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April 23, 2026

GOD BLESS AMERICA

Vol. 53, No. 37

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## Bangor Area High School Puts On An Exceptional Rendition Of The Phantom of The Opera



The Bangor Area High School Theatre Department chose "The Phantom of The Opera" as their Spring Musical this year, which ran April 17th - April 19th, and what a show! The Phantom was played by Nicholas Janneck and Christine Daaé was played by McKayla Angus. The entire cast and crew put on an exceptional performance. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

## Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce Proudly Announces 2026 Scholarship Winners

The Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce the following 2026 Scholarship Award winners:  
Pen Argyl Area High School – Ella Mamaña; Bangor Area High School – Liam Hayes; Faith Christian School – Daniella Fortuna; and Career Institute of Technology – Abigail Coleman.  
The Frederick R. Curcio Jr. Scholarship Award winner is Bangor Area High School student Alexander Hobson-Garcia.

The winners will be recognized, and scholarships presented at an awards dinner Tuesday, May 12th at 6:00pm at Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center in Mount Bethel. Registration for this event can be completed on [www.slatebeltchamber.org/events](http://www.slatebeltchamber.org/events)  
The Chamber scholarship committee thanks the many hardworking students that applied this year and wish all seniors the best of luck as they enter this new and exciting chapter after high school!

## Pen Argyl Hosts Bangor in Slate Belt Rivalry Track and Field Meet



Pen Argyl took on Bangor in Girls & Boys Track and Field on April 14th. The Pen Argyl boys beat Bangor, 88 to 62, and the Pen Argyl girls also won, 81 to 69. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

## Local Non-Profit Celebrates 20 Years of Helping Children

Tri County Care Management Organization (TCCMO) marked 20 years of service to youth and families in Warren, Hunterdon and Somerset Counties in a big way, with a special anniversary celebration last month.  
For the past two decades, TCCMO has worked alongside many dedicated partners to support youth with complex behavioral, emotional, social, developmental, and mental health needs. Its vision has always been to help build a healthier community where youth and families can thrive. To



facilitate that, TCCMO takes a family-focused and community-based leadership role in supporting those needs.

With over 120 people in attendance, guests included community partners and supportive  
*TCCMO cont'd on pg 2*

## Pen Argyl Takes On Palmerton High School In Baseball



Pen Argyl went head to head against Palmerton High School in baseball on April 13th, however, Palmerton defeated Pen Argyl, 1 to 0. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press



# TCCMO

Continued from page 1

legislators, current and former families, along with TCCMO Board members, staff, and management team members. They joined together to recognize and celebrate the lasting impact of their collective efforts on the lives of youth and families across their community.

After a short welcome message, Deja Amos, TCCMO Chief Development Officer, introduced the first speaker, Jack Auzinger. He is serving his first term on the TCCMO Board of Directors and works with the DCF (NJ Department of Children and Families) Youth

Council, advocating for youth voices. Auzinger is also a student at Rutgers Newark.

James Parauda, TCCMO Chief Executive Officer, shared a brief history of Tri County, noting that TCCMO was incorporated and started serving families in 2006. Back then there were 3,000 children statewide in the system of care. Today there are over 18,000 children receiving services through CMOs. In 2006, TCCMO only had 200 families as part of its contract. By 2012 that number grew to about 430 families. Over time even more families were in need of help with over 900 children in Warren, Hunterdon and Somerset currently

being served.

Parauda presented Senator Andrew Zwicker the Youth Mental Health Award. Zwicker noted, "I am honored to accept an award from the Tri County CMO. This organization is dedicated to supporting youth facing mental health challenges and the work they do makes a real difference for the children who need it most. I'm proud to be a partner in their mission."

Zwicker's introduction into mental health and substance abuse issues came from a parent he met early in his career. This person explained the many challenges parents face. He knew that whether it was through legislation or joining the Disability

Caucus, he wanted to be part of making the lives of people facing a variety of issues better. He is a true advocate for mental health support, actively addressing mental health crises through legislative action and funding. "I am deeply troubled by the growing number of children and teenagers struggling with their mental health," said Zwicker. "We can, and we must, do more to ensure those in need of care are able to get it."

Other legislators in attendance were Assemblymen John DiMaio and Erik Peterson, as well as Elliot Schneier, representing Assemblywoman Michelle Drulis.

Speakers also included Leslie Brusser, former TCCMO chair, and Joey Lannigan, formerly enrolled in CMO as a youth.

"I was given chances to figure things out for myself," Lannigan recalled. "I had people who knew what I needed, but they gave me the time and the tools to figure it out for myself." Lannigan, a long-time country music aficionado, writes, sings, and plays guitar. He recently signed a record deal and will be touring from Florida to Vermont for two months in the fall with his band

Joey Lannigan and The Spirits.

The celebration's sponsors – EPIC Insurance Brokers & Consultants and Clifton Larson Allen LLP – were recognized, along with a long list of community partners. Among the staff members highlighted for their many years of service was Nicole Russo, TCCMO community engagement coordinator, who has been with TCCMO for 19 years.

The event, held at Beaver Brook Country Club in Annandale on March 26, included two outstanding vocal performances by two young performers, one of whom is currently in the CMO. They received standing ovations from the boisterous audience. The youngsters study at the Sounds of Tomorrow, a vibrant community dedicated to inspiring artistic expression and fostering personal growth based in Somerset.

While the celebration was cause to reflect on 20 years of service, TCCMO is also looking ahead as they begin their third decade of supporting youth and their families. Parauda stated, "Tri County CMO is proud of our past 20 years and looks forward to our future as a member of the Asso-

ciation of New Jersey Care Management Organization. Our hope is to have all families in need access CMO services."

For those who want to get involved, tax deductible donations may be made to Tri County CMO – online at tricountycmo.org or by check payable to Tri County CMO and mailed to Tri County CMO, Attn: Deja Amos, Chief Development Officer, 3040 Rt. 22, Suite 210, Branchburg, NJ 08876

Tri County Care Management Organization is a 501(c) designated organization contracted with the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJ DCF).

Visit [www.tricountycmo.org](http://www.tricountycmo.org) for much more information on its myriad services.

Founded in 2005, Tri County Care Management Organization, a member of NJCMO, understands that the health, wellness, and safety of the family matters. In affiliation with their system of care and community partners, they bring together resources to meet the current needs of children and their families with complex behavioral, emotional, social, and mental health challenges at no cost to families.

