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PRESS



March 20, 2025

GOD BLESS AMERICA

Vol. 52, No. 35



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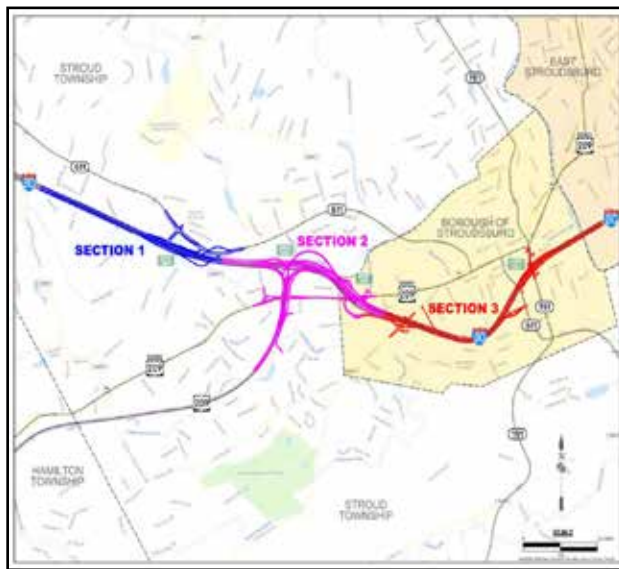


Senator Rosemary Brown Discusses The I-80 Expansion Project

No one enjoys surgery. It's painful, disruptive, and requires time to heal—but when it's necessary, you go through with it because you know it will ultimately make you healthier and stronger. Infrastructure projects, like the I-80 expansion, are much the same. They're inconvenient, often frustrating, and never come at the perfect time. But just like a critical surgery, they are essential for long-term safety, efficiency, and sustainability.

Many of you have heard about the I-80 expansion project over the last few years. As the project moves forward, I want to provide a factual overview to ensure everyone understands its scope and necessity.

Interstate 80 was designated in 1956 as one of the original routes of the Interstate Highway System. Stretching from New Jersey to California, it is the second-longest



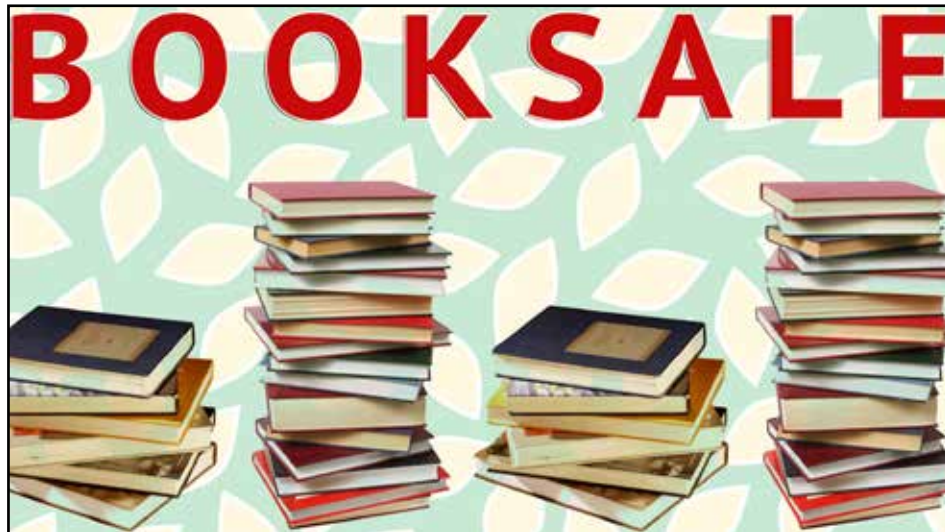
interstate in the country, serving as a vital corridor for national freight, commuter traffic, and tourism. Here in our community, I-80 is more than just a highway—it's a road we rely on daily for basic needs, whether visiting friends, running errands, or taking our kids to school.

While a project of this magnitude is never easy—and many of us

would rather avoid the disruption—its necessity cannot be ignored. There will never be a perfect time for a project of this scale, nor will it be perfect in every aspect, but maintaining and improving our infrastructure is essential.

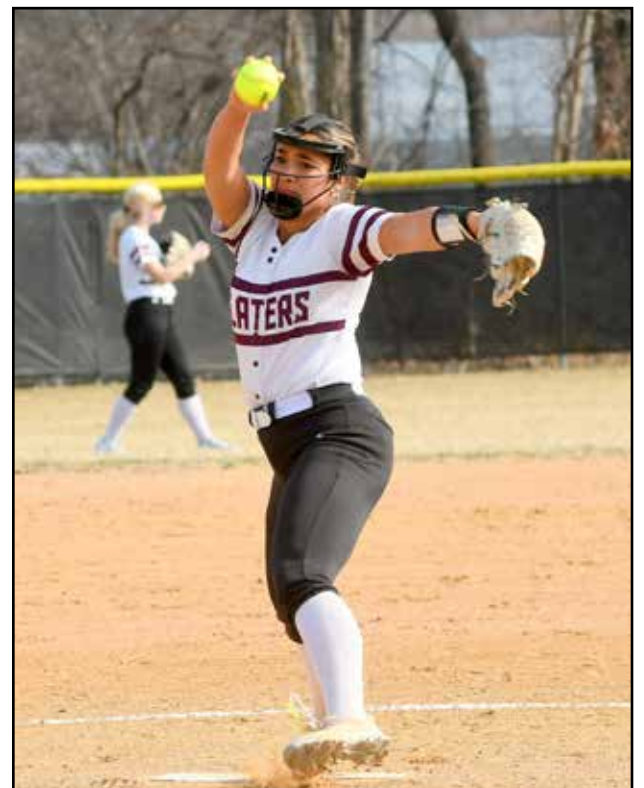
Since its construction in the 1960s, I-80 has deteriorated significantly and no longer meets modern *I-80 cont'd on pg 5*

Support The Friends of The Bangor Public Library During Their Annual Book Sale



The Friends of the Bangor Public Library will hold their Annual Spring Book Sale, at the Bee Hive Community Center, 197 Penna. Avenue, in Bangor on Friday, May 2nd from 10am to 5pm; Saturday, May 3rd from 10am to 4pm; and Sunday, May 4th from 10am to 4pm, which will also be their Bag Day. This event will feature thousands of gently used and like new Books, DVD's, Audio Books, and Puzzles for adults and children. Non Fiction books will be organized according to genres' and Fiction will be organized according to author for easy selection. For additional information please contact Karen Brewer at 484-894-5661.

Bangor Softball Steps Up To The Plate Against East Stroudsburg South



Bangor took on East Stroudsburg South in Softball on March 14th. Bangor lost, 11 to 9. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

New Grant Program Offers Up to \$5,000 for In-Demand Careers



A new opportunity is here for Pennsylvania students pursuing in-demand careers. The Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program offers up to \$5,000 per year to help cover the cost of education—but funding is first come, first served, so don't wait to apply!

