



January 15, 2026

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Vol. 53, No. 22

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Bangor and Pen Argyl Take Their Slate Belt Rivalry To The Wrestling Mat



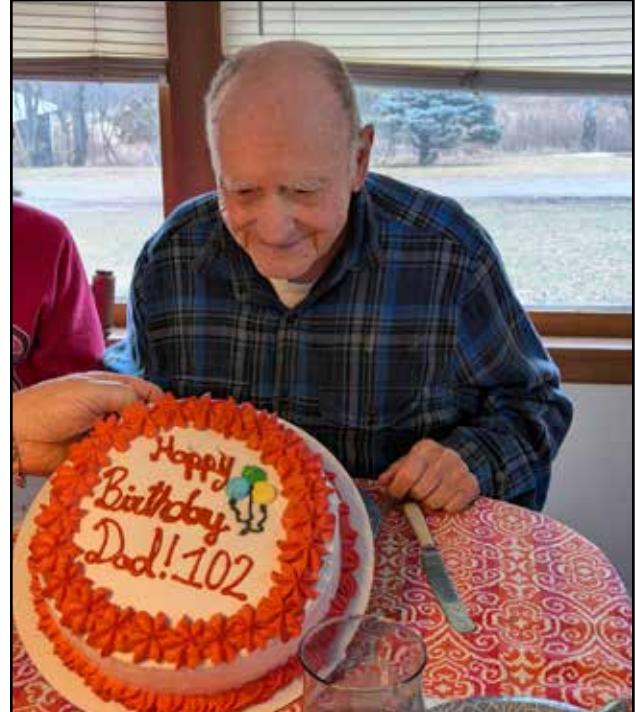
Pen Argyl and Bangor took their rivalry to the mat on January 7th. Bangor won the wrestling match, 45 to 28. Bangor's Jamison Burns (was the recipient of this year's "Doug Comunale Award," for being this match's outstanding wrestler. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

North Warren Takes On Newton In Girls Basketball



North Warren took on Newton High School in girls basketball on January 9th, but they were defeated, 43 to 20. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

Charles Muller Celebrates 102nd Birthday



Charles Muller celebrated his 102nd birthday with his family on January 13th

Project Self-Sufficiency Seeks Donations for "Sister-to-Sister" Prom Shop

Project Self-Sufficiency is seeking donations of new and gently used formal wear, including prom dresses, bridesmaids' dresses, gowns for mothers-of-the-bride, evening bags, jewelry, wraps and shawls, as well as shoes in good condition for display in the agency's annual "Sister-to-Sister" Prom Shop. The dresses must be dry cleaned and on a hanger. All items will be displayed in a pop-up boutique housed on Project Self-Sufficiency's Newton campus; teen girls are invited to select shoes, wraps and jewelry to complement their dress. The Sister-to-Sister Prom Shop will be open 3:00 – 6:00 p.m., March 23rd, 24th, 25th; 3:00 – 8:00 p.m., March 26th; 3:00 – 5:00 p.m., March 27th; and 9:00 a.m. – noon, March 28th. Open to the public; no appointment required.

"The community has been particularly supportive of the 'Sis-



ter-to-Sister Prom Shop' every year, and we hope to have a large collection of beautiful gowns and accessories for display," commented Deborah Berry-Toon, Executive Director of Project Self-Sufficiency. "We believe that every young woman deserves the chance to have a beautiful dress for that special, once-in-a-lifetime event, and we are looking forward to opening the prom shop in March." Donations will be accepted at Project Self-Sufficiency, Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Project Self-Sufficiency is located at 127 Mill Street in Newton. The Sister-to-Sister Prom Shop is a program of the Journey Family Success Center at Project Self-Sufficiency. For information about the Sister-to-Sister Prom Shop, or to find out more about any of the programs at Project Self-Sufficiency, call 973-940-3500 or visit www.projectselfsufficiency.org.