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# The PRESS

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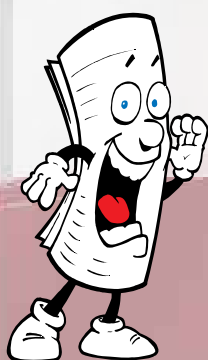
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## Kean, Gottheimer Introduce Resolution Raising Awareness for Rare Genetic Disorder, Shwachman-Diamond Syndrome

Congressman Tom Kean, Jr. (NJ-07) and Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-05) introduced a bipartisan resolution designating November 7 of each year as National Shwachman Diamond Syndrome Awareness Day. Shwachman-Diamond syndrome (SDS) is a rare genetic condition affecting an estimated 2,000 Americans that impairs the body's bone marrow, pancreas, and skeleton, and can lead to an increased risk of blood disorders including acute myeloid leukemia.

"For those living with incredibly rare conditions like SDS, shining a spotlight is the first step toward promoting research and advancing treatment," said Congressman Tom Kean, Jr. "Joyce Fitz, a Linden resident, has dedicated herself to fighting for recognition for her community, and

when she came to my office with this idea, it was clear we needed to spread awareness on the national level. Every individual living with SDS deserves to have their daily fight recognized, and I am proud to lead this bipartisan effort to make that a reality."

"Families facing rare diseases like Shwachman-Diamond Syndrome don't have time to wait — and neither can we. We must boost funding for research and strengthen and expand clinical trials," said Congressman Josh Gottheimer. "I am proud to fight for this bipartisan and common-sense legislation. Families can't wait. We have a responsibility to push forward until we deliver real hope — and ultimately, a cure."

"As a young advocate living with Shwachman Diamond Syndrome I know what it means to

face a rare disease with no cure and limited treatment options," said Joyce Fitz. "Patients and families tackle the daily burdens of complex medical care and uncertainty living with a condition most medical professionals have never even heard of."

"It means the world to me that when I spoke up for my SDS community, Congressman Tom Kean, Jr. truly listened and chose to stand by me on this journey towards bringing national recognition to this disease. Establishing a National Shwachman Diamond Syndrome Awareness Day is the first step to ensure my community is seen, while bringing us one step closer to the research, treatments, and ultimately a cure that patients are waiting for," Joyce added.

Shwachman-Diamond syndrome (SDS) affects an estimated 2,000 Americans, occurring in

approximately 1 in 80,000 newborns. Because the signs and symptoms of SDS can vary widely between patients, the condition is frequently under diagnosed and requires a combination of clinical evaluation, blood tests, and genetic testing. While treatments exist to manage symptoms and treat complications, there is currently no cure and SDS can shorten life expectancy.

The push for a national awareness day was driven by Joyce Fitz, a 17-year-old advocate from Linden, New Jersey and current senior at the Union County Academy of Allied Health and Sciences. Joyce was diagnosed with SDS after 19 months of seeking answers. For years, she has navigated bone marrow biopsies, specialist appointments, and the daily realities of living with a complex, immunocom-



promised condition. Joyce chose November 7 as the awareness date to celebrate the month the disease was first identified in 1964 and the most common gene mutation (7q11) associated with SDS. A similar resolution was also introduced in the New Jersey State Assembly earlier this year.

Congressman Kean is a member of the Congressional Rare Disease Caucus and serves on the Health Subcommittee of the House Energy & Commerce Committee.

The full text of the resolution can be viewed at: [kean.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/kean.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/kean-sds-resolution.pdf](http://kean.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/kean.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/kean-sds-resolution.pdf)

### New to the Bangor Public Library

#### Adult Fiction:

*Into the Blue: A love Story* by Emma Brodie; *Yesteryear: A Novel* by Caro Claire Burke; *One of Us* by Elizabeth Day; *Missing Sister: A Novel* by Joshilyn Jackson; *The Tempest Blade* by Danielle L. Jensen; *A Good Person: A Novel* by Kirsten King; *Whidbey: A Novel* by T. Kira Madden; *Rites of the Starling* by Devney Perry; *Ryder* by Jessica Peterson; *Revenge Prey* by John Sandford; *The Book Witch: A Novel* by Meg Shaffer; *American Fantasy* by Emma Straub; *The News From Dublin: Stories* by Colm Toibin

#### Adult Non Fiction:

*Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones* by James Clear; *The New Perimenopause: An Evidence-Based Guide to Surviving the Zone of Chaos and Feeling Like Yourself Again* by Mary Claire Haver; *London Falling: A Mysterious Death in a Gilded City and a Family's Search for Truth* by Patrick Radden Keefe; *The Book of Pizza: Recipes for Every Pizza Maker* by Martin Philip; *In a World of Sunrises: Heart, Soul & Hope Every Day* by Cleo Wade

#### Large Print Adult Fiction:

*Judge Stone: A Novel* by Viola Davis; *Revenge Prey* by John Sandford;

*Served him Right* by Lisa Unger

#### Junior Fiction:

*Captain Underpants: The First Epic Manga* by Dav Pilkey; *Lightfall: A Place Between* by Tim Probert

#### Young Adult Non Fiction:

*Used or Abused?: Advocating for Animal Rights* by Alexis Burling; *Walls and Welcome Mats: Immigration and the American Dream* by Lars Ortiz; *Dollars and Sense: A Teen Guide to Managing Money* by Nicholas Suivski; *Cryptocurrencies and the Blockchain Revolution: Bitcoin and Beyond* by Brendan January; *How to End Homelessness* by Nick Hunter; *The Ultimate Scholarship Book 2026: Billions of Dollars in Scholarships, Grants and Prizes* by Gen Tanabe; *To the Stars: The Story of NASA* by Ron Miller; *Bang!: The Art, History, and Science of Fireworks* by Ron Miller

DVDs:  
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### New to the Blue Mountain Community Library

The library is located at 216 S. Robinson Ave. in Pen Argyl. Open hours are Monday-Saturday 10am-12pm and Monday and Thursday 6-8pm. Questions? Call 610-863-3029 or email [info@bmcl.org](mailto:info@bmcl.org).

#### April is Volunteer Appreciation Month.

A huge thank you to the library's dedicated volunteers. The library is in need of more adult volunteers for all shifts. This is a great opportunity to serve the community and meet like-minded individuals! Commitment involves just 4.5 hours each month. No special skills are required. All training is provided. Pick up an application at the circulation desk.

Stop in today to see our new mascot: a beautiful little blue fish! Thank you to Waters Edge Aquarium for donating him and to an anonymous donor for donating his bowl, food, and supplies. Through April 18, anyone can suggest a name for the fish. Then through April 30, everyone can vote for a name.

Try the new scavenger hunt for children, with lots of new prizes in the prize basket - plus a scavenger hunt for adults and young adults! Deadline is April 30, with a prize drawn from all correct entries.

Book group for adults is April 14 at 6:30pm, discussing *The God of the Woods*. Register by emailing [info@bmcl.org](mailto:info@bmcl.org). A silent auction will be held from April 10 through May 6. We have many great Mother's Day gifts. Library membership is not required to bid.

