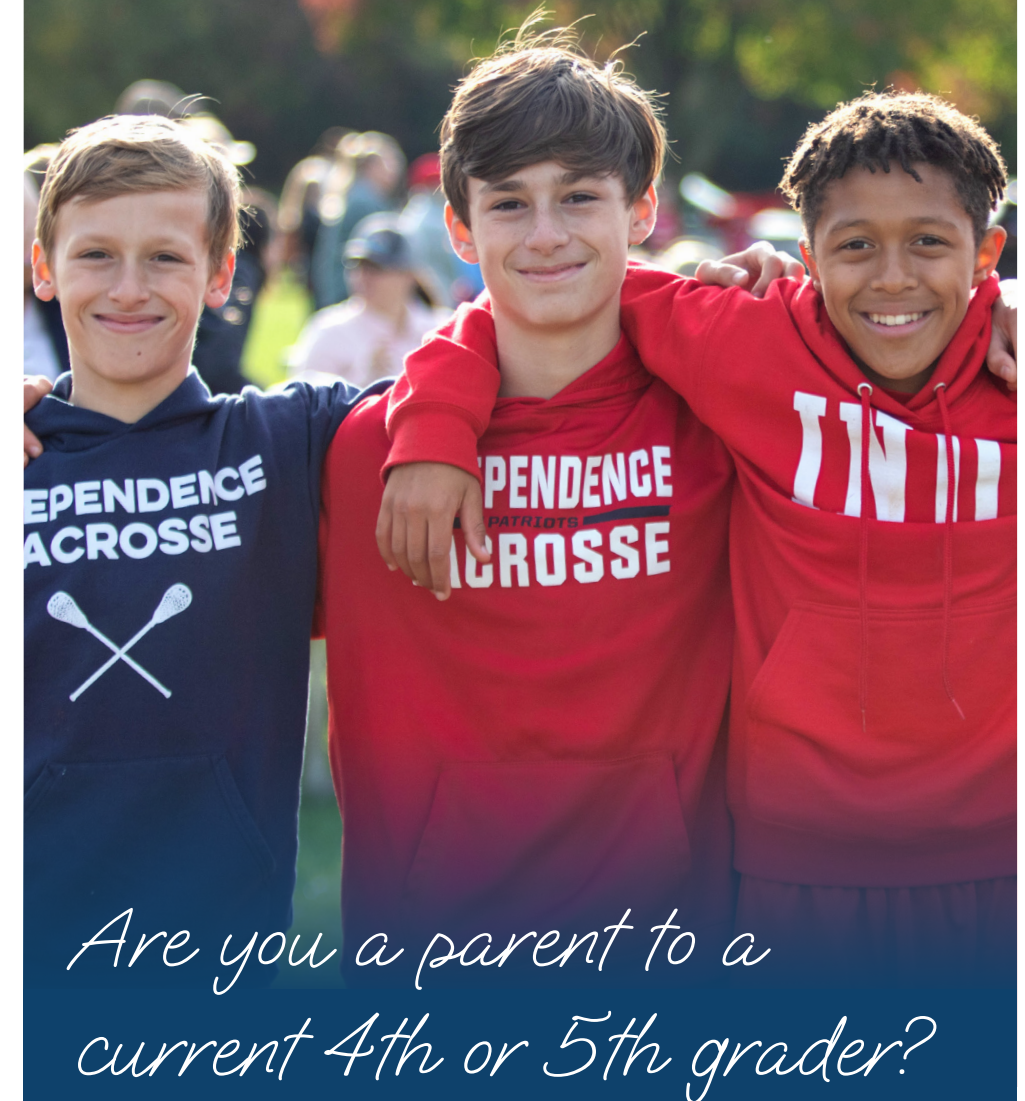
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*Food & Dining*

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## CHIPOTLE COMING TO CLAYMONT, AS IT THINKS ABOUT ITS FUTURE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Chipotle is planning its 12th Delaware restaurant on Philadelphia Pike in Claymont, replacing a Boston Market that closed a year or so ago.

“After months of negotiations with the shopping center owner, Chipotle Mexican Grill has signed a long-term lease and will completely rehab the existing building, which is still very structurally solid,” the Claymont Renaissance Development Corp announced on [Facebook](#).

There will be a pickup window for online orders only on the left side, facing Christiana Care, and that online-only rule is a new concept for fast-casual restaurants, said Brett Saddler, executive director of the CRDC, a nonprofit economic development organization.

