



MONDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 17, 2018

\$1.25

# THE MON VALLEY INDEPENDENT

WHAT HAPPENS HERE, MATTERS HERE.



**National honor**  
Serra's Mark Black has received an invitation from USA Baseball. B1

**INSIDE**



**Early days of Palmer Park**

Ron Paglia looks back at the opening of the Donora Park and the many events that have happened there. A3



**Rivers rising**

Flood fears from Florence are expanding beyond the Carolinas. A5

**SPORTS**



**Charleroi wins**

The Cougars blasted Yough, 8-1. B1

**DEATHS**

- Mary Ann Cypher Alfonsi, 72, West Mifflin
- Sue Ann Ghrist Downard, 60, Adamsburg
- Michael J. Farrier, 56, Lover-Jonestown
- Wayne Vernon Holman, 66, Perryopolis
- Donna Marie Kessler, 68, McKeesport
- Beatrice Emma Little, 91, formerly of Clairton
- Nancy Dandar Marghella, 64, North Versailles
- Barton Rueben Walker, 69, Rostraver Township

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Two sections, 16 pages

**TUESDAY**

Donora residents seek answers from the Mon Valley Sewage Authority.



## 'Cooler heads prevail' in Donora hiring

*Council clashes over the circumstances behind the addition of a new sanitation clerk.*

By KRISTIE LINDEN  
klinden@yourmvi.com

Two employees resigned from positions in Donora borough over the past month, and some officials are questioning how one replacement was hired.

A sanitation clerk resigned, and according to Councilwoman Cindy Brice and Mayor Jim McDonough, a move was made to hire Sandra Nelson as a part-time clerk before council as a

whole could vote on it.

Brice said during Thursday's council meeting that a daily email update sent to council members by borough Administrator John Bedner, included news of Nelson's hire and her start date.

After the meeting, the *Mon Valley Independent* was able to view the email, which did include information about the hire and the supposed start date of Sept. 10 — four days before council could have voted on it.

Brice said Bedner told her that Councilman Ed Parquette hired Nelson, which is why the information was included in the email. At

the meeting, Parquette repeatedly denied making the hire or talking to Bedner on the phone about the hire. Parquette said he didn't remember talking to Bedner about the issue and he isn't a member of the sanitation committee.

Brice said there was a workshop meeting Sept. 6 in which the sanitation clerk position was not discussed, and by 9 a.m. the next day, there was an email indicating someone had been hired.

Councilman John Conger said the committee met about nine days before the workshop meeting and "somehow it was inadvertently not put

on the workshop agenda."

Councilman Gib Szakal asked if part-time police officers have ever been hired before council had a chance to vote on them at a meeting. "All the time," Conger said. Szakal pointed out that Nelson hadn't been hired and hadn't started Sept. 10 as indicated in the email and council was voting on her hire.

Toward the end of the meeting, McDonough said he wasn't trying to stir up trouble, but he heard the same information Brice did about the hire. He said that because Nelson hadn't started, maybe "cooler heads prevailed."

"We need to understand no matter how many votes you have, it still has to be brought in front of the public," McDonough said. "So, thank you for doing the right thing."

The borough's code enforcement officer, Michele Harris, resigned prior to last week's meeting as well.

Council members declined to comment on why Harris, who served as the code enforcement officer since January, chose to step down.

Throughout her time as a borough employee, her work was often lauded by council members during workshop and regular meetings.

## Fayette to be pioneer under land bank act

*The new law gives local authorities more power to battle blight.*

By KAYLIE MOORE  
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Fayette County is expected to become the first in the state to grant land bank powers to its redevelopment authority this week, making it easier for local officials to fight community blight.

The move will be made in accordance with Pennsylvania Act 33, which was introduced by state Sen. Pat Stefano, R-Bullskin Township, last year and signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf in June. Act 33 grants redevelopment authorities the same powers currently allotted to land banks through the Pennsylvania Land Bank Act.

The new legislation, which will enable redevelopment authorities to take a more active role in acquiring and rehabilitating blighted properties and neighborhoods, was passed by both the state Senate and the House of Representatives in consecutive unanimous votes.

