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February 27, 2025

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Vol. 52, No. 32



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North Warren Wins With a 9pt Lead Over Belvidere in Boys Basketball



Belvidere and North Warren went head to head on February 21st in boys basketball. North Warren won, 50 to 41. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

North Warren Takes On Belvidere in Girls Basketball



North Warren took on Belvidere High School in Girls Basketball on February 21st. Belvidere won, 55 to 24

Help Support Local Veterans Struggling with Substance Use

Adapting from military life to civilian life comes with serious challenges. Most veterans, with the support of their loved ones, overcome these difficulties. Others, sadly, resort to using substances as a coping mechanism and develop substance use disorder. More than one in 10 veterans have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder, which is higher than the general population. Help is available for veterans, family members and their advocates at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is active in communities



throughout the state to connect troubled veterans to the resources they need for recovery. In a partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, the state agencies work together to provide supportive

services that are person-centered and focused on achieving overall wellness. Find local treatment options at: www.pa.gov/agencies/dmva/pennsylvania-veterans/special-initiatives/substance-use-disorder.html

DEP to Host Public Hearing on Proposed Warehouse Project in Monroe County

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will host a public hearing to take testimony from the public regarding an application by Route 115 Associates, LLC for a National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) permit for the proposed Route 115 Associates, LLC warehouse project in Tunkhannock Township, Monroe County.

The hearing will take place on Monday, March 3, 2025, from 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM at the Tunkhannock Township Volunteer Fire Company, located at 1539 Long Pond Road, Long Pond, PA 18334. Representatives from the Department's



Waterways & Wetlands Program, the Monroe County Conservation District, and Route 115 Associates, LLC will be in attendance.

Route 115 Associates, out of Conshohocken, PA, plans to construct an 800,000 square foot warehouse along SR 115 in Tunkhannock

Township. The hearing will be to accept comments on the plans associated with the project, including the discharge of stormwater from construction activities to the following receiving watercourses: Tunkhannock Creek and Wetlands to Keiper Run
RT 115 cont'd on pg 3



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Adult Non Fiction: Fearless and Free: A Memoir by Josephine Baker

Large Print Adult Fiction: The Crash by Freida McFadden

Easy Fiction: Let's Boogie by Scott Fehnel; The World Needs the Wonder You See by Joanna Gaines; Spring Song by Ellie Holcomb; The Bakery Dragon by Devin Elle Kurtz; Mermaid Day by Diana Murray; Dinosaur Day by Diana Murray

Junior Non Fiction: The Future of Alby Lisa Idzikowski; How AI Works by Lisa Idzikowski; The Challenges of AI by Lisa Idzikowski; AI and the Arts by Elsie Olson; AI Safety by Elsie Olson; AI Basics by Elsie Olson; Britannica First Big Book of Why by Sally Symes; Parliamentary Government: From the Viking Al thing to Modern Parliament by Alex Webb; Monarchy: From Dark Age Ruler to Modern Monarch by Alex Webb; Democracy: From Ancient Greece to the American Dream by Alex Webb; Dictatorship: From Roman Rule to Modern Suppression by Alex Webb; Socialism: From the Industrial Revolution to the Trade Union by Alex Webb; Communism: From Marxism to North Korea by Alex Webb; Hunting a Hacker by Sarah Eason; Cold Case Closed: Using Science to Crack Cold Cases by Sarah Eason; Spy Stalkers by Sarah Eason; Terror Alert by Sarah Eason; Profiling a Criminal by Sarah Eason; Tracking a Killer: Using Science to Solve Homicides by Sarah Eason; Causes of Climate Change by Tracy Sue Walker; Arctic Ice Loss by Abbe L. Starr; Climate Change and Extreme