To qualify, students must agree to live and work in Pennsylvania for at least one year per year of funding received. Those who don't fulfill

this requirement will have to repay the grant as a loan.

Eligible programs include nursing, engineering, education, business, criminal justice, computer science, agriculture, and other approved fields.

If you're looking to build your future in Pennsylvania, this program can help make it happen. Apply today at www.pheaa.org/growpa before funds run out!

New in the Bangor Public Library

March 7, 2025 to March 13, 2025

Adult Fiction: Deep Cuts: A Novel by Holly Brickley; Blood Moon by Sandra Brown; The Peacemaker by Wanda E. Brunstetter; Ambush by Colleen Coble; Broken Country: A Novel by Clare Leslie Hall; One Good Thing by Georgia Hunter; The Dream Novel: A Novel by Laila Lalami; Every Tom Dick & Harry: A Novel by Elinor Lipman; Famous Last Words: A Novel by Gillian McAllister; Wild Dark Shore by Charlotte McConaghy; Count My Lies: A Novel by Sophie Stava; Far From Home: A Novel by Danielle Steel

Adult Non Fiction: Raising Hare: A Memoir by Chloe Dalton; Super-Italian: More than 110 Indulgent Recipes Using Italy's Healthiest Foods by Glada DeLaurentiis; There's Always Room at the Table: Farmhouse Recipes From My Family to Yours by Kaleb Wyse

Easy Fiction: Bluey Hoorah, it's Easter!; There's a Little Chick in your Book by Tom Fletcher; Arlo Draws an Octopus by Lori Mortensen; Escargot and the Search for Spring by Dashka Slater; Will the Pigeon Graduate? By Mo Willems

Junior Fiction: The Baby-Sitters Club: Mallory and the Trouble with Twins by Arley Nopra

Young Adult Fiction: The Ragpicker King by Cassandra Clare; Our Infinite Fates: A Novel by Laura Steven; The Otherwhere Post by Emil J. Taylor

Nominations Open for the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber's ATHENA Awards

The annual awards will recognize its 100th ATHENA recipient who is committed to advancing women in business and the community.

The Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce's Women's Business Council (WBC) is now accepting nominations for the 2025 ATHENA Awards, which celebrate exceptional women leaders and organizations that champion women's leadership and professional excellence. Applications are open through April 7, 2025, for the three ATHENA Award categories:

ATHENA Leadership Award – Honors an established professional who demonstrates excellence, creativity, and initiative in their field, provides valuable service to improve the quality of life in the community, and actively mentors and supports women in achieving their full leadership potential.

ATHENA Emerging Professional Leadership Award – Recognizes a rising leader who has already made a significant impact in her profession and community and serves as a role model for young women.

ATHENA Organizational Leadership Award – Celebrates businesses and organizations that foster a workplace culture that

empowers, develops, and supports women leaders while actively contributing to leadership development opportunities for women and girls in the broader community.

Since its inception, the ATHENA Awards program has honored 99 leaders and organizations that have come from all walks of life, representing diverse industries, non-profit organizations, and businesses of all sizes—united by their lasting impact on the Lehigh Valley.

“The ATHENA Awards shine a spotlight on women and organizations that create meaningful change, open doors, and inspire the next generation of leaders,” said Flo Scott, chair of the Women's Business Council. “We encourage the community to nominate individuals and organizations that embody the values of leadership, service, and mentorship.”

To submit a nomination, applicants must complete a nomination form, provide two letters of recommendation, and answer three questions related to the nominee's leadership, community impact, and support for women. More

information and the on-line nomination form are available at www.lehighvalleychamber.org/athenaawardslv.html.

The 2025 ATHENA Award recipients will be announced at the Lehigh Valley Women's Summit on June 5, 2025. The ATHENA Awards Ceremony will take place in October, with additional details to be announced.

The 2024 ATHENA honorees included Vicki Doule of Capital Blue Cross, who received the ATHENA Leadership Award; Chloe Cole-Wilson of SILK Lehigh Valley, who was named the ATHENA Emerging Professional; and ASR Media, which received the ATHENA Organizational Award.

The Women's Business Council of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to strengthening the Lehigh Valley by empowering, recognizing, and inspiring women in business and the community.

For more information about the ATHENA Awards or the Women's Business Council, visit www.lehighvalleychamber.org.

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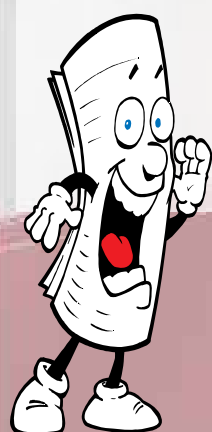
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Allentown Rescue Mission Honors Long-Time Donor



The Allentown Rescue Mission is excited to announce the recognition of Kris and Preeta Kapoor for their dedicated service and commitment to men experiencing homelessness in the Greater Lehigh Valley with an award named in their honor. The ceremony to present the Kapoor Cares Award will be held at the Allentown Rescue Mission on March 21, 2025.

Each year after, the newly created Kapoor Cares Award will recognize a deserving supporter of the Allentown Rescue Mission who demonstrates the same philanthropic spirit as Kris and Preeta Kapoor.

The couple's continuous dedication to the Allentown Rescue Mission has changed the lives of countless men.

After graduating from Delhi College of Engineering, Mr. Kapoor moved to the United States to work as a design engineer for the Fuller Company. In 1986, he, along with 5 other executives, bought the Fuller company and sold it to F.L. Smidth in 1991.

Mr. Kapoor then moved into the real estate arena and committed himself to the greater good of the Lehigh Valley. He founded and served the Hindu Temple Society of Allentown and served on many

Boards of Directors, including the Allentown Rescue Mission.

In the 1960's, Mr. Kapoor lived in the Allentown area and often walked by the Mission. "I developed a habit, you know, of making the sign of the cross as I walked by the big cross outside of the building," Kapoor recounted when describing his connection to the Mission. Mr. and Mrs. Kapoor prepared and served meals at the Mission during the holidays for many years. As time passed, they continued to support the long-time Mission efforts of feeding and sheltering men experiencing homelessness through in-kind and monetary donations. "Oh Lord, I came to this world empty-handed, and I will go empty-handed. Oh Lord, it is You, who gave me. It is You, who is giving, not I," stated Mr. Kapoor.

Eventually, Mr. Kapoor's devotion to the Mission led him to serve on the Board of Directors where he faithfully served for many years. In 2022, the Mission named the shelter's dining room the "Kris and Preeta Kapoor Dining Room" as a thank you for their generous donations and continuous support of the Mission. At that time, Mr. Kapoor stated, "There is no great-

er good than to feed and help those in need." Skip Smith, CEO of the Allentown Rescue Mission, said, "Kris and Preeta have been long-time supporters of the Allentown Rescue Mission dating back before, during, and after his contributions as a board member. Their ongoing and substantial generosity is instrumental to accomplishing our mission to Rescue, Rehabilitate, and Restore men experiencing homelessness."

