



BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

\$1.50 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2017

BUCKSCOUNTYCOURIERTIMES.COM



@COURIERTIMES



FACEBOOK.COM/BUCKSCOURIERTIMES

Acme to add alcohol at Bensalem store

By THOMAS FRIESTAD
STAFF WRITER

Visitors to Bensalem's Acme supermarket soon will be able to buy beer and wine while shopping — to enjoy either at home or in a new restaurant to be created within the store.

The changes come after Acme's acquisition of a restaurant liquor license for its store in the Village Center Shopping Center on Pasqualone Boulevard, off Bristol Road, which the township council approved 4-1 Monday evening.

The market's restaurant area will seat up to 30 shoppers, according to attorney Ellen

Freeman, who represented Acme Markets at the council meeting Monday. State law mandates license-holding organizations meet certain occupancy and space requirements if they want to sell alcohol, she said.

Freeman said the store will request identification from all customers buying alcohol and enforce the drinking age with security cameras and trained on-site managers. Customers will not be able to drink while shopping and must purchase their alcohol at designated check-out stands, she said.

Acme patrons will be able to

buy single servings of beer or wine to drink on location, or up to two bagged six-packs or four bottles to take home.

Barbara Zeidler, who lives about a mile from the Acme site, voiced concerns about customers drinking and driving from the store.

"There are many young parents with children who will dart out in the parking lot," she said, citing the potential for a hazard.

In response, Freeman cited Acme statistics indicating that about only 2 percent of customers eat or drink in the chain's nine other Pennsylvania stores with similar restaurant areas. None

of these sites has been cited for alcohol violations, she said.

Councilman Tony Belfield, who voted in support of approving the license, noted that the store will have the same regulations as any restaurant.

"A grocery store probably wouldn't be in the top 10 places people will choose to have lunch," he joked.

Councilman Joseph Knowles, who cast the lone vote against approving the license, could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

This is the third Acme Markets store in Bucks County to obtain a restaurant liquor license.

The Doylestown Township store received its license in 2014 and one in Newtown Township got its license in 2016.

Nine other Acme stores are licensed in Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties, according to spokeswoman Danielle D'Elia. The Northampton Township supervisors tabled a vote on a liquor license request from Acme at a December 2016 meeting and has not since revisited it.

Thomas Friestad: 215-307-0285; email: tfriestad@calkins.com; Twitter: @RealTomFriestad

A helping hand



PHOTOS BY KIM WEIMER / PHOTOJOURNALIST

Carla Sofronski, of HOST, part of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, talks with a woman living in a tent in Bristol Township last week. Members of the program locate homeless individuals and connect them with multiple crucial services. The program is one of many local organizations facing funding difficulties.

Allergy season nothing to sneeze at

The good news is that late-winter weather delayed the onset of the season. The bad news is it will stay around longer.

By FRED A. SAVANA
STAFF WRITER

Attention allergy sufferers: Stock up on tissues and medications now if you haven't already.

A rough sneezing, sniffing, itchy eye season, which began early and is now in a short-lived remission, is headed east, according to both meteorologists and doctors.

"An unusually mild February set everything into bloom early," explained Tom Kines, a senior meteorologist with Accuweather.com, but that kind of slowed down in March, when a snowstorm hit in the middle of the month.

While that's good news for now, it's likely to mean the allergy season will drag out, as forecasters are calling for cool, wet weather into mid-April that will delay the onset of seasonal allergies, but prolong the insufferable symptoms for millions through the spring and summer.

"Rain tends to cleanse the air and that's good for allergy sufferers," said Kines. "What you don't want is for three or four days of sunshine and above-average temperatures and for everything to 'pop.'"

Kines said he's not sure what's worse, a long, slow season, or a short, tough one. "I guess it depends on the person."

Unfortunately, said Dr. Anil Patel, an allergist with Allergy, Asthma and Arthritis Associates in Doylestown Township and Newtown Borough, an initial burst of allergens followed by cooler temperatures and then a warming trend, intensifies symptoms.

The body produces antibodies against the allergens, called the "priming effect," but that only serves to worsen the sneezing, runny nose and burning, red eyes, explained Patel.

To better fend off the unwelcome symptoms, the allergist encourages his patients to start preparing two or three weeks before the season is in full swing.

He recommends beginning medications before your symptoms start, get used to showering before going

See ALLERGIES, Page A6

Funding woes hurt homeless

Federal cuts will force one local support group to shut down May 1.

