

MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT

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Bulldogs, Jaguars and Eagles, oh my

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

With graduation season upon us, Bulldogs, Jaguars and Eagles are about to enter into life after high school. To celebrate, the Middletown Smyrna Independent wanted to reflect on the mascots, and their history, in our coverage area.

Here is some of what we found.

Smyrna Eagles

The school, which graduated its first class in 1894, has a red and white eagle as its mascot.

First State Military Academy Bulldogs

First State Military Academy cadets chose a bulldog as their mascot when the school opened in Clayton 10 years ago, current principal Blair Newman said.

• See **Mascots** on page 4

The First State Military Academy Bulldogs mascot was chosen by cadets. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/ CRAIG ANDERSON.

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Mascots

Continued From Page 1

Appoquinimink Jaguars, Ducks and Cavaliers

In Appoquinimink School District, the school board selects the school mascots and the colors.

There was a community survey and student input was utilized while choosing the Odessa High Ducks name, spokesperson Danielle Pro-Hudson said.

Appoquinimink High students provided input throughout the process that ended up with the Jaguars, she said.

Student and community opinion was used throughout the years as the Middletown High Cavaliers mascot was updated, according to Ms. Pro-Hudson.

St. Georges Technical Hawks

St. Georges Technical School's mascot is a hawk because of the prevalence of red-tailed hawks in the area.

That's according to Terri Villa, who was the first principal of the Middletown-based school when it opened in 2006.

Also, Ms. Villa said, committees were formed in the 1990s when the school was first being proposed and need was being determined.

The committees focused on different aspects of opening a school, like location, curriculum, branding, etc., she said.

The committee that worked on the branding chose blue and green to align with the Seattle Seahawks since they had already determined that the mascot would be a hawk, Ms. Villa said.

The SG logo and crest were developed in conjunction with Jostens. Instead of the exact Seahawks colors, the committee and Jostens chose to use more widely available royal blue and kelly green because custom colors would have added a considerable cost, Ms. Villa said.

Appoquinimink High Jaguars.



The Smyrna High Eagles mascot cheers in the student section. PHOTO COURTESY OF SMYRNA SCHOOL DISTRICT



St. Georges Tech Hawks.



Middletown High Cavaliers.



Odessa High Ducks.

EDUCATION

Middletown Student honored by Y

Earle will plan '26 Youth in Government Conference as Governor

By Craig Anderson
Middletown Smyrna Independent

MIDDLETOWN — Greg Earle has reached a prestigious pinnacle and is now ready to carry out his duty.

The Middletown High School junior has been selected the 58th governor for the YMCA of Delaware's Youth in Government Program and is tasked with planning next year's conference.

"The position of youth governor to me is not a responsibility I take lightly because my main role and responsibility is to plan next year's (event)," he said.

Student delegates at the 2025 YIG conference — held April 4-6 at Legislative Hall — voted Greg into the position over two others. There were 130 students from 21 schools participating.

The 17-year-old hopes to bring all members of the 2026 conference together.

"I feel Youth in Government promotes such civic engagement and advocacy, and shows other people that the youth have a voice, and they can advocate and do it with power and conviction behind it to make a real change," he explained.

The YMCA describes the effort "as a launchpad for future leaders, teaching them how to navigate and impact the world of public service."

"YIG offers model legislative and judicial experiences for youth in grades 6-12. Students learn by doing and have the opportunity to try



Greg Earle serves as Middletown High's student body president. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

their hand at leadership in an open and receptive learning environment. Students participate in a Model Government Conference by acting as a Senator, House Representative, Lob-

byst, Judge, Lawyer, Journalist, and more."

Participants receive such training during weekly meetings and other events prior to the annual conference.

Jascelyn Parson, the director of the Youth in Government and Black Achievers programs, said, "Greg has eloquently earned the honor to serve as Delaware's 58th governor. ... His dynamic leadership extends beyond the classrooms at Middletown High School.