Mr. and Mrs. Kapoor's additional philanthropic endeavors include a transformational gift to support scholarships for Temple/St. Luke's School of Medicine and the largest donation to expand the Hindu Temple Society in Allentown. "We completely believe in sharing our blessings, God has been very kind to us, and at this point, we don't need very much to live. We are on the last leg of our journey in this world and it's our duty to help the less fortunate in our community we have called our home for 65 years," Mrs. Kapoor respectfully shared.

The Allentown Rescue Mission, a 501c3, 123 bed non-profit homeless shelter has been providing shelter to men experiencing homelessness since 1900. In addition

to emergency shelter services (365 days a year), the Allentown Rescue Mission offers a residential life skills program, and transitional employment on the Clean Team Workforce that's available for hire to the community. The Clean Team Workforce pays the men above PA state minimum wage— helping them save a nest egg to transition

back into the community. In a typical year, the Allentown Rescue Mission provides shelter services for nearly 1,000 men and serves more than 60,000 meals to men in need.

To refer someone to the Allentown Rescue Mission for services or to learn ways you can help make a difference please visit www.allentownrescuemission.org



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Project Self-Sufficiency Programs Educate Public, Support Trauma Survivors, Promote Prevention

Project Self-Sufficiency will offer three workshops during March and April regarding adverse childhood experiences with the goal of educating the public, supporting trauma survivors, and offering tips for prevention and healing within the community. A virtual "Understanding ACEs: Building Self-Healing Communities" presentation on Wednesday, March 26th, 2:00 p.m., will address the neurological and biological effects of adversity on development and its corresponding impact on the health of the overall population. The workshop and dis-

ussion series, "Connections Matter", which facilitates the conversation about issues surrounding childhood trauma, will be offered virtually in English, Tuesday, April 15th, 2:00 p.m., and in Spanish, Wednesday, April 16th, 2:00 p.m. Tips for protection, prevention, and promoting resilience within the community will also be discussed. All workshops are free and open to the public; interested participants are invited to call 973-940-3500 to receive log-in details.

During the Understanding ACEs workshop, parents, caregivers, and other community providers

will learn how childhood trauma impacts physical and neurological development and discuss methods for improving health and well-being across the lifespan.

The Connections Matter curriculum invites providers, parents, and community members to build caring connections to improve resiliency. Discussion during the workshops will focus on understanding adverse childhood experiences and demonstrating how caring connections can serve as a primary buffer in the negative effects of trauma. The training is appropriate for parents and providers raising

and teaching school aged children. All three workshops are funded by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families and led by Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey.

Speakers will address the impact of adverse childhood experiences on social, emotional, and cognitive development, and offer tips and strategies for building resilience. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are widely recognized as falling into three distinct categories, abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Examples of negative behavior said to result from ACEs include



smoking, alcoholism, drug use, absenteeism, and lack of physical activity. These behaviors can cause a cascade of physical and mental health problems, from diabetes to cancer to suicidal thoughts. It is estimated that approximately 67% of the population has experienced at least one adverse childhood experience. Project Self-Sufficiency is bringing together professionals, provid-

ers, and parents who are committed to increasing awareness of the impact of childhood trauma on juvenile development, future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. "Our goal is to help make our community a place in which every child can thrive by providing education and training on adverse childhood experiences and assuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments," explains Project Self-Sufficiency Executive Director Deborah Berry-Toon. "Protection, prevention, and resilience promotion can profoundly improve health according to recent discoveries in neuroscience, epigenetics, and epidemiology. The tools identified in these workshops can positively impact public health, safety, and productivity, and reduce public and private costs now and for future generations."

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I-80

Continued from page 1

design standards. Originally built to carry 10,000 vehicles per day, the highway now handles 80,000 vehicles daily, with 22% of that being truck traffic. By 2030-2040, daily traffic is projected to reach 90,000 to 100,000 vehicles.

Safety concerns also make this project critical. Crash studies between Exit 303 and Exit 307 show accident rates exceeding the statewide average, with the most hazardous section being Exit 304 in Stroudsburg Borough. This stretch has been designated a Safety Corridor, requiring reduced speed limits. Many of us are familiar with the frequent and devastating crashes near the Main Street and Park Avenue exits in recent years. Studies link these high crash rates to congestion and outdated highway design.

The first public meeting on the expansion was held in February 2014, with several additional meetings leading up to the final public session in November 2019. The final design was approved in Janu-

ary 2023, and construction will proceed in three phases, starting west to east at Exit 303, with bidding anticipated in June 2025.

The project will expand I-80 to three lanes in each direction between Exit 303 and Exit 308, while also reconstructing interchanges, improving ramp access, and adding retention basins. The design includes raising bridges, removing and adding ramps, creating flyover lanes, and extending existing ramps to enhance safety and traffic flow. You can view the detailed design plans here.

While many of us may have personal opinions on this expansion, and in an ideal world, we wouldn't need such extensive upgrades, federal and state governments have an obligation to maintain infrastructure that meets modern safety and efficiency standards. The increase in traffic volume—both current and projected—demands action. Fortunately, the federal government has allocated over half a billion dollars to ensure this corridor meets necessary criteria and provides a safer, more effective roadway for residents and travelers alike.

New Jersey's WMA of the Month – Black River, Morris County

The Black River Wildlife Management Area in Chester Township, Morris County, consists of over 3,000 acres of diverse landscapes and plentiful flora and fauna. The WMA is named for the Black River which passes through a portion of Morris County before becoming the Lamington River. The area is well known for birding, hunting, and fishing.

Visit For:
Wildlife Watching: Bureau of Land Management staff plant wildflowers and warm season grass mix to boost habitat and help pollinators. Look for river otters, belted kingfishers, waterfowl, and a variety of songbirds. A converted rail bed, now a foottrail, provides the best opportunity to see the freshwater wetland and riparian habitat on foot. Spring migration brings a plethora of warblers to the area. Look for blue-winged and chestnut-sided warblers in the fields. Red foxes and red-tailed hawks are common.

Fishing: Opportunities are limited, but anglers can try fishing for bass and panfish in the small ponds throughout the area. The Black River is stocked with trout approx-

imately two miles south of the tract's southwestern boundary, but access to the river can be difficult except by canoe.

Hiking: Morris County's Patriot's Path hiking trail crosses through the Black River WMA. The land showcases river bottom, swampy woodland, freshwater marsh, fields, and upland deciduous woods.

Ranges: The Wildlife Management Area has archery and shotgun ranges, open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., located on the west side of Dover-Chester Road.

