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## Philadelphia Funk Rocks The Stage At Weona Park



Philadelphia Funk took the stage on Sunday, July 12th at Weona Park in Pen Argyl as part of the Summer Sounds Concert Series. Catch the next band at Wind Gap Park on Sunday, July 19th. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press.

## Warren County Launches New Era for Parks and Recreation

*County Creates Parks and Recreation Division, Establishes Advisory Board, Adopts Modern Park Rules, and Continues Planning for Future Park Investments*



The Warren County Board of County Commissioners announced a series of major initiatives to strengthen the management, stewardship, and future development of the Warren County Park System.

The actions include the creation of a Division

of Parks and Recreation within the Department of Land Preservation; the establishment of a Warren County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; and the adoption of the first comprehensive update to the County's park rules in more than 25 years.

"Our open space has become one of Warren County's greatest assets, and we're proud to announce a series of measures that will ensure our parks continue to grow, improve, and serve residents for generations to come," said **PARK cont'd on pg 2**

## NJ Property Taxpayers Coalition Calls for State Investigation into Utility Failures



The New Jersey Property Taxpayers Coalition has formally requested that the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) and the Division of Rate Counsel launch a comprehensive investigation into the recent widespread power outages that left hundreds of thousands of New Jersey residents without electricity, including thousands in Sussex County.

In a letter sent to both agencies, the Coalition called for a thorough audit of utility reliability, infrastructure investment, emergency response, staffing levels, and regulatory oversight. The Coalition also requested public hearings and the development of a formal action plan to improve the reliability of New Jersey's electrical system due to ongoing power outages that have been occurring for several years.

"New Jersey residents pay some of the highest utility rates along with the highest property taxes in the nation," said Robert D. Kovic, Esq., Founder of the New Jersey Property Taxpayers Coalition. "Families deserve electrical service that is reliable. They are

not getting that. When prolonged power outages become routine and put families and businesses in crisis, utility companies and regulators must be held accountable."

Kovic also recently spoke with Bethany Rocque-Romaine, Esq., of the Division of Rate Counsel regarding the Coalition's concerns and potential next steps for addressing the recurring utility failures affecting New Jersey ratepayers on a larger scale, including legal possible action.

"The Rate Counsel's Office exists to protect consumers, and we appreciate the opportunity to have spoken with them," Kovic said. "This issue does not simply disappear once the lights come back on. New Jersey families deserve answers and meaningful corrective action. The Rate Counsel seems to be actively trying to address these ongoing problems."

The Coalition stated that the letter marks the beginning of a broader statewide effort to improve electric reliability and ensure greater accountability from monopoly utility providers and state regulators.



# PARK

Continued from page 1

Commissioner Director Lori Ciesla.

A Park System That Has Nearly Doubled in Size

When the county first began purchasing open space for preservation purposes 40 years ago it had one 4-acre park in the center of Belvidere known as Garrett D. Wall Park. Today, the county's park system includes 173 parcels totaling more than 2,900 acres. These lands contain various forests, meadows, wetlands, streams, and waterbody habitats, including a 69-acre spring-fed lake, as well as cultivated farmland, manicured lawns, and other improved areas, with 11 parking areas, 10 buildings, three

pavilions, two museums, multiple historic structures, and more than 26 miles of trails.

Investing in the Future Recognizing the tremendous growth of the park system, the Warren County Board of County Commissioners has established a dedicated Division of Parks and Recreation within the Department of Land Preservation to oversee park operations, maintenance, stewardship, recreation programming, capital improvements, historic sites, natural resource management, and future enhancement of the County's parks and trails.

"Good government means adapting to changing needs, Commissioner Deputy Director James R. Kern III said, adding, "The people of Warren County have invested in preserv-

ing thousands of acres of open space over the years and this reorganization ensures clear accountability and makes sure that the public's investment continues to benefit residents through thoughtful management, maintenance, and recreation."

Citizen Leadership Will Continue

The Commissioners also approved the creation of the Warren County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, which succeeds the former Board of Recreation Commission created in 1987.

Current Board members will continue serving, ensuring that the experience, institutional knowledge, and volunteer spirit that helped build today's park system remain an important part of its future.

"The Board of Recre-

ation Commissioners helped transform what was once a very modest county park system into one that has become a source of pride for Warren County, and we thank every past and present volunteer for their dedication and look forward to continuing that partnership through the new Advisory Board," Commissioner Jason J. Sarnoski said.

Modern Rules for a Modern Park System:

The Commissioners also adopted new Warren County Park System Rules, replacing regulations originally adopted in 1999.

The updated rules establish consistent standards for park operations, visitor safety, recreational activities, special events, permits, protection of natural and historic resources, and stewardship of County park properties.

Planning the Next Generation of Parks:

These actions come as Warren County continues preparing its comprehensive Open Space, Recreation, and Parks Plan.

The planning process

includes extensive public outreach, community surveys, stakeholder meetings, and public workshops to identify priorities for future park improvements, trail development, recreation programming, accessibility, conservation, and historic preservation.

