

The Courier

January 21, 2026 Volume 27 Number 18

Viola outlines proposed budget

■ Annual assessments expected to increase by \$40;

The Ocean Pines Association hosted a town hall meeting on Thursday, January 15, to discuss the proposed Fiscal Year 2026–2027 budget.

General Manager John Viola presented an overview of the proposed budget before opening the floor for public comment.

Highlights of the proposed budget include a \$40 increase in annual assessments to help offset the cost of the new firehouse and rising water rates. The assessment also reflects 42% towards public safety costs, which was approximately 22% of the assessment back in 2014 when the assessment was the lowest.

The budget also includes over \$6 million in capital, including major projects of the south station fire department and the third phase of the golf irrigation project. The remainder of the capital listed is based upon the recommended replacement per the recent reserve study completed in October.

Viola noted that one operational change for the upcoming fiscal year is the elimination of easement cutting by Public Works, with those funds reallocated to support drainage improvements throughout the community.

Membership dues are slated to see inflationary increases, including a 5% increase for Swim memberships; \$5 and \$10 increases for Racquet Sports; \$100 for individual Golf memberships and \$150 for family Golf memberships; and a \$5 increase for Beach Parking. Boat slip rates are proposed to increase by 3% for residential slips and 5% for commercial slips.

Daily amenity rates will also see slight increases, including a \$1 increase for Swim and a \$5 increase for residents and \$10 for non-residents for Golf. Racquet Sports daily rates are not expected to increase.

Due to an increase across Worcester

*please see **viola** on page 4*



Garden club discusses old-growth forest program

Dr. Joan Maloof, Founder of Old-Growth Forest Network, recently spoke to the Worcester County Garden Club about protecting old-growth forests so future generations can enjoy the biodiversity and beauty of nature they provide. As well as contributing to her organization, the club will donate a National Garden Club children's book in her honor to Snow Hill Christian Nursery School.

The Worcester County Garden Club is a member of Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization, whose mission is to provide support, leadership and education for garden clubs and the public about best practices for horticulture, conservation, and landscape design. Individuals interested in learning more about Worcester County Garden Club can contact the membership chair at WorCtyGardenClub@gmail.com.

Pictured left to right are Dr. **Joan Maloof**, Club Program Chair **Pat Arata**.

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RWWC essay contest returns

The Republican Women of Worcester County (RWWC) invites students to participate in its essay contest imagining they are a colonist living in 1770s America. The contest’s theme is “Dear King George.” Students must write a letter to King George III explaining why unalienable rights are being violated.

The contest requires letter writers to explain what are unalienable rights (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness), describe at least two ways they believe the king or British government has violated these rights and explain how these actions affect their life as a colonist. “This is an opportunity for students to learn more about the founding of our country as we celebrate our 250th anniversary,” said Susan Ostrowski, RWWC Literacy Chair.

The contest is open to all eighth-grade students in Worcester County public and private schools. Entries must be double spaced between 600 and 800 words. The contest is open between February 2 and February 27, 2026. Winners will be announced in March. Submissions must be emailed to NLWillett2000@yahoo.com by February 27.



Visit - Students in Mrs. Murray’s third grade class at Ocean City Elementary School recently visited the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation’s Mobile Science Lab. They learned about the parts of a flower and the role bees play in pollinating fruits. Pictured left to right: **Slater Schools, Kinsley Wilson, Lia Baral, Max Trimper and Hazel Negrete.**

**Join Just Walk Worcester
Community Challenge**

This year, The Worcester County Health Department is challenging you to be more active with the annual Just Walk Worcester Community Challenge. This year-long event is designed to help you reach your health goals in 2026. The Just Walk participant who logs the most miles of physical activity between January and December 31, 2026, will be crowned the Just Walk Worcester Champion 2026!

Joining the Just Walk Worcester

Community Challenge is easy. If you are already a member of the Just Walk Worcester program, you are automatically enrolled in this challenge. Not a member yet? Sign up at justwalk-worcester.org or call the Worcester County Health Department at 410-632-1100, ext. 1110 to receive an enrollment packet by mail. Once you have registered, track your miles or minutes of physical activity each

*please see **walk** on page 12*

viola
from page 1

County, the proposed Water and Sewer budget reflects a \$162,000 increase compared to Fiscal Year 2025–2026. Viola clarified that this budget includes Administration, Aquatics, Golf, Racquet Sports, and the Marina. Water and sewer rates at the Food and Beverage facilities also increased but are not included as they are billed directly to Touch of Italy.

A breakdown was also provided of the Public Safety percentage of annual assessments over the past 15 years, beginning with Fiscal Year 2012-2013. During that time, total public safety costs increased from \$199 to \$377 per assessment, driven largely by recruitment, retention, and capital expenses. Public Safety’s share of annual assessments has nearly doubled over the past 15 years,

increasing from 22% to 42%. “I’m just trying to show you where your assessment dollars are going, and it’s going in the right places,” Viola said.

In closing, Viola recognized the Ocean Pines Association staff and the OPA Board of Directors for their efforts throughout the budgeting process.

“This is probably one of the strongest senior management teams that we’ve had since we’ve been here,” he said. “I also want to say credit to the board - this year’s representatives and the entire board have been constructive and very supportive.”