Weather by Isaac Kerry; Become a Technology Whiz: Coding, Software Development & More by Kaitlyn Duling; What is the Coronavirus Disease COVID-19? By Michael Burgan; Geothermal Energy by Robyn Hardyman; Wind Power by Robyn Hardyman; Solar Power by Robyn Hardyman; Military Robots by Lisa Idzikowski; Search and Rescue Robots by Lisa Idzikowski; Space Robots by Lis Sonneborn; Biomass Energy by Robyn Hardyman; Greece by Jill DuBois; Meet Caitlin Clark by Margaret J. Goldstein; Meet Jalen Hurts: Philadelphia Eagles Superstar by Matt Doeden; Meet Travis Kelce by David Stabler; Meet Patrick Mahomes by Joseph Levit; Meet Lionel Messi by David Stabler; Meet Aaron Rodgers by Sam Laskaris; Great Britain by Barbara Fuller; Ireland by Patricia Levy; Poland by Jay Heale; Hungary by Richard S. Esbenshade; France by Ethel Gofen; Italy by Jane Winter; Spain by Elizabeth Kohen; Russia by O.(Oleg) Torchinskii; Sweden by Ethel Gofen; Switzerland by Patricia Levy; Romania by Sean Sheehan; China by Peggy Grace Ferroa; South Korea by Jill DuBois; Japan by Rex Shelley; Saudi Arabia by Hunt Janin; India by Radhika Srinivasan; Nepal by Jon Burbank; Iran by Vjeya Rajendra; Turkiye by Sean Sheehan; Iraq by Susan M. Hassig; Israel by Jill DuBois; Afghanistan by Sharifah Enayat Ali; Thailand by Jim Goodman; Vietnam by Audrey Seah; Philippines by Lily Rose R. Tope; Egypt by Robert Pateman; Nigeria by Jon Burbank; Kenya by Robert Pateman; South Africa by Ike Rosmarin; Canada by Guek-Cheng Pang; Mexico by Mary-Jo Reilly; Cuba by Sean Sheehan; Puerto Rico by Patricia Levy; Brazil by Christopher Richard; Argentina by Ethel Gofen; Australia by Vjeya Rajendra

Young Adult Fiction: The Rose Bargain by Sasha Peyton Smith

Young Adult Non Fiction: The Day the President Was Shot: The Secret Service, The FBI, a Would-Be Killer, and the Attempted Assassination of Ronald Reagan by Bill O'Reilly

DVDs: Jurassic Park Trilogy: Jurassic Park: The Lost World: Jurassic Park, Jurassic Park III

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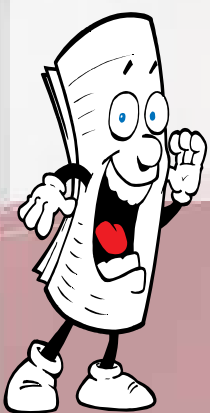
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Pen Argyl Area Alumni Association Offers Bricks to be Purchased For Memorial Wall

The Pen Argyl Alumni Association was formed in 1895, with Richard Jackson Jr. as the first president. This was the early forerunner to the latest Pen Argyl Area Alumni Association, formed in 1982 by casual conversations with Garfield (Gary) Williams Jr., William (Bill) Broad and Russell (Russ) Roper, during the Pen Argyl 100th year Centennial preparations. The organization initiated a huge letter writing campaign to the graduates of Pen Argyl, inviting them to join the Alumni Association. Over 1000 of these former graduates and guests attended the Alumni Reunion Dinner, held at the Blue Vally Farm Show building on June 11, 1982, as part of the Centennial Celebration. As the years passed, the main goals are to raise money to award scholarships to our graduating seniors, gift cards to the two top juniors, and partner with the Pen Argyl Area School District Administration, Faculty, and the school board to purchase supplies and equipment for the needs of all students. The Alumni Association is also working with

Families First Pen Argyl, a family center serving the Pen Argyl Area School District community, to enhance the educational experience for all Pen Argyl students. To date, the Alumni Association has awarded \$73,000 in scholarships. The Alumni Association's newest project is the construction of the Pen Argyl Area Alumni Association Brick Memorial Wall. A vision for this wall was brought to the Alumni board by Randy Ehle years ago. Unfortunately, Randy passed away in 2013. The Association is honored to fulfill Randy's vision. The wall construction was finally completed in November 2024. The wall is 125 feet long and 7 feet high and consists of 9 sections. The middle section contains the Crest at the top, the original Pen Argyl High school logo and the present Alumni board members. Each remaining section will contain the Sponsor's plaque and will be filled in with the purchased engraved bricks. The brick contains up to 3 lines of engraving with up to 15 characters (including spaces, numbers and letters). The

bricks can be purchased for \$125.00 each by any Alumni, family, friends, the slate belt community or anyone representing the high school. The wall is located at the Pen Argyl Alumni Stadium, 501 W. Laurel Ave., Pen Argyl, PA 18072. The wall is graciously sponsored by: Wind Gap Chevy by Brian Goff and Jeff Bastian, Cozy Barn by George and Kathy Hinton, Memorial for John Raymond by Joe and Barb Raimo, Ann Ehle and Joe and Philomena DePue, Memorial for Tim Roper by Allison Overdorf and the Roper family, Memorial for Luke Hahn by Craig and Dana Hahn, Green Knight Economic Development, and Memorial for Mikey Racciato by Phil and Michelle Racciato. Special thanks go to Joe DePue and Craig Reduzzi who led the planning of this project. Also, to TWK construction, Owens Monumental Co., Premier Granite and Marble, and George Hinton and Sons for their help. Brick forms are available at all the Pen Argyl schools offices, Instant Replay and Cozy Barn in Wind Gap, PA or any board member.