"(Greg) is well known, well liked and has profound characteristics that demonstrate excellence, especially as a young African American role model and leader."

She added that he has served in various YIG positions, including youth delegation leader, youth advocate, Insight Committee member and a member of the Governor's Cabinet, along with representing the state in national conferences.

The program fits well with Greg's vision of taking part in public service in Washington, D.C. As for immediately after high school, the National Honor Society student said he's already explored Howard, George Washington, American and Georgetown universities.

Additionally, he plays varsity tennis for Middletown High and is the student body president.

Greg "really likes being outside" and will bicycle up to 13 miles at a time. He's also an actor in productions at the Everett Theatre in Middletown and other local presentations.

Plus, last summer, he worked as an intern for then-state Sen. (now-U.S. Rep.) Sarah McBride, as well as Marcus Henry, who was elected New Castle County executive in November 2024.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.

MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT

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The Middletown Smyrna Independent is published by Independent Newsmedia Inc. USA. Independent is owned by a unique trust that enables this newspaper to pursue a mission of journalistic service to the citizens of the community. Since no dividends are paid, the company is able to thrive on profit margins below industry standards. All after-tax surpluses are reinvested in Independent's mission of journalistic service, commitment to the ideals of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and support of the community's deliberation of public issues.

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BUSINESS

Comcast expanding services in Middletown

MIDDLETOWN — Comcast on April 16 announced that its reliable, high-speed, symmetrical Internet is now available to more homes and businesses in Middletown.

The service will extend to the Middletown Apartments complex and the Brickmill Farm neighborhood, as part of a network expansion that will ultimately reach 13,000 additional homes and businesses, a news release said.

A new, five-year-price guarantee for as low as \$55 monthly is available, among other offerings, the release said. Residents can visit [Xfinity.com/mytown](https://xfinity.com/mytown) and enter their addresses for additional details on construction timing and upcoming service availability, the release said.

Also, the release said, residents can stop by local Xfinity Stores in the

Christiana Mall in Newark, or in Dover, to learn more about products and services, the release said.

Soma Skin & Sculpt open

MIDDLETOWN — Soma Skin & Sculpt is now open in the downtown area.

The Delaware Black Chamber of Commerce on April 24 hosted a ribbon cutting for the business at 101 N. Broad Street.

In a Facebook post, the chamber said, “We’re thrilled to welcome this innovative wellness destination to the community, offering cutting-edge services like Emsculpt Neo, Exion Microneedling, Emface, and Exion Body.”

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Comcast held a community event at Volunteer Brewing Co. to celebrate its expansion into Middletown.

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EDUCATION

Appo, Smyrna school board members elected

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

MIDDLETOWN — On May 13, voters throughout Delaware picked among candidates to fill school board seats.

In the Appoquinimink School District, Tim Higgins (667 votes) got the unofficial nod over Sandhya Celestin-Brown (622) and Chuck Boyce (435).

The candidates were vying to fill the seat of Michelle Wall, whose term expires this year. Ms. Celestin-Brown will serve a four-year-year term that expires on June 30, 2029.

In Smyrna, Aaron Weisenberger (406 votes) finished ahead of Charlotte Middleton (214) and Justine Flint (202).

Mr. Weisenberger will replace school board president Christine Malec, whose term expires this year. His four-year-term expires on June 30, 2029.