The video of the presentation, including public comment, can be found here youtu.be/cc4QRq4DAaY

To submit questions regarding the proposed budget, please email info@oceanpines.org.

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A trip to the pet store

On a recent Sunday afternoon, I was heading out to Petsmart to add a couple fish to my aquarium. My wife was not interested in joining me so, I

Looking back on those hubbub years, I realize now that the fragrance of more roses would have been welcomed.



It's All About. . .

By **Chip Bertino**

chipbertino@delmarvacourier.com

drove to my son's house to see if my three-year-old grandson wanted to join me.

Once at the house, it took me a couple minutes to "find" him. He likes to hide behind the sofa or under the kitchen table. Although I call his name and flip over sofa cushions looking for him, his giggles give him away. Once found, I asked if he wanted to come with me. He said yes and ran to get his shoes.

My 14-month-old granddaughter was standing beside me listening. When her brother darted off for his shoes, she followed him to the chest near the front door where the shoes are kept and her mother was already kneeling putting on her brother's shoes. She positioned herself next to her mother and lifted her socked right foot so her shoes would also be put on. Witnessing this interplay, I couldn't suppress a laugh. Here was this little blonde peanut with vibrant blue eyes and intent visage making it clear to her mother, her brother and me that she was joining the shopping excursion. That's just the way it was going to be. Nino was happy for the company.

Into the truck we climbed and off we drove to the store. Once there I piled the kids into a shopping cart and headed to the fish section. The brightly lit fish tanks mesmerized the kids who were fascinated by the swimming fish of different sizes, shapes and colors. Both kids touched the glass, laughing.

Let's step back a moment so I can share a couple thoughts. When my own children were young, going to the store was often a chore because time was limited. Most shopping trips were missions to accomplish as quickly as possible. In. Out. On to the next thing. I was a parent with a lot on my mind, sometimes so much that I didn't, as my mother says, stop to smell the roses.

Fortunately, my now grown children have never indicated that they were cheated of my time which, knowing my children, makes me wonder a few things: 1) they didn't want to spend more time with me; or, 2) they're waiting to

express their consternation until it comes time to decide whether to pull the plug on me and they'll fight over the honors; or, 3) it's more an issue for me and I actually did okay as a parent.

(Note: should my kids read this column, I suspect I'll hear from them in unison about their retroactive childhood disappointment).

Getting back to present day. Once the store associate netted and bagged the tetras I wanted, the kids and I strolled over to the bird section so they could see the parakeets. Again, they were fascinated. Next, we went to the cat area where my grandson meowed to get their attention. I enjoy being a grandfather.

Back to my house we drove to add the fish to the aquarium. My grandson ran to the front door and pounded on it. My wife opened it and my grandson squealed with pleasure before heading to the toy chest. Holding my granddaughter, I followed behind.

Placing a step ladder and a stool beside the fish tank, the kids "helped" me add the new fish to the tank when it was time. For a few moments they watched as the new fish joined the others. Then the kids headed for other pursuits.

Not long after I took them home where they eagerly shared their experiences with their mom.

During my drive home, I smiled. It's doubtful they'll remember years from now our little excursion which took no more than an hour and a half. I will. Being a grandfather is a gift.

Author's note: Several years ago, when talking with my eldest son about him making the decision to pull the plug when the time arrives, he looked at me and asked straight-faced, "What makes you think we're going to plug you in in the first place?"

He was kidding, I'm sure. At least I hope so.



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Commentary

Marylanders ultimately foot the tax bill

By **Chip Bertino**
Worcester County Commissioner

Who is a Maryland taxpayer? An individual or business that pays taxes to multiple levels of government: state, county and/or municipality. Taxation is not an optional exercise that allows Marylanders to pick and choose what taxes they will pay and to whom. Maryland taxpayers pay them all. That's why again this year, Marylanders should beware.

The 2026 Maryland State Legislative session is underway, in an election year. As if that were not enough drama to make the session interesting, add in new House leadership, new committees, a no tax/no fee increase pledge from the Governor and a nearly \$2 billion deficit.

Budget decisions made in Annapolis reverberate throughout the state and permeate decisions made by

county and local elected officials who are also responsible for budgets, budgets that often have more impact on the daily lives of Marylanders. Think funding for law enforcement, public schools, parks and recreation and roads. Think planning and zoning codes.

For those of us responsible for governing at the county level, there's significant trepidation as this session rolls out. How will the state balance the budget this year, already starting in deficit territory? History reminds us that state legislators and the executive branch often balance the budget by pushing on to local county governments programs and initiatives costs the state legislates are necessary but are unable or unwilling to fund. And when more is required to close a budget deficit, they slash local allocations. Cuts to Highway User Revenue and Project Open Space funding come

to mind.

It's likely Maryland taxpayers will again take it on the chin as local governments will be forced to make the hard budgeting decisions glossed over by Annapolis lawmakers. State legislators and the Governor will claim they balanced the budget, in an election year, without increased taxes and fees. They will campaign accordingly. What is left unsaid in celebratory sound bites is that ultimately Maryland taxpayers are still going to pay in local and county taxes for the left behind unfunded mandates and reduced state funding allocations.

Unless Annapolis legislators practice responsible budgeting, Maryland taxpayers will again pay the price. If the past is prologue, Annapolis lawmakers will pass difficult funding and tax decisions onto local government leaders to pay for Annapolis' unfunded mandates, gubernatorial pet projects and reduced allocations.