RT 115

Continued from page 1

(both are considered Exceptional Value Migratory Fisheries). DEP received the application on March 2, 2023, and it was deemed administratively complete on July 26, 2023. Written comments were received during the 30-day comment period, which ended on January 7, 2025. DEP received several requests to host the public hearing. Individuals wishing to testify at the hearing are asked to submit a written notice of intent to Colleen Connolly, Regional Communications Manager, at coconnolly@pa.gov. Requests will be

accepted up to the day of the hearing. The department requests that individuals limit their testimony to 5 minutes, and that comments be limited to the NPDES permit application. Written copies of oral testimony are requested. All comments, whether delivered orally during the hearing or submitted in writing will carry equal weight and consideration with DEP. Individuals attending the hearing will have the opportunity to testify if they so desire; however, individuals who preregister to testify will be given priority on the agenda. Persons with a disability who wish to testify and require an auxiliary aid, service or other

accommodation should contact Colleen Connolly at coconnolly@pa.gov or the Pennsylvania Hamilton Relay Service at (800) 654-5984 (TDD) to discuss how the Department can meet their needs. The NPDES permit application documentation and conceptual plans are available for review at the Monroe County Conservation District Office, 8050 Running Valley Road, Stroudsburg, Pa 18360 at 570-629-3060 and/or the DEP Northeast Regional Office, 2 Public Square, Wilkes-Barre, PA (570) 826-2511. For further information, contact Colleen Connolly at (570) 826-2035 or at the email above.

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Northampton County Recognized as One of the Nation's Digital Inclusion Trailblazers

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) named Northampton County as a 2024 Digital Inclusion Trailblazer. This national program recognizes the county's efforts to close the digital divide.

Recognizing the array of interests and unique barriers of its community members, Northampton County joins a record number of Digital Inclusion Trailblazers this year. NDIA awarded a total of 60 awardees representing municipal, county, and regional governments, paving the way for digitally inclusive communities across the US.

In an increasingly connected society, digital inclusion—access to affordable high-speed internet, devices, and digital skills training—is essential not only to participate in today's world but also to find greater opportunities to thrive using tools to navigate the internet confidently and independently.

"Northampton County is committed to ensuring that every resident has access to the digital tools and resources necessary for success. Achieving Digital Inclusion Trailblazer status reflects our dedication to bridging the digital divide and empowering our community members to thrive in an increasingly connected world," said County Executive, Lamont G. McClure.

"In the past decade, we've seen local governments step into the important role of building digital inclusion ecosystems, where organizations that provide services can connect and thrive," said Angela Siefer, NDIA executive director. "NDIA's Digital Inclusion Trailblazers celebrate

these critical efforts to bring digital opportunities to all residents."

Trailblazers provide models for other local governments to aspire to as communities build digital inclusion ecosystems. Northampton County achieved Trailblazer status by prioritizing digital inclusion for residents of their communities through:

- Creation of the Northampton County Digital Inclusion Navigator Coalition
- Engaging the Community by Hosting Digital Device Training and Tech Tutorial Events
- Creation of the Northampton County Access Device and Giveaway Program providing refurbished County devices to County organizations and residents
- Meaningful engagement as a member of the Keystone Internet Coalition
- Ensuring Web Accessibility through ADA Compliance
- Issuing a Proclamation designating October 7-11, 2024, as Northampton County Digital Inclusion Week
- Completing a County-wide Broadband Survey and Asset Mapping to use data to inform Digital Inclusion
- Partnering with Kinber's (Keystone Initiative for Network Based Education and

Research) PA Digital Navigator Ecosystem to request funding through the NTIA Competitive Digital Equity Grant Program

• Reaching out to local Internet Service Providers to encourage and provide support for applications to the federal Broadband, Equity, Access, and Development (BEAD) Program

NDIA's Digital Inclusion Trailblazers has set the national standard for excellent digital inclusion work since 2016. Each applicant's materials are verified for accuracy, assessed for community impact, and posted in an interactive map and searchable database on NDIA's website. By sharing materials with open sourcing, NDIA provides community advocates and local government ways to continue learning, connect with trailblazing peers, and plan their digital inclusion solutions.

About National Digital Inclusion Alliance: NDIA advances digital equity by supporting community programs and equipping policymakers to act. Working collaboratively with more than 1,900 digital inclusion practitioners, NDIA advocates for equitable broadband access, tech devices, digital skills training, and tech support. For more information, visit digitalinclusion.org.