“Of course, there will be indoor seating too,” the CRDC said. The timeline to open is the first quarter 2025, “if not before,” the post ended.

Comments were mixed on CRDC’s Facebook page. One of the most interesting came from Carol Derrickson: “WOW!!! Shocked it’s not going to be another warehouse, massage parlor, title loan, smoke shop or liquor store!”

“It’s a good fit for that building,” said Saddler.

“We’re happy to increase the number of food establishments,” said Saddler, exemplifying with La Hermosa, a new Mexican in the Town & Country Shopping on Philadelphia Pike and Harvey Road.

Then there’s Claymont Steak, a Delaware tradition since 1966. “Its owners, Basil and Demi Kollias, plan to tear down the old building and rebuild their restaurant in a brand new one...expanded, spiffier, and maybe even with a patio and a sports bar. If they do it the way they’ve planned it, the steak shop wouldn’t have to close for more than a week,” *The News Journal* reported in January.

That shopping center, in fact, has been part of the conversation in the latest round of discussions to plan the future of the community, which the CRDC calls the “renaissance update.” One suggestion for the center is “mixed used,” often meaning retail and housing. That’s the modern term for an old concept, in which shopkeepers lived above their stores.

The CRDC has heard multiple interesting ideas already, including additional traffic calming and safety measures on Philadelphia Pike and adding similar elements to Harvey and Darley roads. Those measures have included reducing Philadelphia Pike down to one lane, from two.

### TWO MEETINGS ABOUT CLAYMONT

Remediation of part of a site on Claymont’s northeastern edge (the eastern side of Philadelphia Pike, across the bridge over the interstate) will be discussed 6 to 7:30 p.m. May 9 at the Claymont library. That site once held operations of the Honeywell Delaware Valley Works, also known as General Chemical,

The federal Environmental Agency plans to address Delaware River shoreline and nearshore sediments and groundwater.

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photo link: Town of Newark, Delaware



*Government*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**



# JONES-POTTER EXPECTS TO FACE STATUS QUO IN WILMINGTON MAYOR RACE

Purzycki was seen as the pro-developer mayor, laser focused on uplifting the city’s central business district. Jones-Potter became known as a counterweight to Purzycki’s vision—first by rebutting his office over repayments of a city loan, then by directly challenging the mayor in the 2020 election.

In one debate that year, Jones-Potter said Purzycki had partnered too closely with big developers who placed too much emphasis on downtown at the expense of the city’s poorer neighborhoods. Ultimately, Jones-Potter lost the 2020 Democratic primary in a three-way race.

### JONES-POTTER V. CARNEY

Today, she is taking her second shot to become Wilmington’s mayor and in an interview with *Spotlight Delaware* she said she expects to face off against largely the same vision as she did four years ago. But, instead of running against Purzycki, Jones-Potter will face a peculiar situation of running against the highest elected politician in the state.

Gov. John Carney **announced** his bid for mayor of Wilmington on Monday, with a campaign that aims to bolster city finances, improve public schools and reduce gun crime.

But Jones-Potter argued that Carney’s policies at the state have also left many city residents worse off, making him unfit to be mayor. She said the governor’s Department of Education has failed local students who

can’t pass proficiency tests. She said his management of the Port of Wilmington left the facility without thousands of promised jobs.

And, she said Carney’s reluctance to legalize marijuana amounted to a tone deafness in a city where drug laws had been heavily policed. Last year, the Delaware General Assembly passed a bill to legalize marijuana. Carney declined to either sign the bill or veto it. As a result, it became law without the endorsement of the state’s top elected leader.

“To not even approve that, to just acquiesce when the city of Wilmington population is probably the single most heavily impacted by that [is disappointing],” Jones Potter said.

Finally, Jones Potter indicated her belief that Carney as mayor would amount to a third term for Purzycki—an apparent reference to their mutual friendliness with the state’s biggest developers.

“I perceive it to be a method to just continue and perpetuate the practices, the policies, and the management of the city as it’s been done for the last eight years,” she said.

### NOT ANTI-DEVELOPMENT

Asked about her own policy stances, Jones-Potter said she is not anti-developer or even anti-Buccini/Pollin Group—referencing a key ally to Purzycki and the city’s most politically influential development company.

BY KARL BAKER

*This story was originally published on Spotlight Delaware.*  
In 2017, then-newly elected Mayor Mike Purzycki sat on a stage close by to Velda Jones-Potter as she gave her inaugural speech as Wilmington City Treasurer. The two held an amicable relationship at the time, Jones-Potter said, with both of them new to being elected politicians and facing a city that was struggling with crime and a sputtering economy.