"We encourage residents to participate in the planning process by completing the County's public survey and attending upcoming public engagement events throughout the summer," urged Ryan Conklin, Director of the Warren County Planning Department. A link to the online survey is available on the warrenparks.com website. County staff and the county's planning consultants from Brandstetter Carroll, Inc. will also be tabling the Hackettstown Street Fair on July 19 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the Warren County Farmers' Fair & Balloon Festival on July 25 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Residents are invited to visit and share their thoughts about the future of the county's park system.

Looking Toward No-

ember:

As part of this long-term vision, the County Commissioners also will be placing a non-binding public question on the November ballot seeking voter support for expanding the allowable uses of the County's voter-approved Open Space Trust Fund.

If supported by voters and approved by the Commissioners, dedicated Trust Fund revenues could be used not only to preserve land but also to improve, develop, restore, and maintain county parks, trails, recreation facilities, historic sites, and other public amenities.

"Warren County has made a tremendous investment in preserving open space over the past three decades," said Corey Tierney, Director of the Warren County Department of Land Preservation. "As some of our preserved lands mature into parks and recreational destinations, we believe it is important to invest in maintaining and improving these public assets so they can be enjoyed by future generations."

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# Country Singer Joey Lannigan Undeterred By Tough Childhood; In Fact, It Helped Him Reach His Dreams

Joey Lannigan's father died when he was 10-years old. His mother was suddenly a single mom with three boys. "We were not easy kids," admitted Lannigan, adding with a smile, "We had behavioral problems."

His mom had a hard time dealing with the boys and before long, Joey Lannigan, now a fast rising country singer originally from Warren County went from foster home to foster home over the next eight years.

"Once I got into the system I was all over the place," recalled the 29-year old Lannigan, who now lives in the Poconos. "You name it - Passaic County, Somerset, Warren, Hunter-

don."

It could have been worse, and Lannigan knows it. He remains appreciative of the counsellors at Tri County Care Management Organization (TCCMO) who shepherded him along during these trying times.

"They really were there for me," he emphasized of the organization that works with children and families throughout Northwest New Jersey. "I felt like they really looked after me and cared."

While some might think being in the foster home system could be a detriment, Lannigan looks at it another way.

"Yeah, it was hectic, moving around so much, two days here or



2 or 3 years there, but there was one big benefit," Lannigan said. "I was exposed to a lot of people and I was able to pull something from most of them, such as religion, politics, passion."

Throughout his foster home "road trip" a constant for Lannigan was his love of the pen.

"I was always writing, that was a constant," he said. "I was never without a pen and pad. For me it was always about writing - poems, raps, stories."

Initially it had little

to do with music. Once it meshed, it was like lightning striking in a bottle.

Lannigan was 26 when he started his musical career. At first it was a side project to his pharmaceutical job.

"I did my first show in May of 2024," he said. "I was just going to an event at a Harley Davidson in the Poconos and I asked about performing. They said yes and I had four or five days to prepare. From that one I got booked to do another gig."

By the end of the year,

Lannigan teamed up with Mickey Fernandez to form Joey Lannigan and the Spirits. Meantime, somehow the father of country star Zach Bryan found Lannigan online and was intrigued, and invited Lannigan to a show at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J. Before he knew it, Lannigan was travelling around the country doing pre-shows for Bryan with stops in Toronto, Philadelphia, Tampa, and Ohio.

"It was really cool," said Lannigan. "I met some crazy people - Bruce Springsteen, Eli Manning and a bunch of hockey players."

Lannigan's musical career has taken off so well that he ditched the pharma job in the winter of 2025 and is now concentrating only on music, with his first album expected to come out sometime this fall.

Lannigan describes his band's music as aggressive, in your face country rock. When he plays solo, he combines originals and covers that run the gamut from country to folk. With a blend of traditional roots, compelling lyrics, and modern storytelling - and with a style that's uniquely his own, he brings authenticity and passion to each and every performance and

with the songs he writes.

It is no surprise that Lannigan has been inspired by the music of Zach Bryan, as well as Tyler Childers and classic country legends like Merle Haggard and Waylon Jennings. These influences shaped a sound that's both nostalgic and fresh, blending timeless country traditions with contemporary sensibilities.

Lannigan is equally at home performing solo or with the band, locally and beyond. He's not satisfied. There's more work to do. "I've just gotten started. I want to build on my career and expand my reach out there," he said. "That's my goal."

Lannigan, the father of two, is also equally at home when he thinks of his childhood and how it's turned out to be an important part of his life now.

Keeping his early years in perspective, Lannigan remains committed to TCCMO and its mission, supporting the organization in many ways including performing at various events.

"Joey is truly a great success story," said Nicole Russo, who was his Care Manager while he went through the program and is now the Lead Community Engagement Coordinator for TCCMO. "We might have helped him along the way, but it was his own ambitions and determination that made him what he is today. We are so proud of him and what's he has become. And greatly appreciate that he continues to be integral to our program and our focus on children and families. He is someone we should - and do - look up to."

For more about Joey Lannigan, visit joeylanniganmusic.com. To learn more about TCCMO, go to tricountycmo.org.