By THOMAS FRIESTAD
STAFF WRITER

Editor's Note: The names of the homeless individuals in this story are pseudonyms out of this publication's respect for their privacy.

Zippering open his tent flap does not come easily to Jonathan, who is homeless and lives with his fiancée, Lisa, near a woodland waterfront in Bristol Township.

His finger was chomped on during a disagreement with another man two weeks ago, forcing him to get emergency treatment at a nearby hospital. Half his finger is missing, and though Jonathan does his best to keep his now-septic wound wrapped in gauze, he expects he'll lose the rest anyway.

Had Jonathan not gotten treatment through Medicaid at Lower Bucks Hospital in Bristol Township, he might have lost his whole hand, if not his arm or life due to infection. But others like Jonathan might not be so lucky because of a lack of knowledge regarding the services available to them, especially since the social agencies



Allen Johnson, a recovery coach with HOST, used to make daily visits to five or six homeless sites.

that can connect them with those crucial services are grappling with stagnant or diminished funding in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

One such peer support group, the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania's Homeless Outreach Support Transition Program, or HOST, became the casualty of a lack of federal funds. Unsuccessful in its attempt to renew its grant, the program will

shut down May 1.

Granted, things could be worse, agency members say — for example, Congress could have passed a proposed American Health Care Act, which promised to gut funding for Medicaid. Instead, the bill was pulled Friday afternoon because the votes for passage weren't there.

See FUNDS, Page A2



58° Some clouds
32° then sunshine. B3

Index

Advice.....D5 Lotteries.....A2
Classified.....D7 Money.....A9
Comics.....D6 Obituaries..B4-5
Community..B1 Puzzles.....D12
Editorial.....A10 TV.....D5



Head of Trump-Russia probe under fire, won't step down

Potential White House entanglement in a congressional investigation into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election is bringing new cries of alarm from Democrats as political allegations continue to tarnish the probe.

By EILEEN SULLIVAN and ERIC TUCKER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Potential White House entanglement in Congress' investigation of Russian meddling in the 2016 election brought new cries of protest from Democrats on Tuesday as fresh political allegations clouded the probe.

Devin Nunes, the chairman of

the House intelligence committee which is conducting one of the congressional investigations, turned aside calls to step aside. Later in the day, the White House vehemently denied a report that it had sought to hobble the testimony of a former acting attorney general before Nunes canceled the hearing where she was to speak.

President Donald Trump's

spokesman, Sean Spicer, lashed out at reporters, claiming they're seeing conspiracies where none exist.

"If the president puts Russian salad dressing on his salad tonight, somehow that's a Russian connection," he suggested.

The embattled House committee is conducting one of three probes into the election campaign, its aftermath and potential contacts between Trump officials and Russians. The Senate intelligence committee is doing



Nunes

its own investigation, and since late July the FBI has been conducting a counterintelligence investigation into Russia's meddling and possible coordination with the Trump campaign.

Nunes' decision to cancel Tuesday's hearing was the latest in a series of actions that Democrats contend demonstrate that his loyalty to Trump is greater than his commitment to leading an independent investigation.

See NUNES, Page A6

Funds

Continued from Page A1

But that's small comfort for both the homeless and the organizations serving them. They say losses of funding still could bury homeless individuals even deeper, especially those with mental illnesses or substance abuse problems.

FLAILING FOR FUNDS AT A LOCAL LEVEL

An observer would never guess the HOST Program was shutting down soon, the way its recovery coaches continue with outreach efforts to the homeless in Bucks County.

In the program's heyday, recovery coaches Carla Sofronski and Allen Johnson made daily visits to about five or six different homeless sites — individual tents or encampments. They're not taking on new clients to touch base with every day, but still take the time to meet with Andrew, the last of their regulars, every day to help him search for housing.

On a recent outreach trip, Sofronski and Johnson bought a box of doughnuts and drove to a local retailer to collect Andrew, who has a mental illness, and give him a bite to eat. From there, they took him back to their Bristol Township office to administer mental health services and go through his housing paperwork with him line by line, ensuring he understands.

Transportation, Sofronski said, is a vital service for people like Andrew who otherwise have no way to get around besides on foot.

"He doesn't have any money for transportation," she said, gesturing to Andrew, "because if he has money, he's focused on getting food to eat."