Hunting: DMZ 9 provides varied terrain and a large herd for deer hunting. The turkey population in THA 9 is modest, and seasoned callers can be successful in the spring and fall seasons. Wood ducks, black ducks, and mallards provide waterfowl hunting opportunities along the six-mile section of the Black River that flows through the tract. Upland game hunters can find cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, and woodcock. Pheasants are stocked during the small game season. The WMA's dog training area is also stocked with chukar in October.

Access: There are several different parking areas at



the WMA. The main lot and ranges are located off North Road, also called County Route 513 north of Chester and Route 206. Access is also available by heading north on Route 206 from Chester towards Flanders. Other access points are along Pleasant Hill Road and Ironia Road on the western side of the WMA. The Patriot's Path Trailhead can be accessed at the Southern end of the WMA along Pleasant Hill Road.

Owned by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Fish & Wildlife, the Wildlife Management Area System is comprised of more than 360,000 acres in 122 areas throughout the state, which is more than 44% of

New Jersey's state-owned public open space. WMAs are maintained and supported with funding from hunting and fishing license sales, the Federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and the Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program.

Support the maintenance of New Jersey's Wildlife Management Areas by becoming a Wildlife Habitat Supporter! Donate now and get your Third Edition sticker:

WMAs are patrolled by NJ Fish & Wildlife Conservation Police Officers to ensure public safety. If you see violations while visiting a WMA, please call the 24-hour DEP hotline at 877-WARN-DEP (877-927-6337).

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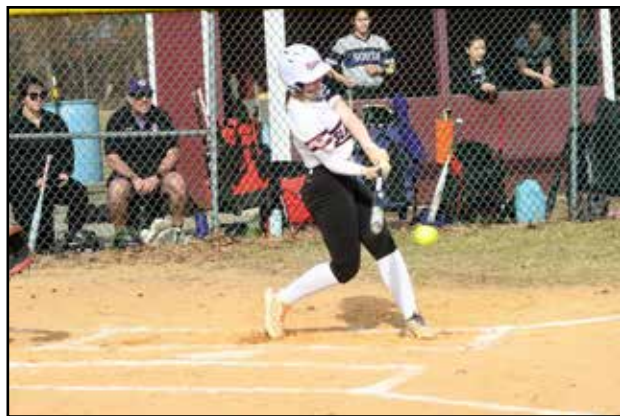
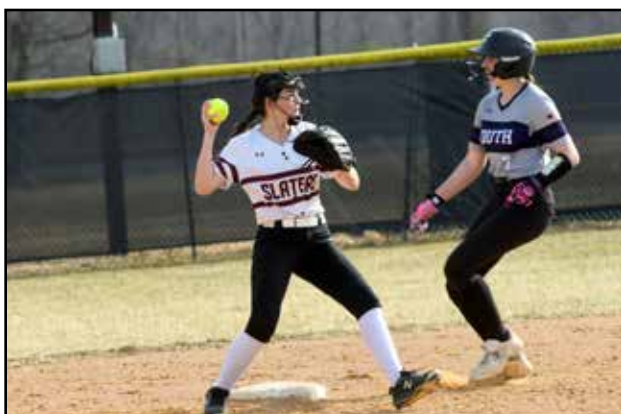
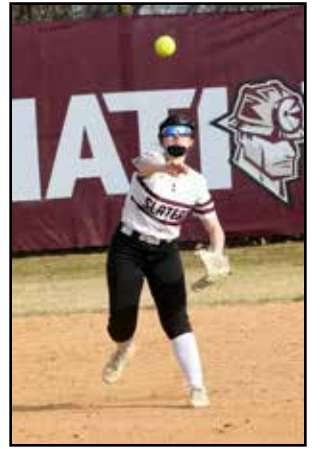
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Bangor took on East Stroudsburg South in Softball on March 14th. Bangor lost, 11 to 9. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press



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Garden Dilemmas? Ask Mary!



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Hello, fellow readers,
It's the time of year we start thinking about our gardens and addressing early tasks, such as cutting back the ornamental grasses and perennials left standing for winter interest and providing a habitat for beneficial insects. But be sure to give the critters a chance to emerge, typically after temperatures rise above 50 degrees for about ten days. Another task is rejuvenating shrubs that need a fresh start.

Clients from long ago occasionally reappear, asking for guidance. Bonnie from Stillwater,

NJ, is planning a monarch garden, which I helped her with, which led to plans to refurbish some of her existing shrubs planted long ago. Her overgrown Palablin lilac (*Syringa meyeri*) needs to be rejuvenated, and late winter or early spring is a perfect time, just as the plant is coming out of dormancy.

There are two ways to rejuvenate lilacs. Pruning back a third of the branches each year to six to eight inches, cutting out the dead wood in the center of the plant, and doing so for three consecutive years until the plant is completely rejuvenated. That way, you can have some blooms during the restoration, as lilacs bloom on old wood. Or you can do a total rejuvenation in one year.

Bonnie also has a unique plant I look forward to tackling: a 'Graham Blandy' Boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*). Ken Druse, a well-known gardening author nearby, has them, and he cleverly lassos them with yarn to exaggerate their svelteness. They make a



striking invitation into a charming stone bridge topped in turf, leading to an alluring lawn embraced with glorious garden goodies.

Bonnie's Graham Blandy has never been pruned and is overwhelming the front stairs to her home, rising above the roof. You need to refurbish boxwood over several years, and early spring is the best time. Never remove more than a third of a boxwood's mass in a given time. Be sure to use clean tools as Boxwood blight is devastating many of them.

Graham Blandy grows to be 15 feet tall and about 18 to 24 inches wide, but Bonnie's

is chubbier than that. You can maintain the height at five feet if you prune them occasionally. But topping a plant is not a good idea as it weakens the canopy, and if there's a snow load, it could devastate the plant. And so, Bonnie's will remain standing tall, but we'll work on making Graham thinner (Smile.)

Speaking of rejuvenation and removing dead wood, spring is a perfect time to clean things out: out of our homes and in our gardens and improving our outlook on the garden of life. With all the controversy and divisiveness, it's hard to stay positive, but we can find respite and wisdom in



nature and our gardens. There's something greater at work here; our collective energy and kind actions can help turn pessimism around.

My dear friend Vicki Johnson, whose tips on Encouraging Indoor Blooms I shared a few weeks ago, sends the loveliest cards. I received one last week that especially speaks to me. The front of the card has a beautiful photo of her beloved cat, Lucy, sleeping in a nest of white bedding, and inside is a poem by Langston Hughes titled Dream Keeper.

"Bring me all your dreams, you dreamers. Bring me all of your heart melodies. That I may wrap them in a blue cloud-cloth. Away from the too rough fingers of the world."

Yes, indeed, the rough fingers—the controversy, the divisiveness. Let's wrap each other in love instead. Only love can heal the too rough fingers of our world. And from that, will come remarkable growth.