But, over the subsequent years that relationship crumbled as a power struggle ensued. Each politician ultimately came to represent in the minds of many Wilmingtonians the opposite poles of city politics.

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# CARNEY LAUNCHES UNPRECEDENTED WILMINGTON MAYORAL CAMPAIGN

The decision by the governor, 67, was expected after he said last fall that he was interested in the role and has since quietly raised more than \$100,000 in campaign funding, according to records.

While the move is unprecedented by a sitting governor in modern history, Carney said that after more than 30 years serving in public office he believes it will actually be his biggest challenge yet. In thinking about the future, he was energized about the progress made in Wilmington in recent years to address crime, redevelop affordable housing, jumpstart economic development and solve longstanding issues in educational opportunity.

“People say, ‘Oh, that’s a step down, isn’t it?’ It’s kind of more of a step up to me, because the challenges are tougher,” he said.

On Monday afternoon, Carney sat down with *Spotlight Delaware* to share his outlook on city finances, policing, politics and even what he wants to see done with the now statue-less Rodney Square.

## CARNEY V. PURZYCKI

After eight years of Purzycki at the helm of Delaware’s largest city, Carney said that there are many accomplishments to be proud of, but that voters should not consider his campaign as an extension of Purzycki’s administration.

“We are different and take different approaches,” Carney said, particularly noting his emphasis on education

issues on which the current mayor has been quieter. “It’s a critical time. I think the city’s on a good positive path, but there are lots of big issues.”

While Purzycki brought an emphasis on economic revitalization of the Market Street corridor, spurred in tandem by significant investments by hometown developer Buccini/Pollin Group, and the redevelopment of affordable housing, along with partners like REACH Riverside and Tomorden Foundation, Carney has a passion for education—his parents were teachers in local city schools.

He championed the Wilmington Learning Collaborative as a way to address the educational disparities in the city that have lingered since schools were desegregated decades ago. While the mayor does not have a formal role on the WLC, Carney said that he would continue to advocate for its necessity in addressing city educational needs.

With some teachers angered by early surveys by the WLC that were critical of the results of local schools, Carney heard their concerns and advised them to stay a part of the process.

“We have to have high expectations,” he said, noting that he’d like to see greater balance given to the concerns of educators though.

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BY JACOB OWENS

*This story was originally published on Spotlight Delaware.* Gov. John Carney **filed** Monday to run in the September Democratic primary, but instead of seeking federal office like some of his predecessors, he’s running to be mayor of his hometown, Wilmington.

With Mayor Michael Purzycki declining to run for re-election after two terms, citing a desire to spend more time with family as he approached age 78, Carney will face a field that currently includes only former state and city Treasurer **Velda Jones-Potter**.



# CARNEY ANNOUNCES HE'S RUNNING FOR MAYOR OF WILMINGTON

BY BETSY PRICE

Gov. **John Carney**, who leaves office in January after two terms, announced on DETV Monday morning that he is running for mayor of Wilmington. Carney said he was going to leave the taping at the I.M. Pei building downtown and walk over to file. He called running for mayor “really a big challenge.”

“I’m really excited about it We’ve got some big issues to deal with for sure,” Carney told DETV’s Ivan Henderson. “But I bring experience I think to the job that’s necessary to get it done and confront those issues and to lift every family, every neighborhood in our city up and be better still in the future.”

Carney plans to have a big public announcement this afternoon.

He will be running against Velda Jones-Potter, a former state treasurer and Wilmington treasurer who ran for mayor in 2020 against Mayor Mike Purzycki and lost. She has been a bitter opponent to Purzycki and

his agenda for Delaware’s financial hub and largest city.

“I believe the residents of Wilmington are ready for a leader who genuinely cares and will put their interests first,” Jones-Potter said. “From sponsoring youth sports teams, tutoring students in the FAME Program, the founding Board Member of Eastside Charter School and the Police Athletic League, to public service as State Treasurer, Wilmington Finance Director and City Treasurer, I have demonstrated a sincere commitment to the people of this city. I look forward to the election and serving as Mayor to improve the quality of life for all people of Wilmington.”

Purzycki is at the end of two terms and is not running again.

Carney, who has been governor, U.S. congressman and lieutenant governor, has lived in Wilmington for 40 years with his wife, Tracey Quillen Carney and their two sons.

