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JANUARY 2025

Big Issues Face Maryland Lawmakers This Session

The Maryland legislature's annual 90-day session got underway on January 8. Each year, state senators and delegates discuss and review thousands of proposed bills. Here are four of the most important topics that will draw plenty of debate between now and April.

4 High Energy Costs

With Maryland shutting down coal power plants and seeking alternatives to fossil fuels, electricity costs are rising. Delegate Brian Chisholm wants Maryland to roll back the Climate Solutions Now Act (Senate Bill 528), which he said "created this mess."

"Let the free market determine how to most efficiently, cost-effectively, and environmentally consciously increase supply and lower costs," he said.

Senate President Bill Ferguson suggested that Maryland consider all wind, solar, geothermal, nuclear and natural gas options to find necessary relief from high utility costs.

3 Health Care

Among the many health care issues plaguing Marylanders, two are near the top of the list: the high cost of prescription drugs and the number of denied claims. Republicans have also discussed cutting Medicaid spending.

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The Cost Of Crowded AACPS Classrooms

BLUEPRINT FUNDS FOLLOW THE STUDENT

There is a wide variance of individual per-pupil funding within each school:

FUNDING SOURCE	STUDENT A		STUDENT B		STUDENT C	
	ELIGIBLE	FUNDING AMOUNT	ELIGIBLE	FUNDING AMOUNT	ELIGIBLE	FUNDING AMOUNT
Foundation (base amount)	✓	\$8,642	✓	\$8,642	✓	\$8,642
Compensatory Education			✓	\$7,519	✓	\$7,519
English Language Learner					✓	\$8,642
Special Education					✓	\$7,951
		\$8,642		\$16,161		\$32,754



Table data sourced from Anne Arundel County Public Schools' website

By Ian Ferris

Rising classroom sizes across Maryland are causing parents and teachers to become concerned about the quality of education that students are receiving. The issue has extensive implications for students' academic performance and for teachers' workloads and mental health.

"If you're going to put your money anywhere, it would be on qualified teachers and smaller class sizes," said Kate Stefancik, a behavior specialist with 27 years of experience in education. Stefancik currently works at Marley Elementary School in Glen Burnie.

Research supports Stefancik's perspective. The Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) experiment, a 25-year study conducted in Tennessee, demonstrated that smaller class sizes in kindergarten through third grade have significant benefits. At this age, children learn the fundamentals of reading, writing, math and socialization, which are critical for development.

In 2021, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation sought to improve public education by reshaping funding allocation. The Blueprint created an "expert review team" tasked with analyzing schools to determine their

funding needs and assess whether the Blueprint's goals are being met.

However, the implementation of the Blueprint has had unintended consequences. Rich Wiles, a 20-year teacher at Severna Park Elementary School, explained, "In Blueprint, if your school is a high-performing school and you have high test scores, your class size now increases, and they give more resources to lower-performing schools."

This funding disparity has led to larger class sizes in Severna Park schools. "Our class sizes jumped up," Wiles said. "We have some first grades that are like 25-26 kids this year."

During a Board of Education workshop near the end of the 2023-2024 school year, Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) Superintendent Mark Bedell said 1.5% of classes in the county, or 25 classes across eight schools, have 30 or more students.

AACPS Chief Financial Officer Matt Stanski admitted that most of those classes are from the Severna Park, Broadneck, Crofton and South River feeder systems.

Stanski said it's not fair to blame the Blueprint legislation for all staffing shortages because it's a nuanced issue that involves a bunch of factors like funding and school enrollment, but the Blueprint has caused school systems to reflect on how resources are allocated. He also emphasized that AACPS is still

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New Year Ushered In With First Snowstorm Of 2025

Across Anne Arundel County, 6 to 10 inches of snow fell on January 6, causing schools and businesses to close. Kids enjoyed three back-to-back snow days on the heels of winter break, and crews worked hard to clear roads, walkways and trails. A second weather system again blanketed the area in light snow on January 11, just before the Ravens' playoff game against the Steelers, which Baltimore won 28-14. Thank you to all of our readers who submitted snow photos, and as always, please feel free to send your news and photos to the Voice by emailing spvnews@severna-parkvoice.com. View more snow day photos on page 30.



Canine Graysea never lost "faith in the flakes" and reported an unofficial snowfall total of about 7 inches in Severna Park.

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Margueritte Mills - Volunteer Of The Month

Every month, the Severna Park Voice recognizes the good work of a local volunteer to honor Voice founder and lifelong Severna Park resident Margueritte Mills.

Carolyn Heim Helps Make SPUMC Home For Guests Experiencing Homelessness

By Meredith Winter

For over 30 years, men and women experiencing homelessness have found shelter in area houses of worship during the coldest months of the year through Winter Relief, a program coordinated by Arundel House of Hope. Each week, a local house of worship provides guests with a warm place to sleep, meals, activities, companionship, spiritual guidance and more.

Severna Park United Methodist Church (SPUMC) became a Winter Relief host site in 2012, and congregant Carolyn Heim stepped up to volunteer immediately. As SPUMC's site supervisor, she oversees the efforts of roughly 200 volunteers and a leadership team of about 15 people who make Winter Relief possible for two weeks each year.

In addition to countless hours of planning and preparation, Heim spends every afternoon, evening and morning of SPUMC's Winter Relief weeks in November and February at the church she has attended since 1987. She makes it a top priority to learn every guest's name by day two, to help them feel like the church is truly their home while they are there.

Heim shared that SPUMC's army of Winter Relief volunteers give of their time not only through preparing meals, providing transportation and hosting activities, but also through unique kindnesses to help guests feel loved and at home. Professionals within the church have provided dental cleanings and haircuts, and congregants have washed laundry in their homes, played games and shared meals with guests, and more. In the fall, Heim added, volunteers hold a large bonfire for guests, and in Febru-



Photo by Meredith Winter

As the Winter Relief site supervisor at Severna Park United Methodist Church, Carolyn Heim leads a large team of volunteers who come together twice a year to provide shelter, meals, and companionship to men and women experiencing homelessness.

ary, guests enjoy an ice cream social.

"There was one year that one guest basically told us that he felt like every time he walked in our doors, that he felt like he was home, so that was really meaningful to us," Heim recalled. "Part of what we do ... is all of our volunteers that happen to be at the church each evening — the ones cooking, the ones that host, myself — we all sit down with (the guests) and eat dinner, and we talk to them and hear their stories, so for somebody to say that — that they felt like they were home — made us feel like we were doing the right thing."

Echoing Jesus' teaching that it is a greater blessing to give than receive, Heim emphasized that the volunteers gain so much from the experience of serving during Winter Relief. She encourages those interested in serving to get involved because "it's an opportunity to do a mission right here at the church without going off to Costa Rica or somewhere else."

Heim is familiar with missions

abroad, as well, having served on trips to Utah and Costa Rica. She has volunteered on SPUMC's missions committee, on the finance committee, as a Sunday school teacher, as president of the United Methodist Women, and more. She previously took disciple classes at the church — 34-week intensive Bible studies — and later taught them as well.

Heim is an avid reader who enjoys playing pickleball and going for long daily walks with her husband, who recently offered to serve as assistant Winter Relief site supervisor after another volunteer stepped down. She began her career in banking, and today she books cruises on a part-time basis. A resident of Shipley's Choice, Heim has three adult children and two grandchildren, and she is involved in the Assistance League of the Chesapeake and the Junior League of Annapolis.

Heim expressed gratitude for the dedicated volunteers who help host Winter Relief each year, sharing that they all do a great job and many return to serve year after year. She acknowledged that one day she will need to find her replacement as site supervisor. But for now, she continues to serve, noting that it touches her heart.

"Our church's mission statement is 'Love. Serve. Follow.' In providing effective leadership to our Winter Relief program, Carolyn embodies all three: Love for God and neighbor, a compassionate serving heart, and a powerful example of what it means to follow Jesus in our time and in this community," said the Rev. Ron Foster, lead pastor of SPUMC. "She has done a fabulous job of mobilizing volunteers to serve and making hundreds of guests feel loved and valued."

Big Issues Face Maryland Lawmakers This Session

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2 Blueprint For Maryland's Future

Passed by the legislature in 2021, the landmark legislation is increasing education funding until it reaches a hefty \$3.8 billion price tag each year. The 10-year plan is focused on the following pillars: early childhood education, high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders, college and career readiness, more resources for students to be successful, and governance and accountability.

Advocates expect the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to trans-

form the state's education system into one of the best in the world, but some elements may have to be sacrificed or postponed to make the plan more affordable.

1 Budget Deficit

With costs outpacing revenue, Maryland is facing a \$2.7 billion deficit for Fiscal Year 2026. According to Maryland Matters, Department of Legislative Services budget analyst David Romans made the following claim to legislative fiscal leaders. "By fiscal 2030 — the final year of our forecast — we are showing the state will only have

enough revenue to cover 84% of the expenses we're projecting the state to incur," Romans said. "That is the largest gap that we have seen in the last 20 years. It is more significant than the Great Recession."

Lawmakers will start by cutting current projects, but if that fails, tax increases are possible for the state's high-income earners.

Governor Wes Moore has directed state agencies to partner with the Governor's Office of Performance Improvement to find operational cost savings, streamline operations, and eliminate redundancies to better serve taxpayers.



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Hicks Family Strengthened By Supportive Community In Fight Against Pediatric Cancer

By Meredith Winter

A week before Christmas, one of the things 8-year-old Clyde Hicks was most looking forward to was giving his big sister, Clover, a present he'd picked out for her birthday, which falls on December 25.

Clyde loves his family — his parents, sister and pets — as well as his friends, art, chess, puzzles, math, “Despicable Me” and “Minions.” The Oak Hill Elementary School third-grader is especially passionate about baseball, and has played as catcher, shortstop, pitcher — even a coach — on his Green Hornets spring and fall teams, the Nationals and Brewers. The memory of his teammates pushing his wheelchair to first base last summer still helps Clyde stay positive today as he bravely faces ongoing cancer treatments.

In November 2023, Clyde told his parents, Nate and Shelley Hicks, that he'd been having back pain. Following an MRI that revealed a mass between two of his vertebrae, he was diagnosed in December of that year with Grade 2-3 intramedullary astrocytoma, a rare pediatric spinal cancer.

As Clyde underwent 30 sessions of targeted proton radiation therapy, the cause of his cancer was identified as Mismatch Repair Syndrome, a



Clyde Hicks and his older sister, Clover, posed for a photo with Luigi and Mario while on a family trip to Universal Studios Hollywood, which was made possible through Make-A-Wish Mid-Atlantic.

rare genetic condition caused by gene mutations. Follow-up imaging in April 2024 revealed new challenges: Grade 2 brain cancer, separate from his spinal cancer. Clyde finished another 30 radiation sessions in late December 2024.

Throughout this journey that no child or parent wants to face, Clyde has demonstrated courage and optimism. He continued to play baseball regardless of how he felt, stayed in touch with his friends while at the hospital, and reached new heights — literally — on a family trip to California.

“I was tall enough for all of them —

thank goodness! — and they were really fun,” Clyde said of riding the roller-coasters at Universal Studios Hollywood while on an unforgettable trip made possible through Make-A-Wish Mid-Atlantic. Nationally, the nonprofit has granted more than 360,000 wishes for children with critical illnesses.

“Make-A-Wish was a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” Nate said, noting that the September 2024 family trip was planned out to the last detail, from travel to lodging to entertainment.

Clyde put his pitching skills to the test in a throwing game and won a prize on his first try: Agnes’ unicorn from “Despicable Me.” In addition to exploring Universal Studios, the Hicks family saw the Hollywood Walk of Fame, visited the iconic Santa Monica pier and arcade, and more during the trip.

“We really enjoyed just being together more than anything,” Nate said.

At home, the Hicks’ spirits have been lifted by their Oak Hill community: The school organized a parade to send Clyde off to radiation treatments, among other gestures. The scout groups Clyde and Clover are in have been unwavering in their support as well. Pack 918 provided gifts and gift cards during Clyde’s treatments to make hotel stays more comfortable, and Troop 2366 encour-

aged Clover with special activities.

Family friends launched a GoFundMe campaign for the Hicks, and Clyde’s baseball teammates have supported him wholeheartedly. The avid sports fan has even been welcomed as a special guest by the Baltimore Orioles, Savannah Bananas, Baltimore Ravens, Washington Commanders, Annapolis Blues, Maryland Terrapins and U.S. Naval Academy.

Nate and Shelley shared that every kindness their family has received has provided them with strength and motivation along their journey.

“Strong community and strong friends and strong family — all of those things have really helped,” Nate said.

A captain in the Air Force, Nate shared that after taking time to process the initial shock and sadness of Clyde’s diagnosis, he and Shelley decided that it wouldn’t do them much good to agonize over unknowns. Instead, they determined to take things “one day and one decision and one step at a time throughout the rest of the journey.”

Nate has also immersed himself in understanding the science of it all, considering it a blessing to learn so that he can help others process cancer diagnoses. “If there’s anybody out there that’s going through a similar situation that would like to talk to us about it, we’re here to help them,” he said.

Through physical therapy, Clyde is working toward walking again after losing some functionality in his legs. He will continue with immunotherapies to help his immune system fight cancer.

To learn more about Clyde’s journey and ways to support his family, go to www.onclydesside.com.

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HOMETOWN HEROES

Doug Braun • Earleigh Heights Volunteer Fire Company

By Zach Sparks

zach@severnaparkvoice.com

Awards and plaques line shelves in the home of Charles “Doug” Braun, an emergency medical technician (EMT), treasurer and hall manager for Earleigh Heights Volunteer Fire Company in Severna Park.

The President’s Award winner for helping the president with day-to-day operations in 2020 and 2022. Most hours in 2019, most training hours in 2020, member of the third quarter in 2021 and most standby hours in 2023 with 1,623.

He values recognition from his peers above individual accolades.

“Awards are nice, but I don’t do it for awards,” Braun said. “You can put awards on your wall and dust them off every month, but when you get a thank you, that is really special.”

Braun joined Earleigh Heights Volunteer Fire Company in February 2019. He originally wanted to be a firefighter. A father of two children, then ages 3 and 5, Braun decided to help the station another way after consulting his wife.

“I’m not 29 years old anymore; I’m 69,” Braun said. “It’s a young man’s game.”

Instead of firefighting, he pursued the path of EMT. He passed the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians test, which gave him two hours, or 120 minutes, to answer 120 questions.



Charles “Doug” Braun is an emergency medical technician (EMT), treasurer and hall manager for Earleigh Heights Volunteer Fire Company.

“I passed the test in 118 minutes,” he said with a laugh.

Braun enjoyed washing firetrucks for and with the career firefighters, and by summer 2019, he became the pseudo treasurer, helping Earleigh Heights catch up on bill payments.

He was later voted to be treasurer, which put his business expertise to use. Braun previously worked as a contract advisor with Northrop Grumman. He wrote and negotiat-

ed contracts, many of them for the U.S. Department of Defense, and he resolved conflicts.

The volunteer had no idea he would soon oversee the fire company’s finances during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the station relies so heavily on community events for fundraising, it was a daunting task to continue operations with no revenue and almost no savings, but Braun made it work, getting contractors to accept payment installments instead of full invoices.

Once Earleigh Heights got clearance to resume in-person activities in 2021, Braun got to work on hall rentals and invited food trucks to return.

He is currently renting the hall through 2026. The station can hold up to 400 people and it’s stocked with tables, chairs and a kitchen.

“We’ve done weddings and wedding receptions, quinceañeras, birthdays, funeral wakes,” he said.

Braun and other volunteers also stay busy with bingo events, bull and oyster roasts, and the annual July carnival.

As Braun explained, Anne Arundel County provides a budget for utilities and supplies, but the station is not county owned, so the career and volunteer staff fundraise for the apparatus they need. “We don’t buy the ambulances, but we buy our firetruck, utility truck, chief’s truck, engines 121 and 122, and the rescue squad,” he said.

Because the fire station is old, it has its challenges, like leaks and issues with heating and cooling, but Braun loves working alongside the career firefighters and volunteers.

“It’s taken a lot out of my family as well; I hope people realize that,” he said. “When I’m at the station, my wife is at home picking up the slack for my now 7-year-old and 9-year-old.”

Earleigh Heights Volunteer Fire Company Chief Dave Crawford said he and his team are very lucky to have Braun on their team.

“Our fire company has roles beyond responding to medical and fire emergencies,” Crawford said. “Doug stepped up and filled a critical need. He applied his business insights and experience to help analyze our processes and improve a key part of our fundraising operations. We depend on volunteers like Doug to support the success of the fire company.”

Awards are nice, but Braun volunteers because he wants to give back to the community, he is retired and because it sets a good example for his kids.

“I think it’s important we support each other, because a lot of communities don’t have that support,” he said. “People seriously rely on us during possibly the worst day of their lives whether it’s stabilizing them and getting them to the hospital or putting out a house fire, saving their property and saving their lives.”

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With Your Help, SPAN Has Touched Many Lives

Michele Sabean

Director of Development
SPAN Inc.



Almost 35 years ago, on April 2, 1990, SPAN opened its doors to local area families in crisis. SPAN was formed because of the concern on the part of the ministers in the Severna Park area regarding the growing demand for emergency help, the need to identify the people seeking help, and a process to help those people in a dignified and efficient manner. When the original six churches came together to start SPAN, they consolidated the process for those needing assistance.

We are a very small organization, so summarizing our data from the beginning is difficult, however, in the last 15 years, SPAN has helped more than 60,000 people with food and/or emergency financial assistance. In these last 15 years, SPAN has helped with close to \$2 million in emergency financial assistance for people facing court-ordered evictions or utility turnoffs, and those needing help with medical expenses. Expanding that data to SPAN’s start, together we have helped more than 100,000 people! That’s not just a number; that represents real people helped.

“James” is a single dad raising two young children. He started coming to SPAN when his wife, who was the main breadwinner in the family, left. He had trouble paying for day care and the bills, especially the rent.

As he was trying to find a better paying job and keep things going with the children, he got behind with the utility bill and had a turnoff notice. The financial help and food, as he got re-established, was important.

Just as James was going through a crisis, many of our clients are living paycheck to paycheck and then faced with an emergency such as a health crisis or loss of job hits. We have clients battling cancer or other chronic health issues that make it harder to work. Some of them are also supporting other family members. For some, the food assistance is extremely helpful as they struggle with prolonged job searches and high prices.