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# Project Self-Sufficiency Seeks Donations of New School Supplies - Sponsor a Backpack for a Student in Need

Project Self-Sufficiency is seeking donations of new school supplies for distribution to more than 500 children and teens during the month of August. Organizers are suggesting that donors sponsor a backpack for students in need; a \$25 donation will purchase and fill a small backpack with the key supplies needed for elementary school students while a \$50 donation will purchase and fill a large backpack with key supplies for middle and high school students. Monetary donations, which allow the agency to purchase supplies in bulk, will be gratefully received at <https://www.projectselfsufficiency.org/school-supplies>. For those who prefer to shop, a wish list of items has been prepared, including new backpacks, crayons, pencils, erasers, glue sticks, scissors, pens, spiral notebooks, and loose-leaf paper. Backpacks in solid and neutral colors are preferred. Backpacks and supplies will be distributed to more than 500 students at a festive Back to School Fair in August and at other events throughout the school year.

“The start of a new school year can be a fun, yet stressful, situation for many families,” commented Project Self-Sufficiency Chief Executive Officer Deborah Berry-Toon. “We are immensely grateful to the community for lifting up these children and families and helping to ensure that they get off to the best possible start.”

Those who need backpacks and school supplies are invited to call Project Self-Sufficiency, 973-940-3500, to be put on the distribution list. Project Self-Sufficiency is located at 127 Mill Street in Newton. For information about donating school supplies, or to inquire about any of the programs and services available at Project Self-Sufficiency, call 973-940-3500, or visit [www.projectselfsufficiency.org](http://www.projectselfsufficiency.org).

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, child-care, 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.projectselfsufficiency.org](http://www.projectselfsufficiency.org) or call 973-940-3500.

## 2026-27 State Budget Passes in PA, Topper Says

Pennsylvania House Republican Leader Jesse Topper (R-Bedford/Fulton) said Sunday that the Fiscal Year 2026-27 state budget and related legislation passed the Pennsylvania General Assembly and now heads to Gov. Josh Shapiro for his expected signature.

“The budget passed by the General Assembly today continues our recent history of scouring every corner of state government for existing taxpayer dollars to avoid tax increases, cuts to government services or tapping into the Commonwealth’s Rainy Day fund,” Topper said.

“I am also glad to see important investments in education where we are combatting the ongoing issue of growing waitlists at career and technical centers, expanding the successful GROW PA program to ensure Pennsylvania’s graduates have incentive to stay here, and ensuring our largest state-related universities receive funding based upon meeting new performance metrics and accountability provisions.”

Topper also noted that the budget prioritizes improvements in rural Pennsylvania.

“The state budget we just passed makes critical investments in our transportation infrastructure so we can move ahead shovel-ready road and bridge projects in areas across Pennsylvania,” Topper added.

Despite the budget’s passage, Topper warned that work remains on reversing troubling fiscal trends in Pennsylvania to avoid tough budgetary decisions in the future.

“While revenues higher than budget estimates have shown some of the Republican-led policy wins in prior budgets are starting to have an impact, we must continue the work of providing pathways for significant economic growth and development in Pennsylvania if we stand any chance at reversing the challenging demographics of our ever-shrinking population,” Topper explained.

“Pennsylvania must use the tools at our disposal to create an environment welcoming to investment while getting government out of the way of job creators so we can continue righting the ship of economic growth and development in Pennsylvania.”

## New to the Blue Mountain Community Library

**Blue Mountain Community Library News:**  
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).

**Our America on Wheels museum pass has arrived and is ready for checkout!** Stop in today for this wonderful resources, courtesy of a sponsorship from Deerfoot Auto Parts.

**The library will discuss Theo of Golden by Allen Levi on Tuesday, July 14 at 6:30pm.** Email [info@bmcl.org](mailto:info@bmcl.org) to RSVP.

**The BMCL Summer Fun with Reading Program (SFRP) 2026: Words and Wonders! is underway.** Stop in today for reading challenges with exciting prizes, a readers' raffle, and programs for ages 3-6 and 4-9!

**The Book Nook is having a half-price sale during all open shifts from June 22-27: every morning from 10am-12pm, plus Monday, June 22 and Thursday, June 25 (6-8pm).** All items are half price! We have fiction and nonfiction for all ages plus large print, puzzles, and DVDs.

**New to the circulating collection - with many courtesy of a grant from Penguin Random House/United for Libraries - and more to be catalogued:**

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The Midnight Train (Matt Haig)  
Brawler: Stories (Lauren Groff)  
Dungeon Crawler Carl (Matt Dinniman)  
Upward Bound (Woody Brown)  
Revenge Prey (John Sandford)  
Anatomy of an Alibi (Ashley Elston)

**Adult nonfiction:**  
Crochet (Marie-Noelle Bayard)  
Dog Show (Billy Collins)  
There Is No Place for Us (Brian Goldstone)  
20-Minute Air Fryer (Christina Kynigos)

**Large print fiction:**  
Served Him Right (Lisa Unger)  
The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store (James McBride)

**YA fiction:**  
The Unteachables (Gordon Korman)

**YA nonfiction:**  
Top 20 Daredevils (Melvin and Gilda Berger)  
The World Record Paper Airplane Book (Ken Blackburn and Jeff Lambers)

**Juvenile fiction:**  
Hydoponic Hijinks (Rie Neal)  
Squished (Megan Wagner Lloyd and Michelle Mee Nutter)  
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Hello fellow readers,

A few weeks ago, I shared about my dear friend and design colleague Marty Carson’s celebration of life. The story is titled The Gift of Noticing: A Dove Tree That Didn’t Bloom and is archived on AskMaryStone.com. Several have sent sympathies along with memories of Marty and her gardens. Thank you, kind readers.