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# HOUSE DEMS FORCE END TO DEBATE TO PASS SPEAKER'S HOSPITAL BILL

BY BETSY PRICE

Delaware House of Representatives Democrats on April 25 forced an end to a floor debate so they could pass their speaker's controversial bill to create a state board to oversee hospital budgets. The move came after three hours of head-scratching gamesmanship in which Republicans essentially filibustered with multiple representatives questioning aspects of the bill and Speaker of the House Valerie Longhurst's attempt to play Lady Beneficient failing because she frequently couldn't keep the scorn out of her voice.

One reason for the hurry: The House and Senate are about to take a two-week break so the Joint Finance Commission can conduct hearings on capital requests. Passing the bill now means it can move more quickly through the Senate and into law.

## MOVING HOSPITAL BILL

The end started after a break, when the House came back into session at 9:30 p.m. Rep. Ronald Gray, R-Selbyville, took the floor. As he was waiting for David Bentz, a former representative who stepped down in 2022, to go to work for the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, five Democrats rose.

Acting speaker William J. Carson, R-Smyrna, asked, "Does someone have something here?"

Rep. Madinah Wilson Anton, R-Newark moved to call the question and noted there were five members standing under House Rule 48 Seven.

Despite audible comments that Gray had the floor, Carson immediately responded, "Motion has been made and seconded and is a non-debatable." He trailed

off to start again, "Mr. Chief Clerk" but was interrupted by House Minority Leader Mike Ramone, R-Newark/Pike Creek, who noted that Gray had the floor.

"It's not debatable with the five-man rule," Carson said. He started a roll call on the motion, which fell along party lines, except for Rep. Sean Lynn, D-Dover, who voted no for the motion and on the bill.

Lynn rose after the vote on the bill to say he was severely disappointed that his attempts to be heard in the last four hours had been ignored, especially because his children had been waiting in his office the entire time.

"I've been up and I've been down and I was absolutely denied the opportunity to have my voice heard on behalf of my district," he said. "Dover is significantly affected by this bill. I'm significantly disappointed in both the tenor of the bill and the way that was handled this evening. And, lastly, that we were deprived of a right to have questions asked and to have statements heard."

Lynn said he had significant questions about bond covenants and bonds that the hospitals had issued, which he thought would lead to significant pre-emption issues and had not had the opportunity to be heard on that. He threw a message bag over his shoulder as he ended his statement and walked out to the applause of Republicans.

## LONGEST DEBATE?

Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, R-Claymont, noted that the hospital debate had been the longest in his 12 years in office, but it was also fascinating to get the different perspectives.

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# HOSPITAL BOARD PAY: \$40,000 A YEAR TO CHAIR, \$35,000 TO SIX MEMBERS

BY BETSY PRICE

A new version of the bill that would create a board to oversee state hospital budgets would pay the chairman \$40,000 a year and the six members at \$35,000 a year, a total of \$234,694 a year.

“For this analysis, average salary costs are assumed to be similar to those of other existing state boards and commissions,” the fiscal impact note says.

House Substitute No. 2 for House Bill No. 350 says the annual cost of the proposed Diamond State Hospital Cost Review Board would be about \$1 million a year.

The bill, sponsored by House Speaker Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, is set to come up today on the House floor, despite vehement opposition from hospitals. They say one clause in it could threaten their agreement to be taxed at 3.58% on net revenues so that Delaware will qualify for about \$100 million more in Medicaid money.

## HOSPITAL REVIEW BOARD

The proposed board would be responsible for the re-

view and approval of annual budgets of six statewide hospital systems. It would include seven members, six appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, and the executive director of the [Delaware Healthcare Association](#).

The annual costs of the board are estimated at \$890,127 for 2025, assuming nine months of operations, \$942,228 for 2026 and \$946,333 for 2027. The state doesn't estimate costs beyond three years in the fiscal notes accompanying legislation. The board is expected to have an annual ongoing cost of \$500,000 for contractual support to help review the budgets, as well as two analysts whose salary and health insurance will be \$201,210.

Beyond the idea of having the government control the budgets of a nonprofit business, hospitals have warned that requirement in the bill to immediately limit hospitals to charging no more than 250% cuts into the revenues they agreed to fork over to get more federal Medicaid

money. Enacting that restriction would cause state hospitals to lose \$360 million in revenues, said Brian Frazee, executive director of the Delaware Healthcare Association. If HB 350 passes, it would cause hospital to overspend their deal by \$80 million, he said. Dropping the 250% requirement would solve the hospital's problem in the Medicaid deal, he said.

