

B | LOCAL & LIFE

WEST CHESTER, LIBERTY TWPS.

Public invited to MLK Jr. march, event

By Michael D. Clark
Contributing Writer

WEST CHESTER, LIBERTY TWPS. — A Martin Luther King Jr. holiday tradition of a quarter of a century will continue this month for hundreds of people joined by Lakota school students.

School officials recently announced details of the Jan. 15 community march, which for the second year will be held at the Liberty Center, in Liberty Twp.

The annual Live The Dream March For Unity event, which was founded in 1998 by current

organizer Gail Webster of the West Chester Presbyterian Church, is one of the largest MLK holiday events in Butler County and draws sponsors and participants from both West Chester and Liberty townships.

A longtime supporter is Lakota Schools, the biggest school district in the county.

Recent years saw a COVID-pandemic pause in the post-march gathering to honor MLK student essay winners, said Lauren Boettcher, manager of school and community relations for the 17,500-student school system.

“Lakota has been a longstanding partner for our community’s celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And the student contest is always a great extra enrichment opportunity to promote to our students and their families, and we especially enjoy celebrating the work of our student winners each year,” said Boettcher of the event in the Sabin Hall of Liberty Center.

“We are excited to see the in-person program return this year and look forward to hon-

Lakota continued on B4



Students and community members march in the Live The Dream March For Unity. This year’s event will begin at 10 a.m. Jan. 15 at the Cabela’s parking lot, 7250 Cabela Drive. A post-march program will start at 10:30 a.m. STAFF

HAMILTON

Hamilton retailer to combine stores



Sarah Dankhoff, owner of Wildfire Hygge Goods, will close the company’s High Street store by the end of the month and move inventory to the company’s other store, 127 N. Second St., downtown Hamilton. NICK GRAHAM / STAFF

Wildfire Hygge Goods + Home will close its High Street store.

By Michael D. Pitman
Staff Writer

HAMILTON — Wildfire Hygge Goods + Home saw some pretty good growth in 2023, said owner

Sarah Dankhoff, so closing her High Street gift shop might seem counterintuitive.

But by taking this one step back, she said she can leap forward and grow exponentially by consolidating everything at her store at 127 N. Second St., which opened a couple of years ago.

The Wildfire store at 226 High St. will close Jan. 27, a decision Dank-

hoff made on Christmas Eve. The High Street shop opened in August 2019 but by 2020, she “realized we had way outgrown our space.”

With help from the city of Hamilton, she found the North Second Street building after not being able to find a 3,000-to-5,000-square-foot location on High Street. Dankhoff decided to keep the High Street store because “it was not the time

to leave” Hamilton’s main drag, as it was still experiencing some growing pains.

“We couldn’t do it yet,” she said. “Wildfire was just two years old (and) the city of Hamilton was different then. You had to be on High and Main streets to really get some wind underneath your

Wildfire continued on B4

PUBLIC SAFETY

Crashes involving ODOT crews fell sharply in 2023

By London Bishop
Staff Writer

Crashes involving vehicles with the Ohio Department of Transportation declined last year, but there is still more work to do in ensuring workers come home safely, the agency says.

There were 56 ODOT crews struck by vehicles in 2023, according to the agency, down from 135 in 2022, and 154 in 2021.

However, the department says this year, they want to “keep the number at zero,” ODOT wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

“We are encouraged by the downward trend, but 56 crashes involving our crews is still 56 too many,” ODOT Press Secretary Matt Bruning said. “We cannot state it enough, drivers need to move over for all roadside workers. If they cannot safely do so, they need to slow down. Above all, they need to pay attention. You can’t move over and slow down for the crew you don’t see because you’re looking at your phone.”

The reason for the drop-off may be due to a few factors. Ohio’s distracted-driving laws took effect in April last year, and officers could begin issuing tickets to people using

ODOT continued on B4

CARLISLE

Casey’s on track for March opening in Warren County

Developer originally filed location plans for site back in 2018.

By Ed Richter
Staff Writer

It’s been nearly six years, but a controversial gas station/convenience store project in Carlisle could be opened in late March.

Contractors for Casey’s General Store have been busy with the construction of a new, 3,200-square-foot gas station/convenience store at 767 Central Ave. The corner lot where the Pizza Hotline once stood is busy with

construction activity as the station’s fuel tanks and other infrastructure have been installed at the site.

“The store is currently on track to open at the end of March 2024,” said Katie Petru, director of communications and community for Casey’s General Store. “Weather could impact this, but currently it’s on schedule.”