You may recall at the celebration Marty’s son Bob gave me a silver spoon engraved with my name. Since then, the story has deepened.

After turning the spoon over and researching the markings on the back, I learned it is a Victorian berry spoon patented in 1884. Think about that for a moment. The Brooklyn Bridge had only recently opened. Thomas Edison was still developing electric lighting. Marty’s parents had not yet been born.

It’s intriguing to imagine how many hands have held that berry spoon. Somewhere along the way, it belonged to another Mary. And now it has found its way to me.

Because gardens are never just about plants. They are about relationships. About belonging. They are about what we carry forward.

My sister recently brought me another object carrying a story as

she prepares to move across the country —a cherry table. It had belonged to our family for years, and as the story goes, one of the leaves had been shortened because it didn’t fit the space where it was used.

Along with the table came a collection of old photographs of family gatherings—children who are now grown.

And among those treasures was a xerox of a letter my father sent me when I was attending the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, paying my own way. It was after I had returned from a scholarship in England. I have the original letter, but I didn’t know that my father had given my mother a copy.

Reading it again transported me back in time. My father was worried about me moving to Manhattan at age 18. He wasn’t a man who talked openly. In many ways, his strategy was to keep his head down. Or ignore what made him uncomfortable.

The letter itself wasn’t emotional. Other than the first paragraph, where Dad wrote how proud he was of my accomplishments. That paragraph alone made the letter a treasure. Much of it described his interim Florida apartment and the ham radio equipment he had set up while working there before he and Mom moved into their new house. Yet between the lines was a connection. A father reaching toward a daughter in the best way he knew how.

The Xerox copy became a treasure because of the story.

It made me think about all the things we leave behind. Furniture. Photographs. Letters. Silver spoons. Without context, they are objects. With context, they be-



come vessels carrying pieces of our lives. The stories are what matter.

This year, our nation celebrated its 250th anni-

versary. Imagine where our country—and our world—will be in another hundred years. Hopefully in a more peaceful



place. What stories will future generations inherit? What objects will survive? What gardens? What wisdom?

Meanwhile, here in the present moment, the vegetable garden reminds me that life keeps moving forward. My early start became a late start. The deer discovered my bean sprouts before I managed to install the netting. The cucumbers from a two-year-old seed packet are thriving. Volunteer tomato plants have appeared, and I have no idea what variety they are. I’ve decided to let them stay.

Sometimes the best things in a garden are the ones we didn’t plan. And the same is true in the garden of life.

We are all carrying something forward. A spoon passes from one hand to another. A garden passes from one gardener to another. A story passes from one generation to the next.

And perhaps that is the greatest gift of all: not what we leave behind, but what continues to grow because we were here.

Garden Dilemmas?  
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## 40th Senate District Recovers from Storms

From PA State Senator Rosemary Brown

The severe storms over the holiday weekend caused widespread power outages and significant damage across our region, particularly in the East Stroudsburg area. I want to thank residents for their patience during this difficult time and, most importantly, for the kindness they showed one another. Time and again, neighbors came together to lend a helping hand to one another.

I also want to thank the thousands of line-workers, forestry crews, public works employees, first responders, emergency management personnel, dispatchers, engineers, and support staff who worked tirelessly around the clock to restore power and keep our communities safe.

Met-Ed and PPL re-



stored service to more than 324,000 customers impacted by the storms. While most customers have had their power restored, crews continue to complete the most complex repairs, including replacing damaged utility poles, repairing downed power lines, and clearing fallen trees to safely restore service. I know these outages

were difficult for many families and businesses, especially over the holiday weekend. I am personally in contact daily with our utility providers throughout the restoration process, and we stand ready to assist any residents who continue to experience storm-related issues or need help accessing available resources.

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

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. The workshop and discussion series, "Connections Matter", which facilitates the conversation about issues surrounding childhood trauma, will be offered virtually in English, Tuesday, July 21st, 2:00 p.m., and in Spanish, Wednesday, July 22nd, 2:00 p.m. Tips for protection, prevention, and promoting resilience within the community will also be discussed. A virtual "Understanding ACEs: Building Self-Healing Communities" presentation on Wednesday, August 19th, 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. 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.

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. 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.

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 esti-

mated 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," 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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# Boscola Supports State Budget with No New State Tax Increases, Continued Investments in Schools, Jobs and Infrastructure in Pennsylvania

State Senator Lisa M. Boscola (D-Lehigh/Northampton) voted in favor of Pennsylvania’s 2026-27 state budget, a bipartisan agreement that holds the line on state taxes while providing property-tax relief and investing in public education, workforce development, infrastructure and essential services.

“Families are already stretched by the rising cost of groceries, utilities, health care and housing. The last thing they need is Harrisburg asking them for more,” Boscola said. “I voted for this budget because it holds the line on state taxes and invests in priorities that make a real difference in people’s lives.”