As of Thursday afternoon, the requirement remains in the bill.

[House Bill 350](#) would create the Diamond State board under the Department of Health and Social Services. It will try to keep hospital budgets at or below increases of a state spending benchmark. Established in 2018, it was 3% to 3.8%, the amount tied to the state's gross domestic product.

The state move comes at a time when healthcare costs are chewing through Delaware's budget. About \$2 billion of its budget is allocated to healthcare costs, and the state's health insurance premiums will rise by 27% this year, requiring an injection of an additional \$39.5 million into its budget just to pay its share of those premium increases.

Longhurst has said she went after hospitals because:

- Hospitals represent 42% of all healthcare costs in Delaware;
- Hospitals never met that benchmark, except for that first year of the pandemic;
- Inpatient and outpatient costs at Delaware hospitals totaled \$3.5 billion in 2021, although hospitals tie that to patients seeking care they put off because of the pandemic;

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# NEW CASTLE COUNTY TO MANAGE HOPE CENTER AFTER AUDIT

BY JACOB OWENS

*This story was originally published by Spotlight Delaware.*

New Castle County is taking over the operations of the Hope Center homeless shelter from a hotel company that had **held the contract** to manage the facility ever since it launched during the height of the COVID pandemic. The company, Hersha Hospitality Trust, is the same firm that sold the Hope Center building—then a Sheraton hotel located amid the Christina River wetlands near New Castle—to the **county** in late 2020 for nearly \$20 million.

In an email sent to council members earlier this month, Carrie Casey, the county’s community service department manager, announced that the takeover of the critical social services operation would occur April 19. She wanted the council to be “aware of the change” and that she expected a “smooth transition with minimal impacts.”

“The Department has been working on a plan for several months in the event of this occurring,” Casey said in the email.

Casey did not disclose in the email the reason that county officials are taking over the facility. When asked about the reason for the change, a spokesman for County Executive Matt Meyer said simply that Hersha Hospitality in 2020 was the right partner for the Hope Center, but “is not the right partner going forward.”

The spokesman, Brian Cunningham, did not elaborate on the assertion, but said the county administration “anticipates significant savings” with Hersha Hospitality no longer operating the Hope Center. Cunningham further stated that the county will contract out individual tasks at the shelter, such as staffing, trash service and maintenance.

In 2020, Meyer led the acquisition of the hotel using the county’s allocation of COVID-era federal American Rescue Plan Act funding and has touted the Hope Center’s services since it opened.

## HOPE CENTER HOUSING

Today, the Hope Center provides short-term housing, as well as certain medical care and transportation for unhoused people, but DART Transit buses do not stop near the facility.

The county takeover of the Hope Center is occurring just after the publication of an audit that showed that Hersha Hospitality did not properly report all money flowing into the facility and failed to charge for certain services that had been provided.

During a meeting of the New Castle County Council’s Executive Committee on Tuesday, County Auditor Bob Wasserbach outlined the findings, describing in detail how one unnamed client of the Hope Center was not properly billed for 36 rooms they were contractually obligated to pay for—leading to a temporary shortfall of more than \$240,000. Ultimately that issue was corrected and the bill paid, he said.

Following his testimony, Wasserbach declined to state the name of the client, but ChristianaCare reportedly had a contract to rent 36 rooms from the Hope Center, according to a DelawareLive **report** from last year.

Finally, while Wasserbach said Hersha failed to follow financial reporting rules, he also noted that he was “not aware of any fraud or misuse of funds.” Nevertheless, Wasserbach’s testimony Tuesday sparked a string of probing inquiries from council members about management at the Hope Center.

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# HOUSE GOP CONDEMNS MORRISON FOR RAPE, VIOLENCE COMMENTS

BY BETSY PRICE

Delaware House Republicans this week condemned Rep. Eric Morrison who, among other things, said in a hearing that racketeering, extortion and bestiality were not violent crimes and that most cases of rape were statutory and not violent.

“While Rep. Morrison is factually wrong—racketeering, extortion and bestiality often involve violence—our antipathy for his declaration centers on his views of sexual assault and rape,” the statement from the 15-member caucus said. “His belief that most sex offenders are being victimized by ‘a whole lot of misconceptions’ is only surpassed by his casual dismissal of the mental and physical trauma suffered by the victims of sex crimes he perceives as non-violent.