BANGOR (51) VS NORTHERN LEHIGH (31) BASKETBALL SENIOR NIGHT



Kamal Crockett with his mother, Latoria, and his brothers



Ayden Fassl is the son of Dan and Amanda



Gino Merlo with his parents, Bernadette and Eric



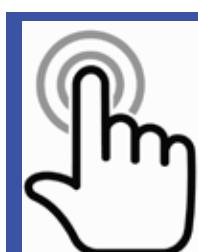
Jason Cruciani Marcontonis with his mother, Georgia and his sisters



Gavin Pysher with his parents, Brian and Nicole, and his brother



Julie Culbertson with her parents, Dan and Becky, and her brother, Nathan



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SCAN ME

Photos by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press



Julie Smith with her father, Jonryan

New in the Bangor Public Library

Adult Fiction:

The Secret Christmas Library: A novel by Jenny Colgan; Her Time Traveling Duke by Bryn Donovan; The Ferryman and His Wife by Frode Grytten; We Who Will Die by Stacia Stark

Adult Non Fiction:

The Cocktail Diaries: A Spirited Adventure by Sam Heughan; Family of Spies: A World War II Story of Nazi Espionage, Betrayal, and the Secret History Behind Pearl Harbor by Christine Kuehn; Queens at War by Alison Weir

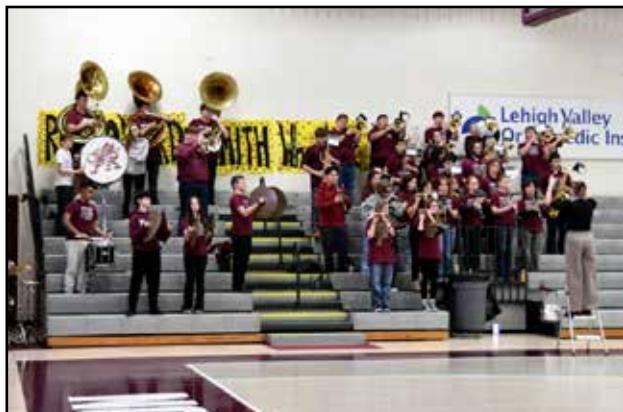
Easy Fiction:

The Christmas Sweater by Jan Brett; This is Not a Sleepy Bear Book by Brian Gehrlein; Nunu and the Sea by Isabella Kung; Cat Nap by Brian Lies; A Knot is Not a Tangle by Daniel Nayeri; The Old Sleigh by Jarrett Pumphrey; A Snow Day for Amos McGee by Philip Christian Stead; Shibu's Tail by Tess Thomas; The Polar Bear and the Ballerina by Eric Velasquez

Junior Fiction:

Mine Craft: The Mountain by Max Brooks; Mine Craft: The Village by Max Brooks; Wings of Fire: The Graphic Novel Book Nine: Talons of Power by Tui Sutherland

BANGOR VS NORTHERN LEHIGH BOYS BASKETBALL GAME AND HALL OF FAME INDUCTION



NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Estate Of: William F. Gates | Date Of Death: February 9, 2025

TO ALL PERSONS, FIRMS, AND CORPORATIONS HAVING CLAIMS AGAINST THE ESTATE OF THE ABOVE-NAMED DECEASED:

Notice is hereby given that Taryn L. Gates and Shawn E. Gates, as Executors, has been appointed to administer the estate of the late William F. Gates, of Columbia, NJ.

All creditors of the deceased are hereby notified to present their claims, in writing, to the undersigned Personal Representative or may file them with the State of NJ, Warren County Surrogate's Court, Attn: Michael J. Doherty, 323 Front Street, Belvidere, NJ 07823, within 90 days from the date of the first publication of this notice, or within the time provided by law, whichever is later.

Claims should be sent to:

Taryn L. Gates, 174 Polkville Road, Columbia, NJ 07832
Shawn E. Gates, 7 Niles Drive, Woodstock, NY 12498

Failure to present your claim within the specified timeframe may result in the claim being barred and unenforceable against the estate.

Further information may be obtained by contacting the Personal Representative or by reviewing the estate file at the office aforementioned.

Dated: January 1, 2026

Bangor Area High School Proudly Inducts the following members into the 2025 Class Hall of Fame: L-R: Morgan McColian, Emily Peer (Howell) and James Weisenbger.

Photos by Dale Young/
The Free Weekly Press

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NORTH WARREN (20) VS NEWTON (43) GIRLS BASKETBALL



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PEN ARGYL (36) VS SAUCON VALLEY (53) BOYS BASKETBALL



More Pennsylvanians Now Eligible for PA ABLE Savings Accounts

More Pennsylvanians are eligible to participate in the PA ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) Savings Program in 2026, Treasurer Stacy Garrity announced recently.