Senate GOP Members Consider Lawsuit Over Unconstitutional Use Of Income Tax Revenue

Senate Republican Leader Anthony M. Bucco (R-25), Senate Republican Budget Officer Declan O'Scanlon (R-13), Senate Republican Whip Michael Testa (R-01), Senator Doug Steinhardt (R-23), and Senator Carmen Amato, Jr. (R-09) sent a letter to Governor Murphy notifying him of intended legal action if the next budget unconstitutionally abuses taxpayer money meant for property tax relief again.

For the past several years, the Governor's budget proposals have unconstitutionally proposed using property tax relief funds based on favoritism and the legislature has adopted the budget that doubles down on his abuses.

An excerpt of the letter reads:

"Recent New Jersey State budgets have been appropriating income tax revenue to named beneficiaries based on naked political favoritism and outside of the pretense of any formula whatsoever—

much less one that is reasonable or fair. This has clearly violated the New Jersey Constitution, which requires all income tax revenue to be appropriated based on formula for property tax relief. If the budget you propose next week once again seeks to dole out property tax relief funds based on favoritism and the law of the jungle—and the Legislature again follows suit and doubles down on your lead—we will work to bring litigation with aggrieved schools, municipalities, and taxpayers whose property tax relief funds have been abused at their expense."

You can read the full letter at: www.senate.nj.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4519/Bucco-O'Scanlon--Constitutional-Funding-Issue-22125-FINAL?utm_source=New+Jersey+Senate+Republicans&utm_campaign=ed82820ec0-EMAIL_CAMPAIN_2025_01_08_08_37_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_

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Since 1976, the New Jersey Constitution has required income tax revenues to be placed in the Property Tax Relief Fund (PTRF) and to be used exclusively for the purpose of reducing or offsetting property taxes based on a formula:

No tax shall be levied on personal incomes of individuals, estates and trusts of this State unless the entire net receipts therefrom shall be received into the treasury, placed in a perpetual fund designated the Property Tax Relief Fund and be annually appropriated, pursuant to formulas established from time to time by the Legislature, to the several counties, municipalities and school districts of this State exclusively for the purpose of reducing or offsetting property taxes. [N.J. Const. art. VIII, § 1, ¶ 7]

To speak to any signatories of this letter, contact Kyle Fischer, SRO director of communications, at kfischer@njleg.org.

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Comments On Proposed Waterfowl Seasons in PA Accepted

Hunters and members of waterfowl organizations have several options to ask questions and voice opinions on the 2025-26 proposed migratory game bird seasons.

Questions or comments can be submitted to waterfowlcomments@pa.gov, or a letter can be mailed to Pennsylvania Game Commission, Bureau of Wildlife Management, 2001 Elmerton Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797.

An online question-and-answer session will be held on the proposed seasons on Thursday, March 6 at 1 p.m. on the Game Commission's YouTube channel. The briefing will be available to view live and thereafter.

"The briefing on YouTube will include summaries of recent federal framework changes and other 'hot topics' with the opportunity for viewers to submit follow-up questions for real-time response," said Game Commission waterfowl biologist Amanda Hoyt. "It's a convenient option for hunters statewide to catch up on all things waterfowl without leaving home," she added.

Those submitting questions or comments



by email or mail should provide the species, zone (if applicable), and county or counties they're referring to. The comment period closes March 21.

A Waterfowl Open House will take place at the Game Commission's Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, 100 Museum Road, Stevens, PA 17578, on Saturday, March 8 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Attendees will have the opportunity to interact with Game Commission staff and view proposed seasons presented.

"For those able to travel to Middle Creek, the Waterfowl Open House will provide a weekend opportunity for more extended in-person discussion with Game Commission staff carrying out the research, regulation setting, habitat, and law-enforcement elements of the agency's waterfowl management program," Hoyt said.

Each year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service along with the states in the Atlantic Flyway meet to establish federal frameworks for migratory game bird seasons. These frameworks form the side boards that each state must set their season within. States can be more restrictive – fewer days or lower bag limits – but cannot be more liberal than the federal frameworks allow.

Generally speaking, frameworks do not vary widely from year-to-year, but changes in habitat conditions or populations of migratory game birds may cause them to change. For the 2025-26 seasons, there are two changes. The Atlantic Population Canada goose daily bag limit has been reduced from 3 to 1 bird during the regular season and for northern pintail, there will be a flat daily bag limit of 3.