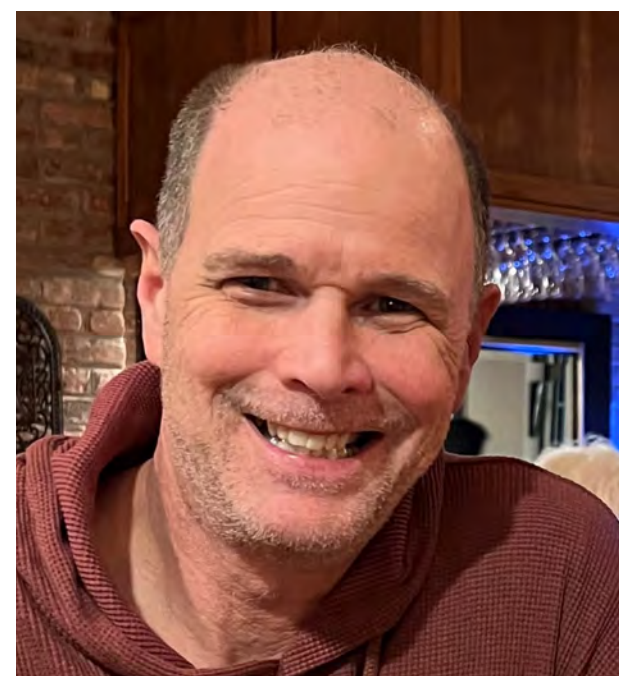
Polling places were open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

For information, visit elections.delaware.gov.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



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COMMUNITY

Watchmaker building named after Rep. Hensley

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

ODESSA — The Veterans Watchmaker Initiative has a much more long-lasting future, thanks to the man whose name is now permanently affixed to it.

At a ceremony on March 15, the nonprofit's training building was titled after Rep. Kevin Hensley, R-Townsend, who worked for funding to support the facility. The site now has an outside plaque with his name, as well.

The recognition comes after Rep. Hensley urged New Castle County Council to approve \$276,000 in bond bill funding to transfer building ownership to the organization.

And it did so March 5.

The school at 307 Sixth St. had been leasing the property from the county for \$1 annually. It opened in 2017, teaching disabled veterans to create and repair watches, while bringing job opportunities with salaries of \$100,000 a year or more, according to a news release.

Rep. Hensley described the project as a “labor

of love” for himself and Veterans Watchmaker Initiative founder/CEO Sam Cannan.

“It’s the only school that teaches this unique art of watch repair, watchmaking, in the entire country, and the fact that we have it here in downtown Odessa makes it a special gem,” Rep. Hensley said following the ceremony.

Mr. Cannan said he’s comforted by having ownership of the property.

In the release, he noted, “Rep. Hensley’s ongoing support in securing the grant was a great move forward for this growing school to be named in his honor.”

He also highlighted the support of Rep. Bill Carson, D-Smyrna, along with Gov. Matt Meyer and Tom Gordon, who both served as previous New Castle County executives.

For information, visit veteranswatchmakerinitiative.org, call 302-378-7088 or email scannan@vwmi.org.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



Sam Cannan, left, and state Rep. Kevin Hensley next to the plaque bearing the legislator's name at the Veterans Watchmaker Initiative in Odessa. For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com.

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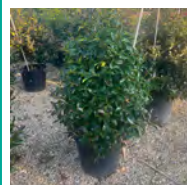
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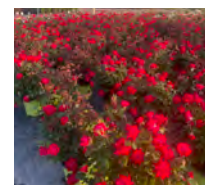
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EDUCATION

Envirothon champ Odessa High loves the outdoors

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

TOWNSEND — Weeks of preparation reaped a long-awaited reward for Odessa High students on April 10. The school's Future Farmers of America and Agriscience team captured the 30th annual Delaware Envirothon, ending a 22-year winning streak by Charter School of Wilmington.

Odessa senior Kalena Diaz, bound for the University of Delaware as an agriculture and natural resources major, said "It's a team activity you can prepare a month prior to the event so the time you put in collectively rather than just as an individual really sets it apart from any activity I've done in the past."

Other members of the championship team included Joseph Delaney, Zachary Binnie, Nathaniel Sutton and Keith Schmid.

Each member of the winning squad earned a \$500 scholarship from the Delaware Envirothon and other prizes, including an award plaque for their school, host Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Natural Control said in a news release.

Odessa will represent Delaware at the 2025 National Conservation Foundation International Envirothon to be held in Alberta, Canada, from July 20 to 26.

Charter had three teams place in the top five among a record 22 squads that included 111 students.