Stefano hailed the legislation as an important tool to combat a growing problem that affects many communities.

"Unfortunately, blight is like a cancer that spreads rapidly through our neighborhoods and risks the safety and economic vitality of the communities we serve," Stefano said. "In my district, several areas looked into forming a land bank, but found the start-up costs and the recurring costs to maintain it too expensive."

In many of the 16 land banks that formed following the Land Bank Act's passage five years ago, Stefano said, local redevelopment authorities have led the way for the operations. Allowing them to now act as their own land banks eliminates redundancy and provides a huge cost savings, he added.

"Since our inception, the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority has essentially been implementing the same types of projects and initiatives undertaken by land banks," Fayette County Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Andrew French said. "Act 33 and the ordinance being considered by the commissioners will provide us official land bank powers and give us one more tool to help fight blight in Fayette County."

Since the Land Bank Act's passage, French said, the redevelopment authority has acquired and rehabilitated

LAND BANK • A2

COMMUNITY DAYS



Heather Hart / For the Mon Valley Independent

Emilia Borden, 4, of Donora enjoys a hot dog at North Belle Vernon Community Days. See more photos from the event and the Italian Society of Mutual Aid's car show on Page A8.

## Wi-Fi-equipped buses carry Yough students

*The district is participating in Google's Rolling Study Hall.*

By JAMIE MARTINES

As the wheels on the bus go 'round, Yough middle schoolers will be tapping away on their laptops.

Starting today, three of the 20 buses that shuttle students to and from Yough Intermediate Middle School will have wireless internet access.

The school is one of 16 school communities nationwide to participate in Google's Rolling Study Hall pilot. The program focuses on rural areas where students have long commutes and may not have access to internet at home, equipping buses with Wi-Fi, providing students with laptops and funding tutors to ride the buses with students.

"Why not maximize that time on the bus?" said Yough Superintendent Janet Sardon. She explained that the program will give students more time to work on homework and to receive extra tutoring from the nine Yough teachers who will

YOUGH • A2



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Tanner Jarmon, an eighth-grader at Yough Intermediate Middle School, demonstrates a laptop connected to Wi-Fi on a moving bus for the Rolling Study Halls program.

...Check Today's Paper For Some

### MONEY \$AVING SPECIALS

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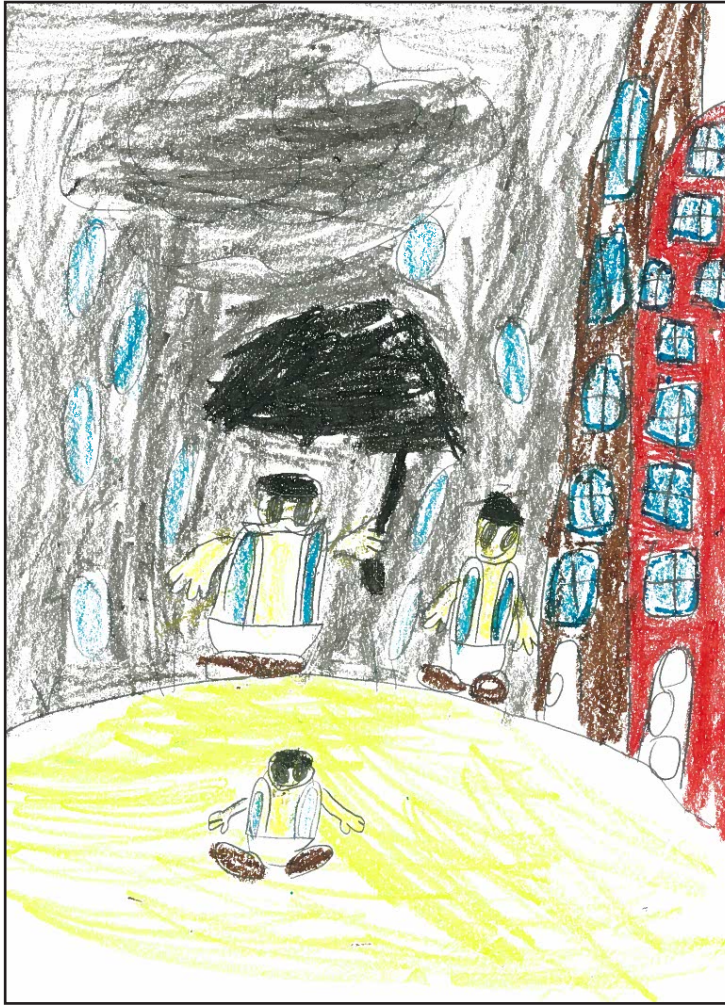
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## Today's weather