“It would be concerning for any citizen to exhibit such hubris, but for a lawmaker, it strikes us as dangerously misguided.”

Morrison, D-Glasgow, made the comments during an April 17 hearing in the House Education Committee, which was considering [House Bill 290](#). It would authorize legislation to allow convicted violent felons to qualify for Delaware’s SEED Scholarship Program. Felons now are barred from accessing this taxpayer-financed scholarship.

### MORRISON COMMENTS

“This bill does not change the violent felony code in any way,” Morrison said during a rambling speech. “It changes the SEED Program...We have things in here, for example, like racketeering. Racketeering is certainly not a violent crime. Extortion is not a violent crime. We have bestiality listed under violent crimes. We have the general term of ‘crime’ listed under violent crimes.

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*Education*

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



# CHRISTINA TOWN HALL: PHONES, BULLYING, DRESS CODE, SATS

BY JAREK RUTZ

In the **Christina School District's** second town hall this school year Tuesday night, the handful of community members that showed up brought concerns of cell phone use, school bullying and test prep. The goal of the meetings is to allow Christina residents to interact with the district's board of education.

It's a unique arrangement because in monthly meetings, the board is not allowed to respond or interact with those that give public comment.

## DRESS CODE

Lane Carter, a teacher at Newark High School, first spoke about concerns of cell phone usage. She wants to see privacy rules put into place so students cannot video record and share videos of other people in the building.

Carter also said she was concerned about the dress code, mainly with students covering their faces. She said it's hard to identify those that have face coverings and said it makes it hard for attendance reasons and also in the case of an emergency.

"We would recommend a policy that would include no hats, no hoods, no ski masks and no medical masks without a medical note," she said.

## PHONES AND GAMBLING

John Schmidt, director of youth prevention services at **Delaware Council on Gambling Problems**, spoke first at the town hall.

In his role, Schmidt goes to schools throughout the entire state and talks to children about developing a healthy relationship with phones, social media, video games and helps them understand how it impacts their lives, mental health, relationships, grades and more.

He's been working with Christina schools for more than five years.

"What I've seen, specifically since COVID, has been a significant deterioration in the attention that is paid in classrooms to active instruction because of the presence of phones in classrooms," he said.

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# SCHOOL BEHAVIOR GROUP WANTS MORE FUNDING FOR SPECIALISTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The state task force dedicated to evaluating the ongoing problems with student behavior and school climate acknowledges that there is a real problem in Delaware schools. The 24-member Student Behavior and School Climate Task Force, made of government and educational officials as well as school behavioral specialists and resource officers, got its first taste of official suspension data Monday night.

Several members said schools need more money for specialists than they now are getting.

Statewide data from 2021-2023 shows that the most common suspension is out of school with no service requirements (33,000 cases, 47.53%), followed by in-school suspensions (29,000, 42.1%) out-of-school with service requirements (5,000, 6.52%) and in-school suspensions with interventions (2,000, 2.8%).

That number is total disciplinary referrals, but changes depending on the incident. For example, 79% of students were disciplined with out-of-school suspensions

without service requirements for fighting. For skipping class, 72% of students received in-school suspensions. The overwhelming majority of infractions also took place in schools within New Castle County.

The task force recognized that certain groups of students, such as Black students and students with disabilities, are punished at a disproportionate rate compared to White traditionally learning students.

For a couple years now, parents have flooded school board meetings to tell disheartening stories of their child being bullied or a victim of bad behavior by classmates. In Nov. 2023, for example, one mom said that students in the Milford School District hold a “fight club” in the school, and videos are circulated through social media.

The task force’s job is to study the needs and options of students and educators to improve student behavior and school climate policies.

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# TWO HIGH SCHOOL ENTREPRENEURS GO FOR \$12K THIS WEEKEND

BY JAREK RUTZ

A passion for financial freedom led high school senior Keon Jones to dedicate himself to entrepreneurship and a business creation. Now, he and classmate Kyle Richardson will pitch their business to entrepreneurs, business professionals and community leaders to compete for \$100,000 in prizes at the [2024 Diamond Challenge Summit](#). The event took place from Thursday to April 27 at the [University of Delaware](#).

Jones and Richardson, both seniors, are aspiring entrepreneurs at [Freire Charter School Wilmington](#). Their business, RichCoverage, is an affordable and effective hair-loss solution. Their product is a sort of powder that serves two purposes.

“It’s a way for you to give yourself esteem or improve a self-esteem issue that you have from like hair loss or

bullying or, you know, hair receding and all that,” he said, “but also just a way to style your hair and it is more convenient and efficient than other options.”