Pennsylvanians with a qualifying disability occurring prior to age 46 are now eligible to open a PA ABLE account. Previously, eligibility required the disability to occur before age 26.

PA ABLE accounts allow individuals with disabilities and their families to save up to \$19,000 per year tax-free without impacting important benefits. For veterans, savings and investments in PA ABLE accounts do not impact VA benefits.

Funds can be used for expenses such as housing, health care, transportation and assistive technology. Contributions are deductible on state income taxes, and qualified withdrawals



are exempt from state and federal income taxes.

Photos by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

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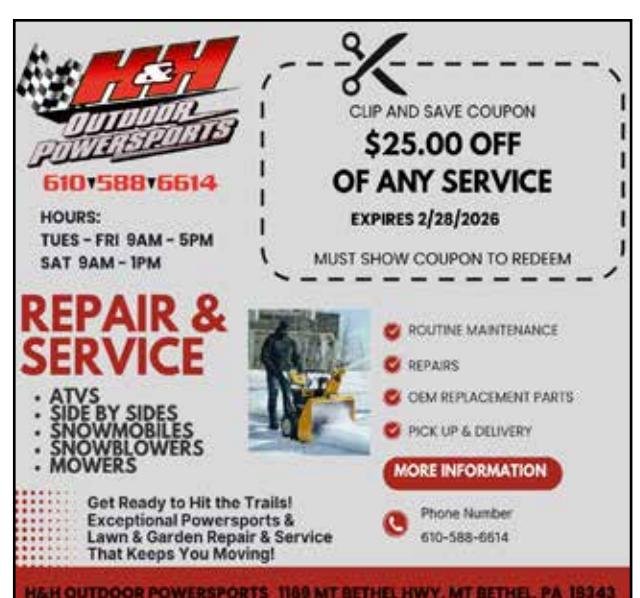
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Project Self-Sufficiency Programs Educate Public, Support Trauma Survivors, Promote Prevention - Virtual Presentations Offered in English and Spanish

Project Self-Sufficiency will offer three workshops 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, January 21st, 3:00 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 discussion series, "Connections Matter", which facilitates the conversation about issues surrounding childhood trauma, will be offered virtually in English, Tuesday, February 17th, 2:00 p.m., and in Spanish, Wednesday, February 18th, 2:00 p.m. Tips for protection,

prevention, and promoting resilience within the community will also be discussed. All workshops are free, hosted on Zoom, 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, providers, 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," ex-

plains 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."

Project Self-Sufficiency is a non-profit organization located in semi-rural northwestern New Jersey which has assisted low-income families along the path to economic self-sufficiency since 1986. The agency is dedicated to empowering individuals and families to achieve economic independence and self-reliance, providing a safe and inclusive environment that fosters growth, learning, and opportunity. Services include career guidance and assessment, computer classes, high school diploma instruction, parenting workshops, childcare, legal assistance and education, help with emergency basic needs such as clothing and food, health education, support groups, life skills classes, family activities, home visitation, and more. For more information, visit www.project-selfsufficiency.org or call 973-940-3500.

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Free Community Gun Safety Class Scheduled for January 17th in Stroudsburg, PA



Community members are invited to attend a free Gun Safety Class on Saturday, January 17, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Monroe County Control Center. This educational event is designed to provide practical instruction on safe firearm handling, proper storage, and responsible ownership.

Located at 100 Gypsum Road in Stroudsburg, PA, the Monroe County Control Center will host certified instructors and knowledgeable guest speakers who will guide participants through essential firearm safety principles. The session is offered as part of the Community Partnership for Gun Safety grant program and is open to the public at no cost.

The class is ideal for new firearm owners, individuals seeking a refresher on safe practices, and community members interested in learning more about responsible firearm ownership. Attendees will receive

guidance on firearm handling basics, safe operation and storage, reducing risk in the home, and Pennsylvania concealed carry questions. The session also includes an open discussion period with instructors and guest speakers.

This free community event focuses on building confidence, increasing awareness, and promoting safety through practical education. No prior experience is required.

Attendance is limited to the first 50 participants, and advance registration is required. Registration is currently open.