Nowadays, Sofronski's phone is consistently buzzing, as she and Johnson are scrambling to connect at least 25 homeless participants to the county's remaining service providers before its closure while still addressing their immediate needs.

Since its inception in December 2015, the HOST Program has helped 22 homeless individuals find homes, Sofronski said.

"We take (homeless)

individuals of all kinds (into our program), and though they're not required to have a diagnosis, many of them do, of course, have a mental illness," Johnson said.

The HOST Program began with a \$1.2 million Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. According to June Cairns, the association's vice president, the program was intended to close after one year but stayed open longer because its funds were used efficiently.

Though Medicaid funds cover peer support and treatment for the homeless, the medical assistance expansion under the Affordable Care Act does not extend to locating and engaging these individuals, Cairns said. This, she added, is problematic because, unless recovery coaches can engage the homeless, they most likely would not begin receiving help at all.

"Once people agree and get benefits, they can take (Medicaid-covered treatment) if they want it," Cairns said. "It's all about relationship-building that happens before they're willing to do that."

Even though grants remain in place for some other homeless service organizations in the counties, they, too, face financial restrictions.

Bucks and Montgomery counties have received human services block grants from the state since 2012. For Bucks County, the grant has remained stagnant at about \$26.5 million, said Donna Duffy-Bell, administrator of the Bucks County Department of Mental Health/Developmental Programs. Before that, the amount was reduced 10 percent from \$29.15 million. In Montgomery County, the grant totals about \$41.3 million, an amount spokeswoman Lorie Slass said also has changed minimally over the past four years.

In addition, the human services grant is comprised of seven smaller funds geared toward different human services in each county. And when county departments divide these funds among different local initiatives, Duffy-Bell said,

more money sometimes goes toward more visible priorities, like opioid addiction, rather than hidden ones like homelessness.

Duffy-Bell said the departments have had to make some tough choices in terms of which groups receive funding.

"We did not have the funds to continue to sustain that effort (at the HOST Program)," she said.

Of note, the human services grant isn't the only source of funding for county service providers. In 2016, Bucks and Montgomery received federal grants totaling \$1.87 million and \$4.13 million, respectively, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

However, budget developments from the Trump administration indicate these federal grants are not necessarily stable. The Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter, the Bucks County Housing Link and the Bucks County Homelessness Prevention and Rapid-Rehousing Program are all on the shortlist of nonprofits providing services to the homeless starting down funding shortfalls in the scenario that lawmakers pass Trump's budget proposal.

The Emergency Homeless Shelter is home to about 70 individuals at any given time, said Marlene Piasecki, chief operating officer of the Family Service Association of Bucks County, which runs the shelter. Its inhabitants would struggle if either funds to the shelter were cut, she said, or with fewer funds going to support services like the HOST Program that can get these individuals back on their feet.

"If you eliminate case management services ... they'll remain homeless for a longer period of time," Piasecki said. "If you eliminate these services, how much longer are they going to remain homeless before they can get into housing or find a job?"

Removing one homeless service provider like the HOST Program from the equation can have an adverse effect on the county's remaining ones,

said Keith Smothers, coordinator for the Projects for Assistance in Transitions from Homelessness Program, or PATH, in Langhorne.

Even though his program, a branch of the Pennel Mental Health Center, is "probably the biggest mental health provider in the county," it still relies on collaborating with other providers to help homeless individuals, Smothers said.

"(Homelessness) is not a problem that can be solved with one organization; it takes a community to come together," Smothers said, adding that the HOST Program was one of the groups with which PATH worked. "That they're gone is going to make our job more difficult."

Smothers said PATH is funded via a combination of county, state and federal grants, though federal funding has been "going down little by little" over the past six years to less than a quarter (currently making up about \$47,000 of the program's \$217,000 budget). This is a trend Smothers would prefer not to continue.

"If (the federal government) cuts our funding, we hope whatever cut is made up by the state or county, but even the county is having problems with funding," he said. "The funding may not be here forever, so we're hoping it continues. I'd hate to see us in a position where we have to close up shop."

Though the proposed Medicaid cuts under the American Health Care Act are no more, service providers still worry health care could come under fire down the road.

HITS TO HEALTH CARE AND THE HOMELESS

On Saturday, the day after the American Health Care Act was taken off the House floor, President

Donald Trump published a tweet beseeching supporters "do not worry" because "ObamaCare will explode," opening the door for future changes to the Affordable Care Act.