Occasionally over the years, we hear back from people SPAN helped. “Lisa” came in recently with a donation for SPAN and told us she wanted to give something back since SPAN was the short-term assistance that had made a major difference in her life, helping her to stay on track and not fall further behind. She said SPAN’s financial help allowed her to stay in her apartment when she had an unexpected health crisis and was temporarily unable to work. The help from SPAN allowed her to continue going to school, paying her other bills and moving forward.

But the more than 100,000 people impacted by SPAN’s help are only part of the story — many more lives have been touched. The individuals in this community who have made that work possible over the years have had impactful SPAN experiences also. I was struck by the assurance in the young teen who commented that helping with SPAN food drives was something the teen’s family always did.

We have many families with multiple generations involved in helping SPAN — spending time sorting food together, inspiring relatives to donate financially; grandparents including shopping and donating food in their activities with their grandchildren; or as a family, sponsoring another family in our Holiday Caring program. For some, SPAN’s Turkey Trot was the first 5K race they ever completed! And many are connected to SPAN through their church. Our 13 member churches provide so much ongoing support and are also essential for our special events. This year, thanks to the generosity of many individuals, groups and especially our member churches, 500 children were sponsored with Christmas gifts, significantly more than in the past.

To celebrate the many years of this community working together to help our neighbors, SPAN is having a big birthday party on April 5. The celebration will have food trucks, music and games, and will be a wonderful opportunity to mark what we have accomplished together. So many lives have been impacted, both those helped and those helping. We would love to hear your stories and see your photos. Email us or post on Instagram or Facebook using #SPAN35 to be entered for raffle prizes and mark your calendars to join us to celebrate!

SPAN is an independent nonprofit food pantry and emergency services provider that has been helping local families with eviction prevention, utility turnoffs, medical/prescription bills, and food since 1990. For more information, call 410-647-0889, email spanhelps@yahoo.com or visit www.spanhelps.org.



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Cast Your Votes For The Best Of Severna Park

The new year is underway, and that means voting for the Best of Severna Park contest will kick off soon. We would love your help choosing the best community amenities, restaurants, shops, non-profits, and other groups and businesses that make the area so special.

Check the February edition of the Voice for the official print ballot, which will also be shared online. Voting

will start as soon as the February paper hits mailboxes and will continue through March, with the winners being announced in the April edition. Rules will be printed with the February ballot, but you can get started now by brainstorming your favorite businesses and services.

To recommend a category that was not included on last year's ballot, email spvnews@severnaparkvoice.com.

The Cost Of Crowded Classrooms

» Continued from page 1

recovering from the recession of 2007-2009 and has been working to attract and retain employees.

"We've had to be intentional to invest in make-up step (salary increases), invest in higher COLAs (cost-of-living adjustments) to get our starting teacher salaries up higher," Stanski said. "But those investments come as a tradeoff to something else, and that tradeoff at times for the last three to four years has been new teacher FTEs (full-time equivalents). One, because we've had to invest on keeping the workforce we have, but it's hard to ask for new FTEs when you can't fill the ones that you have."

Parents are noticing the effects of larger classes. Bernadette Muehlhauser, a parent of a third-grader at Benfield Elementary, said, "Currently, my son is at 29 kids in his classroom ... This is the first year that he's kind of mentioned something about distractions, like just having distractions, and it's hard to focus."

Title I schools, usually in lower-income areas, haven't seen as drastic a change because they receive increased funding from the Blueprint.

"Title I schools tend to have a little bit lower class sizes than schools that are not Title I because we have a little more funding, so additional teachers are often purchased with that money," Stefancik explained.

Stefancik noted some improvements at Marley Elementary School after the Blueprint passed, citing "additional personnel" and an "evidence-based curriculum" as progress. However, she pointed out that the Blueprint has failed to bring in more highly qualified teachers.

The teacher shortage lies at the heart of the problem. "Maryland is not producing enough candidates to fill the jobs that are vacant," Wiles said.

The National Department for Education Statistics found that 86% of U.S. K-12 public schools reported challenges with hiring teachers for the 2023-2024 school year. In Maryland, 10.7% of all teachers did not return to work in the 2023-2024 school year, according to the Maryland Department of Education.

Class size growth can also be circumstantial. When a teacher moves grades or professions, remaining classes must merge, leaving them larger and with a worse staff-to-student ratio.

Erica Adams, a parent of a third-grader at Oak Hill Elementary School, hasn't seen much change at her child's school.

"As they progress from kindergarten to fifth (grade), their classes are

getting a little bigger, but I think that's a natural progression," she said.

The grade above her son has changed. "They were a bigger grade, and then they lost a teacher, so those class sizes got exponentially bigger," she said.

To address the shortage, schools are implementing creative solutions. "Which is creating what is called a contingent teacher," Wiles explained. "So it's a non-certified teacher that is being hired, and they're getting their degree while learning the job."

While these contingent teachers help fill vacancies, the high attrition rates make it difficult for schools to retain teachers long-term.

Another factor impacting students' education is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stefancik has noticed "much more aggressive behaviors in the classroom, especially at young ages, way more absolute defiance and disrespect, along with students often coming in not knowing as much as they used to, you know, not necessarily coming fully prepared for school."

Wiles has also noticed changes, mentioning that since the pandemic, "Some (students) need more resources, and we're having those students that need more resources within big classes, which makes it even more challenging."

While many parents focus on how class size impacts their children's education, an often-overlooked factor is the increased workload for teachers. Muehlhauser and Adams acknowledged the challenges this creates for educators.

"It's not a good environment for them to teach in," Muehlhauser said, reflecting on the difficulties teachers face managing large classrooms.

Adams agreed, adding, "I think that they have a harder time because it's just more to manage, and they can't give the proper attention to each student."

During the Board of Education workshop last spring, District 5 member Dana Schallheim addressed Severna Park Elementary School (SPES) and asked parents to be patient as the school system works to find a solution for adjusting class sizes and providing the best education for all students.

"SPES, I know you're hurting. OK, I get it. I hear you," she said, "but this is not the board's decision. This is the superintendent and his staff's decision based on data, based on enrollment, based on a myriad of other factors including Blueprint."

Zach Sparks contributed reporting to this story.

Reverend Lauren Holder's Lifelong Journey To St. Martin's-In-The-Field



The Rev. Lauren Holder, pictured with her husband, Jay, and their two children, was officially installed as rector of St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church in mid-January.

By Hannah Bates
Student Intern

The Rev. Lauren Holder's father had recently died and she was filled with grief. Seeking to process the loss, Holder left her home in Georgia and booked a flight to Spain to walk the Camino de Santiago, or the Way of St. James. Over a two-week pilgrimage, Holder hiked 125 miles from Ponferrada to Santiago de Compostela. She said this gave her the necessary time to recover and pray for St. Martin's-in-the-Field, a church hundreds of miles away from her home, a church she had only visited, and the church where she would begin serving as the new rector in a little under three months.

In mid-January, St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church of Severna Park celebrated Holder's official installation as its newest rector.

Throughout most of Holder's life, the priesthood did not attract her. Though she was always active in her church community from a young age, Holder had no desire to become a rector. She often said to those who encouraged her to pursue it, "My call is to be with people and not be in a pulpit."

She had always pursued church positions that allowed her to work closely with people. For two years, she served as a missionary and English teacher in West Africa, and for four years she served as a youth minister. In both callings, Holder deeply enjoyed her job, but both times she felt that God was calling her in another direction. While

in West Africa, Holder developed a medical condition that prevented her from staying overseas. She believed her calling was missionary work and returned home feeling defeated.

Holder, however, was then pleasantly surprised by a local church asking her to serve as its new youth minister. Again, she thought she had found her calling, yet every few months or so, her boss would ask her if she was interested in pursuing seminary. Holder always declined, until she led a youth mission trip to Costa Rica and overheard a woman talking about her path to becoming a priest. "Maybe I am called to be a priest," Holder realized at that moment.

She started the lengthy process of becoming ordained in the Episcopalian church and began dating her now husband, Jay Holder. Pursuing priesthood, Holder moved to New York to earn her Master of Divinity at The General Theological Seminary, marrying Jay two days before classes began.

After graduating, Holder served as a priest in churches in New York and Georgia and later applied for bishop of the Diocese of Rochester. She was not selected, but the disappointment from that was overshadowed by her grief for her father, who died a day later. Due to the public nature of the bishop vetting process, many churches knew of Holder and invited her to become their new rector.

However, Holder knew she needed a break. She declined every church that asked, except for one. When St. Martin's reached out to Holder, the leadership sent her a letter of condolence. Holder deeply appreciated this act of kindness and decided that once she was ready, she would visit the church.

After spending time with congregants, Holder decided St. Martin's was her next calling, but that before she could begin preaching, she needed to finish grieving. After explaining this to the church, Holder was impacted by the compassion and cooperation from St. Martin's. She found a community willing to wait for her to finish her sabbatical and hike the Camino de Santiago.

When she returned to the church in October 2024, Holder experienced one of her favorite memories: the weekend she began preaching also happened to be the church's weekend celebration of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. This event, marked by lively music, great food and community, was the perfect start to Holder's beginnings with St. Martin's.

Following four months of settling in, Holder, her husband and her two children were excited to celebrate her official installation in January. Holder said that she is blessed by the church community she has grown to love dearly and that she desires for each congregant to know that they are "such a gift" to her. Holder also hopes for greater integration between the church and the Severna Park community. She wants St. Martin's to be a place of peace and respite for all in the local area.

St. John The Evangelist News

Lent With Purpose

February 26 at 7:00pm

Prepare your heart to enter more deeply into the season of Lent at this special Walking with Purpose sponsored event in the parish activities center. All women are welcome. The Rev. John Bilenki will be the speaker.

This pre-Lent personal retreat will include time for reflection, reconciliation and adoration. No RSVP is required. Learn more about St. John's Walking With Purpose program and special events at www.wwpstjohnsp.com.

Volunteers Needed

Food Volunteers: Dinner is an integral part of the course Discovering Christ. Friendships are built around a delicious meal, and

hearts are opened as participants find fellowship and support in others who share their faith journey. Help make this a possibility by volunteering to contribute food items to the different sessions of Discovering Christ this January and February. Some of the sessions will be catered, but side items as listed will be welcomed.

Intercessory Prayer

Volunteers: St. John would like to storm heaven with prayers for both the Discovering Christ participants and the ChristLife team while the Discovering Christ sessions are running. Consider spending an hour in the oratory on Thursday nights this January and February, praying for the lord to touch the hearts of the participants so that they may

encounter him in a very real and personal way.

Hospitality Volunteers: There are lots of opportunities both large and small to help make Discovering Christ a success. Do you have a strong back? Can you help for half an hour and set up tables and chairs before the Discovering Christ sessions? Or help with breakdown? Or perhaps you could help with food, serving the many guests who come to these sessions?

Check SignUpGenius for open opportunities. Please note: all hospitality volunteers must be Virtus compliant before being permitted to volunteer.

For more information about any of these opportunities, visit www.stjohnsp.org/dc-volunteer.

LaToya Nkongolo Fills House Of Delegates Vacancy



LaToya Nkongolo spent the first week of the General Assembly with her fellow delegates at the State House in Annapolis.

Many Severna Park residents now have a new representative in the House of Delegates.

Following Rachel Muñoz's resignation as a state delegate representing District 31, the Anne Arundel County Republican Central Committee received three nomination forms from candidates seeking to fill the seat.

Candidates LaToya Nkongolo, Jason DuBois and Corine Frank answered questions during a public hearing at Earleigh Heights Volunteer Fire Company on January 3. A vote resulted in Nkongolo getting the nomination, which was then forwarded to Maryland Governor Wes Moore for approval. Nkongolo was sworn in on January 10, two days after the start of this year's 90-day session of the General Assembly.

Nkongolo ran for the House of Del-

egates two years ago and the Board of Education in 2024.

During her newest bid for the House of Delegates, Nkongolo emphasized her experience as a small business owner, parent, educator, mental health professional and budget manager, and expressed a passion for advocating for meaningful change.

In a statement, Nkongolo pledged to work tirelessly to champion and protect her party's values.

"I am committed to representing the conservative values that have long been overlooked in the Maryland General Assembly," she said. "Over the past three years of campaigning, I've had porch conversations with thousands of residents, and I understand what matters most to our district: family unity, strong communities, hard work, and a sense of safety."

It's Budget Season!

Dana Schallheim
Board of Education
District 5



Happy New Year! May 2025 bring each of you good health and happiness.

Now that January is upon us, so too is budget season. By the time this story prints, it's

likely that both Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) budget hearings will be in the past; however, you will still have ample time to make your concerns known via phone, email and at regularly scheduled meetings of the board should you choose to sign up to provide

testimony on non-agenda items. The board will amend and adopt the Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget during the February 19 meeting, which will begin at 6:30pm. Additionally, the county executive holds annual budget hearings in every district. The District 5 hearing will occur at Severna Park High School on Thursday, January 16, at 6:00pm.

Superintendent Mark Bedell's three key focus areas for this budget are early childhood literacy, special education, and multilingual learners. Each of these areas requires additional resources if we want to become the great school district our students deserve.

The recommended budget not only adds four teachers, 20 teacher

» Continued on page 12

Sheriff's Office Announces Key Initiatives And Achievements

By the Office of the Sheriff,
Anne Arundel County

Under the leadership of Sheriff Everett Sesker, the Anne Arundel County Office of the Sheriff is proud to share significant accomplishments and improvements designed to enhance public safety, strengthen community connections, and build a more capable and efficient law enforcement team. These initiatives represent the sheriff's ongoing commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all residents.

1. New Hires

The sheriff has prioritized building a strong and skilled team by hiring highly qualified new personnel to ensure we maintain a capable and prepared workforce to serve the community.

2. New Vehicles

Under the sheriff's leadership, we are nearing the goal of equipping every deputy with a dedicated vehicle. This initiative ensures deputies have the resources needed to perform their duties effectively, enhancing their ability to respond quickly.

Having a vehicle for every deputy improves response times and community safety by ensuring law enforcement is visible and readily available throughout our neighborhoods. A dedicated vehicle allows deputies to cover more ground, engage proactively with the public, and respond to incidents with the tools and equipment needed already on hand.

3. Promotions to Command Staff

The sheriff has recognized outstanding talent within the department by promoting qualified individuals to command staff roles. These promotions were long overdue and helped to ensure that we comply with the mandates outlined in the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021. The addition to our command staff will also strengthen our leadership, providing a collaborative and capable team to guide the department toward continued success.

4. Strengthened Community Connections

The sheriff's office has made it a priority to build stronger relationships with the community. By participating in public events, organizing outreach programs, and working closely with local organizations, we have increased our presence and created more opportunities to engage directly with residents. These efforts help us better understand the community's needs, address concerns, and show our commitment to working together for a safer, more connected community.

5. New Positions for Civilians

Recognizing the importance of civilian roles within the department, the sheriff has created new positions that allow civilians to grow and advance their careers within the agency. These newly created civilian supervisory positions enable sworn

personnel to devote more time to enforcement initiatives instead of administrative tasks. These supervisory positions allow employees to take on more responsibilities, gain leadership experience, and contribute meaningful contributions to our mission and to our agency. This approach helps retain experienced staff, supports career development, and builds a more inclusive and skilled workforce.

6. Higher Positive Visibility for the Sheriff's Office

The sheriff has prioritized strengthening our connection with the community, emphasizing that we are more than just an agency — we are an agency that deeply cares about public safety and the well-being of those we serve.

Through impactful initiatives like Purple Light Night, the department has raised awareness about domestic violence and offered unwavering support to survivors. Community-focused efforts, such as donating clothing to shelters, organizing school supply giveaways, and hosting events like Toys for Tots and Trunk or Treat — with special consideration for children with hidden disabilities — provide vital assistance to families in need. Additionally, including a deputy trained at the DARE Academy builds meaningful relationships with the next generation.

7. New Canines and Handlers

The department's K-9 unit has been strengthened with the addition of new canines and highly trained handlers, significantly enhancing its capabilities. These teams are integral to drug detection, search operations, and crime prevention, contributing to increased public safety. Additionally, the K-9 teams are actively involved in community outreach efforts, educating the public about the vital role and value of K-9s in law enforcement.

8. Deputies in Every Courtroom

Following the tragic murder of a Maryland judge, and at the request of Anne Arundel County's chief administrative judge for the circuit court, Sheriff Sesker took the unprecedented step of assigning a deputy to every courtroom. This proactive measure has significantly enhanced security, ensuring a safe environment for court proceedings and all who attend.

9. Special Police Officers

To reduce costs and allow deputies to focus on specialized assignments, Sheriff Sesker established the Special Police Officer (SPO) program for the courthouse. These armed contract SPOs, who have authority solely on courthouse grounds, are trained by and work directly under the sheriff's office. They will manage public access points and other areas as designated by the sheriff. This initiative enables deputies, with statewide law enforcement authority and advanced training, to dedicate their expertise to assignments that require their specialized skills.

» Continued on page 12



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It's Budget Season!

» Continued from page 10

assistants, and a speech pathologist to our birth-to-age-5 services to ensure that our youngest children requiring extra support are put on a path of success, but also adds over 100 special education teachers, additional teacher assistants, 28 Individualized Education Program (IEP) facilitators, five occupational therapists and five speech pathologists.

These extra teachers and support staff will provide increased support for our students who receive special education services, alleviate the crushing workload on existing special educators and IEP facilitators, and improve student outcomes. Please note that no additional special education resources were funded last year even as needs have increased. Kindergarten through 12th-grade students receiving special education services have grown 5% over the last two years and over 23% for our birth-to-5 cohort.

In the area of early childhood literacy, this budget adds \$2 million for early intervention teachers to replace expiring Blueprint for Maryland's Future funding, and \$275,000 for staffing as the conversion of the Carver Professional Growth & Development Center in Gambrills becomes our fourth early education center. If educators have the resources they need to intervene and begin to solve

literacy challenges earlier, outcomes for these students will improve.

Also, among the fastest growing student groups are multilingual learners. Dr. Bedell is recommending over \$2 million, which includes 18 teachers who specialize in English language development, two bilingual pupil personnel workers, and shifting six existing bilingual facilitator positions to 12-month positions to better serve families year-round.