Despite sound bites and press releases to the contrary, this legislative session may rely less on responsible governing than smoke and mirrors. And when the smoke clears, it will be the Maryland taxpayer – all of us – who will foot the bill.

Reader Letter

Stand up for vote integrity

Editor:

Consider this, most of the violence and hatred we see on TV and read about all stems from the stolen election of 2020. (Now continue reading keeping an open mind). This is not debatable and it only will make sense to an objective thinking mind that will allow itself to look at the undisputed numerical evidence. If you don't agree with this, then consider changing your information sources. (Those sources only will allow you to learn what they want you to know.) Millions have died world-wide from different causes all stemming from a lack of American leadership. The proof is out there!!

This isn't partisan grievance wrapped in legalese. It's a fundamental issue of trust. Elections are the bedrock of democratic legitimacy. When the custodians of that process — state boards, national parties, and all those with a stake — behave like they're more interested in shielding themselves than solving glaring problems, faith in our system erodes. Honest elections is the foundation of our republic and freedoms!!

Joining the Defense: Political Theater or Strategic Misstep?

The optics are troubling:

-The DNC is widely viewed as a national champion for voting access and democratic participation.

-Yet here it is, aligning itself with an entity accused of lax maintenance of voter rolls — the very thing that fuels skepticism about election integrity.

This move suggests an alarming prioritization of political alliances over accountability.

What Should Happen Next

If the DNC truly believes that these allegations are without merit, its argument should stand on facts and evidence — not on the spectacle of volunteering as a named defender of a system facing legitimate questions.

Instead of hiding behind the machinery of party politics, the focus needs to shift toward actual fixes:

-Transparent audit and cleanup of voter rolls. Many dead people are voting!

please see letter on page 12

Courier Almanac

On January 21, 1977, U.S. President Jimmy Carter grants an unconditional pardon to hundreds of thousands of men who evaded the draft during the Vietnam War.

A recent report from the senior care experts at Seniorly indicated that millions of retirees are in jeopardy of outliving their retirement savings. The Seniorly report tabulated projected retirement income and expenses starting at age 65, and found that the average American retiree can expect roughly \$762,000 in income generated from government-sponsored plans like Social Security, savings and investments. But the expected living expenses of such individuals was determined to be \$877,000, meaning the average retiree may have a shortfall of \$115,000. Retirement savings shortfalls also are a cause for concern in Canada, where 59 percent of Canadians indicated they fear they will outlive their savings in a 2025 CPP Investments Retirement Survey. Projections like those from Seniorly and the fears expressed by Canadians concerned by a potential shortfall of retirement savings underscore the need to prioritize saving for life after working, which can have short-term benefits as well. In fact, 49 percent of Canadians who expected to utilize the Canada Pension Plan reported lower levels of stress as a result of their commitment to retirement planning.



**The
Courier**

Chip Bertino Publisher/Editor

Mary Adair Comptroller

Linda Knight Advertising Representative

Contributors

Jack Barnes, Elaine Bean Dan Collins, Douglas Hemmick

Robert B. Adair 1938-2007

98 Nottingham Lane Ocean Pines, MD 21811

410-629-5906

thecourier@delmarvacourier.com

www.delmarvacourier.com

facebook.com/TheCourierofOceanPines

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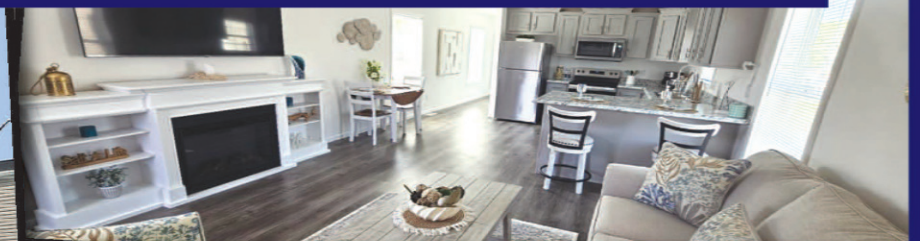
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Artists bring their masterpieces to ‘Art Uncorked’

By **Elaine Bean**

A new emerging impulse in the world today is making connections. Art Uncorked, a fundraising event for the Art League of Ocean City will connect five masters in art with masterpieces in food and wine, and also connect art and fine wine and cuisine lovers together for an evening of the best of each.



Kevin Fitzgerald



Kirk McBride

Five local art masters from Berlin and a bonus artist will offer their works during a silent auction at the fundraiser: Patrick Henry, Kevin Fitzgerald, Lynne Lockhart, Kirk McBride, and Evan Fitzgerald. Kim Klabe, who paints with actual wine, adds her work to the unique mix.

Art Uncorked is being held on Thursday, February 12 between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., at the Ocean Pines Yacht Club with food provided by Touch of Italy and wine curated by The Wine Coach, Laurie Forster, nationally recognized wine educator. Proceeds from the event support the many community programs of the nonprofit Art League, including special programs and camps for school children and the

disabled.