During the 2026-27 fiscal year, Pennsylvania will provide more than \$1 billion in state-funded school property-tax relief for homeowners. Combined with the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program for seniors and people with disabilities, total state-funded property-tax relief will

exceed \$1.3 billion.

“I have fought for years to deliver meaningful property-tax relief, particularly for seniors and families struggling to remain in their homes,” Boscola said. “This funding provides real help, but relief is not the same as reform. I will continue pushing for a fairer system that reduces our overreliance on homeowners to fund public education.”

The budget also delivers approximately \$8.87 million more than last year to school districts in the 18th Senatorial District. Since FY 2022-23, annual state education funding for those districts has increased by more than 34%, or \$53 million.

“I have fought hard to increase the state share of funding for our local schools,” Boscola said. “Over the last four budgets, we have increased annual funding by more than \$53 million, providing additional resources for students, teachers and classroom programs while helping relieve pressure on local property taxpayers.”

The spending plan continues investments across Pennsylvania’s workforce and economic-development pipeline. It supports the Pennsylvania First Program, which helps attract business investment and create jobs; Main Street Matters, which strengthens downtowns and neighborhood business districts; and the Ben Franklin Technology Development Authority, which supports emerging technologies and growing companies.

The budget also maintains funding for Pennsylvania’s community colleges and career and technical education equipment grants, while increasing funding for career and technical education programs.

“Workforce development cannot begin and end with a four-year degree,” Boscola said. “We need strong community colleges and career and technical schools, modern equipment for hands-on training, and economic-development programs that help Pennsylvania businesses start, grow and hire. This bud-

get invests across that entire pipeline.”

The budget also provides \$775 million in one-time funding to accelerate local road and bridge projects that have already been planned in communities across Pennsylvania.

“Safe and reliable roads and bridges are essential to our communities and our economy,” Boscola said. “This funding will move planned projects forward faster, support good-paying jobs and strengthen the infrastructure that Pennsylvania families and businesses rely upon every day.”

Boscola said the final budget agreement does not address every challenge facing the Com-

monwealth but represents a responsible compromise that delivers meaningful results for Pennsylvania families.

“This is a responsible

budget, negotiated by a divided government and keeps Pennsylvania on the right track, that is why I supported it,” Boscola said.



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- Easy Non Fiction:**
- Moo On the Farm!: 10 Noisy Farmyard Sounds; Animal Babies in Rain Forests* by Jennifer Schofield
- Easy Reader Fiction:**
- Fly Guy & Fly Girl: Friendly Frenzy* by Tedd Arnold; *The Pond Crew* by Cynthea Liu
- Easy Reader Non Fiction:**
- Dinosaur Babies* by Lucille Recht Penner
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# St. Luke’s Launches Veterans Health Care Navigation Line to Improve Access and Support for Those Who Served

St. Luke’s University Health Network is proud to announce the launch of its new Veterans Health Care Navigation Line, a dedicated resource designed to simplify access to care and provide personalized guidance for veterans and their families. The service began this month, marking a significant step forward in the Network’s commitment to serving those who have served our nation.

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State Senator Rosemary Brown and the American Legion Department of Pennsylvania are partnering to offer assistance to veterans of the 40th Senatorial District in her Scotrun office.

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Contact Senator Brown’s office at (570) 620-4326 to schedule an appointment.



Senator Rosemary M. Brown

Veterans do not need to be a member of the American Legion to receive these services. Visit SenatorBrown40.com for additional information.

questions, referrals, scheduling appointments and accessing benefits. The new navigation line is part of a broader initiative to create a more coordinated, accessible, and veteran-centered care experience across St. Luke’s. In addition to the navigation line, St. Luke’s is gathering direct feedback from veterans to better understand their needs, introducing a specialized hospital bracelet to identify and support veteran patients, and offering veteran-focused events such as the Veterans Hike held on June 13. “Veterans deserve access to high-quality, coordinated care, and our goal is to make that experience as seamless as possible,” said Chad Brisendine, Chief Information Officer and Chair of St. Luke’s Veterans Services Committee. “The Veterans Health Care Navigation Line connects veterans directly with knowledgeable team members who understand their unique needs and are dedicated to guiding



them every step of the way.” St. Luke’s has long been committed to honoring and supporting veterans through comprehensive health care services, community partnerships, and employment and education opportunities. The navigation line enhances these efforts by providing a single, trusted point of contact for veterans seeking care across the Network. This effort reflects St. Luke’s mission to ensure every veteran receives high-quality care close to home, delivered by providers who understand the unique physical, emotional, and transitional challenges associated with military service. From primary and specialty care to mental health services and wellness programs, St. Luke’s offers a full continuum of care tailored to veterans and military families. The Network works closely with TRICARE, the VA Community Care Network, and other military health programs to ensure seamless coordination and access. The Veterans Health Care Navigation Line reinforces this commitment, offering personalized assistance so veterans can focus on their health, their families and the lives they’ve earned.