#### New to the circulating collection:

##### Adult fiction:

-*The Astral Library* (Kate Quinn); *Cold Zero* (Brad Thor); *The Crossroads* (C.J. Box); *More than Enough* (Anna Quindlen); *The Viper* (Brad Meltzer); *Cleopatra* (Saara El-Arifi); *The Castaways* (Lucy Clarke); *The Devil's Bible* (Steve Berry); *A Mother's Love* (Danielle Steel); *The Girls We Sent Away* (Meagan Church); *How to Read a Book* (Monica Wood); *The Life Cycle of the Common Octopus* (Emma Knight); *When I Kill You* (B.A. Paris); *If Two Are Dead* (Rick Mofina); *A Dead Draw* (Robert Dugoni); *The Right to Remain* (James Grippando)

##### Adult nonfiction:

*The Let Them Theory* (Mel Robbins); *Black Dahlia* (William J. Mann); *The Other Family Doctor* (Karen Fine)

##### Large print fiction:

*Nightcaps at the Beach House Hotel* (Judith Keim); *New Beginnings in Lavender Bay* (Michele Brouder)

##### Young Adult fiction:

*Beth Is Dead* (Katie Bernet); *A Tribute of Fire* (Sariah Wilson); *A Vow of Embers* (Sariah Wilson); *A Curse of Ashes* (Sariah Wilson);

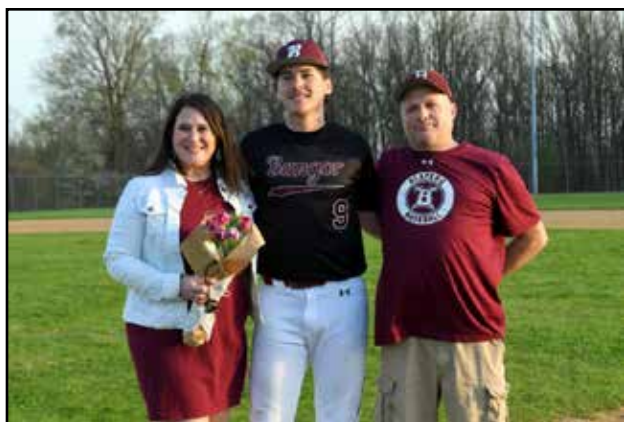
##### Juvenile fiction:

*The New Class* (Swapna Reddy); *Sparkling Steps* (Sue Bentley); *Pete at the Beach* (James Dean); *A Bear, a Man, and a Donut Van* (Daniel Bernstrom); *Fox and the Mystery Letter* (Alex G. Griffiths)

##### Juvenile nonfiction:

*Who Was Nellie Bly?* (Margaret Gurevich); *What Was the Hindenburg?* (Janet B. Pascal); *Minecraft Construction Handbook* (Matthew Needler); *Minecraft Combat Handbook* (Stephanie Milton); *Who Was Ruth Bader Ginsburg?* (Patricia Brennan Demuth); *Who Is Malala Yousafzai?* (Dinah Brown); *The Wonder of Easter* (Matt Mitter)

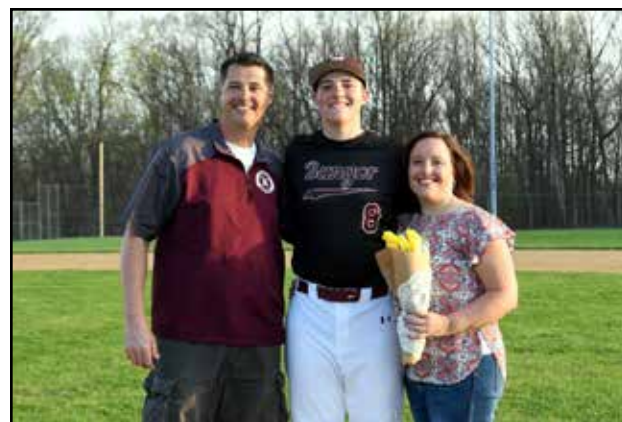
# BANGOR (10) VS MORAVIAN ACADEMY (5) SENIOR NIGHT BASEBALL



Gino Merlo with his parents, Eric and Bernadette Merlo



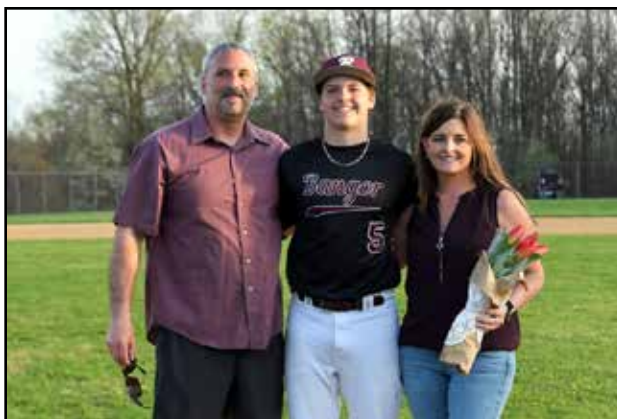
Austin Richards with his parents, Eric and Jennifer Richards



Owen Mera with his parents, Michael and Amy Richards



Dalton Pascoe with his parents, William and Kimberly Pascoe



Gavin Pysher with his parents, Brian and Nicole Pysher.



Photos by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

## Northampton County Seeks Poll Workers for Upcoming Elections

Northampton County Elections Division is seeking registered voters who live in Northampton County to serve as poll workers for the up-

coming Primary Election on Tuesday, May 19th, and General Election on Tuesday, November 3rd. Every year, elections in Northampton County are

made possible by citizens who step up to serve. Poll workers play a critical role in ensuring elections run smoothly by assisting voters, managing check-in processes, and helping facilitate the voting experience at polling locations across the County. Poll workers are also responsible for closing out the polling place at the end of the night and returning materials to

the Elections Office. The County relies on these individuals to uphold fair, accurate, and secure elections. All poll workers are required to attend a mandatory training prior to Election Day and are compensated for both training and service. Workers may earn between \$175 and \$200 on Election Day, depending on assignment and train-

ing. Election Day typically runs from 6:30 a.m. until after polls close at 8 p.m. Additional compensation and mileage reimbursement are provided for those who return supplies to the Government Center. The easiest way to get started is by completing the Pennsylvania Department of State's poll worker interest form online at: [www.pa.gov/services/vote/apply-to-become-an-election-poll-worker](http://www.pa.gov/services/vote/apply-to-become-an-election-poll-worker).