“Art Uncorked is an unforgettable evening where art, wine, and food come together in perfect harmony,” Rina Thaler, executive director of the Art League, said. “Every course is thoughtfully paired to highlight how artistic expression and wine and food can beautifully complement one another, all in the beautiful setting of the yacht club. During each course, five new masterpieces of art will be revealed with an opportunity for guests to bid on them and take them home that evening. We hope you will enjoy this wonderful event while you’re supporting the arts in our community.”

The participating artists are all masters in their fields and well-known in both the local arts community and nationally.

Patrick Henry is a true native of the Eastern Shore. He is drawn to the open ocean, bays, and marshes of the area, and his heritage allows him to portray these scenes with a fresh insight. Henry is one of the coastal area’s most recognized painters and is well known for his Eastern Shore scenic paintings.

“I’ve always been about the value of the arts in a community and uplifting the quality of life by people being able to act on their creative passions,” Henry said. “The Art League provides that environment.”

Lynne Lockhart is a signature member of the Society of Animal Artists and noted for her portraits of animals, capturing their unique personalities and quirks. She believes painting is a visual language as is much of the language of animals. She also paints landscapes, and her paintings are widely sought at exhibitions and local businesses.

“I want to support the Art League because their work is very important

to me,” Lockhart said. “They promote art and make it very accessible to everyone.”

Kirk McBride developed an interest in American painting as a young man when he first saw the work of Edward Hopper and Winslow Homer. Their images led him to make paintings of people, places and moments that he experiences today. McBride is a signature member of the Mid Atlantic Plein Air Painters Assn. and the American Society of Marine Artists, and widely collected.

“In these times of reduced funding for just about everything from the government, it’s important that the private sector step up and support the institutions that support the arts,” McBride said. “And that’s what the Art League does.”

Kevin Fitzgerald has been painting for over 30 years, many of them locally. His interest in painting is rooted in the works of masters from the 15th to the 20th century and their relationships to current forms. His painted scenes of the ocean and fields of the Eastern Shore are widely collected worldwide.

Evan Fitzgerald is a noted muralist and painter, with his murals on display locally including at Seacrets, 410 Social Eatery and Barroom, Telescope Pictures, and Sugar Planet.



Patrick Henry



Lynne Lockhart

His primary subjects are people wearing extravagant headdresses made from animals and flowers painted on a special wood surface.

Tickets for the event are \$150 per person or \$900 for a table of six. Seating is limited, and early purchasing is encouraged. Tickets may be purchased at OCart.org or at GiveButter.com/ArtUncorked.

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Diocese to participate in pilgrimage

The Catholic Diocese of Wilmington will participate in the upcoming 2026 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage which announced its theme recently. The pilgrimage, under the theme “One Nation Under God” will honor St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, the first American citizen to be canonized a saint as dioceses along the Eastern seaboard of the United States come together from Memorial Day through July 5, 2026 to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist.

Following similar successful pilgrimages in 2024 and 2025, the 2026 pilgrimage will coincide with celebrations of America’s Semiquincentennial, with the final leg of the pilgrimage route ending in Philadelphia on July 5, 2026. The National

Eucharistic Pilgrimage will pass through the Diocese of Wilmington from June 11 to June 12, receiving several pilgrims and a support vehicle from the Archdiocese of Baltimore on June 11 and handing off the next leg to the Diocese of Camden on June 12.

Of the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington’s participation in the 2026 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage, Most Rev. William E. Koenig, Bishop of Wilmington said, “As Bishop of the Diocese that encompasses Delaware, the first State, and Maryland’s Eastern Shore, both rich in Catholic tradition and American history, I am grateful that the 2026 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage will include the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington. As our nation enters her Semiquincentennial year,

this pilgrimage offers an opportunity for reflection and renewed commitment to our Catholic faith as we celebrate the gift of religious freedom. I pray that the theme of this year’s Pilgrimage “One Nation Under God” will remind us of the unifying power of our faith and the mission given to us through the Gospels: to proclaim the Good News to all.”

More detailed information regarding the exact route and events in conjunction with the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington’s participation in the

2026 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage is forthcoming. For local updates check out cdow.org and thedialog.org. To learn more about the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage effort visit eucharisticpilgrimage.org.

The Catholic Diocese of Wilmington was established in 1868 and comprises 54 parishes, 20 missions and 29 schools serving the State of Delaware and the nine counties of Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Information about the diocese is available at www.cdow.org.

Vintage Village added to Farmers Market

The Ocean Pines Farmers & Artisans Market introduced a new section called Vintage Village, a curated space designed for vintage and antique vendors to showcase their unique treasures. This addition aims to enrich the market’s eclectic atmosphere and provide a destination for vintage enthusiasts in 2026.

The Market operates year-round with weekly market days at White Horse Park, offering a collaborative setting alongside local farmers and artisans and a chance to connect with shoppers and collectors.

The Farmers & Artisans Market seeks vintage clothing, accessories, and textiles, antique furniture, decor, and collectibles, unique, handmade, or repurposed items, vendors who share a passion for community and local

commerce

Why join Vintage Village?

- Regular exposure to local shoppers and collectors
- A supportive, community-oriented environment
- Opportunity to be part of a growing market that values quality and uniqueness

Interested vendors should contact the Ocean Pines Farmers & Artisans Market at OPFAMarketplace@gmail.com. Applications are welcome from anyone fitting the desired categories.

The Ocean Pines Farmers & Artisans Market is committed to fostering local commerce and community spirit, and the Vintage Village is set to become a highlight for vintage lovers throughout 2026.