In the 2018 filing, the developer said the new Casey’s location could offer 20 to 30 jobs, and typically 10 to 15 are full-time positions.

In addition to the gas station,

Casey’s continued on B3

MIDDLETOWN

Middletown Arts Center launches exhibit with Butler Behavioral Health

By Ginny McCabe
Contributing Writer

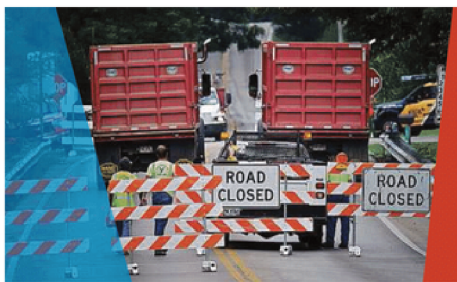
The Middletown Arts Center, in collaboration with Butler Behavioral Health, will launch a satellite art exhibit that features the work of Bev Brewer Stolzenberger.

“Our mission is to create art and cultural experiences where the influence of arts is felt and celebrated by the entire community,” said Kate Dykes, executive director of the Middletown Arts Center. “Showcasing the work of

Exhibit continued on B3



Bev Brewer Stolzenberger, a retired elementary school teacher, will be the first to exhibit her work at the satellite exhibition of the Middletown Arts Center and Butler Behavioral Health. CONTRIBUTED



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LOCAL & STATE

REAL ESTATE

Three Ohio cities among 'hottest' housing markets for '24

By Jim Weiker
The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio home shoppers hoping for a bargain this year are likely to be disappointed. The real-estate service Zillow predicts three Ohio cities will be among the nation's 10 hottest, or most competitive, real-estate markets in 2024. Zillow forecasts Cincinnati will be the second-hottest market, followed by Columbus at No. 3 and Cleveland at No. 8. Leading the nation is Buffalo, New York, while India-

napolis lands at No. 4. Zillow reported that cities on the list "should stand out as strong in a housing market still buffeted by low inventory and relatively high mortgage rates and prices." But the company cautioned that the housing market will remain tight for most buyers in 2024. "While mortgage rates have come down significantly in recent weeks, and projections for improved affordability and more homes for sale have become more common, the chal-

lenges that limited the U.S. housing market last year are unlikely to disappear entirely in 2024." Zillow's list attempts to measure how "competitive" housing markets will be. The ranking is based on several calculations including anticipated home value appreciation; the speed of home sales; and the estimated number of new jobs per new home. The last metric in particular resonates in Columbus, where job growth is expected to be weak this year, but the number of new homes built

might be even weaker, leaving buyers fighting for available homes. Zillow's list comes a few weeks after Realtor.com's similar forecast of hot housing markets. Realtor.com's list included none of the three Ohio cities on Zillow's list but pegged another Buckeye city, Toledo, as the nation's hottest market for 2024. Realtor.com's lineup is based on expected sale and price growth rates. No matter which list proves more accurate, Ohio homeowners and shoppers should

expect more price hikes and competition this year. In central Ohio, home prices have risen more than 40%, or nearly \$100,000, since the end of 2019. Columbus-area prices stabilized some in 2023, but continue to rise faster than the national average. But despite the big jumps, Midwestern cities on Zillow's Top 10 list are more affordable than nationally. In Columbus, for example, the typical home value is \$301,138, well below the national average of \$347,415.

"Housing markets are healthiest where affordable home prices and strong employment are giving young hopefuls a real shot at buying and starting to build equity," Anushna Prakash, data scientist for Zillow Economic Research, said in a news release. "I'm cautiously optimistic that the housing market will get back on stable footing in 2024 — we shouldn't see the massive price spikes of the early pandemic or fast-rising mortgage rates of recent years."