“When you come up in a household that wasn’t necessarily the highest income, it gives you that job to kind of make it out and make a way for yourself,” Jones said, “and the way I see it is you’re not going to make that million by working for somebody else—you’re going to have to go out there and create your own thing.”

Having ownership over a business or product and being your own boss, he said, results in that idea of financial freedom that he longs for. RichCoverage was one of the top teams at the [EntreX Delaware Venture Showcase](#), where the team earned \$500 and punched their ticket to the Diamond Challenge Summit.

Richardson, who used to live in Jamaica as a young child, saw his father own and operate an arcade and construction business. He said seeing his father run those two businesses, while helping him work in the arcade, sparked his interest in entrepreneurship

At the summit, Richardson and Jones competed with students from across the globe at UD and hoped to cash in to win up to \$12,000 for their business. The three-day competition is the culmination of the year-long global pitch competition. Richardson and Jones are very confident in their business.

“We feel very confident,” Richardson said. “I think we’re going to win. There’s no doubt that we’re going to win. And that’s it.”

Jones said the summit is a great opportunity because of the diversity of people that are going to be there.

“The fact that it’s just such a big stage and knowing that we were able to get to that stage is just a huge accomplishment,” he said.

At the event, entrepreneurs will network and present their business ideas to a panel of business experts, entrepreneurs and community leaders.

The development of the product was pretty consistent, with a few tweaks to the ingredients they put in the powder. Richardson said it only took the two a single week to develop the product. They made it as part of their dual enrollment class with about 15 other students.

“It’s not designed to be done with a huge group,” said their teacher Nathan Moser. “The students are getting the high school credit for an elective, but they’re also getting dual enrollment credits, UD credit, so that when they graduate high school, they’re already having college credits.”

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photo credit: Keith Neff Mount AD



*Sports*

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



# MOUNT PLEASANT NAMES BASEBALL FIELD LIMMINA FIELD

BY NICK HALLIDAY

The Mount Pleasant Green Knights have named their baseball field Limmina Field after longtime baseball coaches Rosario (Soddy), Joseph and Rob Limmina. Soddy is the father and Rob and Joe are his two sons. The trio has put many years into the Green Knights baseball program, dating back to the 60s when Soddy was head coach.

As a trio, they coached from 1990-2005 with Rob acting as head coach while Joe and Soddy were his assistants. We don't have a win total, but under the Limminas the baseball program was very always competitive, fighting for a Flight A title or a state championship. The Limminas are responsible for the school's only baseball state championship in 2000.

In a press release from Mount Pleasant, they said, "The impact the Limmina family has made in the baseball

community over the past several decades is immeasurable. We are thankful for the many athletes they have trained, for the programs they have developed and the communal relationships they have built. Mount Pleasant High School is very appreciative of the Limmina family's efforts, talents and desire to make the game of baseball relevant and great."

Having been lucky enough to play for the Limminas myself I can say they had a big impact in my baseball career especially in high school. I still remember the first day tryouts—all we did was run—and we all used to say who's ready for track practice. There was a strategy beyond it, but I am not sure I can write it.

The Limminias always used to preach to us also "if you look good, you play good". So we all used to have to buy boxes of black shoe polish because our cleats had to



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be clean for every game. You couldn't have a dirty uniform or be missing any piece of it. I remember being benched because I had forgotten my belt. Coach Rob said, "It's not your parents fault, it's yours." I learned a lesson that day.

I know when I say this all those players who played for the Limminas would agree with me they would not change it for the world. I still miss the days of running poles/hallways, to bus rides on road trips cleaning our uniforms on the way, to taking BP and having Soddy hit with us. I will never forget those days as well as many more. Congratulations to the Limminas on having the field dedicated to them. It is well deserved.





# SMYRNA TOPS DMA TO CROSS .500 MARK ON SEASON

lead in the bottom of the first inning on a solo home run by Roscoe.

DMA faced the Eagles' freshman pitcher Alexis Dennis for the first five innings. Dennis mixed pitches well and threw with good velocity, making it a tough day for the Seahawks at the plate. When DMA got runners on, they just couldn't break through the Eagles defense to score.

Gracie Riccio (DMA) reached third in top of the second inning, but no Seahawk could push her across the plate. Goad reached third base in the top of the fourth, but a strikeout and a ground out left her stranded.