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# Shapiro Administration Launches New Heat Pump Workforce Training Program for In-Demand HVAC Jobs

Building on Governor Josh Shapiro's commitment to workforce development and lowering energy costs for Pennsylvanians, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) launched Penn Heat Pump Pathways (opens in a new tab), a first-of-its-kind statewide program that will recruit, train, and upskill HVAC workers to install energy-efficient heat pumps.

Funded through a \$4.9 million U.S. Department of Energy grant, the program will help prepare Pennsylvania's workforce to meet growing demand for energy-efficient heating and cooling systems while supporting the Shapiro Administration's broader effort to expand access to skilled trades and create more pathways to family-sustaining careers. Once launched, DEP expects the program to help support energy-efficiency improvements in more than 10,000 homes across the Commonwealth.

"Governor Shapiro has made investing in Pennsylvania's workforce a top priority because we know creating more opportunities for workers strengthens our economy and helps families succeed," said DEP Secretary Jessica Shirley. "Penn Heat Pump Pathways will prepare Pennsylvanians for good-paying careers while helping homeowners reduce energy costs through high-quality, energy-efficient installations."

Over the past three years, Governor Shapiro has made workforce development a cornerstone of his economic agenda. The Commonwealth has increased funding for apprenticeship programs and career and technical education by more than 50 percent — from \$118 million to \$183 million — while registering 266 new pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs and enrolling more than 20,000 new apprentices across Pennsylvania.

This program, administered by the Home Performance Coalition, focuses on three key areas: training, support, and opportunity. Training providers will offer approved heat pump instruction for both individuals entering the HVAC industry and experienced technicians looking to expand their skills. Employers can use the program to upskill existing workers and recruit newly trained employees.

Eligible participants may also receive support such as paid training costs, wraparound services, and career resources. By collaborating with employers, the program will also connect new workers with apprenticeships, job placement opportunities, and career counseling.

DEP's Energy Programs Office received the \$4.9 million Training for Residential Energy Contractors (TREC) grant through the Inflation Reduction Act from the U.S. Department of Energy

to establish the program. Pennsylvania was the first state in the nation to receive TREC funding. Since receiving the award, DEP has worked with the Home Performance Coalition to design Penn Heat Pump Pathways and build on existing heat pump training opportunities across Pennsylvania.

Workers and employers who successfully complete the program may become eligible to participate as qualified contractors in the Penn Energy Savers Program (opens in a new tab). The program is designed to help eligible low- and moderate-income households purchase and install energy-efficient appliances, including heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, electric stoves, and heat pump clothes dryers, as well as make electrical and insulation upgrades. Eligible households could receive rebates of up to \$14,000 toward qualified equipment, materials, and installation costs. More information on this proposed program, eligibility, percent of project covered by the rebate, etc., is available on the Penn Energy Savers website (opens in a new tab).

By expanding access to specialized HVAC training, Penn Heat Pump Pathways will help meet growing industry demand, strengthen Pennsylvania's skilled workforce, and ensure more homeowners can benefit from energy-saving technologies that lower utility costs.

# Clean Team Workforce Celebrates Its First Retiree

The Clean Team Workforce is proud to announce the retirement of Tom Stier, a senior lead employee and the company's first-ever retiree. While the Clean Team Workforce provides transitional employment to guests graduating from the Allentown Rescue Mission's Transformation Program, the organization hires select graduates, like Stier, for key, long-term roles.

Stier came to the Allentown Rescue Mission in 2012, along with his twin brother Tim, after facing financial difficulties brought on by the passing of their mother and the downsizing of the store where they worked. Both men graduated from the Mission's Transformation Program in 2013. Tim found employment at a local company, while Tom joined the Clean Team Workforce and has worked there for the last thirteen years.

During his tenure, Stier worked every job offered by the Clean Team Work-



force. He rose through the ranks from street litter collector to a trusted crew leader and driver. "Tom has been instrumental in the continued success of the Clean Team Workforce. He served as a mentor and role model for new employees, conducted employee training, and led crew transport, litter cleanup, and equipment maintenance," stated Clean Team Workforce Manager Michael Mauro. "He will be greatly missed."

Beyond his official duties, Stier fostered a strong sense of community as the unofficial leader of the Clean Team Workforce's "breakfast club". Stier arrived at the Allentown Rescue Mission each morning at 3:30 a.m. to brew fresh coffee and open the building for his colleagues. The men shared a meal and enjoyed each other's company before starting the workday.

When asked what he will miss the most, Stier responded, "The people. I've made so many friends over the years at the Allentown Rescue Mission and on the job. I'll be back to say hello."



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## DEP Proposes Updated Safeguards to Prevent PFAS Forever Chemicals in Biosolids from Polluting Groundwater

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has proposed two permit updates that will prevent Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) “forever” chemicals in biosolids from polluting farm fields and groundwater. The updated permits introduce monitoring requirements for the first time for wastewater treatment facilities that produce biosolids for land application.

“Pennsylvania continues to lead the way in protecting residents from PFAS chemicals. Three years ago, we published the first standalone drinking water safeguards in Pennsylvania history, years ahead of the federal government, and today

we are taking steps to keep forever chemicals out of our food and out of our groundwater,” said DEP Secretary Jessica Shirley. “These updated permits will give the farmers of Pennsylvania peace of mind that the biosolids they use to fertilize their fields are not going to come with PFAS contamination.”