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Study: Obesity drug does not increase suicidal thoughts

By Gretchen Cuda Kroen
Advance Ohio Media

CLEVELAND — A new study funded by the National Institutes of Health has found that the drug semaglutide, a medication marketed under the brand name Wegovy for obesity or Ozempic for type 2 diabetes, is associated with a lower risk of self-harm and suicidal thoughts compared to other medications. It had previously been suggested that semaglutides may increase the risk, based on a limited number of anecdotal reports that some patients prescribed semaglutide experienced suicidal thoughts. Unconfirmed by rigorous sci-

entific studies, these reports spurred investigations by American researchers and European regulatory agencies. However, new research funded by the National Institutes of Health and conducted in part by Cleveland researchers, found the medication did not increase the risk of suicidal thoughts, and is in fact associated with a lower risk of suicidal thoughts compared to other medications for obesity and diabetes. The study, published Friday in the academic journal Nature Medicine and paired with a related research briefing, was co-led by scientists at Case Western Reserve University and the

National Institute on Drug Abuse at the NIH. Specifically, the analysis found that contrary to the earlier anecdotal reports, patients treated with semaglutide had a 49% to 73% lower risk of suicidal thoughts than those given other medications that worked via different mechanisms. The researchers came to these conclusions after examining the electronic health records of nearly a quarter of a million patients in the United States who were obese or overweight and who were prescribed semaglutide or another medication for weight loss between June 2021 and December 2022.

They found that the risk of developing first-time suicidal thoughts in people prescribed semaglutide for weight loss was 0.11%, and 7% if they had a previous history. By comparison, the group prescribed other weight loss medications had a risk of 0.43% and 14%, respectively. The researchers also examined the medical records of 1.5 million U.S. patients with type 2 diabetes who were prescribed either semaglutide or other medications for their condition between December 2017 and May 2021. They found that a semaglutide prescription was associated with 0.13% risk of first-time suicidal

thoughts, and 10% for patients with a prior history compared to 0.36% and 18% for other diabetes medications. "The important thing is that this is a real-world study using clinical data, not patients who were enrolled in a research study," said Dr. Jennifer Duncan, an endocrine psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic. Given that these medications are fairly new, some patients have expressed reservations about using them, and these results provide peace of mind, said Duncan. "For a lot of patients, this medication feels very promising, but they want

some security about the safety of the medications that they're taking," she said. In addition, Duncan said that losing weight affects many aspects of a person's life including their mental health and it's important not to neglect it. She recommends patients on these medications use them under a physician's guidance and find ways to address the positive and negative ways their struggle with weight impacts their psychological well-being. "We can't just give somebody a medication and have them lose weight and that's that," she said. "There's so much more that goes into it."

Casey's

continued from B1

the convenience store offers some grocery items as well as freshly prepared food like pizza, subs, sandwiches, salads and bakery items. Officials said this operation differs from competitors in that products are mostly made to order for the customer. According to its building permit application, Casey's is planning to construct a 3,220 square-foot convenience store with 10 fuel pumps. The estimated cost of the building project is listed at \$600,000. The site consists of two parcels, one of which is the former Pizza Hotline restaurant at the corner of Central and Lomar avenues. Casey's originally proposed to construct a 4,320-square-foot building facing Central Avenue. However, in April 2022, the city Planning Commission approved a scaled-down site plan that calls for a 3,200 square-foot building and one less fuel dispenser. Residents opposed to the



It's been close to six years in the making but Casey's General Store is under construction at 767 Central Ave. The new 10-pump gas station and convenience store is expected to open in late March barring weather issues, according to a company spokeswoman. The large fuel storage tanks were buried prior to the Christmas/New Year's holidays. ED RICHTER/STAFF

project said the new convenience store and gas station was inappropriate for the location next to a residential area and also raised concerns about the possible impact on other gas stations in the village. The plan stalled in 2018 due to a 3-3 vote by the planning commission. At the time there was one vacant planning commission seat.

The owners of the property challenged the decision, which was overturned by the Warren County Common Pleas Court in 2019. However, Casey's did not act within one year of the decision, so it needed to start the process over again with the planning commission. Casey's has more than 2,600 locations in 17 midwestern states, including

several in the Dayton/Cincinnati region. The Ankeny, Iowa-based company is the fifth largest pizza chain in the nation, and 57% of their locations are in communities with populations of 5,000 or less, according to their website. Contact this reporter at 513-594-5546 or email Ed.Richter@coxinc.com.