High schools represented included, among others, Appoquinimink, Middletown, Milford, MOT Charter, Odessa, Polytech and Smyrna. Also competing was the Peach Blossom 4-H Club of Greenwood.

In the release, DNREC described the competition:

"Each team answered questions,

reviewed specimens, and took measurements in topics dealing with aquatic ecology, soils/land use, wildlife, forestry and the current environmental issue of 'Roots and Resiliency: Fostering Forest Stewardship in a Canopy of Change.'

"Teams also had to give a seven- to 10-minute oral presentation of a scenario based on the current issue."

Heading to the University of Kentucky to Agriculture Science, Middletown High senior Ashton Evans spent time identifying characteristics of seven trees, including genus, Latin name, common name, pests on the tree and different diseases.

Ashton experienced his first Envirothon and described it as "full of things I'm interested in and it's the field I'm going into so it's a lot of fun."

Alexis Clay, Middletown agriculture teacher and Future Farmers of America advisor, said the competition involved "Hands on learning."

"It's taking what we learn in the classroom and what we do outdoors at the school and applying it to the real world — going into the forests, soil pits, testing air quality and soil use all day at a state park."

In addition to DNREC, major sponsors include the Delaware Solid Waste Authority, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Sussex Conservation District, the Kent Conservation District, and the New Castle Conservation District, along with many other smaller donors.

The event was held at the Blackbird State Forest Education Center.

For information on the event, visit delawareenvirothon.org.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X



Appoquinimink High's Jackson Lesage reads the event program on April 10. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



The Odessa High School FFA and Agriscience team won the 2025 Delaware Envirothon. Team members included, from left, Kalena Diaz, Joseph Delaney, Zachary Binnie, Nathaniel Sutton and Keith Schmid . For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com. PHOTO COURTESY OF DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL



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GOVERNMENT

Gott becomes Smyrna's new mayor

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

SMYRNA — Tabitha Gott became the mayor, and Ken Olson joined Town Council after April 29's municipal election.

Mayor Gott was the only mayoral candidate on the ballot, while Mr. Olson edged Ayonne "Nick" Miles, 171-165, to earn one of three at-large positions in the sole contested council race.

Mr. Olson also beat incumbent Michael Rasmussen (141 votes) and Deborah Camaratta (103).

Mayor Gott, previously a Councilwoman, replaced Robert Johnson, who opted not to run for another

term.

On election day, Mayor Gott said she was "very excited to see what the future holds for us.

"There are lots of opportunities for growth and success, both from (town staff) and from a community standpoint. We can reach those goals; they're attainable. We have a tremendous community."

She also stressed the need for transparent government operations and a review of Smyrna's charter, which she said hasn't been revised since 2003.

"The goal is to create a footprint that, when this journey is over as mayor, ... we continue forward in a

positive way," Councilwoman Gott said. "So, creating the processes and addressing the challenges that we have now, so we don't have them moving forward, (are priorities)."

Mayor Gott became unopposed April 8, after George Coates was removed from the mayoral ballot by Town Council, due to a residency issue.

Nelson Drew Jr. ran unopposed for the District 1 seat, presently held by Mayor Gott.

Council members serve three-year terms, while mayors are voted in for two years.

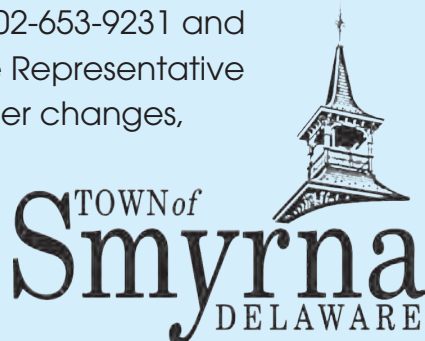
Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



New mayor Tabitha Gott stands in front of Smyrna Town Hall on April 29. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

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COMMUNITY

At 100, ‘baby’ Knussman loving life in Smyrna

Credits exercise, especially walking, as the key to longevity

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

SMYRNA — This centenarian is the youngest of 12 children, aka “the baby” of the family.