“Farmers need reassurance that what they spread on their fields is safe,” said Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding. “This is central to public trust and to growing safe, healthy food that also protects our water resources for the future. In crafting thoughtful, intentional public policy we must consider established sci-

entific data, coupled with public and industry perspectives to ensure our success in protecting soil, water, and food systems.”

Under the updated permits, wastewater treatment facilities would have to monitor PFOS and PFOA in any biosolids they produce for land application. PFOS and PFOA are two forever chemicals that have been linked to health issues like cancer.

The permits would also require that wastewater treatment facilities with PFOS or PFOA in biosolids over a certain threshold develop a plan to reduce the amounts of the chemicals in the wastewater. The updated permits would also allow wastewater treatment

facilities to accept food waste in their digesters.

DEP developed the revisions to these permits through a robust two-phase stakeholder engagement process. First, beginning in January 2025, DEP convened a 16-member Data Gathering Team to review available data and practices in other states regarding PFAS in biosolids. With the results from the Data Gathering Team in hand, DEP then formed a Biosolids Working Group to discuss proposed updates to the general permits. This group included the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association (PMAA), Pennsylvania Water Environment Association (PWEA), Mid-Atlantic Biosolids As-

sociation (MABA), the Pennsylvania Septage Management Association (PSMA), Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, PennAg Industries, PA Farm Bureau, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), and DEP.

The draft permits are published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin (opens in a new tab). DEP will hold a 60-day comment period that will open July 4, 2026 and close at 11:59 PM on September 2, 2026. All comments will be taken into consideration. Comments may be submitted through DEP’s eComment platform (opens in a new tab) or by emailing [ecomment@pa.gov](mailto:ecomment@pa.gov) (emailed comments must include the originator’s name and address). The permits are PAG-07

(General Permit for Beneficial Use of Exceptional Quality Biosolids) and PAG-08 (General Permit for Beneficial Use of Biosolids). An additional permit for septage biosolids (PAG-09) is also available for public comment.

In January 2023 DEP finalized regulations limiting PFOS and PFOA in drinking water, the first time that Pennsylvania has ever set a drinking water standard independent of the federal government, which was still years away from implementing drinking water limits. DEP continues to investigate sources of PFAS contamination throughout Pennsylvania.

For more information, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection’s Website: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep>

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# NJ DEP Launches Sixth Annual Summer Youth Inclusion Initiative To Inspire Future Environmental Leaders

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection today announced the launch of its sixth annual Youth Inclusion Initiative, an innovative partnership with community-based organizations that provides young people in underserved communities with the opportunity to experience careers in a wide variety of environmental fields.

Participants aged 16 to 20 are from communities that have disproportionately less open space or lack access to natural lands. They will work closely with DEP staff over the next six weeks with private and non-profit community-based organizations to learn about careers in water and air monitoring, natural resource management, wildlife conservation, and more.

“The DEP is proud to once again offer this award-winning program to help the next generation of New Jerseyans develop skills that prepare them for careers in a variety of environmental professions,” Department of Environmental Protection Acting Commissioner Ed Potosnak said. “Our staff is excited to share their expertise and commitment to protecting the environment with emerging environmental leaders dedicated to improving public health and quality of life in their communities.”

**Pioneering Initiative:**

The Youth Inclusion Initiative is believed to be the only state-led program in the nation of its kind that focuses on connecting young people in overburdened communities with hands-on experience in environmental professions.

Since 2021, the summer program has progressed from 18 participants and two host organizations to more than 100 participants from 10 host organizations. Community Host Organizations are essential to the success of the program by working to recruit participants and then planning and supervising their summer experience. Additionally, the organizations promote participants’ continued growth by helping them identify next steps, such as furthering their education.

This year’s community host organizations are: Groundwork Elizabeth, Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC, Newark), the Neighborhood Improvement Association (NIA, Trenton), NJ Community Development Corporation (Paterson), the Environmental Justice Alliance (Newark); the Outdoor Equity Alliance (Trenton), Stevens

Institute of Technology (Hoboken), Team Wilderness (Jersey City), United Parks as One (Newark) and WNW Strategies Inc. (Willingboro).

This week participants were introduced to DEP’s senior leadership and were provided an orientation at DEP headquarters. During the orientation, they were familiarized with the department’s work to protect public health and the state’s resources as well as the many activities planned for the summer. The orientation featured career spotlight presentations by staff from DEP’s Office of Emergency Management, as well as the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

“Environmental careers aren’t one-size-fits-all,” said Elizabeth Dragon, DEP’s Assistant Commissioner for Community Investment and Economic Revitalization. Whether these young people are interested in the trades, college, military service, or public sector work, the environment needs them. When alumni tell us, ‘This is what I want to do for the rest of my life,’ we know we’re building more than just a workforce – we are empowering future environmental leaders.”

Summer Programs in

**Detail:**

Over the course of the summer, participants will spend most of their time gaining technical skills through hands-on activities such as utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to collect and analyze survey data on park facilities, conducting field assessments of wetlands, building rain barrels, collecting macroinvertebrates (aquatic insects) from a stream to determine water quality, and more.

