

TROJANS RALLY

Greater Johnstown boys come back to defeat Forest Hills in key Laurel Highlands matchup. B1.



CATS CRUISE

No. 5 Pitt-Johnstown takes alternate route to victory over East Stroudsburg. B1.



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THURSDAY

\$2.50 NEWSSTAND

Johnstown council fills vacant seat

BY DAVE SUTOR

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Mike Hamacek has been picked to be the newest member of Johnstown City Council.

He was appointed to the board by a 5-1 vote among other council members during a special meeting Wednesday.

Hamacek, an Old Conemaugh Borough resident, will fill out the remainder of a term that is set to expire in early January 2028. He has not yet officially been sworn in.

"I'm just really looking forward to working with this new council and I'm

Hamacek: 'I'll be an asset to the city'

ready to get to work," Hamacek said during a telephone interview after the meeting.

Hamacek, who owns Hamacek Construction, has been involved with numerous city-operated residential development projects, but said he will no longer do work for the municipality when on council.

Hamacek said he has not renewed his license that would make him eligi-

ble to participate in the projects.

"My strengths would be I ran a business for 30-some years and I'm pretty aware of how things operate within the city," Hamacek said. "With the upcoming Main Street (redesign) project, I believe I'll be an asset with my construction background and my business background. I'm just a very well-rounded person and I think I'll be an asset to the city."

Hamacek was one of four applicants for the vacant seat, along with Nicholas Graham, Melissa Komar and Jasmine LaRue.

Komar withdrew herself from consideration the day before the meeting.



Hamacek

Mayor Rev. Sylvia King, Samuel Barber, Taylor Clark, Nick Spinelli and Deputy Mayor Chuck Arnone voted for Hamacek. Lorraine Brandon-Taylor supported LaRue.

Hamacek finished tied for fifth in last year's general election, with the top four vote-getters earning council seats. He also lost a special election to fill the vacant position in a head-to-head race versus Clark. However, Clark won a full four-year term, so he declined the special two-year seat,

Please see **COUNCIL**, A2

Richland board replaces 2 nurses

BY JOSHUA BYERS

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Richland school board not only approved the resignation of two nurses at Wednesday's special meeting, but the hire of two nurses to replace the outgoing staff.

Arnold Nadonley, superintendent, stressed that the exiting nurses, Jennifer Batche and Kristie Murray, were doing so voluntarily and that their replacements, Heather McCormick and Skylar Barbarich, were competent people ready to take on the job.

"I have no doubt that they will do fine," he said.

Both McCormick and Barbarich were hired at a rate of \$51,857 with start dates to be determined.

Nadonley also noted that the pair will receive on-boarding mentors and support from the Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8 to help their transition into the schools.

According to the agenda, and a comment from Nadonley, Murray, who worked at the high school, resigned due to another job offer.

Her last day was Jan. 16.

Batche, who worked at the elementary school, will conclude her time at Richland Feb. 13, the agenda states. No reason for her departure was provided.

Please see **RICHLAND**, A2

AVIATION PROGRAM TAKING OFF



JOHN RUCOSKY/THE TRIBUNE DEMOCRAT

Flight check instructor Devin Mullen (right) shows prospective student Jordan Siegfried, of Confluence, a Piper Lance at Somerset County Airport Wednesday near Friedens.

'Close to home'

Flight training academy opens at Somerset airport

BY DAVID HURST

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SOMERSET – Jordan Siegfried remembers family "dragging" him out of the National Air and Space Museum as a wide-eyed kid with a passion for planes.

As he stood next to a six-seat Piper Lance at Somerset County Airport, the now-27-year-old Confluence man was looking to give wings to his childhood dream.

He was the first aviation enthusiast to arrive to an airport open house Wednesday for Nulton Aviation's

upstart flight academy.

"This is always something I wanted to do ... and with this (opportunity) so close to home," Siegfried said, "I want to try."

Siegfried said he's initially hoping to pursue a pilot's license to fly as a hobby – but the Somerset school's director, Will Guzik, said Nulton instructors have programs in place to enable aspiring pilots to pursue careers as flight instructors or even fly commercial jets through a partnership with St. Francis University and SkyWest Airlines.

"You tell us what path you want to pursue and we'll be here to make it as easy as possible for you," Guzik said.

Nulton, the fixed base operator at John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport, has offered flight training programs at the Richland airport for years. It currently hosts more than 70 students pursuing several different levels of flight readiness.

The goal is to replicate Johnstown Airport's flight training success at Somerset County Airport, Guzik added.

Please see **FLIGHT**, A2

Drone railroad checks on tap

Texas firm plans to open Richland hub

BY DAVID HURST

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A Texas-based company is planning to open a Richland Township facility this spring to use drone technology to inspect railroad infrastructure from the sky.

It's a move aiming to create "dozens" of jobs at John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport by the end of the year – with a goal of more than 240 employees by late 2028, Horizon Aerobotics CEO Denver Hopkins said.

Horizon Aerobotics' flight operations officials described Johnstown as a "critical proving ground" for drone-reliant rail inspections. "The future of the commercial drone industry is anchored in beyond visual line of sight operations. That's why we're excited to partner with Aerium in Johnstown – they're build-



Hopkins

Please see **DRONE**, A2

Spending in budget pitch driven by social programs, schools

BY ERIC SCICCHITANO

CNHI STATE REPORTER

HARRISBURG – Social supports, public education and protections for Pennsylvanians and their property remain the biggest expenses within Gov. Josh Shapiro's proposed general fund budget.

Shapiro introduced a \$53.26 billion spending plan for 2026-27, the fourth and final budget proposal of his first term as governor.

The largest projected expense totals \$21.94 billion under the

plan for Human Services. It's approached by Education at \$20.64 billion. Together, the programs account for a combined 80% in general fund spending.

Roll in the \$6.36 billion sought for Protection of Persons and Property – millions more for four additional state police cadet classes, public defenders and prosecutors, crime and violence prevention, law enforcement and disaster preparedness and response – and all but about 8% of the total spending

requested of the general fund is accounted for.

Each program would see additional dollars in transfers from select special funds, too.

"Let's come together and make smart investments in schools, safety and economic development. Let's cut costs and cut taxes. Let's protect our fundamental freedoms. And let's continue our rise," Shapiro said Tuesday as he closed his annual budget address to members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

General growth

The general fund is the primary operating account for Pennsylvania's government.

According to the budget proposal, 78.7 cents of every dollar in the fund would be spent on grants and subsidies.

Year over year under Shapiro, and with bipartisan agreement in both the House and Senate, there are more dollars to disburse.

Please see **BUDGET**, A2



Gov. Josh Shapiro (right behind lectern) addresses members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly Tuesday during his annual budget address at the Capitol in Harrisburg.

COMMONWEALTH MEDIA SERVICES

Public Notices inside today

Including:

■ Portage Area Board of School Directors will hold its regular voting meeting Feb. 19. B5.

And on our website at: <https://market-place.tribune-democrat.com/johnstown-pa/publicnotices/search>

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LOTTERY

Wednesday's Powerball 27-29-30-37-58
Powerball: 15
Power Play: 2
More Lottery numbers: B8

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WEATHER
Cold with clouds and sun.
High 20, low 14.
Five-day forecast/B8



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