Today's weather drawing is provided by Jay Veyon Jeffries of Rostraver Elementary School.

**Today**  
75, 66



**Tuesday**  
78, 62



**Wednesday**  
79, 61



**Thursday**  
83, 66



**Friday**  
82, 64



# Angela Davis set to speak in McKeesport

Activist and writer will give the keynote address for the Crossing Bridges Summit at PS-Greater Allegheny.



Angela Davis

By JEFF STITT  
jstitt@yourmvi.com

Penn State Greater Allegheny is once again confronting modern attitudes toward race, gender and politics as part of its Crossing Bridges Summit. The McKeesport-based campus will be hosting author Angela Davis as the third keynote speaker of the Crossing Bridges Summit from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Oct. 19 in Wunderley Gymnasium on Greater Allegheny's campus. Born in Birmingham, Ala., Davis is an activist, scholar and writer who advocates for the oppressed. She has authored several books, including "Women, Culture & Politics."

In her talk, "Angela Davis Speaks: A Conversation about Modern Movements on the State of Race, Gender and Politics" she will address specific topics on race, gender and politics.

Davis will participate in a question-and-answer session after her speech.

After Davis' talk, attendees are invited to join the campus for further discussion at noon Saturday. Refreshments will be provided.

The Crossing Bridge Summit was enacted to consider ways Greater Allegheny can serve as a catalyst for social change and bridge racial divides in the community.

"Through the summit, we reach out to our neighboring communities to better understand the role our campus can play in addressing social needs in the region," said Chief Academic Officer and Chancellor Jacqueline Edmondson. "The summit provides the time and opportunity for us to discuss strategies and make plans with community partners that will help us reconsider our curriculum, our role in the community, and the importance of collaboration in the process."

Earlier this year, the campus welcomed Michael Eric Dyson, author and professor of sociology at Georgetown University, to discuss his new book, "Tears We Cannot Stop." His talk launched the summit and asked community leaders, students, faculty, staff and interested citizens to come together to consider how the community can address the racial divides in local communities.

The campus is located at 4000 University Drive, McKeesport.

For more information or event details contact Erica Tachoir, Ph.D. coordinator, career services by calling 412-675-9117 or emailing eec16@psu.edu.

## LAND BANK FROM A1

nine properties for resale to low-income homebuyers; rehabilitated 33 owner-occupied residential properties; demolished more than 40 residential blighted properties and seven commercial blighted properties; and aided in the construction of more than 40 new homes for sale to first-time, low-income homebuyers.

In total, French said, the authority has invested more than \$7.1 million in those efforts using a variety of local, state and federal resources.

"In Fayette County, these projects have had a tremendous impact on sta-

bilizing our most fragile communities and have had a significant secondary impact of creating additional revenue for the impacted municipalities," French said.

Fayette County Commissioners Vince Vicites, Dave Lohr and Angela Zimmerlink voted unanimously Tuesday to place the new legislation on the agenda for Thursday's meeting, when the matter is expected to be approved.

"While this ordinance isn't official yet, I am optimistic and appreciative of the leadership and support the county commissioners have taken over the past

several years in providing the tools and resources for us to fight blight throughout the county," French said. "Because Sen. Stefano and our entire legislative delegation have been so instrumental in starting this process and seeing it through to its final passage, Fayette County wanted to remain on the forefront and be the first to designate their redevelopment authority as the official Fayette County Land Bank."

For more information, contact French at 724-437-1547, ext. 210, or afrench@racfpa.org.