For more information or to register, interested individuals are encouraged to visit their website. Everyone is encouraged to register early due to limited availability. Their website is: www.gunsafetymonroepa.org/courses. For additional information, email gunsafety@monroecounty-pa.gov or call 570-517-3042

St. Luke's Miners Campus Expands Sleep Lab to Bring Vital Care Closer to Home

Millions of Americans suffer from sleep disorders that can lead to serious health issues, including heart disease, diabetes, and depression. Unfortunately, access to specialized care remains limited in many communities.

To address this need, St. Luke's Miners Campus has expanded its Sleep Lab, significantly increasing capacity and improving access for residents of Carbon and Schuylkill counties. The new eight-bed unit offers expert evaluation, testing and treatment to help restore healthy sleep and enhance overall well-being.

The expanded Sleep Lab now includes six additional testing rooms, six registered technicians and three Sleep Medicine Specialized Providers, offering increased access to provider evaluations, specialized sleep disorder treatment and testing closer to home. Work on the expansion was completed on December 12, 2025, after 8 months of construction, representing a \$1.8 million investment in the Miners Campus.

Part of St. Luke's Neurosciences, St. Luke's Sleep Medicine provides comprehensive diagnosis and treatment for conditions such as insomnia, sleep apnea, narcolepsy, restless leg syndrome and snoring. Common risk factors for sleep disorders include obesity, advancing age,

family history, hypertension, smoking, and being male or postmenopausal. The Sleep Lab expansion ensures more patients can receive timely, advanced care in this community.

"Sleep is essential for physical and mental health, yet millions struggle with disorders that impact daily life," said Diana Laquinta, President of St. Luke's Miners Campus. "Expanding the Sleep Lab reflects our commitment to improving access to specialized care for our community. We're proud to bring these services closer to home for patients who need them most."

Dr. David A. Cohen, SLUHN Section Chief of Sleep Medicine, added, "Sleep disorders are often overlooked, but they profoundly affect health and quality of life. Our team uses advanced technology and personalized treatment plans to help patients sleep better and live healthier. This expansion will allow us to diagnose and treat more patients, helping them achieve better sleep and better health."

Common risk factors for sleep disorders include obesity, advancing age, family history, hypertension, smoking, and being male or postmenopausal.

If you struggle to get a good night's sleep, ask your Primary Care Physician about a referral to a St. Luke's Sleep Medicine specialist today.



A little ice magic swept through Allegheny Creek Brewing Company on January 10th. Many little princes and princesses gathered for celebrate Elsa's Surprise Party! It meant so much to Elsa and Anna to celebrate with their friends! For more events like this one visit Allegheny Creek Brewing Company at 690 Allegheny Road, in Mount Bethel, PA, or check out their ad on page 10 for more upcoming events! (Courtesy ACBC)

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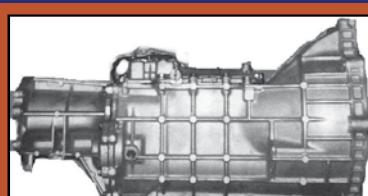
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Habitat for Humanity Northwest New Jersey Hosts 4th Annual Have a Heart for Habitat Radiothon with WRNJ Radio

On February 12th, 2026, Habitat for Humanity Northwest New Jersey (Habitat NWNJ) will take over the WRNJ airwaves to host their 4th Annual Have a Heart for Habitat Radiothon! Having been a community partner for many years, WRNJ is gracious enough to help share the stories of Habitat NWNJ once again. This year, homeowners, volunteers, and community partners alike will share what Habitat NWNJ means to them, and why there is a need now, more than ever, for volunteers to donate their time, talents and treasure.

"This year we hope to raise \$25,000.00 to sup-

port our Home Build & Home Repair programs across Warren & Sussex Counties, there being a much bigger need now that Habitat is serving all of Northwest New Jersey," states Kyle Stuber, Director of Development for Habitat for Humanity NWNJ, "But it's not just about the money; Have a Heart for Habitat Radiothon gives us the opportunity to tell our story to a wide listening audience in Northwest New Jersey thanks to WRNJ".

Donations can be made via the website at habitatnwnj.org/wrnj and during the Radiothon, volunteers will be answering the phone for call in pledges at 908-



852-1234. Have a Heart for Habitat will air live on WRNJ, Thursday, February 12th, 2026, from 9:am to 3:pm.