Dear King George,

Sponsored by the Republican Women of Worcester County

In a double spaced, 600–800-word letter:
Imagine you are a colonist living in America in the 1770’s.
Write a letter to King George III explaining why you are concerned that your unalienable rights are being violated.

In your letter be sure to:

- Explain what unalienable rights are (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness)
- Describe at least two ways you believe the king or British government has violated these rights
- Explain how these actions affect your life as a colonist

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Farmers Market kicks off winter season

The Ocean Pines Farmers & Artisans Market announced recently the start of its winter season, bringing the best of local flavors, artisanal goods, and live music to the community every Saturday morning.

Located at White Horse Park Marketplace, the market operates year-round, rain or shine, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm through April. This winter, enjoy a curated selection of fresh produce, baked goods, artisanal foods,

and unique products from local farmers, merchants, and artisans.

"As winter settles in, the market is still bursting with flavor and excitement," says David Bean, Market Manager. "Our merchants are ready to share their best winter offerings."

Winter produce highlights include fresh greens, citrus fruits, and local "brassicas" like kale, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts. D. J. David Greengrocer is sourcing quince, persimmons, and pomegranates. DelVecchio's Bakery offers freshly baked bread, pastries, and cookies.

Artisan food producers like We Be Jammin' preserve summer flavors in jams, jellies, honey, and fruit butters. "By shopping at the market during the off-season, you're supporting local farmers, bakers, and artisans," adds Bean.

On select Saturday mornings, the market will feature live music from local talents on the Market Stage. Enjoy acoustic performances while you shop for your favorite winter produce and artisanal products.

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Mary Jane Hastings

Pine'eer Craft Club honors Mary Jane Hastings

The Pine'eer Craft Club is honoring longtime member and artist Mary Jane Hastings as she prepares to retire and conclude her time as a vendor at the Pine'eer Artisan Gift Shop after this weekend.

Hastings, 96, has been a cherished presence at the shop for many years, sharing her artistic talent and creativity with the Ocean Pines community. The Craft Club and the Artisan Gift Shop expressed deep appreciation for the privilege of featuring Hastings' artwork, noting the lasting impact her pieces have had on both patrons and fellow artisans.

A Baltimore native, Hastings moved to Ocean Pines from Selbyville in 1992 with her husband. She joined the Pine'eer Craft Club roughly a decade ago after being invited by the late artist Jim Adcock, a close friend known for his Ocean City scenes and iconic coastal imagery.

"He was a dear friend," Hastings said. "I'm glad to have art as a hobby, because you can do it so much longer than anything else. I do not play golf or tennis now, but I can still paint."

Working primarily in acrylics, Hastings paints on multiple surfaces and is best known for her landscapes and bird-themed artwork. Her offerings at the Artisan Gift Shop have included prints, canvases, greeting cards and a custom puzzle created from her original work. Her ever-changing inventory has been a favorite among regular visitors to the shop.

Hastings began painting many

years ago under the guidance of a local artist and said creativity has always been a constant in her life. She recalls receiving an art set as a favorite Christmas gift during her childhood.

"There has always been art in my life," Hastings said. "It's important to be persistent in your artistic endeavors and to keep trying to stretch and expand as an artist."

Family remains central to Hastings' life and work. Her daughter appears in many of her larger pieces, and she has children living nearby. Her great-granddaughter has recently begun exploring painting as well.

The Pine'eer Craft Club expressed gratitude for Hastings' years of involvement, artistic contributions and the inspiration she has provided to the local artisan community, wishing her well as she enters this next chapter.

The Pine'eer Artisan Gift Shop is open Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. during the winter.

The Pine'eer Craft Club is always seeking new crafters, and meetings are open to the public. Artisans interested in selling their work at the shop may contact shop managers Debbie Jiwa or Barbara Herzog, or email opcraftclub@aol.com for more information.

Since its inception, the Pine'eer Craft Club has donated nearly \$201,000 back to Ocean Pines and has been proudly handcrafting in the community for 50 years.

For more information, visit www.oceanpines.org/pages/artisan-gift-shop.

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Dolly Parton cocktail experience planned

Step inside a glitter-soaked, rhinestone-studded cocktail experience at the Ocean Pines Yacht Club on March 7 and 8.

Guests will sip their way through a high-energy evening featuring three over-the-top themed cocktails (or mocktails), each crafted as a sweet and sassy tribute to the Queen of Country herself. Between drinks, enjoy dazzling performances, laugh-out-loud games, and interactive moments that make this event part party, part performance—and totally unforgettable.

Costumes are encouraged. Please note, this is not a dinner event.

Cocktails on the menu include:

-The Jolene: *"Your beauty is beyond compare..."* – fiery, sultry, and just a little dangerous. Spicy + seductive – a Southern twist on a margarita with a touch of burn.

-The 9 to 5: *"Pour myself a cup of ambition..."* – bright, caffeinated, and keeps you going til quittin' time. Coffee + cream + bourbon = working woman's old fashioned.

-The Backwoods Barbie (with cotton candy garnish): *"Just a backwoods Barbie, too much makeup, too much hair..."* – sweet, showy, and proud of it! Fun + flirty + unapologetically pink. Vodka, prosecco, elderflower, and a splash of cranberry.