Explaining her role among her loved ones, Virginia Knussman chuckled. She was also pleased as she turned 100 on April 12.

“I’ve been so blessed that I could not ask for any better life than I have at 100 years of age,” she said on April 9 at her Spring Meadow home. “I’m very happy that, at this stage, I’m as good as I am physically and mentally.”

Longtime friend and neighbor Janet Greaves visits Ms. Knussman each Saturday night and enjoys every moment of it.

“I love just talking with her about movies, about baseball games and just about her life in general,” Ms. Greaves said. “I always say to her, ‘I wish I had all these things to talk about.’ She is the most wonderful person to sit here and visit with.”

So, what’s the key to living a century?

“Exercise,” Ms. Knussman stated with clear enthusiasm. “I’ve been walking all my life.”

For 30 years, she walked to her job at Clayton Bank and Trust. She also stayed in shape with exercise guru Richard Simmons’ “Sweatin’ to the Oldies.”

It was 1955 when she and her late



• See **Knussman** on page 17

Virginia Knussman sits in her Smyrna living room a few days before turning 100. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

Knussman

Continued From Page 16

husband, Joseph Knussman, moved to the area, when he took a job with Breyers Ice Cream.

They had a daughter, followed by three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Eventually, Ms. Knussman moved to Spring Meadow, a 55-plus community, for all the activities there. She said she never misses an event at the clubhouse, where she plays Bunco and line dances.

She's joined by a caregiver during the week but tends to herself on Saturdays and Sundays.

"The only thing I don't do is cook. I've kind of been forbidden to do that by my daughter, even though it's an electric stove," Ms. Knussman said.

And, while she also won't pick up a vacuum, the 100-year-old will certainly hold a book chosen by her granddaughter to read. She enjoys mysteries, currently in the middle of "The Things We Do for Love" by Kristin Hannah.

Plus, baseball is a specific interest. Ms. Knussman roots for the Baltimore Orioles, the Philadelphia Phillies and the Washington Nationals.

Reflecting on her century, the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969 is a particularly indelible memory, she said.

But now, "I'm here to witness a lot of things I don't want to know."

Regardless, Ms. Knussman feels lucky.

"I have everything that the Lord has been blessed to give me," she said. "I am so blessed that I can't ask for anything more."

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



Virginia Knussman was about 18 in this photo, taken by her then-future husband, Joseph Knussman. PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA KNUSSMAN



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EDUCATION

Delaware FFA members honored with blue jackets

Delaware Farm Bureau

NEWARK — The Delaware Farm Bureau honored 81 high school students in the Blue Jacket Bonanza Program during its convention on March 25.

According to a news release, the jackets were presented to Delaware

Future Farmers of America members and have “been an integral part of the organization’s official dress since 1933, serving as a symbol of professional growth, career success, and agricultural advocacy.”

The awards came at the Delaware Future Farmers of America Convention at the University of Delaware.

Students, among others, who received a blue jacket included:

- ♦ Appoquinimink -Alexandra Jones, Saanvi Kalidindi, Miely Medina Rizo, Jonas Karpinski, Anna Heckscher, Diana Nowak, Sophia Miller and Evelyn Burress

- ♦ Middletown -Morgan Fink, Brooke Ryan, Mackenzie Nickle,

Owen Hickey and Riya Patel

- ♦ Odessa - Graedy Hodge, Alexis Dury, Alexander Perchik and Delilah Schilling

- ♦ Smyrna - Kylie Jester, Catherine Maguire, Jesse Mabrey and Mackenzie Hadaway



Pictured, from left, are Delaware Farm Bureau President Bill Powers, Young Farmers and Ranchers Chair Will Powers, and Middletown High Future Farmers of America Blue Jacket recipients Brooke Ryan, Mackenzie Nickle, Owen Hickey and Riya Patel. PHOTO COURTESY OF DELAWARE FARM BUREAU