If you or someone you know could benefit from becoming a homeowner, or is a homeowner in need of repairs, please

visit the Habitat for Humanity Northwest New Jersey website at habitatnwnj.org for more information. To support the work Habitat for Humanity Northwest New Jersey is doing in your community, feel free to visit their website at habitatnwnj.org/donate.

Habitat for Humanity Northwest New Jersey is a recently merged affiliate of Habitat for Humanity, International, combining the efforts of the Warren and Sussex County Habitat for Humanity affiliates. Having merged officially in 2025, they have served Sussex County since 1993 and Warren County since 1999. An accredited 501 (c)(3) charitable organization, Habitat's mission is: Seeking to put God's love into ac-

tion, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope. You can learn more about Habitat NWNJ at habitatnwnj.org.

WRNJ (1510 AM) is a radio station broadcasting Adult Contemporary format licensed to Hackettstown, New Jersey, USA. The station is currently owned by WRNJ Radio, Inc. and features programming from ABC Radio. It is locally owned by Norman Worth and Larry Tighe. WRNJ offers a local news intensive format featuring local and national news, oldies from 1955 to 1985, talk shows pertaining to the community, and local sports. They also broadcast on WRNJ FM 104.7, 105.7, and 92.7.

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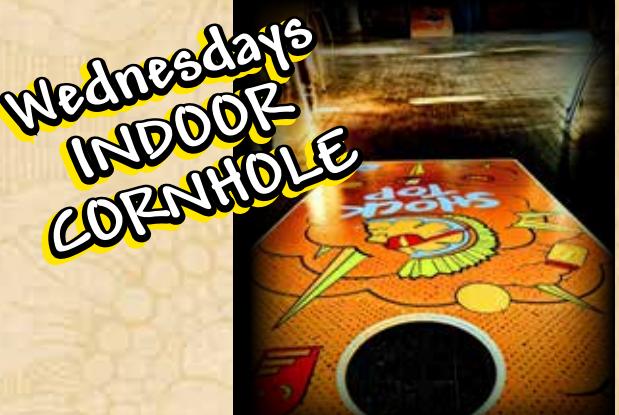
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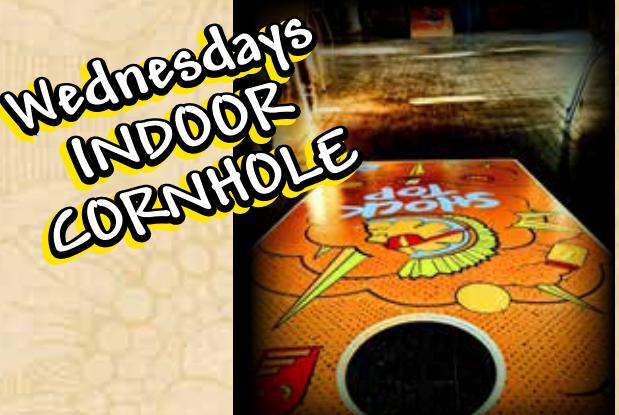


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PEN ARGYL (28) VS BANGOR (45) WRESTLING

Photos by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press



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Hello, fellow readers,

Many of us long for greenery, especially in winter. So much so that roughly 66 percent of American households have indoor plants. Not only are they beautiful, but they also improve air quality and provide joy and serenity, supporting our mental well-being.

While we naturally reach for tap water to care for our plants, municipal water is treated. It often contains salts, chlorine, fluoride, and other additives. Over time, these elements can build up in soil—especially in pots—making it harder for plants to thrive.

Even those of us with

well water know it may not be what it used to be. Since the 1940s, chemical pesticides and the overuse of phosphates have altered soil health and water balance—another reason to avoid chemical fertilizers.

In contrast, rainwater and snowmelt are nature's original plant water, untouched by municipal processes. Rainwater is slightly acidic, with a pH near 7, unlike tap water, which is kept alkaline to prevent pipe corrosion. One of the critical nutrients plants need to survive is nitrates—a combination of nitrogen and oxygen found naturally in rainwater.

Rainwater harvesting dates to ancient times and is gaining popularity. By collecting roof runoff in a rain barrel, you gather water enriched with organic matter from pollen, plant debris, and even bird droppings. The barrel itself keeps water "alive," offering gentle nourishment each time you water.