Exhibit

continued from B1

over 600 artists annually, many community members enjoy the exhibitions in our onsite galleries at the MAC, and upwards of 45,000 Middletown citizens and visitors view revolving satellite art exhibits at our Community Partner locations, spreading the joy of art far beyond the MAC's four walls." She said the MAC has fostered a strong community outreach partnership with BBH for years, recognizing the therapeutic impact arts and culture can have on mental well-being. Many individuals receiving care through BBH are already participating in impactful cultural resources through the MAC's growing Community Outreach Programs. "Strengthening our relationship with the new satellite art exhibit represents an innovative approach to extend the benefits of artistic expression and cultural engagement to a wider, often underserved, audience. Located at the Middletown Counseling Center on Manchester Avenue, this installation will represent

the ongoing commitment of the MAC and BBH to create equitable access to arts and culture experiences for all members of our community," Dykes said. This collaborative initiative is a significant step towards breaking down barriers and promoting inclusivity, recognizing the therapeutic value of the arts in the healing process. "We are thrilled to unveil this exhibit as a symbol of our continued partnership with Butler Behavioral Health, and Program Manager Kate McLain," said Dykes. "Through this collaboration, we aim to use the universal language of art to provide a welcoming, inspiring and comforting space for our community members." Brewer Stolzenberger will be the first to exhibit her work at the satellite exhibition. She is a retired elementary school teacher who grew up in Middletown and graduated from Miami University. "Bev's work is especially appealing because her photography captures the intrinsic beauty of the natural world, offering a unique blend of artistic expression, and a deep connection to the outdoors. Through Bev's

lens, the beauty of nature becomes a source of serenity, an ideal display at the counseling center," said Dykes. Brewer Stolzenberger understands how beneficial the creative process can be. She initially began photography as a means to support her mother, Pat Brewer, with her watercolor paintings. Pat Brewer was a renowned watercolor artist in Middletown. Bev would capture places and moments in time that her mother would then transform into beautiful watercolor renditions. "After her death in 2017, I wasn't sure what my purpose for photographing might be," said Brewer Stolzenberger. "I enrolled in photography classes at the Middletown Arts Center, and my interest in taking pictures returned." Brewer Stolzenberger said she has learned several important lessons on her photography journey. "I will always be grateful for the insights and techniques I have learned from other artists. One of those lessons was to be true to one's own self, one's own inclinations, and one's own

style," she said. Brewer Stolzenberger hopes that those visiting the exhibit will enjoy the calming natural objects she has captured, including birds, flowers, butterflies, and sunsets. The satellite art exhibition will be held at the BBH Middletown Counseling Center at 1131 Manchester Ave. MAC is accepting proposals from local creatives for future exhibitions at BBH. For details, go to www.middletownartscenter.com. The satellite art exhibitions will be rotated every few months. The MAC is an independent, non-profit institution. MAC has been dedicated to enriching Middletown and surrounding communities for over 65 years, providing exceptional educational opportunities for youth, adults, and families to participate in visual arts and arts experiences with over 15 free exhibitions annually. The MAC exhibition season is supported by The Miriam G. Knoll Foundation and The Middletown Community Foundation. For more information about MAC and its programs, events, and exhibitions, visit middletownartscenter.com or call 513-424-2417.

CINDY MORGAN, 69

Actress known for roles in 'Tron' and 'Caddyshack'

By Meredith Blake
Los Angeles Times



Cindy Morgan, who starred in "Caddyshack" and "Tron," died at 69. TNS

Cindy Morgan, an actress known for her roles in "Caddyshack" and "Tron," has died. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's office in Florida confirmed her death, which they said was due to natural causes, but officials were not able to specify when she died. She was 69.

Raised in Chicago, Morgan first gained notice as a model who appeared in commercials for Irish Spring soap. She made her feature film debut in the 1980 raunchy hit comedy "Caddyshack." Starring opposite Chevy Chase and Rodney Dangerfield, she played Lacey Underall, the bombshell niece of a judge and country club founder played by Ted Knight. Directed by Harold Ramis, it was Morgan's first film. "It was the longest and best party I've ever attended," she said of the experience. In interviews, Morgan has claimed that the film's producer Jon Peters tried to pressure her into posing for Playboy; she resisted. In 1982, she appeared in the sci-fi film "Tron," which brought then-groundbreak-

ing video game visuals to the big screen. Morgan played both a computer programmer named Lora and a digital counterpart named Yori. She also had many guest roles on TV, including "Matlock," "Falcon Crest," "CHiPs" and "The Larry Sanders Show." Morgan also made regular appearances at fan conventions where fans would fawn over her and her two best-known roles. "You'd see the guys coming over to talk to Lacey Underall, but then they'd become that 14-year-old boy ... it's actually very sweet, charming," she said. Information on survivors was not immediately available.

OBITUARIES In Memoriam

For more information call the Obituary desk at 937.610.7309

In Birthday Remembrance
Mike Morris

Who would've been 4 years old Jan. 8, 2024. We are thankful for the good memories of the good times we had. We love and miss you!

Happy Birthday Mike! Lovingly, Your Family