Blueprint mandates will require AACPS to hire 154 additional classroom teachers to provide more opportunities during the school day for professional development, collaborative planning, and working with small groups of students who need additional supports. As stated in recent news articles, there is a possibility that this or other portions of the Blueprint could be "paused" due to significant state budget challenges. Specifics won't be known until the Maryland General Assembly passes the budget later this spring.

For more information about the Fiscal Year 2026 operating and capital budgets, including the entire budget document, Dr. Bedell's remarks about the budget and more, visit www.aacps.org/capitaloperating-budgets. Should you want to communicate your budget concerns or ideas to the full board, please email boardoffice@aacps.org and request your message be sent to all members.

As always, I can be reached at 443-534-2660, dschallheim@aacps.org, or via the social media platforms (Facebook or Instagram).

Sheriff's Office Announces Key Initiatives And Achievements

» Continued from page 10

10. Peer Support for Deputies in Distress

Acknowledging the challenges and stressors faced by deputies, the sheriff has established a peer support program. This initiative provides a crucial support network, helping deputies navigate difficult situations and promoting the importance of mental health and resilience.

11. Growth Through Training and Classes

Under the sheriff's leadership, employees have been encouraged to pursue professional growth through training and educational opportunities. This investment in development ensures a highly skilled and knowledgeable team, equipped to face evolving challenges in law enforcement.

12. Implementation of a Drone Program

The sheriff has introduced a drone program to enhance safety for both officers and citizens. This technology provides critical support during operations, offering valuable aerial perspectives and reducing risks during high-stakes situations.

13. Office of Professional Compliance

The sheriff has created the Office of Professional Compliance, also referred to as Internal Affairs, to promote accountability and maintain the highest standards of

integrity within the department. Additionally, the body-worn camera unit has been reallocated to the Office of Professional Compliance to guarantee regular review of the footage, ensuring that all personnel consistently follow laws and regulations.

14. Crime Apprehension Teams

The former warrant team has been restructured into crime apprehension teams one and two, focusing on improving efficiency and effectiveness in apprehending offenders and enhancing overall public safety efforts. The teams are currently undergoing additional training and are being equipped with the necessary tools to ensure the safety of all individuals during arrests.

15. Partnering with Outside Agencies

By partnering with agencies across the county, the sheriff has enhanced collaboration and shared resources to better protect and serve our communities. These partnerships improve communication and coordinate efforts to address county-wide challenges.

These achievements reflect the sheriff's dedication to strengthening our department, enhancing service delivery, and supporting our team. Let us continue working together to build on this momentum and uphold the highest standards of excellence in our duties.

For more information, call 410-222-1572 or email shsims99@aacounty.org.

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Overhauling Maryland's Military Law

Senator Bryan Simonaire submitted his military legislative package on January 9. He called the package "the most comprehensive overhaul of Maryland military law in modern history."

The package consists of eight bills:

- **Modernization of Military Laws Act**
- **Health Equality for Service Members Act**
- **Educational Equality for Service Members Act**
- **Tax Relief and Pensions Equality for Service Members Act**
- **Business and Insurance Equality for Service Members Act**
- **Judicial and Public Safety Equality for Service Members Act**
- **Transportation Equality for Service Members Act**
- **Recreation Equality for Service Members Act**

Simonaire has been researching and working on this legislative package for almost a year and recently gained the bipartisan support of Delegates Nick Allen, Charlotte Crutchfield, Nic Kipke, Edith Patter-

son and Mike Rogers, who all agreed to sponsor the various bills in the House of Delegates.

The senator has also worked directly with the uniformed services, military advocates, federal and state agencies, military legal experts, and Department of Legislative Services legal counsel to craft a consensus and workable solution.

Simonaire said that while there are numerous other benefits, this legislative package does the following:

- **Completely restructures Maryland's military law into the 21st century with modernized and standardized terms that are also strategically centralized in one location.**
- **Establishes consistent and equal benefits among all eight branches of the uniformed services and reserve units.**
- **Expands the Department of Veterans and Military Families' authority and duty to provide support to service members, in addition to veterans.**

The advantages, Simonaire said, are namely that the bill:

- **Updates current laws to provide over 100 additional benefits that were being denied to various former and current service members simply because of inconsistent and outdated terminology.**
- **Creates a centralized structure that facilitates easy, consistent and standard military laws for future revisions.**
- **Provides the authority and duty to support the service members in Maryland.**

"Inconsistent military laws have run rampant for decades," Simonaire said. "However, the great motivator to this overwhelming legislative effort was knowing the benefit it would provide to our service members."

To get an idea of the magnitude of this package, every legislator received a memo this past November from the Department of Veterans and Military Families highlighting 34 sections in Maryland laws with inconsistencies in military terminology.

In contrast, this comprehensive legislative package updates more than 230 inconsistent sections with over 500 revisions touching nearly every article.

"This legislative solution is coherent, sensible and a game-changer for many of our veterans, service members and reservists," Simonaire said.



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Abby Cover Makes Girls Soccer High School All-America Team

By Zach Sparks

zach@severnaparkvoice.com

The accolades continue to pile on for Severna Park senior midfielder **Abby Cover**. A two-time state champion, Baltimore Sun Player of the Year, and all-state and all-county first-team selection, Abby has another accomplishment to add to an impressive resume.

United Soccer Coaches announced in December that Abby was among its 142 high school All-Americans, 63 of whom are girls. Players on this year's United Soccer Coaches High School All-America Teams were recognized for their accomplishments during a ceremony on January 11 in Chicago.

Abby grew up on the soccer pitch and began learning her skills at the Soccer-Tots program on Long Island, New York.

She also plays basketball. Soccer, though, is her biggest passion.

"I love the fact that it's in constant motion," she said when asked why she loves soccer. "The ball rarely goes out of play."

Her family moved to Anne Arundel County in 2011, and Abby joined a Green Hornets rec team before moving to a club team coached by her dad, **Mark Cover**, a current Green Hornets U13 coach. Abby's younger sister, **Emma Cover**, is on that team.

Abby credits her dad for nurturing her interest in soccer, encouraging her to enjoy the sport and not just the dedication necessary to improve.

"He fostered me into enjoying the game and each piece, and the hard work of getting better," Abby said.

Hard work guided her as she moved from Green Hornets to higher-level teams, including Maryland United's U18 club team and Severna Park High School's varsity team, which she made as a freshman four years ago.

Severna Park varsity girls soccer coach **Rick Stimpson**, known to the players



Photo by David Bashore

Midfielder Abby Cover was an all-state and all-county player this year. She intercepted a pass that led to an assist on the first goal of the state championship against Towson in November.

as coach Stimmo, said Abby is a force on both ends of the field.

"She's always available to receive the ball, she's never flustered, and when the game is on the line, she will always step up," he said.

Examples of that clutch factor are not hard to find. In the fall, Abby scored an overtime game-winner against Chesapeake in the state semifinals.

"In the state semifinal, it was a perfect

» Continued on page 24

Six-Game Surge Gives Falcons Optimism

By David Bashore

For a basketball team not returning a ton of experience from last season, Severna Park's boys are building something promising.

Behind steady guard play from **Garrett Moden** and **Charlie Hartman**, and the slashing post presence of **Keaghan Gorski**, the Falcons are utilizing their patient Princeton-style offense to great effect as they garner valuable experience to get where they want to go.

Severna Park's recent six-game win streak put the Falcons squarely on the right path to build a postseason platform. That streak only ended January 10 at the hands of Annapolis, where the Falcons led by seven at half but ultimately lost in overtime 51-47.

Gorski scored 12 points in the loss, while Hartman added 10 and Moden scored seven. The Falcons led 30-23 at halftime, and they had opportunities to close the game out late but couldn't get a shot to fall. They got one basket in overtime, a 3-pointer from sophomore **John Batty**.

That loss, bookended with the season-opening loss to Broadneck, marked

» Continued on page 17

Photos by David Bashore

Top Right: Severna Park's Xavier Marshall looked for a passing option against Annapolis during the Falcons' 51-47 overtime loss to the Admirals on January 10. Bottom Right: In the face of stiff defense, Garrett Moden went to the basket with a finger roll against Annapolis.



Best Sets Broadneck Career Steals Mark

Bruins Move To 7-3 At Midway Point Of Season

By David Bashore

On the girls basketball record board at Broadneck High School, London truly is best.

With the third of her six steals in a 56-25 win over Glen Burnie on January 3, **London Best** set a new program record with her 289th career steal. **Macie McNece** scored 27 in the win, hitting seven 3-pointers.

Best already owned the school's single-game steals record with 10.

The Broadneck duo of McNece and Best has led the Bruins to a 7-3 record near the midway point of the season, a stretch culminating in a narrow 43-40 win at Meade on January 10.

McNece scored 22 in the road victory.

After a 59-28 loss to St. Mary's

» Continued on page 17



Photos by Dennis McGinley

Left: London Best broke Broadneck's school career steals record in a January 3 win over Glen Burnie. Right: Through 10 games, Macie McNece is the Bruins' leading scorer.

Happy New Year Severna Park!

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Holiday Tourney Crown Highlights Broadneck's Progress

By David Bashore

The Broadneck boys basketball team has made waves outside of county play in the 2024-2025 season. In-county has been a separate question so far, but the Bruins are optimistic about the stretch run with the pieces they're putting together.

Broadneck took on a different opportunity than in previous years for their holiday games, tripping to Cape Henlopen, Delaware, where they won a tournament title by beating Oakland Mills and the hosts, Cape Henlopen.

It was a successful team-bonding trip that head coach **Jeff Starr** hopes will pay dividends down the road.

"We got a chance to go to Delaware and stay overnight, so I thought that was a good team-building, camaraderie thing," Starr said. "I told them this was kind of like a college experience, going to stay overnight, stay in the hotel, playing a game, and then possibly playing the next day. I try to give my teams a different experience every year, whether it's playing a different opponent or traveling somewhere else."

The Bruins are now 6-3, 5-0 out of county, but 1-3 in the county. That's in part down to a team finding itself after graduating a large chunk of their offense, but also in part to playing some quality opposition.

After the season-opening win over Severna Park, Broadneck has lost in-county to South River, Glen



Left: Broadneck's Alijah Hawkins battled for a rebound during the Bruins' 71-40 victory over La Plata in December. **Right:** Kamari Williams, pictured going up for a shot against La Plata, leads the Bruins in scoring at just under 12 points per game.



Photos by Dennis McGinley

Burnie, and most recently Meade, 58-54 on January 10.

"I thought we played a good game, had too many turnovers for a close game like that against a quality opponent," Starr said. "In spite of more turnovers than we wanted, we hit some clutch shots and had some really good moments."

Out of county, the Bruins cruised against the Park School, La Plata and North Caroline, in addition to the two wins in Cape Henlopen.

With steady senior leadership, the team has turned to a trio of younger heads to fill the scoring void. Junior **Kamari Williams** leads the team in scoring at nearly 12 points a game, while freshman **Liam Sabo** averages 10.5 points and almost nine rebounds a night. Junior **Ashton Sellman** has contributed with scoring bursts here and there in a complementary role.

There is plenty of room for growth for Broadneck, as they hit a challenging back half of the schedule: in addition to Meade, they play Chesapeake, Northeast, Annapolis, and Arundel in the space of two weeks.

"We're still a work in progress," Starr said. "I think we're starting to figure out as a group what we're good at and what we need to work on. But I like the direction that we're going. I like the cohesiveness of our team, and these guys like playing basketball with each other. They try to push each other in practice, and I like

that for a team that's growing and a lot of guys are figuring out new roles from last year.

"Our second half of the season, we've got a pretty tough stretch in front of us, but everyone's going to end up playing everybody. We're just hoping to grow and get better as the second half of the season goes on. That helped us win a couple of playoff games last year, and if we can get that same energy and growth as the season goes on, you never know what could happen."

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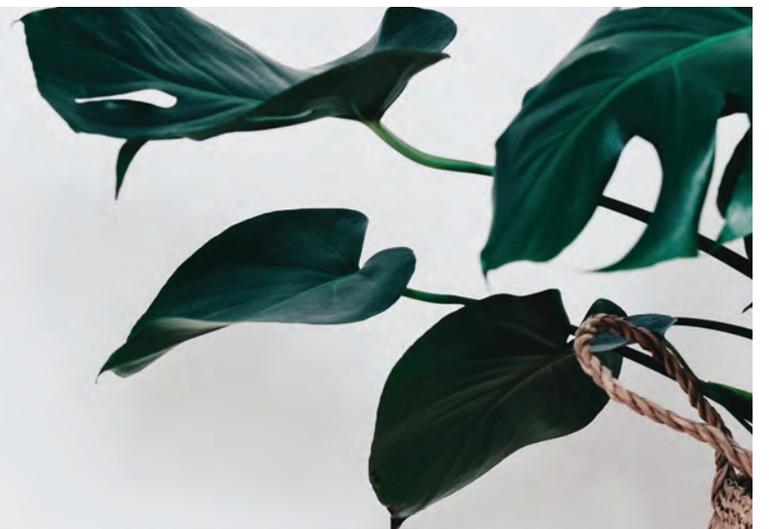


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Falcon Girls Finding “Creative” Answers To Injury Bug

By David Bashore

The injury bug is, in fact, not contagious. But for the Severna Park girls basketball team, it might feel like it.

In the last month, the Falcons have seen six players go down: three season-ending knee injuries, one less severe knee injury, and two foot injuries have the team rolling with as few as nine dressed players. The list includes point guard **Maria Bragg** (foot) and forward **Abby Cover** (knee), both hoping to return soon.

That’s left coach **Kristofer Dean** and his staff in a pickle as they try to balance day-to-day competitiveness with keeping the end goal in mind.

“We’ve been lucky to not deal with it the last few years, but it’s a lot. We’re just trying to hang on and build with what we have,” Dean said. “I think they’re handling it pretty well, based on the circumstances we’re at. We’re definitely having to get creative and trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together — maybe one or two pieces a day and work toward the end of season.”

Sometimes taking the long view is a coach’s mantra, and sometimes it’s because the coach has no choice. In either case, it seems to be working out so far for Severna Park.

After the Falcons’ 40-31 loss to Annapolis, they sit at 4-5 on the season. They started 2-1 before the injuries hit, then there was a 19-point scoring effort in a loss to Crofton, in which both teams failed to crack 30 points.

Since then, though, Severna Park has been able to keep scores low and find enough offense to remain competitive, despite slipping below .500.

There was a 54-39 win over Indian Creek in the “All About the Girls” holiday tournament, followed by a 39-35 loss to Frederick. Those came after a 55-14 win over Kenwood, and a 42-33 loss to Severna School.

“To look at that (Crofton) game and to see where we’ve taken these 8-9 girls, and then we took them against a pretty good Annapolis team and we were up 30-29,” Dean said. “They’re going in the right direction, and we’ll keep building. Obviously, you want to be healthy, but where we’re headed is where we’re going to want to be.”



Photo by David Bashore

Erin Hussey, pictured during Severna Park’s game at Annapolis on January 10, has taken over as one of the primary ball-handlers.

Dean credited senior guard **Payton Jeffers** and junior forward **Naomi Batty** as two players who have stepped into new roles: Batty as a post presence that the team sorely needs, collecting offensive rebounds and giving an option in the paint; Jeffers as another ball-handler to complement Bragg and **Charley Coward** on the perimeter.

“I told the girls, ‘We’re going to coach the living you-know-what out of you; we’re going to get every ounce we can get from now until we get some pieces back, until the end,’” Dean said. “I told Abby and Maria in particular that it kind of did us a favor here, because we were really relying heavily, especially on Maria, to handle the ball and be the point guard. We have pieces around her, but they weren’t going to handle the ball full-time, and now they have to. They’re building that confidence and hopefully when Maria comes back, we’ll have pieces around her to help support her, and that will make us stronger in the end.”

“We’ll just keep plugging along. (Winning and losing) matters at the end. Right now, it just matters that we keep putting pieces together.”

Best Sets Steals Mark

» Continued from page 14

on December 9, the Bruins bounced back and beat Indian Creek 68-42 the following day. South River beat Broadneck in the Bruins’ home opener, 54-26 on December 13, but they bounced back five days later by drubbing Severna School 50-28.

During the holiday break, the Bruins competed in the “All About the Girls” holiday tournament in greater Baltimore. They beat Glenelg Country 40-27 in the semifinals of their bracket, falling to Springdale Prep the next day, 49-41.

Broadneck is now 7-3, with their next game against Northeast on January 14.

Falcons Surge

» Continued from page 14

the only two losses for Severna Park as of January 12. They beat Crofton 52-38, Westlake 52-36, and Green Street Academy 50-35. After the holiday break, they routed Chesapeake Science Point 70-16.

The Falcons have scored two team-building ventures this season already: they won their home Winter Jam, going 2-0 over the holiday break, and they spent the weekend of January 11-12 in New York City watching St. John’s take on Villanova at Madison Square Garden.

Severna Park nears the midway point of the season with a full schedule coming. They played Meade on January 13, Southern the next day, and will face South River on January 17 — all of those games at home.

Severn School Seeking Second Consecutive Conference Title

Boys Basketball Team Faced Grueling Early Season Schedule To Prepare For League Play

By Kevin Murnane

Severn School varsity boys basketball head coach **Michael Glasby** wanted to test his athletic and talented team with a challenging December docket so they could improve and prepare to make another run for the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) B Conference title.

Last year, Severn won the B Conference title and was ranked the sixth best team in the Baltimore area, according to MaxPreps, a national high school athletic website.

“We created a schedule so we would play strong competition and test our young players and see how they would react to playing some of the best teams in the Baltimore-Washington area,” Glasby said.

In December, the Admirals played local powerhouses Mount Saint Joseph and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, both ranked teams from the Baltimore area, as well as Wise and New Hope Academy out of the Washington, D.C. area. The Admirals also traveled down Route 50 to play in the prestigious Governors Challenge tournament, which invited high schools from the East Coast to Salisbury to battle for bragging rights.

Severn held its own against this challenging slate, losing only four games by a total of 17 points.

“We also wanted to play games on neutral sites and in tough road environments so we could see different styles of offensive and defensive strategies,” said Glasby, who is in his seventh year as Severn’s head coach. “The ultimate goal is to always win the conference title, and by playing this daunting early schedule, we’re more prepared to battle for the conference title.”