The approximate runtime is 120 minutes, with doors opening 30 minutes prior to showtime.

Showtimes are as follows:

-Saturday, March 7: 4 - 5:30 p.m.

-Saturday, March 7: 7 - 8:30 p.m.

-Sunday, March 8: 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$50 plus box office fee and tax per person, which includes one cocktail and the performance. VIP Cocktail tickets are \$95 plus box office fee and tax and includes three cocktails, performance, souvenir glass, premium seating, and photo with the cast.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.opyachtclub.com/events/dolly-parton-experience-cocktail-party-2026-03-07-16-00



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New conservation easement protects land, waterways in watershed

Queponco Farms, a 186-acre mix of cropland and woodland off Basket Switch Road, is the latest agricultural easement purchased through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) in Worcester County, and the first project to be completed in Newport Bay watershed since establishment of the

walk
from page 4

month and report them through the website or by phone.

Since the 1990s, the Just Walk program, sponsored by the Worcester County Health Department, has empowered individuals to live healthier, more active lives. This free, self-directed, and self-reported program encourages members to track their miles or minutes of physical activity each month to earn exciting prizes.

For more details about the Just Walk Worcester Community Challenge 2026, the Just Walk program, or other free wellness programs, contact the Worcester County Health Department at 410-632-1100, ext. 1110, or visit worcesterhealth.org.

Partnership for Newport Bay.

The Partnership includes Worcester County, Maryland Coastal Bays Program, the Lower Shore Land Trust, Assateague Coastal Trust, and the Town of Berlin. This unique partnership of local government and non-profit organizations will manage a \$20 million grant through the Whole Watershed Act for water quality improvement projects in the Newport Bay watershed over the next

letter
from page 6

-Public reporting and explanation of registration anomalies.

-Legislative and administrative safeguards to prevent future discrepancies.

Accountability builds confidence. Obfuscation and politicking only deepen mistrust.

Conclusion: Democracy Deserves Better

Our democratic system cannot function on slogans and defensive posturing. It requires rigorous stewardship, especially when the fundamentals of elections — like accu-

five years.

The easement will prevent subdivision and non-agricultural uses in perpetuity, increasing a contiguous block of permanently protected land to over 747 acres. A tributary of Marshall Creek runs through the property. Its woodland provides a riparian buffer, habitat, and water quality benefits for the Newport Bay watershed.

With this purchase, over 11,000 acres

rate voter rolls — are called into question.

The DNC's choice to stand with the Maryland State Board of Elections in this legal fight isn't just curious — it's counterproductive. If our democracy is worth defending, we must start by defending its integrity first, not the comfort of politicians.

Tuesday, January 27, on Annapolis Lawyer's Mall, in Annapolis from 9 to 11 will be a rally lobbying our representatives, who you can speak directly to. You can urge them to support changes to our voting system. This is being sponsored by Secure the Vote, MD. in partnership with the Maryland

of farmland and forest countywide are now permanently protected by MALPF easements. MALPF aims to protect agricultural land, curb urban sprawl, and conserve open space, wildlife habitat, and improve water quality in Maryland. Landowners who sell an easement to MALPF continue to own and farm their land but are restricted from future development, though they may retain some

please see **watershed** on page 13

Freedom Caucus. Attend and demand they pass the "Secure the Vote Act" which supports changes like voter id, in person voting , citizens only voting and stopping mail-in-ballots.

This is your chance to get involved and support the foundation of our republic for once lost will never be retrieved! Please remember the words of Edmund Burke, "ALL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR EVIL TO FLOURISH, IS THAT GOOD MEN DO NOTHING!!!!"

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Health Watch

Small changes can add up to a healthier 2026

By **Danielle Giddins, MD**

A new year is a chance to reset and build healthier routines. Meaningful change doesn't require drastic resolutions — small, sustainable habits are often the most effective.

**Danielle Giddins**

We've now passed "Quitters Day," Jan. 9, recognizing that many give up on their new year's resolutions early. But by making small changes, you can make 2026 a healthier year.

Move daily, even briefly. You don't need a gym or long workouts to stay active. Short "exercise snacks" — such as five-minute walks every hour — can lower blood sugar and blood pressure. A 30-minute daily walk is one of the easiest ways to reduce stress, boost mood and prevent chronic disease.

Eat simple, whole foods. Focus on lean meats, fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and whole grains. These foods support immunity, reduce inflamma-

tion and keep you full. Limit processed foods, salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats for better heart and metabolic health.

Check in with your energy and stress. Pause regularly to ask what drains or restores you. Build in moments of rest when possible and slow down when needed. Even a few minutes of meditation or deep breathing can reduce stress and improve clarity.

Prioritize sleep. Consistent, restorative sleep is vital for physical and mental health. Establish a calming bedtime routine to help your body wind down.

Strengthen social connections. Make time for relationships that nourish you, and enjoy activities like family dinners, group activities, video chats or phone calls. These types of activities can boost well-being and resilience.

Stay mentally engaged. Keep your mind active with reading, puzzles, hobbies or learning something new. Creative and intellectual stimulation builds resilience and purpose.

Practice kindness. Small acts of optimism and decency toward yourself and others can improve emotional well-being and mental health.