Individuals who submit the form will have their information sent directly to the Northampton County Elections Division for consideration. You may also contact the Northampton County Elections Division at: [elections@norcopa.gov](mailto:elections@norcopa.gov) or 610-829-6260 for more information. Serving as a poll worker is a direct way to support your community and strengthen the integrity of our elections.

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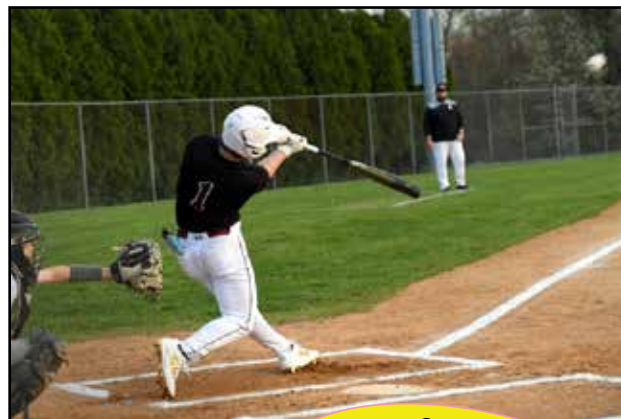
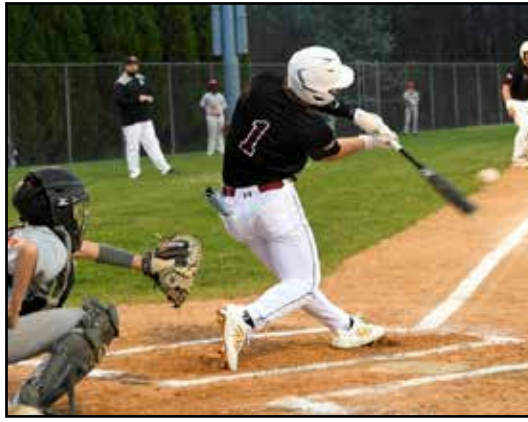
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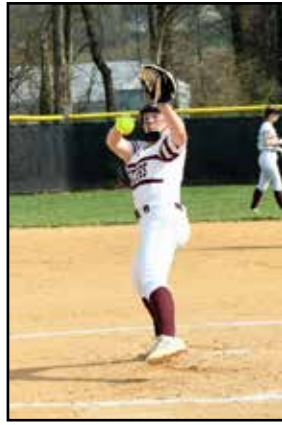
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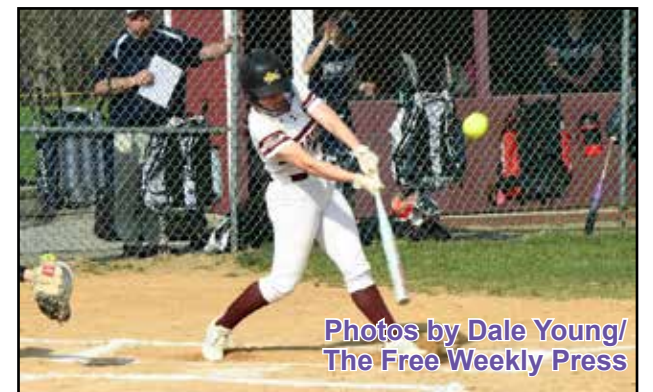
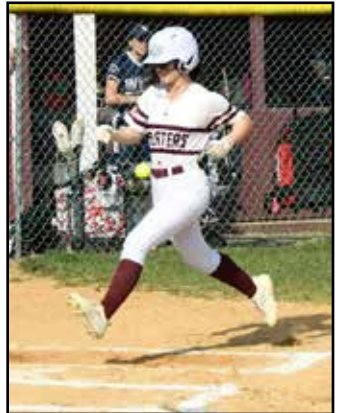
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# BANGOR (5) VS POCONO MOUNTAIN WEST (0) SOFTBALL



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Photos by Dale Young/  
The Free Weekly Press

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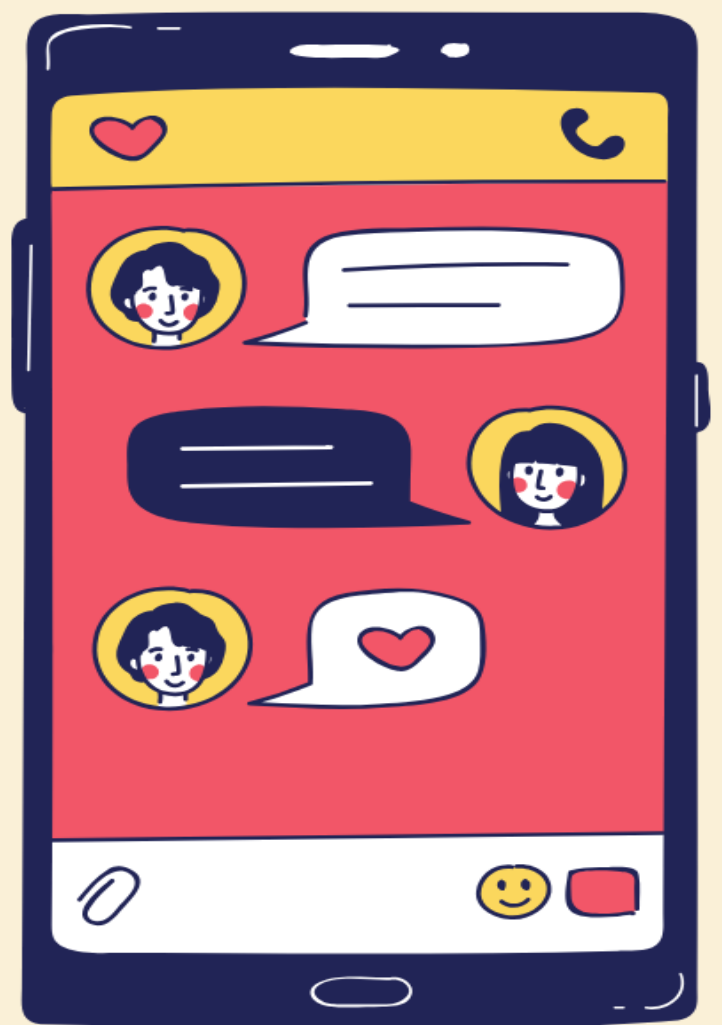