"The Game Commission annually considers various

types of public input when selecting waterfowl seasons within the parameters established by the federal frameworks," said Game Commission Wildlife Operations Chief Ian Gregg. "Results of periodic hunter surveys provide data on the general opinions of a broad cross-section of hunters, while annual written comment periods and interactive events allow individual hunters to provide their specific preferences and concerns in more detail," he added.

With public comments and results of surveys considered, Game Commission staff will prepare and present the recommended 2025-26 waterfowl and migratory and migratory bird seasons, bag limits and related criteria to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for final approval. Final seasons will appear in the 2025-26 Pennsylvania Hunting & Trapping Digest, which hunters receive with the purchase of a license.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission manages and protects wildlife and their habitats and promotes hunting and trapping for current and future generations. Visit www.pa.gov/pgc for more information about Pennsylvania hunting, trapping and wildlife.

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Murphy Administration Reaffirms Commitment To A Fairer And Greener New Jersey By Approving 13 Brownfield Development Areas

Reaffirming its commitment to a fairer and greener New Jersey, the Murphy Administration has approved 13 new Brownfield Development Areas (BDAs) in 10 communities across the state, Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette announced recently.

DEP's nationally recognized BDA program spurs revitalization and economic development by helping communities implement environmental investigation, remediation and redevelopment activities for areas that encompass multiple individual brownfield sites.

"This next step in the relaunching of the BDA program reinforces DEP's commitment to the redevelopment of brownfield sites that place tremendous economic, environmental and public health burdens on municipalities," Commissioner LaTourette said. "The Murphy Administration looks forward to working with all of our community and redevelopment partners to restore these new Brownfield Development Areas to their full and productive use."

The Brownfield Development Area designation qualifies local municipalities

and redevelopment authorities to receive up to \$5 million annually in state Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Fund (HDSRF) grants, including remedial action matching grants that provide up to 75 percent for remedial action costs for any site reuses within the BDA.

In addition, DEP provides a single point of contact in the Office of Brownfield and Community Revitalization to work closely with municipal officials, stakeholders, developers and Licensed Site Remediation Professionals (LSRPs) to coordinate investigation, remediation and redevelopment plans.

The DEP has approved 13 new BDA applications for the following 10 communities:

- Atlantic City: Bader Field BDA, Riverside BDA, Carson Point BDA
- Bayonne: Constable Hook BDA
- Burlington City: U.S. Pipe Foundry BDA
- Camden: Federal Street BDA
- Carney's Point Township: Revitalization BDA
- Egg Harbor City: Agassiz Street Properties BDA, Antwerp Avenue Properties BDA

- Hainesport: Hainesport Gateway BDA
- Passaic: Pulaski Park Extension BDA
- Paulsboro: Riverview Avenue BDA
- West Orange: Lakeside Avenue BDA
- Relaunching, Recommended

A brownfield is a current commercial or industrial site that is vacant or underutilized and which is or is suspected to be contaminated. DEP's innovative and voluntary BDA program partners with a municipality or redevelopment authority and its stakeholders to focus technical and financial resources on brownfield sites, with a vision for redevelopment and community revitalization.

To date, the BDA program has transformed more than 1,000 acres of blighted brownfields into productive reuses that have created stronger, fairer communities, while benefiting local, regional, state and global environments. Overburdened communities have the highest density of brownfield sites, which present opportunities to provide new community assets to underserved communities that lack environmental and/or

public health benefits.

The 13 new BDAs are the first to be added to the program since 2009. Commissioner LaTourette announced the re-launch of the Brownfield Development Area program in October 2023 at the former National Lead site, which is part of the Sayreville Waterfront BDA. The Sayreville Waterfront BDA has received a \$120 million investment in remediation work, including \$20 million in Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Funds (HDSRF) that helped leverage \$100 million in private sector funding and \$400 million in NJ Economic Development Agency ASPIRE tax incentives.

Applications for the new BDA designations were scored by the DEP's Office of Brownfield and Community Revitalization for completeness, description of local redevelopment plans, support for redevelopment plans, level of community involvement, and anticipated benefits to the community, public health and the environment. The approved applications include two or more brownfield sites in a contiguous area.

The next step for the approved applications is the execution of

a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the DEP, each municipality, and BDA Steering Committee. The MOU defines the brownfield sites and the partners working toward remediation and redevelopment. Once the MOUs is signed, the DEP will officially designate the respective BDAs. Praise for the BDA Program

This is a pivotal moment for Egg Harbor City," said Egg Harbor City Mayor Dr. Lisa Jiampetti. "With this new BDA Designation, essential tools, and funding, we can address long-neglected, contaminated sites. By collaborating with NJDEP, redevelopers and other stakeholders, we will turn these areas into vibrant spaces that energize our community and create lasting opportunities for future generations."