The Admirals lost some key players from last year in guard **Kinston Price**, who is playing at Fordham; Severna Park resident and center **Bo Fowler**, who is playing football at Richmond; and guard **Corey Dixon**, who transferred to Good Counsel.

However, Severn returned many key players from last year’s squad including point guard **Daniel Growney**, guards **Jayden Thomas** and **DJ Lee**, forwards **Sean Harvey** and Severna Park resident **Jacob Randall**, and center **Ben Hilburn**.

Randall, who is a four-year starter for the Admirals, also tallied his 1,000th career point total against Our Lady of Mount Carmel and is the team’s leading scorer this year. He also adds tenacious defense, rebounds, steals and assists every game. Randall has been consistent in his scoring with outstanding games versus Curtis High School of New York with 27 points and two blocks, as well as 19 points against Prince George’s powerhouse New Hope Academy.

A senior, Randall is being recruited by Army, Navy, Roanoke, Randolph-Macon and the University of Chicago. Randall uses his 6-foot-4-inch frame and strong leaping ability to



Photo by Kevin Murnane

Severn School varsity boys basketball head coach Michael Glasby (left) congratulated Severna Park resident Jacob Randall on achieving his 1,000th career point total during a game against Our Lady of Mount Carmel in December. The 6-foot-4-inch senior forward is considering multiple college scholarships.

score both inside and outside.

“Jacob is an excellent basketball player,” Glasby said. “He works hard, is a quiet leader and a great student with a 3.8 grade point average.”

As of early January, Severn is ranked the ninth best basketball team in the Baltimore area, according to MaxPreps. However, the MIAA B Conference has numerous formidable foes in Annapolis Area Christian School, Concordia Prep in Towson and St. Mary’s, each of which has been ranked in the top 15 teams in the Baltimore area.

Glasby uses a high-temp offense to let the Admirals play fast but with discipline.

“We have several multifaceted players who can score but also rebound and play defense,” Glasby said. “Our strategy is to take away the opponent’s strength and let our players play freely.”

With those early season losses to Mount Saint Joseph and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Glasby hopes that adversity was an investment in the future. His team played hard but let their momentum slip away in the final minutes of those games.

“We had a seven-point lead against Mount Saint Joe and had a two-minute letdown and lost our focus,” Glasby said. “Mount Carmel was just a very tall team, and our center got in foul trouble, and they hurt us in the paint.”

Randall said, “We let those two games slip away from us. We’ve learned to play harder and be physically tougher if we want to beat those ranked teams in Baltimore and D.C. My job as a senior leader is to bring energy and be relentless on both ends if we want to be conference champions again.”

Glasby is hoping his players are “battle-tested” by playing a rigorous schedule in December and those lessons learned will provide Severn with the knowledge and confidence of defending their conference title in February.



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STUDENT-ATHLETE OF THE MONTH

JOEY SMARGISSI

Broadneck High School
Football, Basketball

By David Bashore

Whether it's on the football field, on the basketball court, or in the classrooms or hallways of Broadneck High School, one thing is clear: **Joey Smargissi** is going to get after it.

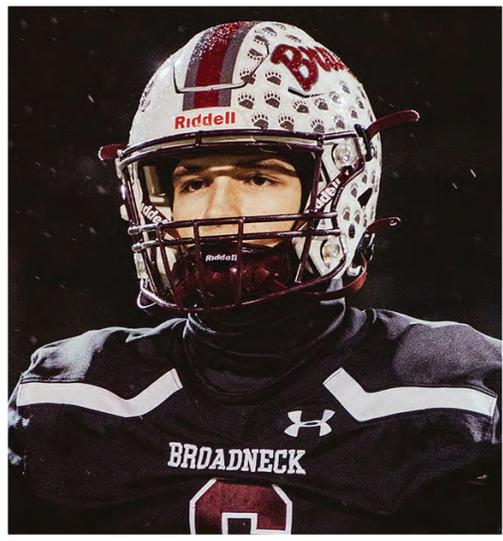
An all-state receiver and starting power forward for Broadneck, Smargissi also has a 3.9 unweighted GPA (4.3 weighted) and is off to Washington and Lee next fall to study and play football.

It's an opportunity to continue playing a sport he loves, at an academically prestigious institution. That's been a goal of his for a long time to meld education and athletics.

"I was always told to put grades before the field. I had some coaches that taught me that, and especially my parents. It all comes from the classroom," Smargissi said. "I don't think people get a lot of those opportunities just being an athlete at those kinds of schools. It's always the first question they ask you — it's definitely one less thing they have to worry about."

Smargissi's fall schedule has been eye-watering: three AP classes, one honors class, football, basketball, National Honor Society (NHS), several clubs, and working as an intern in the Broadneck athletics department.

Through his high school time, he has been involved in Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), Morgan's Message, NHS (and all the service hours), Broadneck



Athletic Leadership Council, and One Love. Prioritizing his grades and athletics has been important, but equally vital has been his prioritization and communication regarding his commitments.

"I just budget my free time," Smargissi said. "Obviously homework is the most important thing, so I set aside time to do that, and if I ever have conflicting Bruin Blocks, two clubs in the same day, you've got to make a priority to let the leader know that you can't make it that day. I think where a lot of people fail is when you don't communicate that."

That communication and prioritization is critical to Smargissi's success in the classroom, and it undoubtedly helps in athletic competition.

He cracks the headlines on occasion, but has proven himself as a reliable, physical presence both on the football field and the basketball court. While most people know him for his football accomplishments, he approaches both sports with the same passion.

"I genuinely enjoy playing basketball, and I've played with most of the people on my team my whole life," Smargissi said. "It gives me another place where I can go and compete, a whole other season where I can do that. When I get into the season, I really start to think how much I like it. There's not a clearcut one and two between basketball, I really do like both."

There might be no clear hierarchy in Smargissi's mind, but football is where he garnered the biggest headlines. He leaves Broadneck in the school's top five for both receptions and touchdowns. He earned all-region and all-state honors from the Maryland Football Foundation, as well as first all-county (coaches' and media) and honorable mention all-metro recognition.

It was that effort, and the classroom, that led him to Washington and Lee, where he can launch his next phase of action.

"I chose it in order to pursue a top-notch business degree, and obviously continuing to play the sport I love," Smargissi said. "The campus is beautiful, and the coaches are young and energetic, and they want to compete. It was the first school I visited, and I fell in love with it."

"I'm looking forward to building with a new team. Everyone comes from all over, so I'm excited for meeting them and getting to compete at a higher level against quality competition."

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Game On Or Timeout? How To Spot Youth Sports Injuries

Daniel Redziniak
Orthopedic Surgeon
Luminis Health



Between the backyard, soccer field and gym, kids are constantly on the move. But no matter how active and energetic they are, children are still prone to injuries, especially during sports seasons. When your child gets hurt, it can be tough to tell whether it's a sprain, strain or fracture. Here's how to recognize the difference and help your athlete get back in the game.

Common Sports Injuries in Kids

Understanding the most frequent injuries — strains, sprains and fractures — can help you provide the right care. Sharing this knowledge with your young athlete is also key, so they can describe their pain and symptoms clearly.

Strains: These involve muscle injuries, typically partial tears. Pain often appears in muscles that do heavy lifting, such as the back, hamstring or quadriceps. Signs include muscle weakness, spasms, cramps, swelling and difficulty moving the muscle.

Sprains: Sprains occur when ligaments around joints tear. Commonly affected areas include the ankle, knee, shoulder and fingers. You might hear a pop or tear when the injury happens, followed by pain, swelling and bruising.

Fractures: A fracture is a broken bone, often caused by awkward falls. Severe fractures are obvious, with bones misaligned or visible through the skin. Milder fractures may cause pain, swelling, bruising or tenderness, and it can be hard to bear weight on the injured area.

When to Seek Treatment

Rest is critical for recovery from sports injuries. For strains and sprains, the RICE method (rest, ice, compression and elevation) is often the best remedy. However, if a fracture is suspected, it's essential to see a doctor for an X-ray and proper treatment, such as a cast or brace.

No matter the injury, it's important to give your young athlete time to heal. While they may be eager to return to sports, rushing recovery could lead to more serious problems. Remind them that taking the time to fully heal is the quickest way to get back to doing what they love.

Comprehensive Care for Youth Sports Injuries

When pain takes your athlete out of the game, you may need help making the next move. Luminis Health experts diagnose and treat children in our same-day and next-day clinics, with appointments available seven days a week, including evenings. We also offer imaging and second opinions to give you peace of mind. Sudden injuries deserve immediate care, and to us, it's about more than just treating injuries — it's about getting your athlete back to scoring goals, hitting home runs, and, most importantly, being a kid. And that's a win for everyone.

Daniel Redziniak is an orthopedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine. Learn more at www.luminishealth.org/orthopedics.

No matter the injury, it's important to give your young athlete time to heal.



Four Bruins Named All-State For Football

Twelve Broadneck
And Two Severna Park
Players Honored With
Postseason Recognition

The Maryland Football Foundation released its list of public school all-state and all-region selections in the week beginning January 6.

Four Broadneck players — running

back **Ian Mauldin**, receiver **Joey Smargissi**, punter-kicker **Dylan Jordan** and defensive back **Tyrin Chinn-Thompson** — received Class 4A all-state honors. The quartet also garnered all-region selections.

Joining Mauldin, Smargissi, Jordan, and Chinn-Thompson on the 4A All-East Region team were quarterback **C.J. Watkins**, offensive lineman **Tyreas Brown**, receiver **Aiden Tupper**, defensive linemen **Tommy Anglim** and **Spencer Long**, linebacker **Jonah Brown** and **Michael Swick**.

In the 4A-3A ranks, Severna Park quarterback **Vince Nguyen** and receiver **Cole Cavanaugh** were both All-East Region honorees.

Right Place, Right Time

Severna Park High School Graduate Mike Laidley Has Led Spalding's Wrestling Program For 23 Years

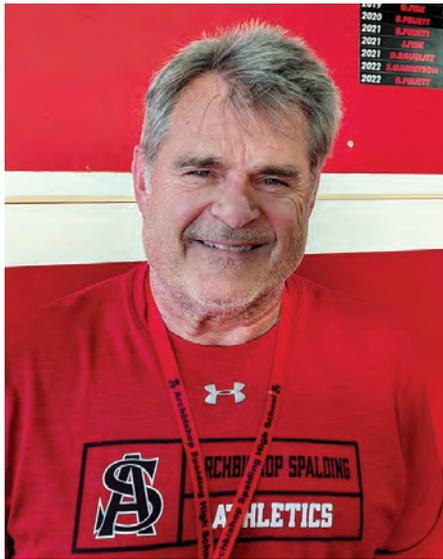


Photo by Kevin Murnane

Archbishop Spalding head wrestling coach and Severna Park High School graduate Mike Laidley has led the Cavaliers wrestling program for 23 years and has had 22 Maryland independent high school state champions as well as two national prep champions during his coaching career.

By Kevin Murnane

Down the hallway from Archbishop Spalding's "old gym" is a small, sweat-filled room where 38 wrestlers train and grapple every day. The wrestlers are exposed to sauna-like conditions so they can maintain their desired weight. Off in the corner is the ubiquitous scale so they can weigh themselves before and after practice.

For 23 years, Severna Park High School graduate **Mike Laidley** has scripted and supervised these practices, and that dedication has led to numerous wrestlers achieving outstanding individual wrestling titles and college scholarships.

But for all of the accolades that Spalding's wrestling program has achieved over those 23 years, if it wasn't for Laidley being in the right place and right time, the program could have ceased because there would have been no coach to direct it.

"I was coaching in a local youth wrestling league and we were using Spalding for our practices," Laidley said. "**Lee Dove**, who was the athletic director at the time, asked me if I would like to coach at Spalding because if they didn't find a coach, they were going to pull the program."

Laidley accepted and quickly began assembling other youth league wrestling coaches, as well as **Eric DeCosmo**, who wrestled at Old Mill High School under coach **Mike Hampe**.

"I feel that part of the program's success is that I surrounded myself with outstanding assistant coaches," Laidley said. "They are the backbone of the program."

Former athletic director **Jeff Parsons** said the name Mike Laidley has been synonymous with Archbishop Spalding wrestling for 23 years.

"Mike stepped in when the program was on the brink of collapse and transformed it into a mainstay in the top tier of the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA)," Parsons said. "Through his unwavering dedication, he's not only produced countless all-state and collegiate

athletes but has shaped young men and women into leaders who succeed both on and off the mat."

The MIAA conference has garnered much respect as several of its high schools in the Baltimore area have achieved national recognition, including Mount Saint Joseph, McDonogh and Gilman, along with Spalding.

Laidley is proud to recount that during his 23 years at Spalding, the program has had 22 Maryland independent high school state champions, 53 National Prep All-Americans, and two National Prep champions in **Charlie Lynch** in the 145-pound division 2011, and **Taina Fernandez**, who last year won the national title in the girls' 126-pound division.

After he graduated from high school, Laidley wanted a new challenge, so he joined the Navy to see the world and serve the country.

"I enjoyed my time in the Navy and I visited nearly 40 countries in my four years of service," Laidley said. "When I got back to Maryland, I went to college and played football at Anne Arundel Community College. I eventually went back to UPS since I worked there during high school. After a few years at UPS, I had the opportunity to purchase McDonogh Companies in Millersville. One of the divisions in my company is landscaping and that allows some flexibility during the winter to devote to wrestling."

Laidley looks forward to when the calendar turns to fall so he can begin scheduling meets and planning his annual Cavalier dual meet at Spalding in January.

"I just love coaching wrestling," Laidley said. "It's the camaraderie of the wrestlers, seeing them succeed on the mat, and many of my wrestlers have gone on to wrestle in college."

Laidley's first state champion was his son, Christopher, who went on to wrestle briefly at Maryland. Other wrestlers who have had noteworthy college careers include Charlie Lynch at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn), **Logan Breitenbach** at Iowa State, **Will Switzer** at Lehigh, and **Brady Pruett**, who also went to UPenn.

Last year, Spalding had a dual meet record of 22-5. The Cavaliers had two state champions in **Vincent Paolucci** at 132 pounds and heavyweight **Delmar White**, who is going to the University of Maryland on a football scholarship.

This year's Spalding wrestling team has numerous outstanding wrestlers in the lower weight divisions and will be in the hunt for the MIAA championship title once again.

There is a great sense of pride for the Spalding wrestling program, which exhibits a large panel of names of all the wrestlers who have been all-MIAA, all-state and wrestled in the national prep championships. This year's wrestlers glance at those plaques every day and tirelessly train in hopes that they will be added to that wall.

"Mike has dedicated his entire coaching career to the Spalding wrestling program, eventually building it from the ground up," said current athletic director **Jon Mellinger**.

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College Report

Throughout the fall, these athletes who graduated from Severna Park and Broadneck high schools, along with nearby private schools, competed in college sports.

FIELD HOCKEY

Zoe Bjelac — Broadneck
Quinnipiac

A first-year defender for the Bobcats, Bjelac did not appear in a game this season.

Maya Everett — Broadneck
Maryland

A sophomore midfielder, Everett appeared in 20 games for the Terrapins, starting twice and scoring her first collegiate goal on September 6 against Boston College.

Arden Huntman — Broadneck
Salisbury

A sophomore, Huntman scored a team-high 17 times in 20 appearances for the Sea Gulls, with a season-high five markers against Catholic University on September 25. Huntman earned second-team All-American honors as Salisbury achieved the No. 1 ranking in NCAA Division III at the end of the regular season and reached the national semifinals.

Charley Kramer — Severna Park
Boston College

Making her debut for the Eagles as a sophomore, Kramer posted a 14-7 record in the cage with three shutouts and 74 saves to earn ACC Goalkeeper of the Year honors.

Jess Kopernick — Broadneck
Stevens Institute of Technology

As a sophomore, Kopernick played in 21 games for the Ducks, starting five, and scoring six times.

Ella Phillips — Broadneck
Washington and Jefferson

A senior, Phillips started 12 of 13 games for the Presidents, logging four shots on goal.

Mady Quigley — Broadneck
Susquehanna

A freshman, Quigley appeared in 21 games for the River Hawks, starting 20. She notched eight goals and added five assists.

Makenna Quigley — Broadneck
Stevens Institute of Technology

A senior, Quigley started all 21 games for the Ducks, scoring four goals.

Safiya Stimely — Broadneck
St. Mary's (Maryland)

A sophomore defender, Stimely started all 12 games she played this season for the Seahawks, logging one assist and helping the defense pitch five shutouts.

FOOTBALL

Josh Ehrlich — Broadneck
Susquehanna

A junior quarterback, Ehrlich ran the offense for the River Hawks, who reached the NCAA Division III national A semifinals. In 14 games, he com-

pleted 67.4% of his passes for 33 touchdowns, and he rushed for 629 yards and 12 more scores. Ehrlich was the Landmark Conference Offensive Player of the Year and was also shortlisted for the Gagliardi Trophy, which is handed out annually to the most outstanding NCAA Division III football player.

Machi Evans — Broadneck
Washington and Jefferson

A sophomore receiver, Evans appeared in three games, catching three passes for 38 yards.

Isaiah Green — Severna Park
Catholic

A freshman receiver, Green did not appear in any games this season.

Anthony Hawkins — Broadneck
Villanova

A freshman defensive back, Hawkins appeared in four games for the Wildcats, logging two tackles.

Jayden Joyce — Broadneck
Davidson

A junior offensive lineman, Joyce played in 10 of the Wildcats' 11 games. He entered the transfer portal after the season and has signed to play next season at Holy Cross.

Braden Layne — Severna Park
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy

A senior, Layne appeared in two games, recording one tackle.

Nathan Levicki — Broadneck
Presbyterian

A junior, Levicki appeared in all 12 games for the Blue Hose, catching 14 balls for 312 yards and a team-high five touchdowns.

Tyler McVicker — Archbishop Spalding
Catholic

A freshman defensive tackle, McVicker appeared in 10 games this season, logging 13 tackles (3 solo), two sacks and one fumble recovery.

Tristan Newhouse — Severna Park
Fairleigh Dickinson

A sophomore punter, Newhouse appeared in eight games, punting a total of 29 times.

Jimmy Patz — Severna Park
U.S. Coast Guard Academy

A senior, Patz appeared in five games, catching five passes for 72 yards.