My technique is more hands-on. I place one of Jolee's water bowls under a gutter during heavy rains, then pour it into a



five-gallon bucket for storage in the garage—a ritual I began with Miss Ellie that brings a smile. Sometimes, during a light rain or snowmelt, I stand watch as the bowl slowly fills. It becomes a meditation of sorts.

I also fill five-gallon buckets with snow and let them melt in the garage. A little factoid: with an average 10-to-1 snow-to-water ratio, a full five-gallon bucket of snow yields about a half-gallon of water. Heavy snow yields even more. Of course, avoid snow contaminated by road salt or chemical deicers, and never water plants with ice-cold water. Let it warm to room temperature to avoid shocking roots.

In winter, houseplants can suffer from low humidity, insufficient light, and water woes. I've had plants so desperate they looked like they were wearing pants two sizes too small—root-bound, uncomfortable, and asking for help.

While early spring is best for repotting, an interim intervention is a long soak with room-temperature water until the pot drains fully. Using rainwater or snowmelt is even better. That gentle, chemical-free hydration flushes the soil, feeds roots, and awakens soil microbes during the transition from winter to spring. Trim yellow or dead foliage while you water. It's a refresh—clearing away the old to



make room for the new.

In winter, snow rests quietly on branches and roofs, insulating the earth below. Then, with a slight temperature rise, it releases itself one drip at a time. That gentle melt seeps into soil, reaches winter-active roots, and prepares the ground for what comes next. Nature reminds us that transformation happens gradually, often invisibly beneath the surface.

Water also teaches us rhythm. It moves when it's time to move and pauses when it's time to pause. It doesn't rush or resist; it responds. Sometimes it flows downstream, sometimes upstream, sometimes in circles—yet ultimately, it finds its way to the low-

est point. We have little control over life's currents, but we can learn to trust them. Like a leaf in water, we're invited to let go and go with the flow.

When we water our plants with rainwater or snowmelt, we participate in that rhythm. We honor a cycle older than us. And when we slow down enough to notice, something shifts within us, too. Standing by the gutter watching Jolee's bowl fill, I'm reminded that tending plants isn't just about keeping them alive. It's about paying attention and nurturing life.

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High School Equivalency Training Program for Teens and Young Adults Starts in March



Enrollment for the next session of the New Jersey Youth Corps program at Project Self-Sufficiency is underway. The sixteen-week program launches in March and gives those who have not completed high school the opportunity to boost their literacy skills, prepare for the high school equivalency exam, obtain on-the-job work experience, and transition into a career, college, or the military. As part of the course, three college credits can be obtained in the Optics Technology and/or Automotive Technology program at Sussex County Community College. Graduates are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 towards tuition or equipment expenses for future education and training.

Interested participants are invited to attend an Open House hosted by Project Self-Sufficiency to learn more about the New Jersey Youth Corps and to complete an application. Open Houses will be held on Thursdays at 4:30 p.m., January 15th, 22nd, 29th, February 5th, and 12th, and on Fridays at noon, January 16th, 23rd, 30th, February 6th, and 13th.

Project Self-Sufficiency is offering a \$100 gift card to those who refer a young adult, ages 16–25, to the New Jersey Youth Corps training and education program. To receive

the gift card, referred individuals must enroll in the program, complete the two-week orientation, and be inducted into the program.

Participants in the New Jersey Youth Corps must be Sussex or Warren County residents, aged 16–25, who have not completed high school. The program includes assessments, testing, employability skills training, life skills workshops, academic instruction, community service projects, field trips, and counseling services. Program participants will prepare for the high school equivalency examination and have the opportunity to receive a weekly stipend based on attendance for the full week. Free transportation is provided.

The New Jersey Youth Corps, which is funded by the New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development, is also in operation at sites around the state, including Camden, Elizabeth, Jersey City, New Bruns-

wick, Newark, Paterson, Phillipsburg, Pleasantville, Trenton, and Vineland. Those who are interested in learning more about the New Jersey Youth Corps at Project Self-Sufficiency are encouraged to enroll online or by calling 973-940-3500.

Project Self-Sufficiency has assisted low-income individuals and families in northwestern New Jersey since 1986. Services offered at Project Self-Sufficiency include high school equivalency education, computer courses, employment skills training, job placement services, support groups, parenting classes, child-care and preschool, legal assistance and education, counseling and advocacy, referrals, and help with emergency basic needs, like food and clothing. For more information about the programs and services offered by Project Self-Sufficiency, visit www.projectself-sufficiency.org or call 973-940-3500.