"The Burlington community wishes to thank Governor Murphy and Commissioner LaTourette for designating the US Pipe location as a BDA," said Burlington City Mayor Barry W. Conaway." This commitment to Brownfield remediation is critical toward the continued efforts to ensure NJ residents are provided with a healthy environment."

"On behalf of the more than 800 members of NAIOP NJ, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, we commend DEP for affirming and expanding its commitment to the BDA program," said NAIOP NJ Executive Director Dan Kennedy. "While it's easy to talk about smart growth principles and redevelopment goals, it is much harder to execute on these plans to ensure that the economic, environmental and community benefits are actually realized. The private sector plays a big part in executing redevelopment plans but needs support from state and local government partners in the form of financial incentives and perhaps more importantly, project coordination to accelerate the investigation, remediation and redevelopment of environmentally challenging sites. The newly designated BDAs and those already designated represent a huge opportunity to clean up sites and get them back to productive uses including but not limited to critically needed housing, logistics assets including warehouses, and community facilities like trails and parks."

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Pennsylvania Senate Concludes First Week of Budget Hearings

The Senate Appropriations Committee began public hearings this week on the proposed 2025-26 state budget. Governor Shapiro's \$51.5 billion budget proposal represents a 7.5% increase in spending — \$3.6 billion more than the current year—without a clear plan to address Pennsylvania's structural deficit. While there are areas of shared interest, I am concerned that this proposal relies on overly optimistic revenue projections and unimplemented policies, while



depleting our reserves and leaving the state vulnerable to future tax increases and service cuts.

Without more responsible budgeting, Pennsylvania could face a \$27.3 billion shortfall within five

years, with the Rainy-Day Fund and existing savings completely depleted. Additionally, the budget leaves a \$4

billion gap next year without identifying sustainable funding sources, raising serious concerns about potential tax increases. This week, we hosted hearings with the PA Department of Revenue, the Pennsylvania State Police, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), the Department of Health, and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. During the Department of Health hearing, I questioned the Secretary about the state's implementation of medical marijuana. I was one of the first legislators in

Harrisburg to support medical marijuana, but concerns remain about how the program has been managed. Specifically, while most doctors issue fewer than 100 medical marijuana certifications, three doctors prescribed more than 11,000 in a single year. I asked how the state is ensuring proper oversight to protect quality patient care. You can watch that exchange here. I look forward to working with my colleagues to craft a fiscally responsible budget that protects taxpayers, strengthens our economy, and keeps Pennsylvania on solid financial footing.

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Garden Dilemmas? Ask Mary!



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Hello fellow readers,
I recently learned the history and impact of Hyper-Humus peat mining in Sussex County, NJ. The Paulinskill Rivershed Watchers hosted the event with their parent organization, the Food Shed Alliance — a non-profit helping farmers, feeding people, and protecting the environment. Hyper-Humus is a company that once harvested peat moss, changing the lay of the land along the Paulinskill River.

David de Wit, a local naturalist, led the

discussion along the hike around the former site of the Hyper-Humus, sharing the captivating history that you can tune into Episode 195 of the Garden Dilemmas Podcast or read on AskMaryStone.com. He described peat as mostly rotted vegetation. “There are two kinds of peat: sphagnum peat and sedge peat. Sedge peats are grasses, canes, and forest leaf litter that get deposited year after year.”

Hyper-Humus Inc. began in 1915, draining the Paulinskill Meadows to facilitate peat mining. After harvesting, peat can regenerate 1/32nd of an inch annually, but it takes thousands of years to form a significant layer. Plus, the carbon and methane gases the peatlands hold safely below are released into the atmosphere when dug up. Carbon dioxide is believed to contribute significantly to climate change. Then, there’s the impact on wildlife by destroying habitats.

“Rumor has it the Whi-



te House lawn is made with Hyper-Humus peat, and every golf course on the East Coast supposedly has it mixed in. It is the world’s best soil additive if you want good, rich soil that holds moisture and provides some fertility,” David said.

From 1985 to 1988, ownership changed. Hyper-Humus was bought by Hyponex and then by Scotts. In 1990, provisions of the Clean Water Act halted the strip mining of the peat, and in 2005, the State of New Jersey purchased the area as a Wildlife Manage-

ment Area. Ed Samanns, with WSP, a consulting company, worked with the Nature Conservancy and New Jersey Fish and Wildlife, which manages the property, to develop a restoration plan for the Paulinskill River and the adjoining forest and marsh systems “to bring it back from the changes that occurred over the years so that it acts as a more natural system.”