"There's never a good explosion; there's always people hurt and there's always trauma," said Cairns, of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "To wish that on anything about health care, what people need to survive, is really callous."

She added that addressing the costs of Medicaid expansion and health care premiums are items lawmakers could revisit to help the counties' neediest residents.

About 15,000 Bucks County residents gained coverage for behavioral health services under the Medicaid expansion and about 2,300 received treatment since 2015, according to previous Courier Times reporting. These figures expand to 20,242 newly covered and 2,562 treated in Montgomery County, according to Slass, the spokeswoman from Montgomery County.

However, too much meddling with Medicaid funds could stymie these figures, said Jonathan Rubin, director of the Bucks County Division of Human Services. Nationwide, about 5 million fewer individuals would have been enrolled by 2026 had the proposed health care bill passed, according to the Congressional Budget Office's report.

The end result, Rubin said, might have been that more low-income residents with mental illnesses could have been pushed into homelessness, either because high out-of-pocket health benefit costs make rent payments impossible or because a lack of treatment inhibits them from retaining housing.

"There's a whole ripple effect," Rubin said. "Hospital stays might go up, emergency costs, homelessness, people could have domestic violence or crime increase. (A loss in treatment) is not just a problem for the individual; it's a problem for the community as a whole."

Bucks County is home to about 511 individuals living in emergency shelters, transitional housing and outside, according to a 2017 preliminary one-night count by the Bucks County Department of Housing and Community Development. Of these individuals, Duffy-Bell said 106 were identified as having a mental illness and 85 as having a substance abuse problem, with some overlap. In Montgomery County, a January 2017 one-night count identified 19 individuals living outside and 291 in shelters, Slass said.

Sofronski said there's often a nervousness among mental health service providers about what legal changes to health care might come down the pipeline, adding that some groups have trouble committing long-term funds because of this uncertainty.

"Everyone is nervous," she said. "I hope (lawmakers) are able to come to even ground and work on this, because health care is not going to be something that can just be rushed."

Jonathan attributed the possible health care changes to a lack of understanding on the part of federal lawmakers.

"The politicians and people really just don't have an understanding into how you can become like this," he said. "Without these programs, it's just going to get worse."

Thomas Friestad: 215-307-0285; email: tfriestad@calkins.com; Twitter: @RealTomFriestad

Correction

Montgomery County Community College student Sara Wilkerson, of King of Prussia, won a first place Keystone award in the feature story category. Incorrect information appeared in a story in the community section.

TODAY

COURIER TIMES

58°

32°

Some clouds then sun

LOTTERIES Tue., 3-28-17

<p>NEW JERSEY</p> <p>Pick 3: 1-7-5, Fireball: 4 Pick 4: 5-3-9-0, Fireball: 4 Cash 5: 2-7-19-39-40, Xtra: 2 Midday Pick 3: 7-7-5, Fireball: 5 Midday Pick 4: 0-2-1-5, Fireball: 5 5 Card Cash:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; font-size: 0.8em;"> 9 SH Q Q A D 9 S 8 C </div>	<p>PENNSYLVANIA</p> <p>Pick 2 Day: 2-2, Wild: 9 Pick 2 Evening: 1-9, Wild: 5 Pick 3 Day: 9-8-0, Wild: 9 Pick 3 Evening: 8-5-0, Wild: 5 Pick 4 Day: 0-5-6-7, Wild: 9 Pick 4 Evening: 4-5-2-3, Wild: 5 Pick 5 Day: 4-0-5-9-4, Wild: 9 Pick 5 Evening: 7-7-2-0-7, Wild: 5 Cash 5: 20-28-32-34-39 Treasure Hunt: 1-7-12-14-26</p>
---	--

MULTI-STATE LOTTERIES

<p>Mon., 3-27-17 Cash4Life: 32-42-58-59-60 4</p>	<p>Tue., 3-28-17 Mega Millions: 30-33-35-37-46 10</p>	<p>Sat., 3-25-17 Powerball: 18-31-32-45-48 16</p>
--	---	---

Twitter: @CourierTimes facebook.com/buckscountycouriertimes

ONLINE POLLS

buckscountycouriertimes.com

Would you support a return to mandatory minimum sentences?

👍
65%
👎
35%

Vote in our latest poll
Which team do you think will win the NCAA basketball championship?