Now-April 30th



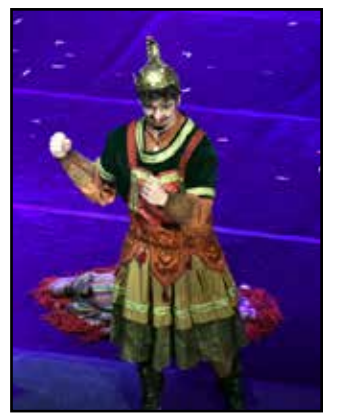
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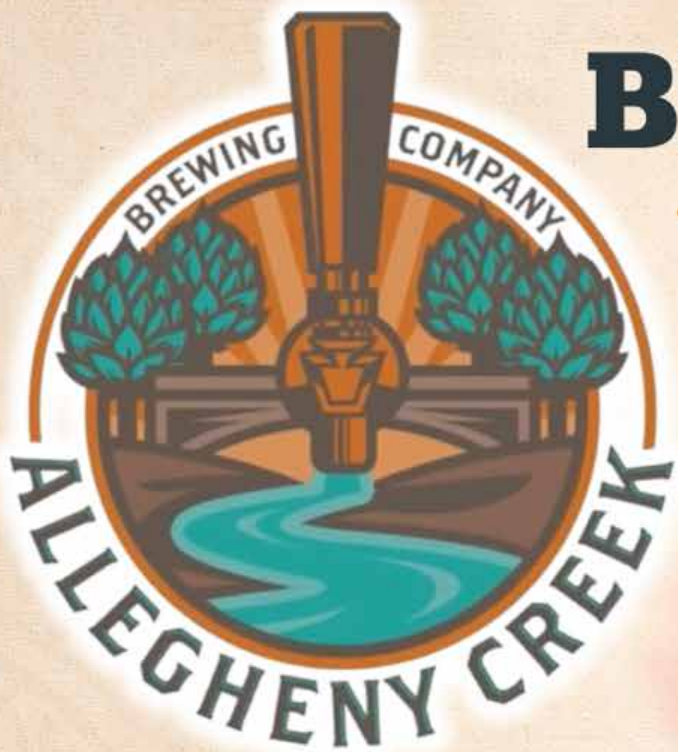


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# BANGOR HIGH SCHOOL PRESENTS: THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA



Photos by Dale Young/  
The Free Weekly Press



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### Garden Dilemmas? Ask Mary?



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(Prunus subhirtella ‘Pendula’) is actually a combination of hardy Sargent Cherry roots, a Yoshino Cherry trunk, and a Higan Cherry canopy. The graft is typically just below the crown, where the tree’s branching begins.

We planted the weeping cherry to replace another that failed in the same spot, likely because it was planted incorrectly. You’ve seen it: the all-too-common “mulch volcano.” Not only unsightly, but it’s also harmful. Excess mulch piled against the trunk holds moisture, inviting rot, insects, and disease.

Sometimes what appears to be a mulch volcano is actually a tree planted too shallowly. Sadly, I’ve even seen professionals plant this way. Root girdling often follows, as roots circle the trunk and constrict it, cutting off water and nutrients. It’s like wearing something too tight—everything gets restricted. Roots wrap inward rather than outward, slowly suffocating the plant.



When planting, give your tree (or shrub or perennial) the right start. Dig a hole two to three times as wide as the root ball, but no deeper. Amend with organic matter, compacting the soil slightly to remove air pockets, and avoid fertilizing at planting, as it can increase stress. Once planted, apply two to three inches of natural hardwood mulch, keeping it away from the trunk.

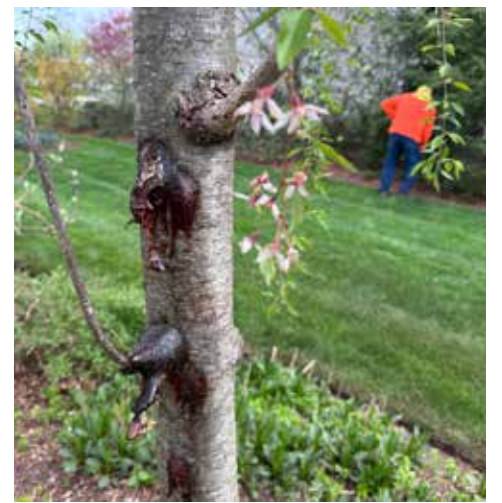
The oozing sap I noticed is called gummosis—a tree’s distress signal. Trees don’t “bleed” without reason. Often, the cause is a canker, bacterial or fungal, that enters



through a wound from a pruning cut, winter injury, or even a nick from a string trimmer. Pathogens are opportunists, waiting for an opening.

Now here’s where the story takes a turn. Recall how we spoke about newly planted plants tend to sleep the first year, creep the second, then leap the third. We installed the tree only three years ago, and last year it began to leap. This spring, its leaves are coming in sparse. That detail feels important.

When two trees falter in the same spot, it’s rarely a coincidence. It suggests something lin-



gering below the surface. Perhaps compacted soil, poor drainage, roots impeded by a shale shelf, or a persistent soil issue.

In this case, the “bleeding” is limited to a side branch, which is reassuring. I sent photos to my go-to arborist, Dave Dubee. He believes that by fertilizing and applying a copper-based fungicide along the trunk, the tree will recover.

If the bleeding is coming from a branch, you can prune the affected branch back to healthy wood, clean your tools thoroughly, and dispose of the debris in the trash (not compost). Then support the tree with proper watering and careful mulching to reduce stress.

But sometimes what we see above ground is only a symptom of something unresolved beneath. In the garden—

as in life—when something falters more than once, it’s worth pausing. Looking a little deeper and asking not just what is happening, but why here? The tree, after all, is telling a story. Maybe it’s not the right place for it to thrive.

I’m reminded of a weeping cherry that began to revert—sending up straight, vigorous branches from below its graft. At the time, I wrote about how we can carefully prune the reverted branches back into harmony with the tree’s grafted weeping form. But I also couldn’t help but feel empathy for the tree wishing to return to the origin of its roots.

Perhaps something we all wish to do too.

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## St. Luke's Leads the Way in Sepsis Prevention

Sepsis is one of the deadliest conditions a hospital patient can encounter. St. Luke's University Health Network, based in Bethlehem, Pa., is one of the nation's leaders in helping to prevent it.

St. Luke's uses a dynamic mix of both human and artificial intelligence (AI) monitoring to achieve some of the best sepsis compliance and sepsis survival rates in the nation.

"We utilize the Epic Sepsis Model - predictive AI - in the background, along with programming engineered by St. Luke's, to monitor every patient every moment of the day for rising risk," said Charles Sunday, St. Luke's Associate Chief Medical Information Officer. "If a patient rises above a certain threshold ... an alert goes to both the provider and the nurse to examine that patient and begin treatment."

This unique approach to preventing and treating sepsis is one of the factors that contributed to the Network being ranked #1 nationwide in quality, safety and patient experience by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Ser-

vices.

Across the Network, every patient in a medical-surgical unit is monitored around the clock. The vital signs, lab results, nursing notes and more are transmitted to a virtual response center staffed by registered nurses. When a patient starts meeting certain metric parameters, the care team knows long before it becomes an ICU emergency.