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The Slate Belt Heritage Center & Museum will hold a "Preservation Workshop" on Sunday, February 8th @ 2:00 PM. Presenters will be Curator Melissa Hough along with Board Member Rachael Winston. Come and learn about the best practices for paper preservation, in addition to general artifact handling and storage for family heirlooms. They will also offer suggestions on how to put together a successful Time Capsule Envelope so it will be readable 50 years from now. This is in preparation for the burial of the new Bangor Time Capsule that will take place in the Church Memorial Park next to the Heritage Center and Museum. Leave a letter for your descendants by purchasing an envelope at the Center, any Sunday from 12:00 -3:00. Envelopes must be returned by March to be included in the time capsule. The Center is located at 30 North 1st Street, Bangor, PA. For additional information please contact Karen Brewer at 484-894-5661. Recently, the Slate Belt Heritage Center and Museum accepted a check from Bangor's 150th Anniversary Committee and was recognized for their contribution to the success of Bangor's 150th Celebration. (Pictured from left to right): John Brown, Bangor's 150th Co-Chairperson, Nicholas Rosato, Slate Belt Heritage Center & Museum Board member and liaison between the Bangor 150th and the Center, Melissa Hough, President of the Center and Tina Brown, Bangor's 150th Co-Chairperson.

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Congressman Kean Announces \$3.8 Million for NJ-07 Projects in House Funding Bill

Congressman Tom Kean, Jr. (NJ-07) announced that he secured \$3.8 million in federal funding for communities throughout New Jersey's Seventh Congressional District. Six of his FY2026 Community Project requests were included in the recently passed government funding bill (H.R. 6938), which cleared the House on January 8. This delivers \$3,792,607 in federal taxpayer dollars directly back to the Seventh District to support critical local projects. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

"My top priority is delivering tangible results for families and communities across the Seventh District," said Congressman Tom Kean, Jr. "These projects represent meaningful, on-the-ground investments that will strengthen public safety, upgrade emergency communications, modernize critical infrastructure, and protect public health for years to come. I am pleased to bring this funding back home, and I am confident it will make a lasting difference in the lives of residents."

Congressman Kean's FY2026 Community Project Funding requests included in the Appropriations bill: Bernards Township:

\$835,000 for police department communications upgrade

The existing police radios in the Bernards PD's inventory are single-band and are approaching the end of their useful lifespan. The Police Department is seeking funding for tri-band radios to outfit officers and frontline police vehicles. Officers are the primary 24/7 first responders in the Township, and interoperable radios would streamline communication and improve the flow of information during critical incidents. In addition, the Police Department will be able to directly communicate with other law enforcement agencies throughout Somerset County and the broader region, improving cooperation and information sharing. This investment will fund 89 radios for the police department—50 tri-band portable radios and 39 tri-band mobile radios.

Greenwich Township: \$97,607 for school resource officer vehicle and equipment

The Township of Greenwich employs one school resource officer (SRO) responsible for an elementary and middle school, serving approximately 630 students. The Police Department needs a dedicated vehicle for the

SRO to improve response times, increase visibility to deter potential incidents, and allow the officer to manage duties in separate locations effectively. The vehicle would also be utilized during community events.

Township of Warren: \$900,000 for public safety communications equipment upgrade

The Warren Township Police Department's communications equipment is over 20 years old and needs to be updated. The systems require interoperability, as central dispatch serves as the communications hub for all police, fire, and EMS emergency calls in the Township. Some current equipment is range-limited and lacks multiple bands, hindering communication with neighboring towns and jurisdictions in emergencies. The requested funding will upgrade emergency operations to meet the growing needs of the community.

Borough of Mount Ar-

lington: \$560,000 for stormwater improvement project

Memorial Pond manages stormwater and acts as a regional basin before entering Lake Hopatcong. The pond receives stormwater runoff from the entire sub-watershed above it. Sedimentation and infilling resulting from the development and watershed conditions require dredging. The project includes data collection and analysis, surveying, engineering, regulatory requirements, and dredging. Mount Arlington, the Lake Hopatcong Commission, and the surrounding lake municipalities (Roxbury, Jefferson and Hopatcong) work together to improve the lake water quality and are supportive of these efforts.