Don't get overwhelmed thinking about the changes you'll make this year — start with manageable steps. This may include a daily walk, an extra serving of vegetables, five minutes of deep breathing or reconnecting with a friend. These small actions can build significant health improvements.

Dr. Danielle Giddins cares for patients at TidalHealth Primary Care in Millsboro and is also TidalHealth's chief wellness officer. If you don't already have one, start 2026 by finding a primary care practitioner. See practitioners accepting new patients at www.tidalhealth.org/careforlife.

watershed
from page 12

limited development rights.

The Whole Watershed Fund pools resources from multiple state sources, including the Maryland Cost Share Program (MACS), Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), the Bay Restoration Fund, the Clean Water Commerce Act, the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund, and the Waterway Improvement Fund.

The Whole Watershed Act provides implementation grants for up to 50% of the program cost, and each watershed program has been asked to secure additional funding from other state, federal, local, and private sources.

The funding will support long-term environmental restoration efforts in Newport Bay, where water quality and habitat conditions have declined in recent years. Working alongside local communities, the Partnership for Newport Bay will lead projects aimed at improving water quality, restoring natural habitats, and strengthening the overall health of the watershed for the future.

Properties with subdivision potential, over 50 acres and at least 50% prime agricultural soils are eligible to apply to sell an easement to MALPF. Applications will be accepted starting in January 2026. Contact Katherine Munson 410-632-1220 ext. 1302 for details.



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Travel

Feel confident when planning your trip

As winter settles in, many people begin to feel the effects of the so-called winter blues. Shorter days, colder temperatures, and limited sunshine can take a toll on both mood and energy. It's no coincidence that this time of year sparks daydreams of warm beaches, turquoise waters, and sunshine-filled days. And the truth is, there has never been a better time to travel than right now.



Cindy McCabe

Travel isn't just about taking a break, it's about resetting. Studies consistently show that vacations reduce stress, improve mental health, and boost overall well-being. Escaping winter weather for a tropical destination can instantly lift spirits, restore motivation, and provide something positive to look forward to during the coldest months of the year. Whether it's a relaxing beach getaway, a romantic escape, or a family vacation, travel has a powerful way of chasing away winter blues.

But while travel is exciting, it's not without its challenges and that's where using a travel agent becomes more important than ever.

Many people don't think about using a travel agent until something goes wrong. Flights are smooth, weather is calm, and everything goes according to plan until suddenly it doesn't. A hurricane hits the Caribbean. A global event grounds airlines or closes borders overnight. These moments are when having a travel professional on your side makes all the difference.

Consider recent events like hurricanes impacting Jamaica or unexpected security incidents in parts of South America. When travelers book on their own, they are often left navigating long airline hold times, confusing rebooking policies, and limited options, all while stranded far from home. A travel agent, on the other hand, is already working behind the scenes. They know who to call, which flights still have availability, and how to get clients home safely and as quickly as possible.

A travel agent isn't just someone who books a trip, they are your advocate. While you're enjoying your vacation, they are monitoring travel alerts, weather systems, and airline changes. If plans need to shift, they handle the logistics so you don't have to spend precious vacation time stressed, frustrated, or worried.

Beyond emergencies, travel advisors also add value in ways many travelers don't expect. They help choose the right destination at the right time, recommend resorts and experiences that match your needs, and often secure added perks you won't find online. Most importantly, they provide peace of mind—something that's priceless when you're far from home.

Winter is the perfect season to prioritize yourself, your happiness, and your well-being. Instead of enduring the cold and counting down the days until spring, why not trade snow boots for sandals and gray skies for sunshine?

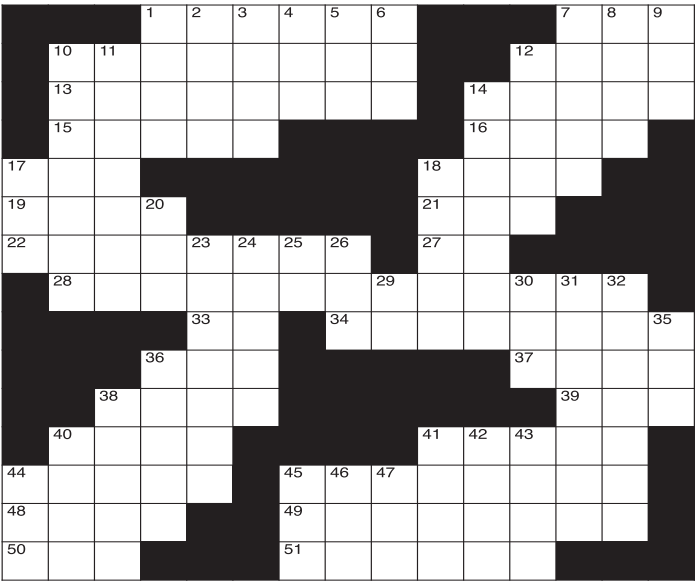
Let a travel professional take care of the details and the worries while you focus on enjoying the journey. Because the best trips aren't just about where you go, but how confident you feel getting there.

When winter blues strike, there's no better remedy than travel and no better way to travel than with a trusted travel agent by your side.

Cindy McCabe is owner of Bethany Travel and can be reached at Cindy@bethanytravel.net or 302-933-0955.