Sponsored by

CHRISTIANHVAC.com

Vol. 108, No. 76
© 2017 Courier Times, Inc.
The Courier Times is printed in part on recycled paper and is recyclable.

Subscribers
HOW TO REACH US
Circulation Customer Service: 1-866-492-1514 (Toll free)
Business office: 215-949-4000
News: 215-949-4200
Classified: 1-866-938-3010
Obituaries: 215-949-4196
News tips: 215-949-4172
newstips@calkins.com

Circulation: Our home delivery customers should receive their paper by 6:30 AM weekdays and 8 AM Sunday. For service inquiries, please call our service center by 9 AM at 1-866-492-1514.

Notice: Unless otherwise requested in advance by a customer, all print subscription packages include the Thanksgiving Day edition and all customers are charged for the newspaper at the Sunday newspaper rate.

Online Customer Service: Subscribers may temporarily stop delivery, report service problems, sign-up for EZPay or pay for service at BucksCountyCourierTimes.com.

Digital Edition: The Courier Times offers a digital edition subscription. The digital edition is an exact replica of the Courier Times. Call for details.

Advertising Levittown
Display: 215-949-4125
Classified: 215-949-4100
Legal: 215-949-4112
Fax: 215-259-0603
Billing questions: Classified, legal ads: 215-269-5060. Retail ads: 215-949-4088. Advertising credit: 267-580-3139.

USPS 06890 Published Sunday thru Friday including New Years, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day & Christmas by Courier Times Inc., 8400 N. Bristol Pike, Levittown PA 19057. Periodic postage paid at Levittown, PA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Bucks County Courier Times, 8400 N. Bristol Pike, Levittown, PA 19057

Offices are wheelchair accessible!

Rob's Is Not Just Towing

Call us for ALL of your Automotive Needs!

TOO BUSY TO GET HERE?

We Will Pick Up & Deliver Your Vehicle For Free!

Full Service Facility

- All Makes & Models Over 35 Years Experience

SPRING AUTOMOTIVE SPECIALS!

PA STATE INSPECTION AND EMISSION TEST

\$39⁹⁹

+fee \$1.65, sticker \$6.00, & tax

Inspection Now Due: 3, 4, 5

*With this coupon only. Not valid with other offers or previous sales.

LUBE, OIL & FILTER CHANGE w/TIRE ROTATION

\$24⁹⁹

Includes up to 5qts of Conventional or Synthetic Blend Motor oil and stocking filter. Free 30 point courtesy check.

*With this coupon only. Not valid with other offers or previous sales.

SPRING INTO SAVINGS WITH

\$1000⁰⁰ OFF any service of \$100.00 or more.

\$2500⁰⁰ OFF any service of \$250.00 or more.

\$5000⁰⁰ OFF any service of \$500.00 or more.

*With this coupon only. Not valid with other offers or previous sales.

Rob's SERVICE CENTER

LPA Auto Sales

3114 Veterans Highway • Bristol, PA 19007

215-943-1144 • www.robstowing.com

BUCKS COUNTY

Courier Times

LUNCH Special

Pick up your complimentary copy of the Courier Times at one of these fine restaurants!

Ariana's

Pizza

230 Levittown Parkway
Levittown
215-949-8785

Golden Dawn

Restaurant

7115 New Falls Rd. • Levittown
215-945-4554

Ariana's

Pizza

230 Levittown Parkway
Levittown
215-949-8785

Puss N' Boots Tavern

942 Trenton Rd.
Fairless Hills
215-295-8236
pussnbootstavern.com

Murphy's

Beef & Ale

5725 Emilie Rd. • Levittown
215-943-4431

Amato's

Pizza

116 Trenton Rd., Fairless Hills
www.AmatosPizzaPA.com
215-945-6045

CHEESE dawgs

Fast • Fun • Food

318 Bustleton Pike • Feasterville
267-684-6470

Round

735 Middletown Blvd. • Langhorne
215-757-2323

MILL CREEK

INN

1 Mill Creek Rd. • Levittown
215-945-0415

CLUBHOUSE

BAR & GRILL & PIZZERIA

Pick-up and Delivery
501 South State St. • Newtown
215-860-5566

WINGS TO GO

Fairless Hills • WingsToGo.com
215-946-9995

If your business would like to participate in this program, call Kim Mela at 215-949-4282