Trey Smack — Severna Park
Florida

A junior kicker, Smack made all 42 of his extra-point attempts and was 18-of-21 on field goals. He connected from more than 50 yards on three occasions, including a career-best 55-yard boot against LSU on November 16.

Tucker Smack — Severna Park
Salisbury

A sophomore kicker, Smack did a bit of everything for the Sea Gulls. He made his only field goal in the team's final game of the season, punted during a game earlier in the season, made all 18 of his extra-point attempts, and served as a kickoff specialist for most of the season as Salisbury made the NCAA Division III national quarterfinals.

Caelan Shepard — Broadneck
Buffalo

In his final season of eligibility for the

Bulls, Shepard returned to Buffalo and appeared in all 13 games on the offensive line, capped with an appearance in the Bahamas Bowl on January 4.

Branden Stahl — Broadneck
Ursinus

A freshman offensive lineman, Stahl did not appear in any games this season.

James Stahl — Broadneck
Ursinus

A freshman offensive lineman, Stahl did not appear in any games this season.

Mason Stillwell — Broadneck
Catholic

A senior defensive back, Stillwell appeared in 10 games this season, making one interception, forcing one fumble and totaling 67 tackles (40 solo).

Jake Wanner — Broadneck
Wilkes

A sophomore linebacker, Wanner appeared in two games this season, making one tackle.

DaQuann Woodall Jr. — Broadneck
Eastern

A freshman fullback, Woodall didn't appear in any games this season.

MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

Carson Sloat — Severna Park
Navy

A senior, Sloat ran in three races this season, posting a season best in the Cantello Invitational on September 7, where he finished sixth.

Collin Sly — Broadneck
St. Mary's (Maryland)

A sophomore, Sly ran in four races this season, setting a personal-best time of 33 minutes, 39 seconds in the 8,000 meters at the United East Conference meet on November 2.

MEN'S SOCCER

Madden Bottner — Chesterton
AACC

A freshman goalkeeper, Bottner did not appear in any games this season.

Axel Cartagena — Broadneck
AACC

A freshman defender, Cartagena appeared in eight games, starting three.

Luke Eberle — Annapolis Area Christian
Liberty

In his final season of eligibility, Eberle appeared in 15 games, starting all, for the Flames. He scored four goals and added three assists.

Mikey Johnson — Broadneck
Delaware

A junior forward, Johnson made 16 appearances for the Blue Hens, starting four games. He finished with five goals and four assists, including the program's first hat trick in 20 years against Rutgers on August 26.

Declan Karney — Archbishop Spalding
Christopher Newport

A freshman defender, Karney started all 18 games this season, averaging more than 85 minutes per game and helping the team keep five clean sheets. He scored his only goal of the season at Denison on September 24, and for his efforts, Karney was named the Coast-to-Coast Athletic Conference's Rookie of the Year.

Sawyer Knapp — Severna Park
AACC

A freshman forward, Knapp appeared in six games for the Riverhawks.

Charlie Kriel — Severna Park
Navy

A senior defender, Kriel captained the Midshipmen and played every minute of all 16 games this season. He helped the team post three clean sheets, and he scored his only goal of the season against Colgate on September 28.

Tyler Madairy — Broadneck
Penn State-Harrisburg

In his final season of eligibility, Madairy started 13 of the 19 games in which he played, scoring twice and adding an assist.

Charlie Meehan — Broadneck
AACC

A sophomore midfielder, Meehan made nine appearances, six of them starts, logging one assist.

Brandon Morse — Broadneck
McDaniel

A senior midfielder, Morse started all 20 games and averaged more than 80 minutes per contest. He scored twice and added an assist.

Gabe Slater — Severna Park
AACC

A freshman forward, Slater appeared in three games this season.

Evan Souder — Severna Park
Washington College

A sophomore defender, Souder appeared in three games, starting once.

Andre Tenorio — Archbishop Spalding
Frostburg State

A senior midfielder, Tenorio appeared in 18 games, with one start.

Zach Tettermer — Broadneck
Loyola (Maryland)

A junior defender, Tettermer did not appear in any games this season.

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

Avery Arizzi — Broadneck
St. Mary's (Maryland)

A sophomore, Arizzi did not score for the Seahawks this season. She placed 41st at the United East championship.

Mollie Fenn — Broadneck
Richmond

A junior, Fenn ran in several races for the Spiders, qualifying for the conference and regional postseason meets. She finished 26th in the 6,000 meters at the Atlantic 10 championship meet, where she ran a personal best time of 21:29.1, and 106th in the NCAA Southeast Regional meet.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Evan Bathras — Severna Park
AACC

A freshman midfielder, Bathras appeared in 14 games for the Riverhawks, starting five. She had two goals, including one in the Region 20 Championship match, and two assists as AACC reached the NJCAA Division II national tournament's group stage.

College Report

Kyleigh Bland — Broadneck St. Mary's (Maryland)

A freshman, Bland backstopped the Seahawks to the NCAA Division III national tournament. She started 18 games in goal, posting a 12-2-4 record and making 72 saves. Bland allowed five goals and posted 14 clean sheets.

Caitlyn Boucher — Severna Park Campbell

A freshman defender, Boucher appeared in all 18 games for the Camels, starting 16.

Felicia Fishburne — Severna Park St. Mary's (Maryland)

A sophomore, Fishburne appeared in all 23 games this season, starting five. She logged a goal and two assists for the Seahawks.

Sydney Holmes — Severna Park Rochester

A sophomore, Holmes started all 19 games for the Yellowjackets, scoring four goals and adding an assist as Rochester reached the second round of the NCAA Division III tournament.

Mia Hull — Broadneck Santa Barbara Community College (California)

After a year at AACC, Hull transferred to Santa Barbara, where she redshirted.

Sierra Lane — Severna Park AACC

A sophomore midfielder, Lane appeared in 15 games for the Riverhawks, starting twice.

Eva Mowery — Broadneck Maryland

A sophomore, Mowery appeared in 10 matches for the Terrapins, logging three shots.

Ella Raines — Severna Park St. Mary's (Maryland)

A senior, Raines did not see game action for the Seahawks this season.

Kasey Thompson — Severna Park South Carolina-Beaufort

A freshman, Thompson appeared in three games for the Sand Sharks, logging one shot.

Tina Tinelli — Chesapeake AACC

A sophomore defender, Tinelli started all 18 games for the Riverhawks. She scored four goals, including the game-winner against Garrett College on September 12, and added four assists. Tinelli was a second-team NJCAA Division II All-America selection.

Brooke Velez — Broadneck St. Mary's (Maryland)

A freshman defender, Velez appeared in five games for the Seahawks.

Sadie Wilkinson — Broadneck Lipscomb

A sophomore, Wilkinson appeared in two games for the Bisons, who won the Atlantic Sun championship and reached

the NCAA Division I tournament.

Gabby Wisbeck — Archbishop Spalding Syracuse

A freshman midfielder, Wisbeck appeared in 16 games for the Orange, starting 10. She logged 10 shots on the season.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Mya Durham — Broadneck Susquehanna

A freshman middle hitter, Durham played in 20 of the River Hawks' 32 matches, averaging 1.56 kills per set. Her season high came in a 10-kill, 3-block effort against Notre Dame (Maryland) on September 7.

Natalie Luscomb — Broadneck Lehigh

A junior right-sided attacker, Luscomb led Lehigh in kills with 265 on her way to second-team All-Patriot League honors. She started 20 of the 28 matches in which she played, surpassing 10 kills in half of those matches. Her season high was 16, which she achieved against Morgan State (August 30) and American (November 16).

Maya Mauro — Archbishop Spalding St. Mary's (Maryland)

A freshman outside hitter, Mauro appeared in all 29 of the Seahawks' matches, leading the team with 286 kills. Mauro had six double-doubles on the season, including five in the team's final eight matches of the season. Her season-best marks came against Notre Dame (Maryland) on October 15, where she had 21 kills and 19 digs.

Emma Quandt — Broadneck Salisbury

A senior middle blocker and right-sided attacker, Quandt helped Salisbury reach the NCAA Division III tournament this season. She was a second-team All-Coast to Coast Conference honoree after logging 10-plus kills four times, including a season-high 12 in the Sea Gulls' opening-round loss to Middlebury. Quandt also had a season-high eight blocks against Gallaudet on September 7.

Makena Smith — Broadneck Lehigh

A senior setter, Smith started 20 of the 29 matches in which she appeared. She dished out 10-plus assists in 24 of those games, including a season-best 35 against Towson in August, one of four double-doubles on the season. Smith ends her career fourth on Lehigh's all-time assists list.

Perry Stevenson — Severna Park Canisius

A freshman outside hitter, Stevenson appeared in five matches for the Golden Griffins, logging three kills.

Maddy Stewart — Broadneck American

A sophomore setter, Stewart appeared in six matches this season for the Eagles, logging no statistics.

Hannah Waters — Broadneck McDaniel

A sophomore setter and opposite, Waters logged 137 assists, 14 aces, 18 kills and 53 digs in 13 matches played.

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Abby Cover Makes Girls Soccer High School All-America Team

» Continued from page 14

pass back to me from **Ava Scott** ... which I was able to finish in the net," Abby said.

She added another goal in her team's 4-0 championship win over Towson, helping the Falcons claim back-to-back state titles.

"We were under pressure early in the game," Stimpson said. "Abby converted a penalty kick right after (Erin Hussey scored). It settled us down and gave us the right momentum."

Abby credits Stimpson with fostering a great environment that makes it easy for players to buy in.

"He had an MVP for each game," Abby said. "He will recognize our little wins as much as our big wins. It's just a great culture that has been created on and off the field."

Abby was a big part of that culture, especially this year.

"We graduated so many seniors who

had huge roles," Stimpson said. "Abby gave everybody the confidence on the field that they were doing a good job, and she encouraged them, but she also took the pressure off of them because she was always available."

Next fall, Abby will take her skills to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She became sold on the women's soccer program after meeting the coaches and learning about their emphasis on passing.

"The campus is beautiful, and they have nice facilities," Abby said. "The coaches and girls on the team are

super nice and welcoming."

After seeing her growth, Mark Cover has no doubt Abby will excel at the next level.

"Watching Abby grow from a 7-year-old skipping down the soccer field to a leader who helped her team win two state championships has been incredibly rewarding," Mark said. "What stands out most to me is her genuine love for the sport, her teammates and her coaches. At the same time, she is a quiet yet incredibly fierce competitor who pushes herself every day. We are so grateful to all her coaches,

especially Rick Stimpson, who has played such an important role in her growth both on and off the field. Our family can't wait to cheer her on as she takes on her next challenge at UNC Greensboro."

Soccer and family vacations have taken Abby everywhere from California to Spain, but the January trip marked her first time in Chicago.

Add another accomplishment to Abby's resume, which will soon have to make room for more accolades.

"It's honestly more than I could have imagined," Abby said of the honor.

Correction: SPHS Has 26 Student-Athletes Sign To College Level

The December edition of the Severna Park Voice included a list of Severna Park High School athletes who committed to play sports at the

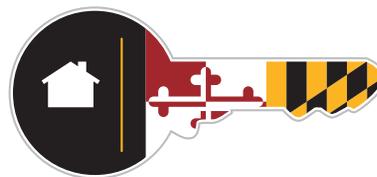
college level. The information for two student-athletes got switched in the print version of the story. Payton Jeffers will play women's lacrosse

at the University of Tampa. Connor Lamoreaux will play men's lacrosse at Frostburg State University. We apologize for the error.



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Green Hornets Soccer League And Tournament Champions

Several Green Hornets teams were crowned champions at the end of the fall soccer season.

Editor's note: Some teams have been omitted because the Voice could not get player names and results.

Rec Soccer Third/Fourth-Grade Boys League Champions

Coaches: Patrick Deitz and Adam Twig

Players: Carter Baranowsky, Brooks Deitz, Charles Deitz, Landon Edwards, William Etter, Brayden Freiss, Shane Jackson, Colin Law, Kieran McHale, Beckett Milligan, Royce Sboray, Owen Soloman, Hudson Twigg and Lochlan Warren

Rec Soccer Third/Fourth-Grade Girls League Champions

Coaches: Kenny Watt and Eric Distin

Players: Ava Bell, Patricia Collins, Caroline Distin, Claire Hebbel, Ainsley O'Brien, Tessa Parsons, Maya Ritterman, Jovie Shinnamon, Brynn Stidham, Grace Tudhope, Callie Walsh, Alexis Watt and Michaela Wells

Rec Soccer Fifth/Sixth-Grade Boys League Champions

Coaches: Marshall Feldman, Rebecca Glynn and Adam Schmidt

Players: David Beatty, Sean Curtis, Nathan Feldman, Mack Glynn, Henry Hines, Benjamin Karsner, Henry MacLaughlin, Dylan Monroe, Edison

Murdock, Philip Norton, Grayson Schmidt, Tyson Sipe, Hunter Slater and Cooper Terhune

Rec Soccer Fifth/Sixth-Grade Girls League Champions

Coaches: Nadia Bivens and Sean Fagan

Players: Allison Augelli, Mia Bivens, Elsie Craig, Rachel Crockett, Emerson Elliott, Aubree Erline, Lillian Fagan, Emily Fortney, Ayla Ghajarnia, Molly Hendrix, Adelaide McCready, Eleanor Rivera, Colette Stoll, Reagan Votaw and Quinn Wisner

Rec Soccer Seventh/Eighth-Grade Boys League Champions

Coaches: Brian Bauer, Mike Archer, Ben Mueller and Kevin Gallicchio

Players: Evan Archer, Ethan Bauer, Alexander Berning, Marshall Brockett, Carter Campbell, Jake Coleman, Nathan Fagan, Ryan Gallicchio, Charlie LaBrier, Tanner Moran, Bryce Mueller, Marcus Ng, Kyle Schuller, Grant Servary, Cole Thomasson and Stone Wall

Rec Soccer Seventh/Eighth-Grade Girls League Champions

Coaches: Matt Mings and Scott Peters

Players: Lulia Abushi, Harper Bass, Elizabeth Childress, Lucy Distin, Ella Doss, Lily Fithyan, Abigail Fritz, Mikaela Kern, Hannah Mckinstry, Morgan Miller, Reagan Panuska, Sophia Peters, Hannah Petre, Addison

Roth, Mia Russell, Allyson Stansbury and Isabelle Williamson

Fallston Cup Girls U9 Silver Division Tournament Champions

Coaches: Casey Banks and Megan Taylor

Players: Olivia Banks, Harper Bloomfield, Kennedy Gilliam, Kennedy Herrman, Reese Laddbush, Adaline Lee, Rylan Taylor, Parrish Vetter, Savannah Watts and Teeghan Waugh

Annapolis Cup 2024 Male U9 Premier Division Champions, EDP-CMSLL U9 Premier I Division Champions

Coaches: Mathew Merriman and Tony Malcolm

Players: Christian Ribeiro, Christopher Comegys, Brody Bombard, Mitchell Baker, Leo Malcolm, Liam Harvey, Ethan Phippen, Oliver Taddeo, Callen Viera, Grant Locher, Hudson Merriman and Bruno Buras

Fallston Cup Girls U8 Silver Division Tournament Champions

Coaches: Jenna Nobles, Courtney Murphey and Joanna Rutland

Players: Summer Murphy, Caroline Cober, Laina Gonzalez, Blake Finn, Lyla MacQuilliam, Walker Mundorf, Chloe Smith, Logan Nobles, Lucy Rutland, Elin David, Kadia Johnson and Ilaria Miluzzo

PSC Classic Soccer Tournament U9 Boys Division Champions

Coaches: Jeff Boyle, Santi Haag, Mike Little and Nicole Roy-Harrison

Players: Drew Boyle, Asher Kunkel, Bennett Copper, Charles Briggs, Elyon

Akinsanmi, Flavius Beatty, Johnny Olson, Leo Haag, Luke Little, Maverick Gilbertson, Remy DeOrio and Simon Gerbasi

ASA Thunder Columbus Cup 2016 Division Champions — Anne Arundel Youth Soccer Association Boys U9 Burgundy Division Winner

Coaches: Brian Whitley, Kyle Bailey and Ronnie Moore

Players: Brayden Westwood, Brice Whitley, Easton Harold, Emmett Moore, Grant Dayton, Jack Logue, Jacob Lewis, Larson Korpon, Leo Snyder, Ryan Bailey, Von Plikuhn and Wyatt Wicklund

ASA Thunder November Cup 2015 Division Champions

Coaches: Jeremiah Grossman, Scott Petrey, Chris Capasso

Players: Barrett Kondratyuk, Brooks Scholl, Ellis Petrey, Emerson Grossman, Cullen Frees, Jaxson Lazor, Niko Capasso, Roman Thomas, Brecken Dunlow, Eric Hartlove Jr., Bryant Caldwell and Charlie Dann

Anne Arundel Youth Soccer Association Boys U13 Gold Division Winners

Coaches: Ben Liles and Robert Mufareh
Team Manager: Jen Liles

Players: Alex Mufareh, Angelo Afanado, Austin Liles, Colin Carleton, Edward Gillespie, JT Hibbard, Jeremiah Gendi, Kevin Wang, Landon Dieujuste, Malakie Stauffer, Matthew Sieben, Trevor Calish, William Dyck and William Myers

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Three Area Educators Named 2025 AACPS Teacher Of The Year Semifinalists

By Meredith Winter

Each year, Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) honors one exceptional educator as its Teacher of the Year from among a pool of dozens of worthy nominees. This year, 75 teachers from schools across the county were nominated for the 2025 award, and in December, 18 of them were selected as semifinalists. Three of those semifinalists teach at schools in the Severna Park and Broadneck feeder systems. Below is an introduction to these three educators, who are devoted to making a difference in the lives of their students.

Jonathan Martin

Arnold Elementary School
Fourth Grade

New Jersey native Jonathan Martin loves teaching math and other subjects to his fourth-grade students at Arnold Elementary School, but his ultimate goal is to empower kids to do whatever it is they want to do in life. “(If) they want to be a musician, they want to be a scientist — whatever it is that they want to do — I just want them to be empowered to have the choice to be able to do it,” he said.

Martin admits that school was not always easy for him when he was a kid. But nearly 20 years ago, as a



student-teacher, he discovered that his own academic challenges opened a door for him to connect with a younger generation of kids who had the same struggles in the classroom. The opportunity to help others was what sold him on a career in teaching.