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Murphy Administration Urges Wildfire Awareness And Water Conservation As Drought Conditions Persist Heading Into Spring

The Murphy Administration today urged the public to continue exercising wildfire awareness and practicing water conservation as drought conditions persist entering the spring, which is peak wildfire season in New Jersey and a time when demand for water for landscaping, gardening, and lawn care increases across the state.

New Jersey remains under an official drought warning and enters spring following minimal precipitation in the fall coupled with the third-driest January on record and well-below average precipitation throughout the winter.

While precipitation in February was nearly normal, it was not enough to fully replenish reservoirs and groundwater. These conditions have also dramatically increased

spring wildfire risk and severely hampered efforts by the Department of Environmental Protection's Forest Fire Service to conduct prescribed fire operations that are critical to preventing wildfires. Typically, the Forest Fire Service targets 25,000 acres of forest, grasslands and marshlands for treatments with prescribed fire. Persistent dry conditions, however, have significantly limited this work with 1,707 acres of grasslands and six acres of forest being treated to date – a historic low.

"Our forests are very dry, and our precious drinking water sources remain stressed from lack of precipitation," said Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette. "As we head into spring following a very dry fall and winter,

we must all do our part to prevent wildfires and reduce water use, especially when gardening, landscaping, and caring for our lawns."

All regions of New Jersey have been under drought warning since Nov. 13, 2024, meaning residents are strongly urged to voluntarily conserve water. The Department is coordinating with water systems to ensure they are using all available sources to increase supplies for the spring season. If conditions do not improve, the next step could be the declaration of a drought emergency, which carries mandatory restrictions. The last statewide drought emergency was declared in March 2002 and lifted in January 2003.

In response to the ongoing conditions, the Administration has launched



the NJ Wildfire SMART (Safety, Mitigation, Awareness, Response, Training) public safety awareness initiative. A separate spring conservation outreach campaign launched this week ahead of peak irrigation season provides tips on how to reduce water usage when gardening, landscaping, and preparing lawns. For information on the campaign and toolkits, visit DEP's Every Drop Counts website.

Governor Murphy has also proposed a \$1 million increase in the Forest Fire Service budget to enhance protection of property and lives amid a significant increase in wildfires.

"The increase in funding that Governor Murphy has proposed for the Forest Fire Service will be critical to providing the Forest Fire Service with the resources they need to respond quickly, safeguard lives and property, and reduce the risk of future catastrophic wildfires," said John Cecil, DEP's Assistant Commissioner for State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites. "As we enter the height of wildfire season, it is more important than ever for all of us to work together to minimize risks to our communities and natural resources."

Drought can be defined across a spectrum of conditions and impacts. Meteorological drought

occurs when dry weather patterns dominate an area. Soil moisture droughts are a function of dry weather patterns in combination with temperatures, soil types, and time of year, and they impact plants and crops.

Water supply droughts relate to reduced and stressed drinking water supply sources. Meteorological and soil moisture drought can begin and end rapidly, while water supply drought takes much longer to develop and then recover from.

February saw average precipitation across most of the state, but the state experienced below-average precipitation from September 2024 through January 2025. During the past 90 days, precipitation has been up to 1.7 inches below normal in parts of the state.

Even more concerning, all regions of the state are between 26 percent to 50 percent below normal precipitation over the past 180 days, with deficits ranging up to nearly 10 inches. The stress is being felt in the reservoir systems that serve the densely populated northern and coastal regions of the state. For current trends, visit dep.nj.gov/drought/current-conditions/#reservoir-levels.

While there have been slight improvements in meteorological drought conditions, New Jersey's water supplies have not

fully recovered from the impacts of longer-term precipitation deficits. Weekly updates on New Jersey's drought warning status may be found at www.njdrought.org

"The DEP continues to closely monitor drought conditions that began late last summer that have placed stresses on reservoirs and groundwater supplies across the state," said State Geologist Steven Domber. "The DEP uses region-specific indicators to gauge the impacts that significantly reduced precipitation has had on water supplies. These include reservoir levels, stream flows, and levels in shallow groundwater sources, known as unconfined aquifers, which are important in the longer-term replenishment of streams and reservoirs."

Drought and Wildfire Preparedness

During a Feb. 13 roundtable with local officials in the wildfire-prone Pinelands region, Governor Phil Murphy and Commissioner LaTourette announced a series of actions dubbed NJ Wildfire SMART to emphasize the importance of collaborative approaches and public awareness to protect lives, properties, and communities from wildfire risks. Following the meeting, the Administration proposed an increase of \$1 million

Article Cont'd On Pg 9

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Murphy Administration Urges Wildfire Awareness And Water Conservation As Drought Conditions Persist Heading Into Spring - CONTINUED

in funding for wildfire preparedness and suppression in the budget for Fiscal Year 2026, which begins July 1, 2025.

The Forest Fire Service has responded to a marked increase in wildfires since the onset of the state's abnormally dry period in September 2024, which saw one of the busiest fall wildfire seasons on record, with 798 wildfires burning 4,847 acres. And since Jan. 1, the Forest Fire Service has responded to 381 wildfires statewide burning a total of 1,242 acres – a 266 percent increase in wildfires compared to the same period last year. Three of these wildfires were classified as “major wildfires,” each burning more than 100 acres.

The first fire was in the area of Fort Mott Road in Pennsville Township, Salem County, burning 377 acres before containment on March 1. The second, also on March 1, was in the area of Poor Farm Road in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, burned 293 acres and became the largest wildfire in Mercer County since the Forest Fire Service began keeping records in 1906. The third wildfire occurred on March 12 in Franklin Township, Gloucester County, threatening 60 homes and burning 191 acres before being contained the next morning. The causes of these fires remain under investigation.

Spring Wildfire Conditions and Prescribed Fires Mid-March to Mid-May

is typically peak wildfire season in New Jersey. At this time of year, trees and underbrush are still leafing out, relative humidity is generally low, and windy days are common. The combination of these factors means forested lands dry out quickly, particularly in the Pinelands of southern New Jersey. The sandy and porous soils in this vast region do not retain moisture for long, exacerbating drying and increasing the potential for a fire to spark only hours after rainfall.

In addition to leading to an early start to the season, the drought has had a significant impact on the ability of the Forest Fire Service to conduct prescribed fire operations over the winter. The application of prescribed fire is the practice of purposely setting fire to forests, grasslands and marshlands under well-defined and strategically planned conditions to achieve land management objectives, including reducing fuels that can exacerbate wildfires and managing healthy ecosystems. Through prescribed fire, the Forest Fire Service reduces risk to New Jersey residents, visitors, property and the environment.