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CLUES ACROSS

1. Mechanical lever

7. Rocky peak

10. Leave a country

12. Discount

13. D.C. ballplayer

14. Partner to "oohed"

15. Engine sound

16. Japanese ornamental box

17. Fido is one

18. Amounts of time

19. DiFranco and Phyo are two

21. Yearly tonnage (abbr.)

22. Make secret plans

27. "Tiny Bubbles" singer

28. "His Airness"
33. Morning

34. Perfected

36. Winger guitarist Beach

37. Abba __, Israeli politician

38. Self-immolation by fire ritual

39. A way to save money

40. Pulpit

41. Make ecstatically happy

44. Once more

45. Works on

48. Nocturnal S. American rodent

49. State again

50. Expression of disappointment

51. Type of door

CLUES DOWN

1. Yugoslavian communist leader

2. Exchange rate

3. High school dance

4. Peter's last name

5. When you anticipate arriving

6. Israeli city __ Aviv

7. Goat-like mammals

8. Margarine

9. End-of-the-spectrum color

10. Make poisonous

11. Popular beverage

12. Actress Lathan

14. Where planes land and depart

17. Political fundraising entity

18. The distinctive spirit of a people or an era

20. Buffer used in microbiology

23. Light, open carriage

24. Metrical feet
25. Email subject line feature

26. A street with lots of nightmares

29. Rapper Rule

30. River in Scotland

31. One who settles a dispute

32. Most chummy

35. We all have our own

36. Arab tribe

38. Slap

40. Ottoman military commanders

41. Scottish or Irish Gaelic language

42. Emit coherent radiation

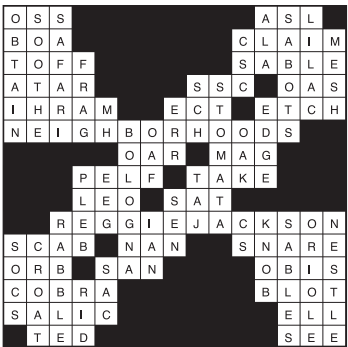
43. Sun or solar disk (Egyptian mythology)

44. Inclined to

45. Olfactory reference syndrome

46. Chest muscle (slang)

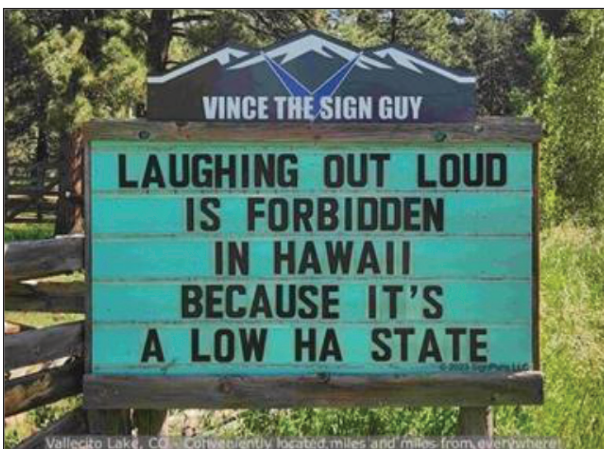
47. Body part



Answers for January 14

Some things to think about

Gathered from the internet
by **Jack Barnes**



Some thoughts

Two elderly gentlemen from a retirement center were sitting on a bench under a tree when one turns to the other and says: 'Slim, I'm 83 years old now and I'm just full of aches and pains. I know you're about my age. How do you feel?'

Slim says, 'I feel just like a newborn baby.'

'Really!? Like a newborn baby!?'

'Yep. No hair, no teeth, and I think I just wet my pants.'

Three old guys are out walking.

First one says, 'Windy, isn't it?'

Second one says, 'No, it's Thursday!'

Third one says, 'So am I. Let's go get a beer.'

A man was telling his neighbour, 'I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me four thousand dollars, but it's state of the art. It's perfect.'

'Really,' answered the neighbor. 'What kind is it?'

"Twelve thirty."

Morris, an 82-year-old man, went to the doctor to get a physical.

A few days later, the doctor saw Morris walking down the street with a gorgeous young woman on

his arm.

A couple of days later, the doctor spoke to Morris and said, 'You're really doing great, aren't you?' Morris replied, 'Just doing what you said, Doc: 'Get a hot mamma and be cheerful.'

The doctor said, 'I didn't say that. I said, 'You've got a heart murmur; be careful.'

A little old man shuffled slowly into an ice cream parlor and pulled himself slowly, painfully, up onto a stool. After catching his breath, he ordered a banana split.

The waitress asked kindly, 'Crushed nuts?'

'No,' he replied, 'Arthritis'



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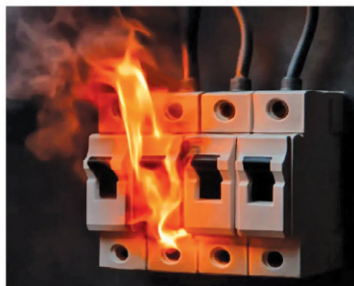
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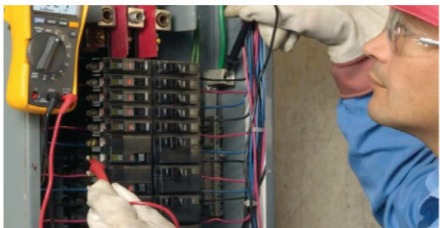
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