This is Martin’s seventh year teaching at Arnold Elementary, following 12 years teaching in Montgomery County. The husband and father of an 8-year-old son earned his undergraduate degree
» Continued on page 33

Laura Palermo

Benfield Elementary School
Kindergarten

Laura Palermo grew up in the Benfield community of Severna Park, attending Benfield Elementary School as a young girl before graduating from Archbishop Spalding and earning both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Towson University. Now, she and her husband are raising their three daughters in that same community, and she is back in the classrooms of Benfield Elementary — this time as a seasoned kindergarten teacher.

Following 16 years teaching kindergartners at Bodkin Elementary in



Pasadena, this is Palermo’s fourth year at Benfield. From a young age, she knew she enjoyed working with children. Whether babysitting or teaching swim lessons, Palermo found fulfillment in watching skills click for kids as they soaked up new information and discovered the fun of learning.

In her nomination letter for Palermo, Benfield Elementary Principal Susan Myers wrote, “Mrs. Palermo is an exemplary educator who embodies
» Continued on page 33

Catie Russo

Broadneck High School
Visual Art

Catie Russo knew while attending community college in Southern Maryland that she wanted to be an educator — maybe she would teach English or history — but it was while she was substitute teaching for her own high school photography teacher that she discovered one subject would allow her to teach them all.

“I realized, wait a second, you can teach any content area through the arts — you know, there is a history component, there is a written expression component,” she recalled. She went to art school, “and the rest



is history.” Russo earned her undergraduate and master’s degrees from the Maryland Institute College of Art, or MICA, and began her

teaching career in Baltimore City before joining the Broadneck High School staff 12 years ago. As a visual art teacher, Russo teaches 2D art classes that cover drawing, painting, printmaking, digital drawing, collage and more. The wife and mother of two also teaches photography.

Russo is a firm believer that art is
» Continued on page 33

Ruth Parker Eason School’s Amy Guerke Honored As AACPS Principal Of The Year



During school arrival on December 19, Anne Arundel school system officials surprised Amy Guerke with the news that she had won the George Arlotto Leadership Award as AACPS’ 2024-2025 Principal of the Year.

Amy Guerke, principal of Ruth Parker Eason School in Millersville, was named the recipient of the 2024-2025 George Arlotto Leadership Award in December and will represent Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) in The Washington Post Principal of the Year program later this year.

Guerke learned of the news on December 19 as she assisted with student arrival and was surprised by Board of

Education President Robert Silkworth, Superintendent of Schools Mark Bedell, Education Foundation of AACPS Vice President Vic Samuels, Executive Director Joe Callahan, and other school system officials.

“I often say that I have the best job imaginable, and being recognized for my work is a wonderful surprise,” Guerke said. “It is a privilege to be part of such
» Continued on page 34

Student Art Exhibit At Annapolis Mall Showcases Youth Talent

From December through early January, more than 275 Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) elementary students’ artwork was showcased at the Annapolis Mall. The annual AACPS Winter Wonderland Art Exhibit showcases original pieces by kids from area elementary schools including Oak Hill, Folger McKinsey, Belvedere, Broadneck, Severna Park and others. The display represented a variety of mediums including watercolor and tempera paintings, collage and mixed media. Wintry subjects spanned snowmen to animals to holiday decor.



Above: Jameson Kilduff, a second-grader at Oak Hill Elementary School, used tempera paint on paper to create “Winter Birch Trees.” Left: Jayden Ho, a first-grader at Belvedere Elementary School, created “Holiday Mola” with mixed media.

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Educator Of The Month

**Allison
Morris**
Benfield
Elementary School



By Lauren Cowin

Just before schools closed for the holiday break, Benfield Elementary School received a gift in the form of a \$4,718.05 grant for its STEM program.

Allison Morris, the school's STEM teacher, applied for a Kick-starter grant through AFCEA of Central Maryland early in the school year. She believed that Benfield's STEM program, only in its second year, would benefit from additional technology.

The last week of school before the winter holidays is inevitably a flurry of activity, and this year's was even more so for Morris, who learned her proposal had earned her school a nearly \$5,000 grant.

Before the final bell rang in December, an oversized check was presented to her in the school's gymnasium.

"It was such a fun week!" she said.

Morris, a Towson University graduate and Severna Park native, has been a teacher for 16 years. She started her career in third and fourth grade classrooms before transitioning to STEM through the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Triple E — Enhancing Elementary Excellence — program.

"Allison consistently inspires curiosity and creativity in her STEM classroom. She is a high-energy teacher that easily gets students excited about learning," said Missy Fuson, assistant principal at Benfield Elementary.

Morris admits she wasn't particularly drawn to math and science as a student, and she wouldn't have

"I think when I was younger, even in high school, I don't think I ever would've seen myself doing anything with robots. By bringing STEM into the classroom, it's showing kids that it's not that intimidating."

— ALLISON MORRIS

predicted she'd end up working with robots. However, as an educator, she found herself most passionate about those assignments that were project-based and student-led, key components of Triple E.

She also has a strong belief that STEM needs to be made accessible to all students to prepare them for an increasingly tech-dominant world.

"If we look at the direction our world is heading, so much is online, so much is on social media; we have big corporations that are doing negotiations and contracts across the world, and robotics and AI is in the center of all of this," Morris explained. "So if that is what our future is going to be, then we need to prepare these students to have access to that."

Additionally, Morris sees the need for an early introduction to STEM education to break through any preconceived notions that it's too hard.

"It's important for these kids to have STEM because they need to see that they can do it," she said.

Morris excitedly shared her plans for the grant money: Bee-Bots, essentially robotic bumblebees, will provide an introduction to coding for students as young as kindergarten. Dash Robots will give intermediate students an opportunity to delve into more challenging coding — Morris already has a "Mission to Mars" project in mind for her fifth-graders. Access to 3D printers will offer students opportunities to elevate many of their creations in class.

This is the second grant Morris has earned for Benfield this school year. Earlier in the fall, she was awarded \$880 from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant program.

For Morris, who grew up on the same street where she now works, the positive energy of the students and parents in the community fuels her own.

"It's definitely been a wonderful experience coming here," she said.



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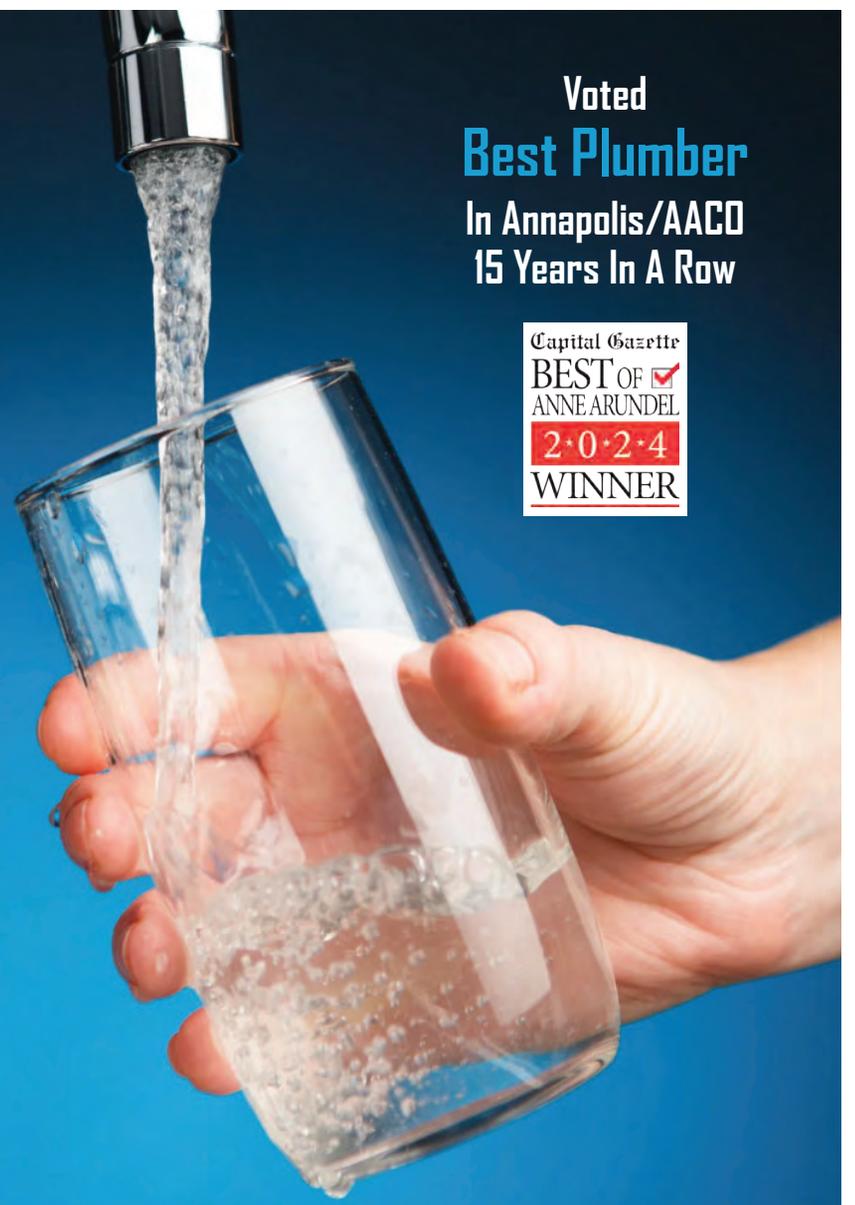
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Jackson Merrill Surprises Severna Park Elementary Students

By Lauren Cowin

“Is that HIM?!”

A brief hush fell over a classroom full of third-graders at Severna Park Elementary School on December 19 after teacher Jennie Merrill announced a special guest would be joining them to discuss the importance of setting goals.

As he walked through the classroom to take his seat in front, it took the students a moment to realize that the special guest was Major League Baseball standout, and Jennie Merrill’s youngest son, Jackson Merrill.

Who better to offer a clinic on goal setting? As Jennie explained, when Jackson

was a student at Severna Park Elementary School, he said in a school project that he wanted to be a Major League Baseball player one day.

By age 21, he had done just that. Jackson earned a spot on the San Diego Padres roster following an impressive spring training. He finished the year with 25 home runs, a Silver Slugger Award and had key hits in the Padres’ playoff run.

He achieved his goal of making it to the big leagues, but as he explained to the kids, ending the season without a World Series ring is similar to earning an A on one assignment, but settling for a B in the class.

“To win a World Series means more

than anything to me, and that’s where my main focus is at right now,” Jackson said.

His experience with the national media during the season prepared him for the barrage of questions lobbed by the enthralled students. While he was thrown a few softballs, such as his favorite animal (he’s a “dog guy,”) other students didn’t shy away from the tough questions.



Photos by Lauren Cowin
Severna Park Elementary School teacher Jennie Merrill surprised her class with a visit from her son Jackson Merrill. A member of the San Diego Padres, Jackson talked to students about the importance of setting goals.

Reese Laddbush dove right in on behalf of the local fan base and asked if he’d rather be on the Baltimore Orioles or stay with his current team.

“I like where I’m at,” Jackson answered. Others asked whether playing baseball was hard, and if he ever gets frustrated.

“It’s not hard to be a baseball player; it’s hard to continue to play baseball, though, because there are times when you want to quit,” Jackson explained, adding that it’s important to push through adversity and continue to improve.

Jackson shared that his favorite game of the 2024 season was one against the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Padres’ rival. The Dodgers had taken an early lead, scoring five early runs. But the Padres chipped away at that lead, ultimately winning by one run in extra innings.

One student followed up by asking if he was nervous when playing against the Dodgers.

“If you get scared of them, they’re gonna crush us,” Jackson said, adding later that the Dodgers are the team he most wants to beat next season.

Following the extensive question and answer session, Jackson posed for a photo with the class, and then autographed baseball cards for each student.

“Oh my gosh, this is so cool,” one recipient was overheard saying as she returned to her seat.

For his attentive young audience, Jackson issued the following lifelong guidance: “Focus and listen. Be open and listen to advice from others because the more knowledge you have, that’s everything.”







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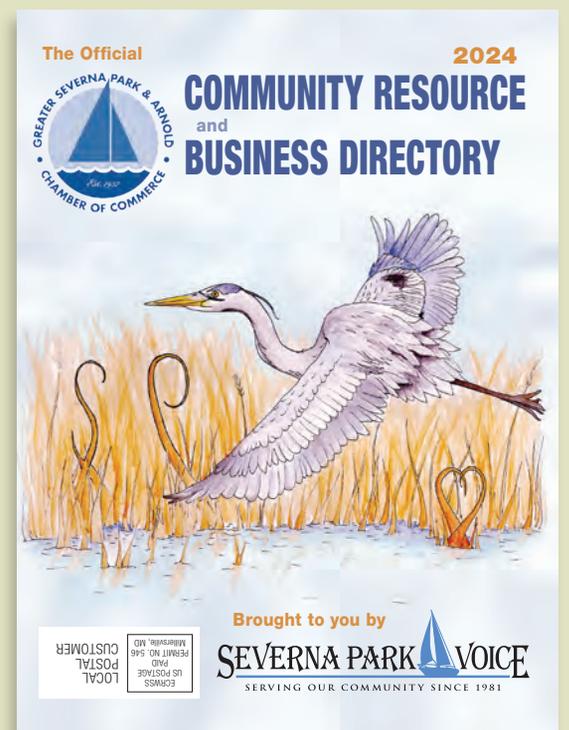

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Teacher Of The Year Semifinalists

Jonathan Martin

from the University of Maryland, and last year earned his master's degree from McDaniel College.

Arnold Elementary Principal Shau-na Kauffman expressed her enthusiasm for Martin being chosen as one of the final 18 in the running for the 2025 award. "We are thrilled that Mr. Martin was selected as a semifinalist for AACPS Teacher of the Year!" she shared. "Every day, Mr. Martin works to be a better teacher for students. He genuinely cares about students and their academic success."

This care is evidenced by Martin's commitment to helping kids overcome their anxiety about math, his emphasis on helping students discover

how to advocate for themselves and problem-solve in life, and his eagerness to attend his fourth-graders' plays and events. He considers himself "lucky" to be invited to these special occasions. Last year, Martin even accepted an invitation to play the tambourine during a song in a school winter concert. "The kids got a kick out of that," he recalled.

"Each year I get to learn and meet new kids. Every classroom dynamic is going to be different just based on their personalities, and I love getting to know them — what makes them tick, I love knowing what they're passionate about, I like knowing what they're anxious about inside the school, and just getting to work with them and challenge those ideas and help them to succeed," Martin said.

Laura Palermo

the principles of creating a positive, inclusive and community-based learning environment. From the start of the school year, she establishes strong relationships with her students and their families, fostering a sense of belonging and trust."

Those student relationships are a favorite part of teaching for Palermo, who shared that she loves "learning about them, tapping into what they're interested in, really identifying their strengths and their challenges, and focusing on promoting their strengths and working to build their confidence in whatever skills they're struggling with, and kind of piece-by-piece putting the puzzle of whatever task it is together."

Her desires for her students are straightforward: She wants them to enjoy coming to school, to be curious

about the world around them, and to be lifelong learners wherever their paths take them.

Palermo goes the extra mile to ensure students feel celebrated by documenting each child's progress and presenting them with personalized scrapbooks at the end of the school year. She keeps parents informed about classroom happenings through weekly communication and photos posted to a private online album. Palermo also serves on Benfield's leadership team, coaches Girls on the Run, attends PTO meetings and after-school events, helps put on a student variety show, and even organizes an annual kindergarten musical.

"I think having a partnership with the families (of students) that we teach is really, really impactful, and it's super important to the success of our classroom in general," she said.

Catie Russo

for everyone.

"I love it when a kid comes to your class and they're really not sure of their place in art, and then you help them to find it," she said. Russo emphasizes that the most "magical" thing about art is not the final product, but the process of thinking critically and creating it.

"The journey of developing yourself as an artist is really exciting," she said.

Russo also places great emphasis on building meaningful relationships with her students. "It's really important to me in my teaching practice that my students feel a sense of belonging in my classroom," she said. To facilitate this, she uses the word "community" frequently to help create a "home away from home" environment in her classroom.

Her impact extends beyond her classroom, and even beyond Broadneck, as Russo serves as the equity lead for her school; has partnered frequently for LGBTQ students in the county, including sponsoring Broadneck's GSA club (gay-straight alliance) since 2016; and is the National Art Honor

Society representative for the state through the Maryland Art Education Association.

"To say that Catie Russo has significantly impacted Broadneck High School and AACPS would be an understatement," Broadneck Principal Patrick Gelin said of Russo. "Her work has transformed instruction within the art department, continues to have an immeasurable impact on the academic and social-emotional success of students who are involved with National Art Honor Societies and GSA clubs across AACPS and Maryland, and continues to be the driving force behind our student- and data-centered approach to equity."

On April 25, the Education Foundation of AACPS will honor all 75 Teacher of the Year nominees at the 39th annual Excellence in Education Awards, where the 2025 AACPS Teacher of the Year will be announced. The 2024-2025 Principal of the Year — Amy Guerke of Ruth Park-er Eason School — will also be celebrated at this event. The 2025 Teacher of the Year will then go on to represent Anne Arundel County in the Maryland State Teacher of the Year competition.

Superintendent Bedell Proposes \$1.8 Billion FY2026 Operating Budget

Cognizant of a looming state budget shortfall but adamant that Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) can be "the greatest school district in this country, period," if given the appropriate resources, Superintendent of Schools Mark Bedell proposed a Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget to the Board of Education in December that prioritizes special education, early literacy, multilingual learners and employee compensation.

Bedell's \$1.8 billion recommendation contains more than \$16 million for the division of specialized instruction and early intervention services as the school system addresses the diverse needs of a student population that has grown by 5% in each of the last two years. Of the 155 special education positions recommended by Bedell, 91 are classroom teachers and instructional staff and 28 more are critical Individualized Education Program (IEP) facilitators who will support legally mandated IEP process requirements and relieve significant workload from classroom teachers. AACPS has not received additional positions to address the growth of students with special needs in three years.