“Prescribed fire plays a critical role in reducing wildfire risks, but persistent dry conditions have made it increasingly difficult to implement a prescribed fire at the intended scale,” said Bill Donnelly, State Firewar-

den and Chief of the Forest Fire Service. “Despite the challenges, the Forest Fire Service remains focused on utilizing all available tools to protect New Jersey’s communities.”

Information about wildfire risks and mitigation has become especially critical for people who live within or next to forested areas, also known as the wildland-urban interface. The Forest Fire Service continues to develop and enhance information tools in support of fire mitigation and detection:

The New Jersey Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal compiles data and resources to assist residents, community leaders and fire professionals in taking actions to mitigate the threat of wildfire risk around their property and in their community. Wildfire intensity modeling data and preparedness resources presented in the portal were developed by the nation’s wildfire experts, with Forest Fire Service personnel providing practical and local information, such as the impact of forest management practices on wildfire risk.

The NJ Fire Danger Dashboard is updated frequently by the Forest Fire Service as conditions dictate. These updates include a fire danger rating by county, a color-coded index of different fire danger ratings and a snapshot view of risk by county. The dashboard also displays any current

campfire restrictions that may be implemented depending on fire weather conditions such as high winds or prolonged dry periods.

In addition to these online resources, the Forest Fire Service is committed to issuing timely social media updates to inform the public and media about developing and ongoing wildfires classified as major or as complex incidents.

Major wildfires are defined as at least 100 acres in size. Fires smaller than 100 acres that result in road closures, threaten structures, or otherwise impact developed properties are known as complex incidents.

In the event of either a major wildfire or a complex smaller fire, real-time updates will be posted on the Forest Fire Service’s Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) accounts. Posts will pro-

vide essential information including the wildfire’s size, containment status, road closures, evacuations and types of resources responding to the fire. Posts will also include the approximate time of the next expected update.

Most wildfires can be avoided by adhering to commonsense safety tips:

-Don’t discard cigarettes, matches or smoking materials on the ground.

-Use indoor wood stoves and fireplaces carefully – both can emit embers that spark fires. Fully douse ashes with water before disposal.

-When towing a trailer, ensure chains are not dragged on the road, which can create sparks that fly into nearby vegetation, igniting a wildfire.

-Be mindful of where you park or drive your vehicle. Hot exhaust systems can ignite dry vege-

tation if parked or driven over.

-Be careful when cutting grass or using yard tools. Power tools like lawnmowers and chainsaws can throw off sparks that ignite dry grass or leaves.

-Keep matches and lighters away from children and teach youth about fire safety. Children can learn about wildfire safety with Smokey Bear’s mobile game Smokey’s Scouts.

-Contact your nearest Forest Fire Service office about how to obtain a Campfire Permit.

To learn more about wildfires in New Jersey, steps to protect property, and other resources, visit www.njwildfire.org; Like the Forest Fire Service’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NJForestFireService; and follow the Forest Fire Service on X (formerly Twitter) @njdepforestfire and Instagram @newjerseyforestfire

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Local Restaurant Looking to Partner with Businesses and the Community to Provide Hot Meals for Those in Need

Willie Mae's Place is continuing its mission to give back to the community through its Monday Meal Sponsorship Program, providing hot, hearty lunches to individuals in need at the Street 2 Feet Day Shelter in Stroudsburg, PA.

Since launching this initiative in January, Willie Mae's Place has successfully completed four food donations, ensuring that those experiencing homelessness or food insecurity have access to warm, nourishing meals. This ongoing effort is made possible through the support of generous sponsors, including Full Circle Removal, DC Drywall & Finishing, Believe the Bullet LLC, Love Light Consulting, and Willie Mae's Place as well.

"We're incredibly grateful for the businesses and individuals who have stepped up to make this possible," said Shantelle



Davis, owner of Willie Mae's Place. "A warm meal can make a world of difference, and we're committed to keeping this effort going as long as we have support."

How It Works:

- Donations are made directly to Street 2 Feet, which then covers the cost of the meals prepared by Willie Mae's Place.

- Once the cost of the meals is covered, any additional donations go directly to Street 2 Feet to support their ongoing programs and services for those in need.

- For \$250, sponsors can

provide meals for up to 50 individuals, ensuring they receive a nourishing, restaurant-quality meal.

Willie Mae's Place is actively seeking additional sponsors to help sustain and expand this initiative. No donation is too small, and businesses or individuals interested in making an impact can reach out to learn more about sponsoring a future Monday meal.

For more information on how to get involved, please contact Willie Mae's Place at 570-817-1582 or visit willie-maesplace.com.

Senator Lisa Boscola Seeks Sales Tax Holiday for School Supplies

Senator Lisa M. Boscola (D-Northampton) announced she will soon introduce legislation to provide a sales tax holiday on school supplies. Aimed at combatting the effects of inflation, this bill would provide targeted tax relief on items commonly found on back-to-school shopping lists, such as book bags, crayons, textbooks, and tablets.

The legislation would establish a sales tax holiday to take place annually, from the first Saturday in August through the third Saturday in August. During this two-week holiday, school supplies, art supplies and instructional materials with a sales price of not more than \$50 per item would be exempt from state sales tax. Personal computers and tablets with a sales price of not more than \$1,500 per item would also be exempt.

"Inflation has really hit Pennsylvanians hard," Boscola said. "Everyone is feeling the effects of it, but working families with children, really feel the pinch. I think it makes sense if we can help just a little bit, we should do it."

Every student needs new supplies heading into a new school year. Many teachers dig into



their own pockets around this time to have extra supplies for their students in the classroom. It is unavoidable. The average K-5th grader back-to-school list in Pennsylvania contains at least 17 items. Boscola's proposal aims to make these items tax-free for shoppers during the holiday, so students show up ready to learn on day one.

"My goal with this legislation is to get relief to these families and teachers at the right moment – the first couple of weeks in August are when most students in Pennsylvania are gearing up to head back to school," Boscola added. "To me, this is a commonsense proposal to ease the pressure on working families. I'm hopeful we can get this done for Pennsylvania."



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Shapiro Administration Stocks Trout in Pennsylvania Waterways, Prepare Campgrounds Ahead of Opening Day of Trout Season



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Hantavirus in Pennsylvania and Surrounding States

Hantaviruses are a family of viruses that have caused serious illnesses and death in people worldwide, including Pennsylvania, where the last known case was in 2022.

“Hantavirus’s role in the recent tragic death of the actor Gene Hackman and his wife provides an opportunity to educate the public about this virus and implications for re-

sidents in our area,” said Jeffrey Jahre, MD, St. Luke’s Senior Vice President of Medical & Academic Affairs and Section Chief Emeritus of Infectious Diseases.

Although hantavirus disease is an uncommon illness in humans and is particularly rare in our region, it has been reported in 41 states including Pennsylvania and some sur-

rounding states, Jahre explained. It is transmitted to humans through contact with infected rodents or their excreta, primarily through inhalation of airborne particles including dust containing the virus.