Hyper-Humus widened and straightened the channel so water would drain more quickly. The restoration plan calls for

adding back the sinuosity of the channel, the natural twists and turns, to improve the water quality.

Michelle DiBlasio, Nature Conservancy’s Freshwater Restoration Manager, said, “Of all the sites across the watershed, year after year, we see the poorest water quality coming out of this one-mile stretch of river.”

Michelle shared how they measure water quality based on water temperatures and dissolved oxygen. The area often runs from 28

to 30 degrees Celsius in summers, well over the 25-degree Celsius average needed to maintain the trout populations throughout the year. And the oxygen levels are usually below 4. “Critters in our streams need at least 6 milligrams per liter of dissolved oxygen. Ideally, they want 7 to 8 milligrams,” Michele said.

“The restoration project will entail about 1000 acres, with about a mile of stream. That’s pretty significant. It’s hard to make big changes to water, but something like this could truly impact the water’s quality.”

After they receive permits, likely at the end of March, the next step is to secure funding to do the work in three phases, which will take years and millions of dollars.

Undoubtedly, things won’t restore to how they were in the 1700s. Much like when we go through hardships, we carry wounds (I call stretch marks) from the history of our past. But they fade as we move forward and new growth begins. The scars are badges of wisdom gained. We’ll still call the area the Hyper-Humus section of the Paulinskill River Wildlife Management Area. By keeping the name of the “stretch marks,” we will remember and learn from what happened there. May the lesson never fade.

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Governor Shapiro Files Lawsuit Challenging Trump Administration's Unconstitutional Federal Funding Freeze in Order to Protect Pennsylvania Interests

Governor Josh Shapiro filed a lawsuit challenging the Trump Administration's unconstitutional freeze of federal funding. As of today – even after multiple court orders to release the federal funds and Governor Shapiro's engagement with Pennsylvania's federal representatives — state agencies still remain entirely unable to access \$1.2 billion in federal funding, with an additional \$900 million requiring an undefined review by federal agencies before it can be drawn down. To ensure the interests of our Commonwealth and its residents are protected, Governor Shapiro is taking legal action to restore access to this funding. “The federal government has entered into a contract with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, promising to provide billions of dollars in Congressionally-approved funding that we

have committed to serious needs – like protecting public health, cutting energy costs, providing safe, clean drinking water, and creating jobs in rural communities,” said Governor Shapiro. “With this funding freeze, the Trump Administration is breaking that contract – and it's my job as Governor to protect Pennsylvania's interests. Over the past two weeks, my team and I have engaged with our Congressional delegation to try to restore access to all the federal funding Pennsylvania has been promised under law – but despite those efforts, state agencies remain unable to draw down these critical dollars. While multiple federal judges have ordered the Trump Administration to unfreeze this funding, access has not been restored, leaving my Administration with no choice but to pursue legal action to protect the interests of

the Commonwealth and its residents.”

Almost immediately after the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a directive on January 27, 2025, Commonwealth agencies realized that billions in federal funding appropriated by Congress to Pennsylvania were no longer accessible. Federal agencies suspended access to billions of dollars in funding without supplying a plausible explanation as to why certain funds are being suspended, giving any consideration to the harm their action would cause, or considering how Commonwealth agencies have relied on receiving that committed funding.

Since then, the Shapiro Administration has worked with its federal partners and Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation in an attempt to fully restore access to these funds. Simultaneously,

multiple federal judges have ordered the Trump Administration to unfreeze this funding – however, because Pennsylvania was not involved in previous litigation, it is not guaranteed that future litigation in those cases will protect Pennsylvania's interests and funding.

As of February 12, 2025, despite those multiple court orders, over \$1.2 billion in federal funding owed to Pennsylvania agencies remains suspended – and more than \$900 million in funding is now marked as requiring further (but unarticulated) federal agency review before reimbursement requests can be approved.

While Commonwealth agencies cannot draw from certain federal accounts, they are stuck incurring debts and obligations in federally approved projects that the Trump Administration currently is refusing to

reimburse. While agencies have some reserves and discretionary dollars to cover small, unexpected debts, the scope of the federal freeze will far exceed those reserves.

Federal funding is in jeopardy for critical Pennsylvania-based initiatives including reclaiming abandoned mine land, capping and plugging orphan wells, and lowering consumer costs. For example, abandoned mine land dollars that are currently frozen will allow the Commonwealth to reclaim 24,000 acres of abandoned mine land across Pennsylvania, construct or maintain 16 water treatment systems that deal with toxic runoff from abandoned mines, and respond to about 60 emergency events per year. Left unaddressed, abandoned mines can cave in and form sinkholes, causing significant property damage

and even death – as happened in Westmoreland County in December 2024. Additionally, the federal funding freeze has restricted access to funding that would help plug more than 500 orphaned and abandoned wells that are releasing toxic chemicals in Pennsylvania communities, as well as funding that would help up to 28,000 Pennsylvania households lower their utility bills.