Bedell's recommendation also contains 173 positions and nearly \$1.7 million to add staffing for four classrooms to expand the prekindergarten program for 4-year-olds, \$2 million for early intervention teachers to replace expiring Blueprint for Maryland's Future funding, and \$275,500 to begin to convert the Carver Professional Development Center in Gambrills into AACPS' fourth early education center.

To continue to address the needs of multilingual learners — the school system's fastest growing population — and their families, Bedell is recommending \$2 million for 18 English language development teachers, two bilingual pupil personnel workers, and a shift of six bilingual facilitator positions to 12-month schedules to be better able to serve families year-round. The number of multilingual students in AACPS has risen by 38% since 2020.

Bedell's plan also includes more than \$57 million for employee compensation increases and benefits costs. That is sufficient for a step or step equivalent for all eligible employees, plus a 3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for all employees. Over and above the step and COLA increases, Bedell's plan includes nearly \$4.2 million in targeted increases specific to each employee bargaining unit.

"This is an amazingly beautiful, diverse school district in so many ways. That diversity is something on which we can — and must — continue to build," Bedell said in his budget address. "For me, where we can go from here is clear: We can become the greatest school district in this country, period. If we have the resources; if we do the things that our strategic plan calls for; if we stay true to being honest about the data, attacking that data in a very strategic way and moving the needle for all of our students, we will become an absolutely phenomenal school district in this country. That results in a higher quality of life not just for our students and their families, but for every single person in Anne Arundel County."

To continue to enhance safety for students and staff, Bedell has included more than \$3.5 million in operating and capital budget costs to construct more security vestibules at schools, enhance school security camera systems throughout the county, and launch a pilot program to harness state-of-the-art technology and install non-invasive weapons detection systems at two yet-to-be-determined schools.

Also included is nearly \$1.6 million to complete the rollout of the middle school athletics program that will begin this spring and \$3.2 million to open the New Village Academy Public Charter School next fall.

Bedell's full Fiscal Year 2026 operating and capital budget recommendations, as well as a text of his budget address and a Budget in Brief document, can be found at www.aacps.org/fy26budget.

AACPS Conducting 10th International Parent And Community Leadership Academy

The Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) Office of School and Family Partnerships is seeking candidates for its 10th International Parent and Community Leadership Academy (IPCLA), which begins on February 18.

The seven-week academy is aimed at improving communication between the school system and international families as well as diversifying the pool of leaders in schools and the community who can better support the academic achievement of international students and English learners. Meetings will be held during the day at various Anne Arundel County Public Schools locations from February 18 through April 2. Transportation can be

provided if needed.

Candidates must be born outside of the United States and speak a language other than English at home.

Participants will identify and discuss challenges facing international students and their families, gain a better understanding of AACPS programs and initiatives, and explore ways they can become leaders in their communities. Participants will receive a certificate and will be recognized by the Board of Education at the end of the IPCLA.

More information, including an application form (available in multiple languages), can be obtained at www.aacps.org/IPCLA or by contacting Frances Cruz at 410-353-4169 or fcruz-serrano@aacps.org.

Q

Question of the month

Each month, the Severna Park Voice poses a question to a local fifth-grade class. This month, students from Mrs. Appel's class at Oak Hill Elementary School answered the question:

If you could make one improvement in the new year, what would it be?

If I could make one improvement in the new year it would be to go from the B team to A team in soccer.

Anna M.

If I could make an improvement in 2025, it would be to improve at horseback riding. I would like to start jumping and doing more shows.

Colette S.

I want to improve in basketball this year and make the team.

Dominik S.

A thing I can improve on is to get better grades to feel like I can be

OAK HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



smart and learn a lot more things to understand and to solve a problem.

Dylan N.

If I could improve myself in one way, it would be to have less screen time because I will be playing video games instead of doing things like playing basketball.

Ean S.

If I could make one improvement in the new year, it would be improving my sport, cheerleading. I want to get more skills in. I can do this!

Finlee G.

I would like to improve at soccer next year.

Gio D.

In the new year, improvements are I would eat healthier, wake up on time and get outside at least two hours a day.

Harper K.

I will improve and get better at soccer because I play. I want to be a soccer player when I grow up.

Isabela F.

I want to improve my gaming skills and sports skills. Also, get all A's in school and eat healthier.

Jack B.

Working out more is the thing I would like to work on in 2025.

Jackson F.

In the new year, I would try to eat less sugar and more protein.

Jamie L.

I would spend more time with my family members.

Katelyn M.

If I could make one improvement in the new year, it would be to do better in math and reading. I would want to change that because I would really like an A in all subjects not a B in those two.

Kaya C.

I want to find something else to do besides being on a device.

Lillian F.

My New Year's resolution is to be healthier by having less screen time, going outside and reading more.

Lily N.

I want to improve on my academic

success so I can have better grades in middle school and this third and fourth marking period. I know I have A's and B's, but I want better grades.

Mason M.

An improvement for this year would be to get better at basketball, for example score five shots.

Mia B.

If I could make one change in the new year, it would be to get better at my tumbling for cheer.

Molly E.

One improvement that I could make in the new year is improving at sports. I want to get better at gymnastics because I'm still pretty bad at handstands and other stuff from gymnastics.

Navy H.

I would like to improve in being more powerful in my tumbling in cheer. I want to be faster so I can be in sync with my tumbling group.

Neve D.

I would like to be better and more flexible in cheer. Also, have more balance so I don't fall as much, and I want to have a standing back flip.

Olivia G.

One improvement in the new year I would make is to eat less junk and drink more water. I think drinking more water is good for our bodies and eating less junk will make us healthier and have more energy.

Olivia L.

I would like to improve in gymnastics for the new year because I am a competitive gymnast.

Sadie P.

Area Schools Earn Award For Wellness

The Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) Wellness Council announced in December 2024 that eight schools including Jones Elementary School, Severn River Middle School and Severna Park High School were the 2024 winners of the AACPS Wellness School of Distinction award. Other county schools to receive the award were Marley Elementary School, Ridgeway Elementary School, Old Mill Middle School North, Southern Middle School and Southern High School.

The award recognizes schools that demonstrate a high priority for the health and well-being of students, staff and school supporters by going beyond the curriculum to produce positive outcomes for the entire school community.

To win the prestigious honor, a school must show that its culture encompasses wellness as reflected in the 10 components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model. WSCC is a coordinated and collaborative school health approach outlined by the Centers for Disease Control.

The components of the WSCC framework are health education; physical activity; health services; nutrition environment and services; counseling, psychological and social services; social and emotional climate; physical environment; employ-

ee wellness; family engagement; and community involvement. In support of all schools, the AACPS Wellness Council created a Wellness Toolkit, which provides information for schools on how to implement all of the components.

From mindfulness in nature activities to staff-focused self-care initiatives to energy conservation projects, each winning school's approach to creating a culture of wellness is unique, but with one common factor: collaboration and motivation to be a well community.

This year, schools that won the award in 2021 or prior were eligible to apply to maintain their statuses. Jones Elementary School and Southern High School earned their third designations while all of the other schools achieved the distinction for the first time. As an extension of the Board of Education policy on wellness and the AACPS Wellness Council, the award is given annually.

The application window for the 2025 award will open in the spring. Schools that won the award in 2022 will be eligible to apply to maintain their designations.

Parents and community members are highly encouraged to be involved in the application process. While a copy of the application can be reviewed on the Wellness Schools webpage, final submissions must be made online by a school employee with approval by the principal. Only online applications submitted via the school system intranet will be accepted. General information about the Wellness Schools of Distinction program can be found at www.aacps.org/wellnessschools.

AACPS Principal Of The Year

» Continued from page 27

an amazing school community and I am deeply grateful for receiving this award."

The AACPS Principal of the Year program began in 2021-2022 at the urging of then-Superintendent George Arlotto with support from the Education Foundation of AACPS, which sought to recognize outstanding principals in the county as is done in the annual Teacher of the Year program, which is now in its 39th year. The foundation formally named the award in honor of Arlotto, who served AACPS for 16 years, including eight as superintendent, in June 2022.

Heather Garris of Tracey's Elementary School, Richard Rogers of Walter S. Mills-Parole Elementary School, and Julia Walsh of Tyler Heights Elementary School are previous winners of the award.

Guerke has been principal at Ruth Parker Eason, which serves students with profound developmental disabilities, for seven years. She has worked for AACPS since 1995 and spent nine years teaching at Ruth Parker Eason and several years in the school system's department of special education before returning to the school as principal in 2018.

"Ms. Guerke is an exceptional leader who is passionate in her plight to instill educational access and opportunity with dignity in the provision of specially designed instruction for the students with disabilities she serves," said Mary Tillar, AACPS' assistant superintendent for

specialized instruction and early intervention services (formerly special education). "Through an asset-driven mindset and a career commitment in special education, Ms. Guerke leads by example, embracing potential, recognizing contribution, and celebrating talents. Her belief in innovation, inclusion, integrity, and equity in educational programming has fostered a positive, highly connected, and successful learning environment."

To be eligible for the award, principals must have at least five years of experience and be in at least their second year at a school. Nominees must also demonstrate excellence in the following areas: management and communication; school and community cooperation; creativity and innovation; and instructional leadership.

In addition to Guerke, the foundation will also recognize the following finalists at its annual Excellence in Education Awards Ceremony on April 25 at Live! Arundel Mills:

Linda Chandler

Old Mill Middle School South

Lenora Fox

Mayo Elementary School

Katherine Hicks

Wiley H. Bates Middle School

Tickets for the Excellence in Education Awards, at which the 2025 AACPS Teacher of the Year and the Independent Schools Teacher of the Year will also be announced, will go on sale in January.

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Naptown Philharmonic Orchestra's Season Continues With Three Upcoming Concerts



Photo courtesy of Michael G. Stewart

The Naptown Philharmonic Orchestra will continue its 2024-2025 season with concerts in February, April and June.

By Meredith Winter

After performing as the Londontowne Symphony Orchestra for 20 years, the Naptown Philharmonic Orchestra (NPO) adopted its new name in 2023 and continues its mission of “providing high-quality, family-friendly, affordable classical and light classical concerts for the enrichment and enjoyment of Central Maryland residents of all ages and backgrounds.”

Each season the NPO strives to perform five concerts. The 2024-2025 season began with performances in September and October and will continue this winter and spring with three diverse concerts in Feb-

ruary, April and June.

“The remaining three concerts in our season demonstrate the many types of music the Naptown Philharmonic presents to our community,” said NPO Music Director/Conductor Anna Binneweg, who has directed the orchestra since 2007. “Our audiences will enjoy well-known pieces from the Broadway stage in February, music that celebrates our beautiful Earth in April, and the fun of our national pastime in June. We’ve got something for everyone!”

Broadway Legends

Sunday, February 2, at 3:00pm

The NPO will transport audiences to New York City in

its February concert showcasing familiar Broadway hits from “Candide,” “Phantom of the Opera,” “Hamilton,” “Mama Mia!” and “Tick, Tick... Boom!” The performance will feature violinist Cameron Raecke and soloists Sarah Burrall, Brian Shatt and Michael Pistorio.

Raecke, co-principal violinist for the NPO, will perform Hummel’s “Potpourri for Viola and Orchestra.” Burrall, a soprano and Pasadena native, teaches choral music and theater in Queen Anne’s County. Tenor Brian Shatt is the director of choirs at Archbishop Spalding High School, from which he graduated in 2009.

Pistorio, a baritone, has performed as a professional chorister, concert soloist and opera principal, and is also a reputable sacred singer.

An Earth Day Tribute

Sunday, April 6, at 3:00pm

April 22 will mark the 55th anniversary of Earth Day, an annual event that elevates environmental protection. The NPO is dedicating its April concert, “An Earth Day Tribute,” to “environmental awareness through the power of music and community collaboration.”

The concert will feature the choruses from Arundel Vocal Arts Society and Apex Arts Vocal Ensemble and will

open with Johann Strauss’ timeless “Blue Danube Waltz.” Bulgarian piano virtuoso Daniela Mineva will perform Polish composer Grażyna Bacewicz’s “Piano Concerto.” The program will continue with a performance of Jake Runestad’s “Earth Symphony” and Jonathan Larson and Roger Emerson’s “Seasons of Love” from the musical “Rent.”

Let's Play Ball!

Saturday, June 7, at 7:30pm

The NPO’s 2024-2025 season will culminate with a unique baseball-themed orchestral experience titled “Let’s Play Ball!” Inspired by the great all-American game, the concert will feature timeless tunes including “Take Me Out To The Ball Game,” “Rookie Of The Year” and “Home Stretch.” Just as baseball is enjoyed by fans young and old, this performance is geared toward audience members of all ages as well.

The season finale will highlight the winners of the NPO’s annual Young Artist Concerto Competition, which is open to all high school students throughout Maryland.

All concerts will take place at Maryland Hall, located at 801 Chase Street in Annapolis. Tickets are \$25, or free for all students with a valid student ID. For more information or to purchase tickets, go to www.naptownphil.org.

Nurture Your Creativity Or Discover A New Hobby This Year

By Meredith Winter

January often brings with it New Year’s resolutions, goal setting and an evaluation of how we spend our time and energy. But it can also be an opportunity to commit to nurturing a creative passion or developing a new one. There are many local outlets to explore musical, artistic, dance and other creative abilities in 2025 and discover the enjoyment they can bring.

Picture Yourself As A Photographer

Aspiring shutterbugs are invited to participate in Kinder Farm Park’s annual “Life In The Park” photo contest, now through February 28. The competition is open to amateur photographers of all ages, and phone photos are accepted. Categories that will be judged include flora (flowers, trees, plants), fauna (animals, fish, birds, insects), landscape and people. Images must be captured within the boundaries of Kinder Farm Park. For a complete list of rules and submission instructions, go to www.kinderfarmpark.org.

Get Out On The Dance Floor

You don’t have to shy away from the dance floor in 2025 — dance classes will be offered this winter at local libraries, the Severna Park Community Center, with the Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks, and through other enti-



ties. Learn simple line dances and enjoy a low-impact physical activity at the Anne Arundel County Public Library’s beginner line dancing classes, slated for February 6 at the Broadneck branch and February 13 at the Severna Park branch. Registration is required at www.aacpl.net/events.

This winter and spring, the Severna Park Community Center will offer dance classes spanning ballet and tap to hip-hop. These classes are fee-

based, and registration is available at www.spccommunitycenter.org. Recreation and Parks is also offering winter dance classes and workshops for adults. Whether you’re interested in Broadway, theater and jazz dance styles, hip-hop or Zumba, Recreation and Parks has classes beginning in January and March. Learn more and register at www.aacounty.org/recreation-parks.

Brush Up On 2D Or 3D Art Skills

Whether a particular medium of 2D or 3D art is a lifelong passion or simply a hobby of interest, the cold weather months present a good opportunity to stay cozy indoors and have fun honing your artistic skills.

Without investing in personal art supplies, you can create a seasonally inspired masterpiece at Broadneck Library’s paint night on February 4. All materials will be provided, but pre-registration is required at www.aacpl.net/events. The Broadneck Library is also home to a needlecrafters group that is open to community members who enjoy sewing, knitting, needlepoint or crocheting. The group will gather next on January 21 and February 18.

If you’d rather get your hands dirty creating something special, Recreation and Parks offers fee-based classes in ceramics. The county department will also host several “make-n-take” ceramics

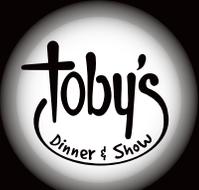
» Continued on page 38

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“Little Shop Of Horrors” Brings Harmony, Humor To Annapolis

Compass Rose Theater, a professional theater and educational non-profit in Annapolis, is performing “Little Shop of Horrors” from February 28 through March 30 at Maryland Hall.

With music by Alan Menken and lyrics and book material by Howard Ashman, “Little Shop of Horrors” won a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Musical and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Musical. One of the longest-running off-Broadway shows, this charmingly tongue-in-cheek musical comedy has captivated theatergoers for over 30 years.

It features a delectable sci-fi storyline and an electrifying 1960s pop/rock score. The story follows Seymour Krelborn, a meek floral shop assistant who discovers a peculiar plant, which he names “Audrey II” after his crush. Little does he know, this unusual plant will develop a soulful R&B voice, a smart mouth and an insatiable hunger for humans.

The Compass Rose Theater show will feature Andrew Agner-Nichols as Orin Scrivello/Skip Snip/Bernstein/Mrs. Luce, Marty Egna as Mushnik, Barrett Johnson as Chiffon, Amanda as Puppeteer/Shopper, Sophie Merbaum as Audrey, Keila Mumphord as Crystal, Elliott Petrilla as Wino/Deliveryman, James Toler as Audrey II/Wino, Tyler White as Customer, Maxwell Wolf as Seymour Krelborn, and Cristen Young as Ronnette.

“This production will pay homage to

the sci-fi, horror films that captivated audiences in the 1950s,” said “Little Shop of Horrors” director Madeline Austin.

In addition to directing, Austin is an off-Broadway producer and producing director with CWNYi (www.madelineaustin.com).

The Compass Rose Theater artistic and production team includes Austin, Barbara Webber (producer), Lisa Rodvien and Jack Benedict (musical directors), Isabel Simoes deCarvalho (set designer), John Purnell (lighting designer), Alejandro Ramirez (stage manager), Michele Hickman (costume designer), and the production team of Peter Katz, Susan Flynn, Logan Herard, Assata Snowden and Ryan Squires.

Since its founding in 2011 by Lucinda Merry-Browne, Compass Rose Theater has produced over 50 shows, garnering a Helen Hayes Award for “A Chorus Line,” five Helen Hayes Award nominations, and several Helen Hayes Award recommendations.

Compass Rose Theater is at Maryland Hall, located at 801 Chase Street in Annapolis. Show tickets are \$15 to \$55, available until showtime while supplies last. Ticket prices and availability are subject to change. Reduced prices are offered for students, seniors, military members and veterans, and groups of 12 or more. Purchase tickets at www.compassrosetheater.org or by calling 410-980-6662.

Toby’s Dinner Theatre Prepares For “9 To 5: The Musical”

Tumble outta’ bed and stumble to “9 to 5.” The show is coming to Toby’s Dinner Theatre in Columbia from January 17 through March 16.

With music and lyrics by Dolly Parton, “9 to 5” is based on the hit movie. Three unlikely friends take control of their office and learn there is nothing they can’t do. Pushed to the boiling point, the female coworkers concoct a plan to get even with the sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot they call their boss. In a hilarious turn of events, Violet, Judy and Doralee live out their wildest fantasy — giving their boss the boot.