Sparta Township: \$400,000 for pump station improvements

The proposed scope of work includes new pumps, controls, a generator, comminutor, and electrical service. These

upgrades are necessary to ensure proper wastewater flow and eliminate risks associated with pump station failure that could harm surface and groundwater quality. These improvements will also help reduce municipal energy costs and promote the health and safety of all residents.

Borough of Hopatcong: \$1,000,000 for lead service line replacement

The Borough is seeking funding to complete the initial phase of lead service line replacements along various roadways. The project will target high-priority communities, including low-income and minority households. In response to state law mandating a lead service line replacement program, which also requires galvanized steel waterlines to be accounted for and replaced by 2031, the Borough seeks assistance in meeting this compliance.

They hope to remove the galvanized steel and lead water service lines and

replace them with copper service lines.

As part of the FY2026 Community Project Funding (CPF) process, Congressman Kean advocated for local priorities identified by community leaders and local officials. In May 2025, he submitted 15 CPF requests to the House Appropriations Committee for consideration in the FY2026 appropriations bills. Of the 15 requests Congressman Kean was allotted, six were included in the spending package passed last week. Another three projects were passed in November, when Kean announced \$3.7 million for local police departments in Byram, Readington, and Holland Townships.

The remaining CPF requests are still under consideration in additional appropriations bills pending in the House. To view the full list of Congressman Kean's FY2026 CPF requests, please visit: kean.house.gov/services/community-project-funding



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Trenton Dems' Attempt to Control Vax Policies Receives Backlash at Committee, Bill Passes Along Party Lines In New Jersey

The Assembly Health Committee heard considerable testimony against a Democrat-sponsored bill that would move immunization authority from the CDC's federal advisory committee to the state Department of Health recently. Republicans on the panel cited concerns about vaccine injury compensation, vaccine exemptions, transparency, public input and political motivation before the bill advanced along party lines.

The bill (A6166) shifts New Jersey from following federal guidance on immunization policies and schedules to relying on state Health Department recommendations.

Jeffrey Brown, acting commissioner for the state Health Department, one of the few voices in favor of the bill, took politically-charged shots at the federal government and Assemblyman Erik Peterson (R-Hunterdon)

fired back:

"You have a lot of derogatory things to say about the federal government. Some of us have no faith in the Health Department in the state of New Jersey. During Covid, the Health Department thought it was wise to put Covid-infected people into nursing homes, killing 8,000 people. Instead of using Trump's mercy ships and field hospitals, you put them in nursing homes. So why should we have any faith in you?" Peterson asked.

Sponsor of the bill and committee chair Assemblywoman Carol Murphy then shut down further questioning of the commissioner.

"Unfortunately, I wasn't given the opportunity to ask the acting commissioner questions. What I would have asked him, I believe is important. What is the process by which the decisions are going to be made?



Assemblyman Erik Peterson (R-Hunterdon) pushed back on a bill shifting vaccine authority to the state Health Department from the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices in the Assembly Health Committee on Monday. Photo by Assembly Republican Office/Jennifer Peacock.

Who decides? Are we adding more vaccines? Are we taking them away? We need legisla-

tive oversight, we need public input when these decisions are made, we need transparency that

it is evidence-based, and we need to make sure there are no conflicts of interest so that people can trust government, and we need clear medical and religious exemptions," Azzariti (R-Bergen) said before voting against the measure.

The federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices under the Trump administration has experienced changes in membership and recently voted to scale back the hepatitis B birth-dose recommendation. Its recommendations to the CDC help inform clinical and public health practices and impacts associated insurance coverage. Current state law requires health insurers and the state Medicaid program to cover immunizations that have an active recommendation from the advisory committee.

Several opponents of the bill asked how vaccine injury reporting and

compensation would be affected under the bill, but Democrats had no clear answer.

The Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System has been run by the federal government for 40 years. The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program is also federally funded and covers vaccines like polio, measles and hepatitis recommended by the CDC for routine administration.

"The precedent and the law currently holds that for there to be a vaccine reportable injury, that it is the guidance of the CDC that would control whether there is a reimbursable outcome. If we are changing the whole system, I think the VAERS system becomes mute," Rumpf (R-Ocean) said.

All Democrats voted in favor of the bill, which passed the Senate by a vote of 25-12 in December.

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