The U.S. Constitution clearly states that federal agencies do not have the power to suspend states' access to money that Congress appropriated or to impose new conditions on money already appropriated and obligated. Governor Shapiro is taking action to unfreeze these funds and ensure Pennsylvania is legally protected so that Commonwealth agencies can continue their work to improve Pennsylvanians' lives.

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The Dangers of Prolonged Thumb-sucking and Pacifier Use



(NAPSI)—While it is normal for small children to use a pacifier or their thumb to calm down or to stop crying, prolonged usage of either can lead to oral health problems down the line.

In general, according to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, children up to the age of three will not face issues from the use of pacifiers

or thumb-sucking, but if they keep that habit up as they age there can be major issues with their bite, their teeth, chewing, how their mouth rests and problems with their tongue.

Understanding Pacifiers - There are two types of pacifiers: conventional and orthodontic. Orthodontic pacifiers are generally flat bottomed and

square, designed to imitate the shape of the mother's nipple. Conventional pacifiers—which are often the type sent home with newborns from the hospital—tend to be round. While either option will soothe a child, the orthodontic pacifiers are the least likely to contribute to bite issues after teething.

These habits tend to

persist because of physical and emotional stimuli, including boredom, hunger, stress, hyperactivity, pleasure, sadness and various kinds of disabilities. An increase in your child's level of stress or anxiety can lead to the continuation of the thumb-sucking habit beyond a healthy age.

The Problems - There are five main issues that may arise from prolonged thumb-sucking or pacifier use:

- Open bite: Upper and lower teeth don't touch when the mouth is closed.

- Increased overjet: Upper jaw and teeth protrude excessively forward.

- Chewing difficulty: Upper and lower teeth don't articulate correctly to provide a solid chewing surface.

- Cross bite: Upper back teeth sit inside the bottom teeth and appear



The back teeth are touching, but there is a big space at the front.

This is known as anterior open bite.



tilted inward toward the tongue, instead of lining up straight and fitting into each other.

- Tongue thrust compensation: An infant generally pushes their tongue out when swallowing, while children and adults rest the tongue against the roof of their mouth.

All five of these issues can cause too much pressure on teeth and jaw, leading to speech impediments, issues with facial development and gum problems—they can also eventually require surgery.

There are no ready-made recipes for stopping your child from thumb

sucking or using a pacifier, but some of the more popular deterrents include:

- Adhesive plaster or tape on the digit
- Verbal reminders
- Reward systems
- Mittens
- Fidget spinners
- A replacement object to soothe your child, such as a blanket or toy
- Oral appliances
- Braces

Remember, children use their a thumb or a pacifier for a reason, so offering encouragement and helping them come up with other solutions to overcome boredom or anxiety is the way to go.

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Fun Ways To Inspire Kids' Imaginations

(NAPSI)—According to numerous studies, imaginative play in childhood can be critical to cognitive and social development. Research suggests that make-believe games can increase language usage, help with self-regulation, let children express a range of emotions, and teach them to think creatively. In addition, keeping kids' brains active and engaged can help prevent a decline in academic skills during school breaks.

So with all of these benefits, how can you encourage more imaginative play? One idea is to create a prop box filled with items to spark ima-



gination. Objects such as stuffed animals, cardboard boxes, fun clothes, and foreign coins can all inspire kids to pretend.

You can also encourage games and imaginati-

ve play that incorporate intellectual challenges. Some examples include designing the best paper airplane, coming up with new games using only a ball and basket, or creating an imaginary

place with building toys. To see some of these ideas brought to life, check out the delightful animated adventure "Wonder Park." The film follows June, a girl with a BIG imagination who uses her knowledge of science to create an imaginary amusement park—that ends up coming to life. Filled with the world's wildest rides operated by fun-loving animals, the excitement never ends. But when trouble hits, June and her furry friends begin an unforgettable journey to save the park.

This "celebration of imagination," as one reviewer called it, can help your kids appreciate the power of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and inspire their own creativity. Plus, the Blu-ray Combo Pack includes even more activities like a sing-along, drawing tutorials and more to keep kids busy and entertained.

As June discovers, imagination is her most powerful tool, and it can help your kids develop not only creativity, but also life skills that will last into adulthood.

Check out the movie trailer at www.WonderParkMovie.com.

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