Notably, the risk of exposure is elevated this time of year for people opening summer homes and hunting lodges since such dwellings are often

subject to rodent infestations during the winter. In the United States, deer mice are the most common vector, but other rodents including the white-footed mouse, rats and voles are also potential carriers. (There is no human-to-human transmission.)

Regions of the United States that have a higher incidence of hantavirus disease include the Southwest, particularly the Four Corners area of New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado, as well as the western states of California, Washington and Montana. An outbreak among the Navajo in 1993 led to disease’s recognition by the CDC and public health authorities. The specific hantavirus identified became known as Sin Nombre virus, which translates to “no name virus” and is often referred to by the acronym SNV.

The typical incubation period for hantavirus is two to three weeks followed by an onset of fever, chills and severe muscle aches. Common respiratory symptoms other than a cough are notably absent. Because the initial symptoms are nonspecific, they are unlikely to lead to the correct diagnosis if not also accompanied by a known history of recent rodent contact. Serologic testing is used



to confirm the diagnosis.

The cardiopulmonary phase of the disease is characterized by an abrupt onset of low blood pressure and a flooding of fluid in the lungs known as pulmonary edema which, without immediate ventilatory support, can lead to death. There is no other specific treatment other than supportive measures.

As with other viral diseases with a high fatality rate, prevention is key. The following are steps to minimize improper contact with rodents and their excreta including feces, saliva and urine:

Before entering a long vacant dwelling without protective gear, allow it to fully air out for at least 30 minutes.

Seal all potential rodent entry sites using steel wool or other impermeable material.

Use effective traps for rodents that may be present. Consult a professional for sealing and trapping if necessary.

Use effective protective gear including gloves,

goggles, properly fitted N95 or KN95 masks when handling dead rodents, nests or droppings and urine.

Do not sweep or vacuum the affected areas to avoid aerosolizing viral particles.

Wet down the contaminated areas with a dilute bleach solution of one part bleach to nine parts water or a recognized disinfectant and use paper towels to blot up the area.

Wash hands thoroughly after handling rodents or their waste products.

Properly dispose of used gloves, masks and contaminated materials in sealed bags.

Avoid camping in areas where rodents are known to be present.

If you experience flu like symptoms after exposure to rodents, seek immediate medical attention. For more information on the prevalence of hantavirus in Pennsylvania and other states, see the CDC hantavirus map: <https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/Hantavirus-caseView#!/Map>.

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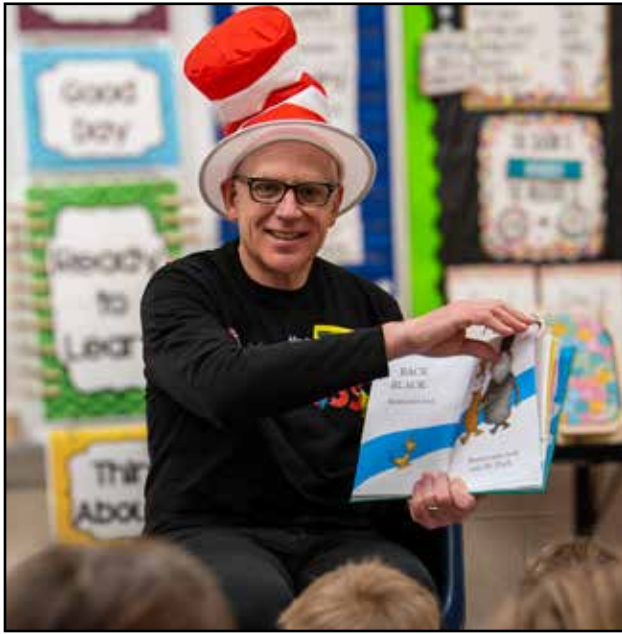
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Read Across America Initiative Continues Throughout St. Luke's Service Area



Since 2018, a team of volunteers from St. Luke's Monroe Campus has participated in Read Across America at Clear Run Elementary School. Read Across America provides an opportunity to further bring our St. Luke's staff and mentoring initiatives to our schools to demonstrate commitment to the communities we serve.

"We are honored to partner with the schools, as they play a vital role in fostering a love for reading – a skill which expands vocabulary, improves writing skills and develops critical thinking skills, all of which are key to achieving success," said Don Seiple, president of St. Luke's Monroe Campus.

"In 2023, we expanded the program to include one elementary school in each of the four Monroe County school districts: Stroudsburg, Pleasant Valley, Pocono Mountain and East Stroudsburg," Seiple added. "Through this partnership, we hope to play a small part in inspiring the students to discover the joy of rea-

ding and a lifelong love for books. Our team truly enjoys reading and interacting with the students, as each story shared becomes a steppingstone to a brighter future."

Read Across America, which officially began on the birthday of author Dr. Seuss (March 2), is dedicated to literacy and aims to encourage reading while educating people about its benefits. Reading and related activities were planned throughout the day on March 3 at St. Luke's Children's Hospital in Bethlehem.

Guest readers included Ralph Greco and Joe Swartz, author and illustrator of Echo City Capers children's books, and Margaret Place, a St. Luke's volunteer. They read books to pediatric patients in the playroom or in their rooms if they couldn't attend the playroom readings. Staff also distributed age-appropriate books and stuffed animals to pediatric patients who were hospitalized and those who came for outpatient procedures throughout the day. Several other Dr.

Seuss-themed activities took place.

St. Luke's Department of Community Health is partnering with more than two dozen schools throughout the community. More than 100 St. Luke's staff will read to approximately 10,000 of the Lehigh Valley's urban and rural students throughout the week.

St. Luke's identifies needs through its Community Health Needs Assessments and partners with school communities throughout the year to consistently connect students, staff and families to care, education and resources. Visit <https://www.slhn.org/community-health/community-health-needs-assessment> for more information.

Delivering Results: Senator Brown Publishes Complete List of Passed Laws



"I'm proud to have successfully passed several bipartisan laws during my time in the legislature, always prioritizing our district's needs."