For more information about the show, call the Toby’s box office at 410-730-8311 or visit www.tobysdinnertheatre.com.

Nurture Your Creativity



» Continued from page 36

workshops where you can create your own cookie jar, flower pot, yard décor or hot cocoa mugs and a cookie plate. Find date, fee and registration information at www.aacounty.org/recreation-parks.

Jam Out With Bluegrass Enthusiasts

Teens and adults are invited to join a monthly beginners bluegrass jam at the Broadneck Library, where budding musicians can learn to play bluegrass music and experienced pickers can develop a deeper knowledge of the genre. Using only acoustic stringed instruments, the group typically plays six to eight featured songs followed by an open jam time. Upcoming gatherings are slated for January 23 and February 27, and more information is available at www.aacpl.net/events.



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The Best And Worst Films Of 2024

From horror and sci-fi flicks to a portrayal of working-class America, all genres were represented in the 2024 film landscape. Film critics Audrey Ruppert and James Buxton picked the best and worst films of the year.

BEST

“The Substance”

“The Substance” proves that horror should not be overlooked by the Oscars as it so often has been historically. The film is an incredibly powerful exploration of multiple topics including the male gaze, objectification, fame, self-perception vs. external perception, aging, and the destructive power of self-hatred. Viscerally disgusting, garish and bold, the film is in your face, and it's meant to be. Watching it felt like being flung face-first into a wall and being forced to confront topics that many of us try to avoid day-to-day. Incredible performances from Demi Moore and Margaret Qualley.

— Audrey Ruppert

“Dune: Part Two”

Action-packed, “Dune: Part Two” doesn't suffer from the same pacing issues as the first movie. Director Denis Villeneuve manages to adapt the incredibly weighty source material into something coherent that retains the spirit of the original text and is visually breathtaking; he brings his French arthouse background to the big screen. Some key changes are made, but they are sensible changes that are thematically consistent.



Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

Timothée Chalamet rose above the skepticism and rose to the challenge of playing Paul with much more depth than the first installment, and his chemistry with the other characters — particularly Zendaya's character — is palpable. I only can wonder how they will manage to close such an impressive undertaking in only one final film.

— Audrey Ruppert

“Challengers”

This is a movie about passion, desire, betrayal and a little bit of tennis in between. Luca Guadagnino crafts a perfect sex drama that substitutes intimacy for sport, restricting every heated dispute or mental breakdown to the confines of the court. Zendaya, Mike Faist and Josh O'Connor are all spectacular, each layering their performance with the kind of depth and complexity that lesser films would struggle to impart onto a single lead.



Photo courtesy of Amazon MGM Studios

Discovering each character's true goals is half the fun, but the amount of weaving and twisting makes a second watch just as fun as the first. “Challengers” is not a film about tennis; it's a film about power, and although the movie seems to be disappearing under the radar this awards season, it's undeniably one of the best movies of the year.

— James Buxton

“Anora”

Sean Baker, the mind behind “The Florida Project” and “Red Rocket,” brings yet another stunning look at the working-class underbelly of America. This time focusing in on the world of erotic dancers and sex workers in the less romantic end of New York, “Anora” quickly delves into the deep end of dangerous clients and the animosity faced by so many women in the industry.

In classic Baker fashion, it's a movie that prioritizes authenticity over star power, with lead actor Mikey Madison being perhaps the only recognizable name on the poster. A brilliant, funny exploration of an underrepresented community, “Anora” is also not afraid to show the pain and horror that comes with that lifestyle.

— James Buxton

WORST

“Kraven the Hunter”

Sony's off-brand Marvel cinematic universe comes to a whimpering close with “Kraven the Hunter,” a movie that doesn't even have the good grace to be entertainingly bad. “Kraven” is a bland, soulless husk of a film that only exists to extend Sony's hold on the rights to “Spider-Man,” an endeavor that seems to have also failed given their decision to bring these movies to a quiet, uneventful close.

Guaranteed to upset die-hard and casual fans alike with its complete disregard of the source material and weak action set pieces, “Kraven the Hunter” is the easiest movie to skip since the studio's own “Madame Web.” Aaron Taylor-Johnson is saved only by the fact he also appears in “Nosferatu” this year, and the quicker people forget about his performance here, the better.

— James Buxton

“Megalopolis”



Photo courtesy of Lionsgate

Francis Ford Coppola has made some of the greatest American films of all time. “Megalopolis” is not one of them. The story behind its inception is undeniably compelling — a cinema legend selling his vineyard and coming out of retirement for one last picture — but none of that negates the fact that “Megalopolis” is an appalling mess of a movie that rarely makes sense and never feels like anything other than a waste of two hours. It's packed to the rafters with generational actors, yet none of them achieve anything beyond endangering their careers. Narratively nonsensical and aesthetically bizarre, it'll be remembered for all the wrong reasons.

— James Buxton

“Argylle”

As D'Angelo Wallace aptly put it, “the book is a bust, the film was a flop, it's like a cinematic universe of sadness.” “Argylle” was the product of a very confusing, overly contrived marketing campaign. The film was announced before the book even came out, with director Matthew Vaughn hyping the story as rivalling the James Bond series in terms of ingenuity for the spy thriller genre and boasting a stacked cast (talk about setting an unrealistically high bar for yourself).



Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

After several delays, the book was finally released; despite an interesting premise — the author being an in-universe character (think, Lemony Snicket) who writes a successful spy novel but has forgotten she was once a spy — the book and film both were incredibly generic. Peppered with stilted dialogue, “Argylle” is less a film and more a series of chaotic action scenes using terrible CGI that is vaguely strung together with an after-thought of a “plot,” and ends with the most predictable twist imaginable. Some fans thought Taylor Swift wrote the novel, because how else could a first-time author get this much buy in? The marketing team gladly took advantage of this baseless speculation. Later, it was discovered that the book was written on contract by a middling thriller writer. The entire debacle was all marketing, zero substance.

— Audrey Ruppert

“Joker: Folie à Deux”



Photo courtesy of Scott Garfield/DC Comics

A film that purposefully spits in the face of its primary fanbase, “Joker: Folie à Deux” was well intentioned — a lot of the fanbase has edgelord, misogynistic and problematic tendencies. Other creators have gotten sick of their fanbase misinterpreting their work (think “The Boys,” “Fight Club” and “The Matrix”) and have also made attempts to disavow the people reading their work uncritically. You're not supposed to admire Tyler Durden or the Joker! But these disavowals aren't working, because this part of the fanbase cannot grasp subtlety.

It doesn't matter that two trans women wrote “The Matrix.” The phrase “red pill” is now forever associated with Alex Jones and Andrew Tate. Bad counterattacks are still bad at the end of the day, and being unsubtle in your disavowal is useless if the film is unwatchable. “Joker” is boring, contrived, a bad musical for some reason, and is a real slog to watch. In the words of commentator F.D. Signifier, progressives should be making good media people want to watch, like “Star Trek,” to promote their ideals, rather than trying to beat misguided fanboys over the head with bad movies that make fun of them. Nobody, progressive or otherwise, wants to watch that.

— Audrey Ruppert



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Chasing Market Trends: The Trouble With Timing

Jason LaBarge
Financial Advisor
and President
LaBarge Financial



The year 2024 included strong growth for many investments. The stock market was up well over 20% and even Bitcoin, which just a few years ago was considered an investment akin to casinos and lottery tickets, rose above \$100,000 for the first time shortly before Christmas.

Numbers like that can be tempting. When you see an asset is worth six figures, it can take every fiber of your being to resist the urge to jump in with both feet and buy as much as you can. On the other hand, if you own an asset whose value has crashed, it can take every fiber of your being to talk yourself out of selling it to avoid losing more money.

None of this should come as a surprise. After all, it's in our nature to buy when prices are high and sell when prices are low. However, any Econ 101 student will tell you that fear of miss-

ing out is exactly what you don't want to do if you want to make money.

Your Emotions Could Harm Your Finances

There's a field of study called behavioral finance that investigates how our emotions and unconscious thought processes impact how we handle money. It turns out they impact it quite a bit, often without us even realizing it. If those emotions cause you to make significant mistakes, they can have devastating impacts on your net worth.

Timing the Market

One common offshoot of emotional investing involves attempting to predict the future. Many investors attempt to maximize their returns by timing the market. They want to buy assets when the price hits rock bottom and sell them only when they reach their peak. The trouble with this strategy is that it requires you to be psychic.

When a cryptocurrency reaches \$100,000, is that the peak, or will it go higher? To the market timer, this is a crucial question because selling at » **Continued on page 43**

Chamber Update

Liz League
CEO
GSPACC



Please give a warm welcome to our newest members and enjoy reading about all the businesses that make our community the best place to live! Visit their websites and find them in our directory at www.gspacc.com.

Viktoria Ringhausen
viktoriaring@gmail.com

A full-time Realtor since 2009, Viktoria is passionate about the real estate industry and loves educating new and future clients about real estate in her community. She holds a military relocation professional certification and seller representative specialist designation so she can better assist current and former members of the military with housing.

Yacht Brokers of Annapolis

www.yachtbrokersofannapolis.com

Have you ever wanted to quit your job, sell your house and possessions, buy a boat, and sail into the sunset? That is exactly what Matt

and Deanna did a few years ago, and their adventure took them all around the world. They returned to the states after finding their passion as boaters, and became yacht brokers, owning a successful business that focuses on helping clients make their nautical dreams a reality.

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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

New Name, Same Commitment: Cassilly & Appel Celebrates 45th Anniversary



Cassilly & Appel, CPAs & Advisors includes (l-r) partners Karl Appel, Patrick Cassilly, Debra Feather and Virginie Bolton.

By Zach Sparks

About 65% of small businesses close within 10 years of opening, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. So, it was quite a milestone in 2024 when Gardiner & Appel Group celebrated 45 years in business.

Entering 2025, the firm will be known by a new name: Cassilly & Appel, CPAs & Advisors.

Scott Gardiner founded the firm in April 1979. He originally called it General Business Services, then Gardiner Group, and later Gardin-

er & Appel Group after the addition of Karl Appel in 1998.

The accounting firm specializes in business counseling, financial review, tax planning and preparation, and succession planning for when a business changes ownership.

Regardless of the name change, clients can expect the same dedication to great customer service from Cassilly & Appel.

"Our clients are small businesses that make up the fabric of the community," Appel said. "We have

so many local businesses, and from when the firm started in 1979, it's always been service oriented. Since we work with small businesses, our clients are part of the business community and so are we.

"Our client base is very diverse whether it's nonprofits, restaurants or contractors," Appel said.

The firm is proud to provide free services to SPAN, the Katherine's Light Foundation and other Anne Arundel County nonprofits.

For clients and nonprofits, Cassilly & Appel does whatever



"We have so many local businesses, and from when the firm started in 1979, it's always been service oriented."

— KARL APPEL

possible to help them reach their financial goals. That takes a team-wide effort from the partners: Appel, Patrick Cassilly, Debbie Feather, Virginie "Ginny" Bolton and the rest of the staff.

"The personal relationships are part of the value we provide," said Cassilly, who joined the firm in 2012. "Working with Scott, Karl, Ginny, Debbie and the whole staff, I think the team has done a lot."

Appel said, "One of the unique characteristics of Cassilly & Appel is that we meet with our clients during the year, and we are very » **Continued on page 43**

Chamber Update

» Continued from page 41

Greg Jimeno is a recognized leader in the legal community. He has served as president of the Anne Arundel County Bar Association; served a two-year term on the Maryland State Bar Association Board of Governors; and was appointed by the governor of Maryland to the Anne Arundel County Judicial Nominating Commission, a position he held for eight years.

Frank Gray was an assistant state's attorney for Anne Arundel County, where he prosecuted criminal cases on a full-time basis. He is an experienced mediator for both custody and property issues, and he has been appointed by the court to represent countless minor children in difficult and highly contentious matters as their best interest attorney.

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The mission at Mid-Atlantic Home Watch correlates to four key services:

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Mid-Atlantic Home Watch, Bryan Bowman is a graduate of the Home Watch Academy, accredited by the National Home Watch Association, and designated as a certified aging in place specialist (CAPS) by the National Association of Home Builders. He is insured, bonded, background checked, and brings a highly technical, professional and personal approach to caring for you, your family and your residence.

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Council Baradel is among the region's premier law firms and serves clients throughout the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. Established in 1982, Anne Arundel County's largest law firm offers a wide variety of legal services to businesses and individuals. Let the team's energy, depth and ex-

perience work for you. Kelly Burgy is a graduate of Georgetown University Law School and specializes in estate and trust planning and administration.

In December, we held our 14th annual Taste and Sip Extravaganza, a signature chamber event that celebrates our wonderful restaurants, liquor stores and bakeries. Held at the beautiful Chartwell Golf and Country Club, over 350 attendees sampled food and drink from **Adam's Taphouse and Grille - Severna Park, April's Table, Chartwell Golf and Country Club, BD Provisions, Bruster's Real Ice Cream, Cheers & Spirits, Firehouse Subs, Fishpaws Marketplace, Goska's Liquors, Nothing Bundt Cakes, Crepes in the Park, Sweet Satisfaction, The Big Bean, Be My Guest Catering, Cafe Mezzanotte, Donut Shack, VanEllin Sweet and Savory Treats, Pat's Select Pizza and Grill, Deep Eddy Vodka** with elves from **The FaceBar Aesthetic Medicine** serving libations, **Park Tavern** (and beer samples from the Oliver Brewing Company, which will open in Severna Park this year), **JB's, Donnelly's Dockside, Blendabowl, Magothy Roasting Company** and **Passanante's Home Food Service!**

Our silent auction table was filled to the brim with wonderful donations, and we were overwhelmed by the generosity of our small businesses that donated beautiful items and services. Many thanks to **Zachary's Jewelers** for a donation to our raffle.

Our event sponsors were **Matt Wyble and Joe Smith of Next Step Realty**. Gold sponsors were the **Gardiner & Appel Group** (now Cassilly & Appel), **Taichi Bubble Tea, KMA Law, Maryland Plastic Surgery and PURE MedSpa at the Aesthetic Institute, Smart Fit Kids Academy/Before and After School Academic and Martial Arts, Mad Soaps Inc., Park Modern Realty,** and **Pomfret & Telljohann Wealth Management Group**.

Our silver sponsor was **Park Hardware**. And our bronze sponsors were **Chick-fil-A Severna Park, Whale Works Design and Illustration, Garage Rescue LLC, Griswold Home Care, Front Porch Travel, People Rise LLC, Kogen Dojo Self-Defense Academy, Fairwinds Travel, Bayside Builders** and **Chesapeake Auto Body**.

Our entertainment included a cappella performances from **Chesapeake Harmony Chorus** and the **Harbor City Music Company**. And we enjoyed a special performance by internationally known **JAGMAC**, six siblings who grew up in Arnold and perform worldwide.

Many thanks to everyone for supporting our Taste and Sip event. Because of its success, we were able to give a generous donation to the **Anne Arundel County Food Bank** and **Anne Arundel County Animal Care And Control!**

For more information about the chamber and events, please visit www.gspacc.com.

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Chasing Market Trends: The Trouble With Timing

» Continued from page 41

\$100,000 will be upsetting to them if the cryptocurrency gains even more value; they'll feel they left money on the table.

But if the cryptocurrency loses value while the investor is waiting to see if it will keep rising, the investor can quickly find themselves worth less than they were when they bought the asset in the first place. That's not just hyperbole; a study found that people who try to time the market and miss out on just the 10 highest-performing days in 30 years risk cutting the value of their portfolio by more than half!

That's why most financial advisors, including me, recommend doing everything you can to avoid letting your emotions drive your investment decisions. It's better to stick to a solid financial plan that is set up to take advantage of the good times and weather the bad ones.

My clients are used to hearing me talk about a concept called red money, green money. Red money involves investments like stocks, mutual funds, and other assets that have the potential to grow your money, but also carry with them the risk of volatility. Green money is "guaranteed." With assets like CDs, U.S. treasuries and fixed annuities, you may not enjoy as much growth potential as with red money assets, but you can also rest easy knowing you will get a specified payout.

A healthy portfolio includes a

carefully selected blend of red and green money investments. Sticking with that portfolio rather than trying to chase returns is a safer way to grow your money as you plan for retirement.

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Cassilly & Appel Celebrates 45th Anniversary

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proactive in business and tax planning, with face-to-face meetings so we are always in touch with clients. We're in tune with them since we're talking to them multiple times during the year."

That care and attention to each client is part of the reason for the firm's long-standing success, along with the trust and confidence clients have placed in the business over the years.

"Something that we take a lot of pride in is the confidentiality we have with our clients, because we live in such a small, close business community that the client confidence and keeping that confidential just between us and the client, that's so important because everyone knows everyone," Appel said. "That trust and confidence is something we are always stressing to everyone in the office."

Another emphasis is staying ahead of industry trends and technology, adopting digital tools and studying the ever-changing financial and tax regulations.

"We invest a lot of money to make sure we are doing things with the current technology," Appel said. "And not just technology but the constant change in tax laws whether it's federal or state of Maryland tax laws, but they're always changing. A lot of clients are always asking, 'With a new administration coming in, what is go-

ing to be different?' And we just have to stay on top of that. We do a lot of training, tax seminars, accounting seminars, to keep up with that."

Joining the firm was one of the best things that ever happened to Cassilly, who looks forward to the next few decades of helping people in the community.

"Being part of a small business and a firm that serves small businesses in the community has been extremely fulfilling for me," Cassilly said.

"The firm's ability to do that for 45 years is quite an accomplishment, and we appreciate all the clients along the way. The name change, it's not that Karl is going anywhere, but the firm is trying to set itself up to continue to serve clients well into the future, with another generation of talent, where other accounting firms may not have done that."

Appel said the firm is always looking to grow and add good people to the firm.

"In a growing firm, there's always a lot of opportunities, and with that growth, there is a lot of upward mobility," Appel said. "Even though we are a lot larger, our core services are the same and our main focus is working with small businesses and the owners of those small businesses."

Cassilly & Appel is located at 570 Baltimore Annapolis Boulevard in Severna Park. For more information, call 410-647-7777 or visit www.cassillycpa.com.

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