With survival rates climbing and unexpected ICU transfers declining, St. Luke's is showing what real world responsible medical AI looks like: always on and keeping patients safer without replacing the humans who care for them.

St. Luke's has engineered the use of these tools - combined with hands-on human response - to achieve top 10% results nationally in sepsis performance. St. Luke's fiscal year sepsis bundle compliant rate as determined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) was just under 88% compared to the national average of 64% and the Pennsylvania average of 61%.

"The sepsis bundle is a

list of elements that focus on very timely metrics," explained Diana Tarone, St. Luke's Senior Network Director of Quality. "We are checking to see if the patient is hypotensive and needs a vasopressor, what antibiotics are administered. It is a constant and consistent watching, monitoring and reassessing of the patient."

At the virtual response center - located off-site, simultaneously serving all St. Luke's hospital campuses - an array of computer monitors lists the patients and their vital signs, with the most at-risk rising to the top.

"It's a very complex list of factors and there has to be a lot of communication between the physician team, the advanced practitioner team and the nursing team," said Dr. Jennifer Axelband, St. Luke's Associate Medical Director of Critical Care Education. "We use AI monitoring in the background to help us stay compliant with these bundles because statistics show that if you stay compliant with the metrics established by CMS, it decreases patient mortality by 30%."

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# Sherrill Administration Kicks Off Earth Week By Announcing Partnership With Union City To Transform Vacant Building Into Parkland

Department of Environmental Protection Acting Commissioner Ed Potosnak today celebrated the start of Earth Week 2026 by announcing the joint acquisition of the site of a vacant building in Union City, Hudson County, that the city will transform into a youth soccer field. The acquisition will help deliver critically needed recreational space to one of the country's most densely populated communities.

Acting Commissioner Potosnak was joined at the site on Palisade Avenue by State Senator and Union City Mayor Brian Stack along with other state and local officials to mark the partnership with Union City and the DEP's Green Acres Program.

"Community revitalization happens one block at a time, one neighborhood at a time," Governor Mikie Sherrill said. "This project reminds us that Earth Week is a time to not only value the protection of open space and natural resources, but that green spaces come in all shapes and sizes and projects like this make our communities like Union City healthier and more livable. I commend Senator Brian Stack and Union City for partnering with the DEP to make this project possible, and for prioritizing the health and wellbeing of youth in our local communities."

"This Earth Week, the Sherrill Administration is delivering on its mission to revitalize communities and

provide equitable access to open space," said Acting Commissioner Potosnak. "Green Acres has time and time again proven to be a transformative force for communities and families across the state – and this project is a testament to how local vision and state leadership bring to life the first park in one of the most densely populated communities in 15 years. This is what delivering for New Jerseyans looks like, and that's what the NJDEP will continue to do."

"This partnership exemplifies how state and local collaboration can transform communities," said Senator and Union City Mayor Stack. "In one of the most densely populated sections of our city, this soccer field will provide our young people with a safe, accessible place to play and grow."

Once completed, the soccer field will serve thousands of Union City youth and families in a neighborhood where access to outdoor recreation space is limited. The field will be the largest of its type in the northern section of Union City. Acting DEP Commissioner Ed Potosnak speaks at podium

Earlier this year, the Green Acres State Land Acquisition Bureau and the Green Acres Local and Nonprofit Assistance Program partnered with Union City to acquire the property for \$4,075,000. Through a joint ownership structure of 95% state and 5% city, the state's

substantial investment in the acquisition frees up municipal resources to demolish the long-vacant, 17,000-square-foot building at the site and develop the new soccer field, creating opportunities where new recreation space has been limited.

"People living in overburdened communities are more likely to lack access to open space compared to other communities," said Alex Rivera, Chairman of the Garden State Preservation Trust. "NJDEP's efforts to create parks in urban areas is critical to ensuring New Jersey's kids have a place for fun, nature, and community. The good memories people will make here is our measure of success."

The Importance of Urban Open Space and Recreation

This project is part of the DEP's State Land Acquisition Bureau's Expansion and Creation of Urban Parks initiative, which focuses on increasing close-to-home open space and neighborhood parks throughout New Jersey. The DEP collaborates with local governments to meet community needs that align with local planning priorities, with emphasis on addressing recreation deficits in densely populated urban areas.

Outdoor recreation spaces support positive health and social outcomes by providing areas for fitness, relaxation, and community connection. With many communities lacking suf-

ficient green spaces, tree coverage, parks, and outdoor recreational opportunities, DEP is committed to advancing equity and environmental justice in creating and expanding the state's open space and outdoor recreation opportunities.

"Green Acres is truly invested in these important partnerships," said Green Acres Director Martha Sullivan Sapp. "Working together with local governments and nonprofits is the best way to ensure close-to-home recreation and open space for all New Jerseyans."

As Union City moves forward with developing the new soccer field, the municipality may explore additional funding options through Green Acres. The program provides grants and zero-interest loans to municipal and county governments, and matching grants to nonprofit organizations for open space acquisition and outdoor

recreation facility development.

The Green Acres Program works with local governments and nonprofit organizations from the time of application through a project's completion. Green Acres has financed the protection of over 80,000 acres and hundreds of recreation development projects statewide through its Local and Nonprofit Assistance Program.

Green Acres is one of the nation's oldest and most successful land acquisition and park development programs, having preserved more than 725,000 acres of open space and developed more than 1,200 community parks since its inception in 1961. The program provides funding to state, county, and local governments and nonprofit land conservation organizations for acquisition and development of land for outdoor recreation and

conservation purposes.

The DEP was established on April 22, 1970 – America's first official Earth Day. Today, DEP employees in dozens of programs continue to advance innovative strategies to safeguard and enhance New Jersey's air, water and land, and the health of its residents.

For more information on DEP's celebration of Earth Week 2026, including a proclamation signed by Governor Sherrill, press releases, social media and other resources, visit <https://dep.nj.gov/>



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## Boscola Announces Over \$1.7 Million in State Grants for Violence Prevention Programs

Senator Lisa Boscola announced that \$1,719,606 in state funding has been awarded today to five nonprofit organizations serving Northampton County through the FY 25-26 Violence Intervention & Prevention (VIP) Grant Programs.

“This state funding will enhance efforts to provide important violence prevention programming that will benefit young people,” Boscola stated. “These grant funds will fund programs that will improve academic performance and social skills and also provide opportunities for young people to have fun in a safe setting. Without these programs many children would be unsupervised and there would be a much higher risk of engaging in risky behaviors.”