- Senator Rosemary Brown [R-40]

Since being elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 2010 and later to the Pennsylvania State Senate in 2022, I have worked diligently to remain accessible, dedicated, and a common-sense problem-solver for our community. I am proud to have successfully passed several bipartisan laws during my time in the legislature, always prioritizing our district's needs. To showcase the work we've accomplished together, I've compiled a comprehensive list of the legislation I have personally authored. I invite you to review this list and see how we are making progress on issues critical to our community. View the list at: senatorbrown40.com/accomplishments

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Parents Can Help Improve Teens Reading with Better Resources

(NAPSI)—If you can read this, thank a teacher. And while you're at it you may be interested to learn that teachers, principals, curriculum and instruction leaders, chief academic officers, senior literacy leaders, and school supervisors hope to improve the effectiveness of their current adolescent literacy programs. The Problem - School district leaders are generally committed to integrating the science of reading principles into instruction. However, according to a recent survey from Lexia—a thought leader in liter-

acy education—60% are dissatisfied and believe schools lack the professional development, age-appropriate reading materials, and data needed to impact adolescent literacy outcomes. What The Survey Showed - More than half of survey respondents report that teacher training, time, and staffing are top concerns. Fifty-seven percent of district leaders say they need more professional development in the science of reading for middle- and high-school teachers, and 57% need more time in their sche-

dule to focus on literacy improvement because so many students are reading below or far below grade level. In addition, 55% report that attracting and retaining literacy educators is one of their greatest challenges. The school leaders also state that, based on feedback from teachers and students, several other aspects of their adolescent literacy programs need improvement as well. Thirty-six percent of respondents say they need better literacy teaching strategies, 33% need more age-appropriate materials for adolescent readers, and

32% need real-time data to improve their implementation plan. The survey also reveals gaps in support for students with dyslexia and emergent bilinguals. More than half of respondents (57%) are not confident that intervention strategies are adequate for successful outcomes for adolescent readers, and 52% need more teachers on staff who can support secondary English language learners. An Answer - "The survey findings indicate that while a majority of leaders are committed to aligning literacy

resources with the science of reading, many districts need more support and guidance to translate these principles into effective classroom practices for adolescent students," said Lexia President Nick Gaehde. "For the past 40 years we've been focused on transforming literacy education and delivering research-based solutions grounded in the science of reading. We combine high-quality teaching resources with professional learning that's tailored to the specialized needs of middle and high school students, so districts can deliver pro-

grams that are more impactful and lead to stronger adolescent literacy outcomes." Gaehde continued, "With our comprehensive suite of professional learning curricula, solutions, and embedded assessment solutions, we continue to stand ready to help schools connect educator knowledge with practical classroom instruction to accelerate literacy gains so more learners can read, write and speak with confidence." For further data, to see the full survey or for an infographic on the issue, parents and educators can visit lexialearning.com.



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Help Wanted Must Have Taken CDL Endorsment Class A or B Benefits Offered & Vacation Time Apply by Calling 610-759-3290

Saturday & Day Shift Servers Wanted At Hunter's Lodge in New Jersey Please Call 610-888-6613

Part Time Tree Helper Wanted! Must Have Valid DL. Call 610-588-1034 TS

CDL & LABORERS WANTED

Henry Yeska & Son Septic Service Hiring CDL Drivers Class A & B and Laborers. Full time & part time available. Experience preferred but not required. Will train on the job. Please call the office at 610-759-3290. TS

Looking for an Experienced Sewing Person Needed for Creative Private Label. High Fashion, Custom Clothing Studio. Part Time in Blairstown, NJ. Call Julia at 610-573-8313 or email: julia.robin.rutherford@gmail.com

NOW HIRING FOR 2024 SEASON! Ground Men, Climbers & CDL Drivers Needed Call Us at 570-807-7746

Part time Outdoor Educators wanted - training provided. Flexible hours. Pays \$17 per hour. Call Sara at 908-362-8217.

Housekeeper Wanted. Flexible hours. Pays \$16 per hour. Call Alison at 908-362-8217.

Firewood

Seasoned Firewood \$190/cord \$95/half cord 570-202-6902

Firewood for Sale. \$120 pick up truck load. Call Craig Wickett at 610-599-6882. Pick Up Only No Delivery!

Firewood for Sale. Mixed Seasoned Hardwoods. \$450 per dump truck load. approx. 1 3/4 cord. Free delivery within 10mi radius. Call Craig Wickett at 610-599-6882 or 610-442-2996.

FIREWOOD Cut-Split-Delivered \$210 a Cord 570-202-6902

Firewood for sale \$200 a cord All different sizes 14, 16 or 18 inches long. Call 610-588-7513

Rentals

10 x 20 Garage for Rent! Electric Overhead Door w/ Concrete Floor. \$125/mo. William St., Pen Argyl. Call 484-330-0093



MISSING
DO NOT CHASE / CALL OUT
Bushkill Twp, Wind Gap, PA
Neutered/Microchipped

KnowCrisis Pet Recovery

484-894-4523

Classified Ad Order Form

All Classified ads are \$15 per week, per inch, with the exception of Yard Sale ads, which are \$5. There is no charge for items being listed as FREE. Please specify the category in which you would like you ad to appear (ex: Help Wanted, Real Estate, Rentals, Vehicle...Etc.) Please specify which size ad, and how many weeks you wish to run. PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.

Ads with Photos! \$20

NAME: _____

PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CATEGORY: _____

WEEKS RUNNING: _____ AMOUNT PAID: _____

Please PRINT Your Ad Information Below

One inch (actual size shown here)

Two inches (actual size shown here)

CLASSIFIEDS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN NOON ON FRIDAY IN ORDER TO BE PRINTED IN THE UPCOMING EDITION. All classified ads must be paid in full, in advance. Credit cards are NOT accepted for charges less than \$25 CLASSIFIED ADS CAN BE SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL TO: THEPRESSADS@GMAIL.COM OR BY MAIL TO: THE FREE WEEKLY PRESS, PO BOX 606, BANGOR, PA 18013 Help Wanted ads are free for current advertisers. Classifieds are NOT accepted by phone Make Checks Payable to: The Free Weekly Press, LLC

LOOKING TO GET THE WORD OUT BUT KEEP ADVERTISING COSTS LOW? Contact Melissa for ONLINE ONLY Advertising options at thepressads@gmail.com

LVMSBL (Ages 58+)
(Lehigh Valley Mens Senior Baseball League)
Riegelsville Reds
are looking for:
Pitchers, Catchers, & Outfielders This is a wood bat, hardball league. Major League Rules.
Call/Leave Message for Coach Greg at 484-894-4524

*You May Bloom Where
You're Planted
...but We Can Help You
Grow Locally*

Spring Sale

1/4PG ADS FOR \$125
3X3 ADS ONLY \$65
2X4 ADS ONLY \$45
NOW - APRIL 30TH

EMAIL THEPRESSADS@GMAIL.COM FOR DETAIL AND OTHER PRICING OPTIONS!

HUNTER'S LODGE RESTAURANT & MOTEL

64 Rt. 46, Columbia, NJ • 908-475-0060 • We Are Open 11am-11pm • 7 Days a Week



Serving Breakfast at 11am



Steamed Clams



LEGENDARY STEAKS!



Martini Monday! \$5 Wells



Taco Tuesday! \$7.99

Motel Rooms: \$95/Night; \$500/Week; \$1,150/Mo.
Includes: A/C & Heat, WiFi, Dish Network, Trash, Parking, Small Fridge & Microwave.
Call 610-888-6613 For Motel Rooms!

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