## YOUGH FROM A1

rotate buses throughout the week.

Lonna Mokay is one of those teachers. The former math teacher has been with the district for 17 years and now works as a guidance counselor. She said that this extra time with students is valuable.

"They have, right there, a teacher who can assist them," she said. Even if students are not doing homework, she'll be there to chat, check in and offer whatever support the student might need right away.

About 100 students will participate in the program, Principal Kevin Smetak said. All of those students — about 20 percent of the school's 550 students in grades five through eight — have one-way bus trips longer than 45 minutes, a requirement to be eligible for the program. All of the students who ride the three Wi-Fi equipped buses had the option to participate, but parents could choose to opt out.

About 30 Yough Intermediate Middle School students, or 5 percent, get driven to and from school by parents or guardians.

"I'm excited because I'll be able to get my schoolwork



Trib Total Media News Wire Services

**Yough School District Superintendent Janet Sardon addresses parents, students, teachers and school board members during the ribbon cutting for the Yough Rolling Study Halls program Friday at Yough Intermediate Middle School.**

done here instead of the library," said Tanner Jarmon, an eighth-grader who lives in Sutersville. He was one of 12 students to demonstrate the program Friday.

Jarmon said he usually talks to friends on the bus but is looking forward to using this time to get some homework done since he doesn't have

a computer at home. Typing was manageable even as the bus snaked around tight turns on hilly roads, and Jarmon said he wasn't feeling nauseous.

Gage Ashbaugh, a seventh-grader who lives in Smithton, said he's struggled to get homework done in the past.

"It's really amazing for me to be able to do my tests, because my teachers put things on Google Classroom," Ashbaugh said. Google Classroom is an online platform

that Yough teachers use to post quizzes, assignments or other classroom materials.

Internet access has been an issue in rural communities nationwide for years.

A March 2018 survey by the Pew Research Center showed that 58 percent of rural adults think that access to high-speed internet is still a problem in their area. Those areas are less likely to have the infrastructure to support broadband services. Fewer internet service providers generally operate in those

areas, and connection speeds are typically slower, Federal Communications Commission data show.

About 3 percent of Westmoreland County residents live in areas that are not equipped to support high-speed, broadband internet access, according to the most recent Federal Communications Commission data.

Sardon estimates that as many as a third of the district's students don't have good internet access at home. The rural, 77-square-mile district 40 miles southeast of Pittsburgh serves about 2,200 students. About 47 percent of the school's students come from low-income families, according to 2016-17 school year data from the state Department of Education.

Google first piloted the Rolling Study Halls program in two schools in North Carolina and South Carolina in 2016.

Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Gamewell Middle School in Caldwell County, N.C., serves students who have two- to three-hour round-trip commutes and do not have internet access at home, according to information provided by the Rolling Study Hall program.

Google partnered with the Consortium for School Networking, an association for school technology professionals, to measure the impact of the Rolling Study Hall program, Sanchez said. At Yough, they'll be looking at students' test scores, classroom achievement and homework completion rates to see whether the program is

benefiting students.

Districts in Clarksville, Tenn.; Santa Fe, N.M.; and three remote districts in Colorado are among those to join the second round of the pilot with Yough this fall, Sanchez said.

Google isn't the first to provide mobile internet services to students. School districts and community members have been rolling out ways to make sure students have internet and computer access outside school for the past decade.

The Coachella Valley Unified School District in Thermal, a southern California desert community, started wiring buses back in 2014, according to reports from The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit newsroom covering education. Though the district's 18,000 students had tablets, many didn't have internet access necessary to complete assignments at home and relied on school buses to traverse hourlong commutes.

In Palm Beach County, Fla., a former guidance counselor and teacher used her retirement savings to purchase a coach bus and install computer workstations equipped with high-speed internet, according to a 2011 CNN report. Estella's Brilliant Bus, founded by Estella Pyfrom, had the resources to support school-age children as well as adults, who could access resume assistance, banking tutorials or GED courses.

Jamie Martines is a staff writer for Trib Total Media News Wire Services.

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