The grants were awarded as followed:

- Greater Easton Development Corporation, (Safe Routes to School Program) \$500,000
- Community Bike Works, (Easton Bike Club) \$494,800
- Valley Youth House, (Services to Easton Area and Bethlehem

Area School Districts) \$412,986

- St Anthony Youth Center of Easton, Pa Inc (dba Easton Area Community Center), (Youth Programs in West Ward) \$232,820

- Wilson Area LINCS Family Center, (Skills Training and Recognition (STAR) Program) \$79,000

Greater Easton Development Corporation will use the \$500,000 state grant to continue its Safe Routes to School program, a community-based safety and prevention initiative serving school-age youth in Easton’s West Ward neighborhood. The program deploys trained Easton Ambassadors along key pedestrian routes surrounding Paxinos Elementary School to reduce risks associated with traffic hazards, unsupervised time, and exposure to neighborhood-level safety concerns during school arrival and dismissal. By providing crossing support, visibility, informal mentorship, and real-time coordination with school and municipal partners, the initiative aims to strengthen

protective factors for approximately 600 students annually.

Community Bike Works will use the \$494,800 state grant to expand the Easton Bike Club, a bike-based mentoring and violence-prevention initiative serving high-risk Easton Area High School students ages 14–18. The program uses bicycles as an engagement tool to connect teens—particularly boys of color from low-income neighborhoods in Easton’s West Ward and South Side—with caring adult mentors in a structured environment. Through a 48-hour Earn a Bike curriculum, daily afterschool and summer cycling activities, one-on-one mentoring, youth apprenticeships, and a new “Bike Bus” commuter support model, the project aims to build protective factors. Teen participants spend time each week with mentors, learning bike mechanics, safe riding, communication skills, and healthy coping strategies, while also gaining access to safe recreational outlets, transportation support, and meaningful

leadership opportunities. Community Bike Works expects to serve approximately 60 individuals during each year of the project.

Valley Youth House will use its \$412,986 state grant to expand its school-based violence-prevention and mental-health services into the Easton Area and Bethlehem Area School Districts, serving approximately 700 students annually across four secondary schools. The project responds to elevated trauma exposure, behavioral disruptions, unmet mental-health needs, poverty-related stress, and school-based conflict documented through local PAYS data, district discipline reports, and county-level violence trends. The initiative provides a coordinated continuum of supports that include trauma-informed, school-based counseling; Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS); the Too Good for Violence (TGFV) evidence-based curriculum; risk and trauma screening; mindfulness instruction for students and staff; crisis intervention; family and collateral engagement; and ongoing participation in Student Assistance Program (SAP) processes. The program aims to reduce violence risk, strengthen protective factors, improve emotional regulation and coping skills, and increase school engagement for youth at risk for involvement in violence but not yet exhibiting chronic violent behavior.

Easton Area Community Center will use the \$232,820 state grant to expand its long-standing organized competitive

sports and athletic programs serving underserved youth in Easton’s West Ward. The EACC currently provides after-school programming, a full-day summer camp, and rapidly growing competitive sports offerings including basketball, wrestling, cheerleading, and a piloted soccer program. The proposed project aims to enhance administrative capacity, strengthen existing sports programs, and expand offerings to include larger-scale soccer programming and additional sports such as pickleball, tennis, golf, and softball. Organized sports are intended to support positive youth development, reduce exposure to gangs and negative peer influences, build social and emotional skills, and provide consistent supervision during high-risk after-school hours. EACC anticipates serving 250 youth throughout the project period.

Wilson Area LINCS Family Center will use the \$79,000 state grant to launch the Skills Training and Recognition (STAR) Program, a new evidence-based after-school prevention initiative for approximately 200 intermediate-aged youth in the Wilson Area School District. The program responds to elevated community risk factors identified through the Communities That Care (CTC) planning process, including low neighborhood attachment, depressive symptoms among youth, normalization of substance use, and limited access to structured prosocial opportunities. STAR will provide three annual cycles of supervised, skill-building sessions delivered after school, with instruc-

tion provided by trained community partners and volunteers. Guided by the Social Development Strategy, the program will strengthen protective factors through hands-on skills training, positive adult mentorship, opportunities for prosocial involvement, recognition of youth contributions, and structured enrichment activities.

“This \$79,000 grant through the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program is a tremendously valuable investment for middle school youth in the Wilson community,” said Armando Moritz-Chapelliquen, President of the Wilson Area LINCS Coalition for Families and Youth. “This funding will expand our capacity to provide the Skills Training and Recognition (STAR) Program, an evidence-based, community-based after-school prevention initiative to increase youth connection to their community. Through structured and supervised programming outside of school time, STAR gives middle school youth meaningful opportunities to build skills, engage in prosocial activities, and receive recognition for their positive contributions.”

PCCD today approved funding today for the FY 25-25 Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Grants and the FY 25-26 Violence Intervention & Prevention (VIP) Grant Programs. Approximately \$62.5 million was available for VIP and BOOST. PCCD received 464 applications for VIP and BOOST. The Committee approved 177 applications for a total of \$65.268 million.

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## Gobblers Take Center Stage In Penn's Woods

History provides context on just how good Pennsylvania spring turkey hunters have had it lately.

During the state's first spring turkey season in 1968, the total take was 1,636.

Compare that to last year, when hunters harvested an estimated 42,543 birds. Not only was that the largest spring turkey harvest in the last five years, it wasn't far off the all-time record of 44,639, set in 2009.

This year is shaping up to be another good one, too. The 2026 spring gobbler season starts with a one-day hunt for junior license holders and mentored hunters 16 and younger on Saturday, April 25. The statewide spring turkey season opens a week later, running from May 2-16, when hunting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to noon, and May 18-30, when hunting hours run from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

Hunters are allowed one gobbler with their general license. Those who purchase a second spring gobbler tag by May 1 can take a second bird, as well, though no more than one per day.

Hunters should be aware there is no Sunday hunting for spring gobblers this year. That will change in 2027 – the Pennsylvania Game Commission earlier this month approved the 2026-27 hunting seasons – but spring turkey hunting this season is open only Monday through Saturday.

Still, much opportunity awaits hunters.

Pennsylvania's statewide turkey population has been on the upswing in recent years and harvests have climbed accordingly. That's not just a result of there being lots of hunters either. Pennsylvania had an estimated 170,265 spring gobbler hunters in 2025, 10,701 of them juniors.

But in monitoring turkey population trends, the Game Commission examines the number of birds harvested per 100 days of hunter effort, which accounts for changes in hunter participation, said Reina Tyl, the agency's turkey biologist. And in 2025, the statewide average of 5.46 gobblers taken per 100 days was higher than both the latest three-year (5.21) and five-year (4.72) averages. The future looks bright, too.