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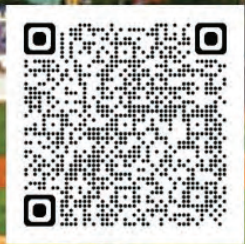
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MIDDLETOWN GALACTIC GALLERY



Bill Quick is also known as Gus the Gnome. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



Steven Melton, left, and Jordan Sypinski were dressed as Ghostbusters characters during the 10th annual Galactic Con at Appoquinimink High in Middletown on March 22. For video, visit baytobaynews.com. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



Kennedy Melton came to Galactic Con in a Ghostbusters uniform.
MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



Little Corner Anime and Witchery owner Miranda Myers speaks with an attendee. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



Jeffrey Duvall holds a boar's head while portraying Inosuke Hashibira from Demon Slayer. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



From left, Erika Garrett, John St. Louis and Shawn Christmas are together at the Galactic Con event. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

COMMUNITY

Mural in downtown Smyrna lauds 'American hero'

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

SMYRNA — The more he learned the more inspired he was to recreate an image of Richard Allen.

Prior to creating a mural depicting the life of the former slave, Michael Rosato talked to folks and read up on his subject.

What emerged, Mr. Rosato said was a vision of Mr. Allen as “a remarkable man, an American hero as far as I’m concerned.

“He was one of the earliest aboli-

tionists, if not the first. He had a brilliant mind, was an entrepreneur and somebody I think bettered mankind given the little opportunity he had as an African American in Colonial America.”

Also, Mr. Rosato said, “I dug into it and learned he was a huge proponent of equality and believed in the Constitution but realized like every African American at the time and even parts today that equality wasn’t

• See **Mural** on page 25



With the mural he created in the background Michael Rosato speaks at a ceremony on March 14. For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/ CRAIG ANDERSON



African Methodist Episcopal Church clergy gather below a mural of Richard Allen on March 14 in Smyrna. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/ CRAIG ANDERSON

Mural

Continued From Page 24

a given though it was written and sounded good it just wasn't part of the life experience."

Mr. Allen was enslaved on Whitehall Plantation before being freed when owner George Kennard purchased the land in 1803. Mr. Allen

later founded the Mt. Friendship AME Church in Smyrna.

The acrylic-painted mural was unveiled on a wall in a ceremony on March 14 in the Smyrna Opera House parking lot, 111 S. Main St.

It was the end of process that began when the Town of Smyrna was awarded \$29,250 in funding from the T-Mobile Hometown Grant Program in December 2023 to complete two murals in downtown Smyrna, Direc-

tor of Planning Jeremy Rothwell said.

A Rosato-created mural of Bombay Hook was dedicated in June 2024, Mr. Rothwell said. According to Mr. Rosato, the process of making Mr. Allen's took about a year to complete.

According to Mr. Rothwell "the Town was not required to provide a local match (for funding.)"

Among the 100 or so ceremony attendees was Smyrna Mayor Robert

Johnson, who called to mural "a great thing to have downtown where people can come and enjoy it.

"It's good to have something about Black history in town because Black history is definitely something that is missed not only in the town but also the country and in the schools ..."

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



ABOVE: Richard Allen speaks at the first meeting of the American Society of Free Persons of Color at Mother Bethel AME Church

Center: Richard Allen, 1760 - 1831 Founder of Bethel AME Church. On his right is the first Bethel AME Church, an old blacksmith

"This land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country, and we are well satisfied to stay where

Left: Sarah Bass Allen, 1764 - 1847 Wife of Richard Allen and founder of Daughters of the Conference. Right: Jarena Lee, 1783 - 1864 First woman preacher in the Bethel

ABOVE: Richard Allen buys his and his brother's freedom from Stokely Stungis for 2,000 Continental dollars and bushels of corn, wheat and salt in 1783. Out the window is present day Bethel AME Church in Smyrna, Delaware. BELOW: Richard Allen delivers salt to General George Washington's army during the Revolutionary War.