Emily Trzonkowski pitched well for DMA, using the inside and outside corners of the plate to keep Smyrna off balance most of the game. Lindsey Roscoe (SMY) entered in the fifth inning and retired the side.

In the bottom of the fifth, Smyrna added an insurance run when Ryann Durnall led off the inning with a single to right field, Roscoe walked, Savannah Arnold put down the sacrifice bunt and with McCutchan at the plate, Durnall scored on a wild pitch.

Down but not out, DMA threatened again in the sixth, when Abbygayle Riddell reached thirds after two fielder's choice ground ball outs. Opalach led off the seventh with a single to left and she hustled to second base before the throw came in. The Eagles retired the next two hitters to hang on for the win.



## BY SHANNON TIMMONS

Softball is a spring sport, but Mother Nature doesn't know that as April 27 felt more like football weather. On a cloudy and cold Saturday morning, the Smyrna Eagles topped DMA 2-0 at Beverly Jo Carter Field. This is a big non-conference win for Smyrna to put them over .500 on the season at 6-5.

There was a shakeup in the Eagles batting lineup today, moving Lindsey Roscoe to the leadoff spot and Hailey McCutchan fourth. Smyrna jumped out to a 1-0

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# SAINT MARK'S BEATS UNDEFEATED SUSSEX ACADEMY

BY JOE SINGLES

After coming of the heels of a tough loss to Caravel earlier in the week, the Saint Mark's girls' soccer team came out on a mission April 26. If anyone was questioning how they responded to their 1-0 loss in overtime earlier in the week, they quickly put any doubt to rest, scoring two goals in the first nine minutes of their contest against the 8-0 Sussex Academy.

After a quick turnover in the Spartans' offensive third, Emma Manley found the ball at her feet sandwiched between two defenders at the top of the 18-yard box. Despite the defensive pressure, Manley was able to break away for a shot from about 10 yards out that found the back of the net. This was only the fourth goal given up by the Sussex Academy squad this entire season as they came in scoring 40 goals while only allowing three.

Then in the 10th minute, the Spartans' Whitney Evancho settled a pass at her feet about 30 yards out then turned and fired a left-footed strike right into the back of the net, catching the Seahawk keeper on her heels. The goal put the Spartans up 2-0 and forced the visiting team to play from behind the rest of the game.

The Seahawks had a bit of a resurgence early in the second half as they placed continuous pressure on the Saint Mark's defense, but all without earning any legitimate scoring opportunities. With 28 minutes to go in the match, Lily Phillips sent a pass deep into the corner finding a streaking Manley who, despite an awkward angle, sent a low shot back across the Seahawk keeper beating her goal side for a 3-0 advantage.

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Five minutes later, Phillips sent a right-footed corner kick into the six-yard box and found sophomore Gianna DiFeebo who redirected the ball pass a diving keeper for the home team's fourth goal of the contest and the final as they walked way with a 4-0 victory.

The Spartans handed the Seahawks their first lost of the season. Sussex Academy will now have a short turn around and have to face Caravel who remains unbeaten after their victory over Saint Mark's earlier in the week. The Spartans will welcome Archmere on Tuesday.



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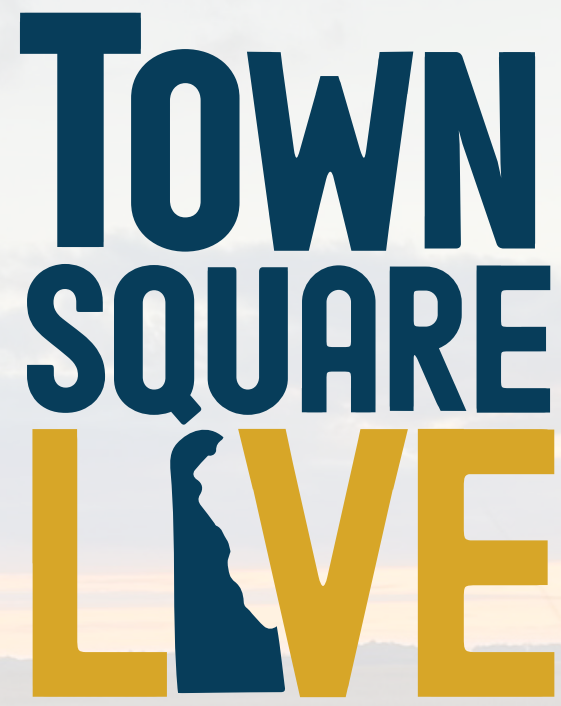
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