The Game Commission tracks turkey productivity – how many new young birds are produced – through a summer sighting survey. It allows agency staff to calculate the number of poult-to-hen ratio. In 2024, every Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) across the state saw a poult-to-hen ratio

higher than 2.0. The statewide average was 3.22.

That "indicates relatively good productivity statewide," Tyl said.

It also translates – right now, this season – to opportunities to go head-to-head with plenty of fun, vocal toms.

"Those males that hatched in 2024 will be 2-year-old gobblers this spring turkey season, which should make for some great turkey hunting," Tyl noted.

Nearly one in four hunters – 23% – harvested at least one gobbler last year. Tyl said hunters up their odds through scouting. Gobblers can't help but give clues to their whereabouts, she added. They want to be seen and heard by hens, so they often choose roost sites that maximize how far their gobbling will carry. They'll often display near field edges and forest openings like logging roads that increase their odds of being seen, too.

"Looking at topographic maps, land cover maps and satellite imagery can be a great way to identify possible roost locations and fly-down areas," Tyl added. "But putting in the work on the ground to confirm where gobblers

are roosting and to locate their preferred displaying areas will take the guesswork out and increase your odds of success."

The April 25 spring turkey youth hunt is open to junior license holders and mentored hunters 16 and under. Junior license holders who are 16 or older can hunt alone. All other participants must, by law, be accompanied by an adult.

An adult mentor accompanying a mentored youth may supervise no more than three hunters total, and must carry the sporting arm at all times while moving. Hunting hours during the youth hunt end at noon.

Throughout the spring turkey season, hunters may use manually operated or semiautomatic shotguns limited to a three-shell capacity in the chamber and magazine combined. Muzzleloading shotguns, crossbows and long, recurve and compound bows also are permitted.

Only bearded birds may be harvested during the spring season. Hunters are encouraged to refrain from knowingly harvesting bearded hens because they do nest and raise broods.



There is no requirement for hunters to wear fluorescent orange during the spring turkey season, though wearing it is recommended while moving.

Blinds used while turkey hunting must be manufactured with manmade materials of sufficient density to block movement within the blind from an observer outside the blind. Blinds must completely enclose the hunter on all four sides and from above. It is unlawful to hunt turkeys from blinds made of natural materials such as logs, tree branches and piled rocks.

Blinds that represent the fanned tail of a gobbler do not hide all hunter movement and are unsafe, and therefore are unlawful to use in Pennsylvania.

Hunters may pursue spring gobblers only by calling birds. It is unlawful, as well as unsafe, to

stalk turkeys or turkey sounds. When in a stationary position, a hunter should sit with their back against a large tree, rock or other barrier that shields movement and offers protection from others who might approach from the rear. All hunters are to wait and properly identify their targets prior to pulling the trigger.

A spring turkey tag comes with a Pennsylvania general hunting license, and spring turkey harvest tags are issued to mentored hunters 7 and older.

Pennsylvania hunters also may purchase a license to harvest a second gobbler in the spring season, with a limit of one gobbler harvested per day. Sales of this license end May 1, one day before the regular statewide season begins.

The \$21.97 license

(\$41.97 for nonresidents) contains a harvest tag. The license can be purchased online, but cannot be printed at home or used before it arrives, so purchasing it directly from an issuing agent might be the best option.

Mentored hunters under 7 who harvest a spring turkey must receive a tag by transfer from their mentor. A recent change by the Pennsylvania Game Commission to provide turkey and antlered deer tags to mentored hunters under 7 will take effect in the 2026-27 license year.

For more information on spring turkey hunting rules and regulations, pertaining to the youth or regular hunts, check the 2025-26 Pennsylvania Hunting & Trapping Digest, which is available online at <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pgc/huntingandtrapping/regulations/hunting-trapping-digest>.

Anyone finding sick or dead wild birds, though, should report those to the Game Commission at 1-833-PGC-WILD or online using the Wildlife Health Survey tool at [www.pgcapps.pa.gov/WHS](http://www.pgcapps.pa.gov/WHS). Sick or dead domestic birds should be reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture at 717-772-2852.

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## Shapiro Administration Secures \$14 Million for Enhanced Geothermal Systems Pilot Demonstration Project in Pennsylvania

This week, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) received (opens in a new tab) a \$14 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to pilot an enhanced geothermal system (EGS) demonstration project, advancing the Shapiro Administration's efforts to deploy innovative, all-of-the-above energy solutions.

"We are very excited about this opportunity to pilot an innovative solution to meet the energy demands of today and the future," said DEP Secretary Jessica Shirley. "Geothermal systems could supply the clean energy needed for economic growth and long-term grid resilience for our communities. This is the type of 'all-of-the-above' energy solutions that Governor Shapiro has prioritized."

The EGS pilot demonstration project will generate both electrical power and thermal energy for rural communities in Indiana County, in areas adjacent to legacy and active oil and gas development. The project will

extract heat from subsurface geologic formations and transfer it to the surface using gas and fluid circulation in an EGS. This thermal energy will be used to generate electricity for the local power grid and provide direct-use heat for nearby homes and businesses.

In addition, the project will repurpose existing oil and gas infrastructure, avoiding additional land disturbance for renewable energy generation facilities. Through extending the life of infrastructure like wells, the project aims to catalyze a new geothermal energy industry — one in which the "heat beneath our feet" helps power American homes, businesses, and farms.

The pilot project will be an existing unconventional gas well operated by CNX Green Ventures. The specific well has not been selected.

DEP will serve as the project lead, in coordination with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Geological Survey. The project is supported by a

world-class team of partners, including Gradient Geothermal Inc., Teverra, Inc., Lehigh University, Idaho National Laboratory, CNX Green Ventures, and Seequent.

Governor Josh Shapiro has made clear that protecting consumers and building new energy supply must go hand in hand. In January 2025, the Governor introduced his commonsense energy strategy, the "Lightning Plan (opens in a new tab)," to build new clean, reliable, and affordable energy projects across the Commonwealth. Through the Lightning Plan and the PA Permit Fast Track Program (opens in a new tab), the Governor is cutting permitting delays, accelerating responsible energy development, and positioning Pennsylvania — the nation's second-largest energy producer and exporter — to build more power faster while keeping costs down. Independent analyses confirm (opens in a new tab) these efforts will save consumers money, create jobs, and attract billions in new energy investment.

The East Bangor UMC Church is hosting a "Small Group Study" on the spiritual life of John Wesley. It references the book, "John Wesley, a Biography" by Stephen Tomkins. It is not necessary to purchase the book. The 4-week study will be on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. starting April 22 - May 13th. It will be accessible online, and will be recorded for those who cannot attend. The church is located at 136 W. Central Ave. (Rt. 512), East Bangor, PA. For questions and Zoom access, contact Pastor Dave Goss (570-556-9482)

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