In addition, they will work on environmental projects in their home communities such as cleaning up local parks and planting community gardens. DEP provides the funding for these projects to the community host organizations.

To complement participants’ exposure to environmental careers, each week of the program will conclude with opportunities for professional development, such as resume and cover letter writing as well as presentations from guest speakers.

Some of the program’s guest speakers work alongside the New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development to open career pathways to sustainable, green jobs for those from un-

derserved communities. Speakers from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will also provide insight into the professional and educational benefits for pursuing green careers offered through the National Guard.

**Partner quotes:**

“At Team Wilderness, we believe every young person deserves opportunities that expand their horizons and help them discover new possibilities, which is why we’re thrilled to partner with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection through the Youth Inclusion Initiative. Through this program our youth will be introduced to environmental careers and stewardship while building confidence, leadership, and a deeper connection to nature. We can’t wait to see what they accomplish this summer.” – Steve Cunningham, Team Wilderness Executive Director.

“Employment Strategies Unlimited believes that environmental stewardship and workforce development go hand in hand. Through our partnership with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, we are proud to help prepare the next generation of environmental leaders while

building sustainable career pathways that create lasting opportunities for youth, adults, and communities throughout New Jersey.” – Rhea Hood, Director Employment Strategies Unlimited / WNW Strategies

“United Parks As One is honored and grateful to be selected as one of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Community Host Organizations for the Youth Inclusion Initiative. This extraordinary program will give ten young people from Newark the opportunity to learn firsthand from environmental professionals while exploring careers in conservation, sustainability, and public service and developing the leadership skills needed to succeed. The exceptional training provided to site supervisors reflects NJDEP’s commitment to excellence and is among the best professional training experiences I have had in nonprofit leadership.”— Armstead Johnson, Executive Director, United Parks As One

“The Youth Inclusion Initiative empowers young people to become environmental change makers through hands-on experiences, real-world challenges, and meaningful career pathways.

Through this program, youth gain the skills, confidence, and leadership needed to create lasting change in their communities and their own lives. We are grateful to NJDEP for its continued partnership with the Stevens Center for Sustainability in empowering the next generation of environmental leaders.” — Dr. Vaishali Kushwaha, Program Manager and Principal Investigator, Stevens Center for Sustainability

“Groundwork Elizabeth is incredibly grateful for our partnership with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and its Youth Inclusion Initiative. Through this exceptional program, our youth gain meaningful hands-on experience, professional training, and the confidence to become the next generation of environmental leaders. The DEP’s commitment to investing in youth has strengthened our ability to provide life-changing opportunities while building a healthier, more resilient future for our communities. Together, we are empowering young people with the skills, knowledge, and purpose to make a lasting impact.” – John Evangelista, Executive Director, Groundwork Elizabeth

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Building Trust In An Era Of Misinformation, Disinformation and Misinterpretation

By Dorothy York, President and CEO of North American Precis Syndicate (NAPS)

As public health information programs are developed, there has been increasing scrutiny of the veracity of the content, in the Fake News era. Persuading the public to act requires a professional communications plan that is resilient to change and includes agile responses to new information.

Like the game of telephone, that we played as children, in which a message is whispered from one person to the next, all around a circle, until it comes back sounding like a vastly different story, so too, even with the best of intentions, can information lead to a chain reaction of misinformation. Some bad actors start off whispering a story that is untrue, which makes matters worse and the public less trusting of the news, even if it is from a reliable source.

Trust has to be earned for meaningful change to take place. The best way to earn trust is to tell the truth, consistently, citing credible sources, such as the government, doctors, scientists, or other reputable experts whose word should be beyond reproach. Even the best sources can make mistakes, which should be corrected as soon as possible, as new information becomes available and situations evolve.

As we watch the leaders of our society trying to set a good example by exhibiting the desired behavior, which is helpful, it would be even better if we could see case studies of people who have actually benefited from following the recommended course of action. It takes time to build trust, which becomes easier when people start to see that a plan is working.

An easy way to earn trust is to have the helpful information repeated again and again in a wide variety of prestigious news media, which people turn to regularly as their primary source of information about new developments and strategies for protecting their health and safety.

Traditional media that is hyperlocal, followed by millions regularly, is a highly trusted resource for health experts to disseminate their helpful advice. Journalists are willing to share information, which could help save lives, if it is from medical experts that are reputable and trustworthy. Statistics should be credible, including the source of the information, such as a survey, a study, a trade association, the government, or the opinion of a doctor.

Some like to use celebrity spokespeople, but if they are paid, that must be disclosed, and they will only be credible if they have had a real life experience that relates to the news to be shared.

The public needs to know what the benefit is of the message that is being conveyed and how they can believe that the information is accurate. If the information is helpful, and shown to be true, people will follow advice like a bee to honey.

For more information, or a proposal from our experts, contact us at [info@napsnet.com](mailto:info@napsnet.com) or visit <https://mynewstouse.com/>.



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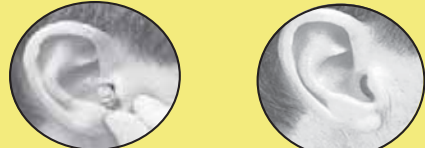
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