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COMMUNITY

Friends of Zoar work to restore Odessa church

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

ODESSA — The restoration of Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church — once an Underground Railroad stop — is in the bids phase, and supporters hope to see its doors open again in 2026.

Friends of Zoar treasurer Steve Johnson believes the venture will be well worth the cost of around \$940,000.

In March he said that, once complete, the edifice on West Main Street will serve as an African American cultural arts center.

“I think the church is part of Odessa’s history that has not been told,” he added. “There’s a big, blank spot here in terms of the story this church represents in the town.

“I think this could be a real jewel in the crown that is historic Odessa.”

The nonprofit has raised about \$675,000 so far for the initial phase, with funds coming from state, federal and private entities, Mr. Johnson said. Plus, a \$100,000 grant from an independent benefactor is pending.

As part of the funding, the National Trust for Historic Preservation pledged \$250,000 in February, he continued. The donation was part of the foundation’s Preserving Black Churches initiative.

Zoar was opened by African Americans in 1881, but by 1998, the building was rarely used, closing completely in 2015. The last regular services there were 52 years ago.

The congregation’s original gath-



• See **Zoar** on page 29

Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church in Odessa was built in 1881. For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

Zoar

Continued From Page 28

ering place was on Osborne Street, a building purchased by members in 1845. Thirty-six years later, members moved to the present site.

According to a news release from the trust, “Zoar Church was a rest stop for the Underground Railroad and a vital hub for African Ameri-

cans in the region. The church is an example of mid-19th century Gothic revival architecture. It was known for its gospel music and is heavily associated with gospel music icon Charles Albert Tindley.”

For information, email friendsofzoar@gmail.com or visit the group’s Facebook page or friendsofzoar.org.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



Friends of Zoar treasurer Steve Johnson talks about Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church in March. MIDDLE-TOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

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ENTERTAINMENT

Middletown musical will spotlight homeless, hungry

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

MIDDLETOWN — Paul Mast walked the streets of eight cities for six months in 2013, returning with the basis for a book.

The former Catholic priest and Kent County native authored “Street Sabbatical: Life Lessons for a Contemplative Beggar” a year later. It was composed of material from meetings with hundreds of homeless individuals.

However, Mr. Mast wasn’t done there. Based on the book, he wrote lyrics for 17 songs and assembled them into a musical in 2022.

That’s how “Compassion Street — The Musical” came to be. It has been performed in Dover, Smyrna and Wilmington since then.

Now, the production is coming to the Everett Theatre, 47 W. Main St., on June 22. The show begins at 4 p.m.

Mr. Mast will serve as a storyteller, transitioning one song to another.

And the show will serve as a fundraiser for the Middletown-based non-profit Our Daily Bread, which assists those facing food insecurity.

Mr. Mast said that, during his street sabbatical, he learned “that there are two kinds of homelessness: people who are physically homeless and living on the street and shelters, and people who are emotionally homeless, living in their houses and experiencing dysfunctions, addictions, separations and more.”

He described the show’s staging at the iconic Everett Theater as taking it “up a plug.”

“In this theater, on this stage, the audience (and) the cast will be thrilled,” he continued.



Paul Mast, left, and Our Daily Bread executive director Brian Farragher hold a shirt promoting “Compassion Street — The Musical.” MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

• See **Musical** on page 31

Musical

Continued From Page 30

Mr. Mast said he and Our Daily Bread executive director Brian Farragher “have quite similar missions.”

Mr. Farragher agreed, saying, “This is a show about people who are homeless and lonely, and what we try to do is not just feed people but give them a place where they can come and feel like they’re a part of something.”

“With what’s happening, I think, right now, in terms of funding in general for these types of programs, we’re looking at a challenging year. So, every little bit helps us, and we’ll put all the funding toward feeding people.”

Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at compassionstreetthemusical.com.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



Paul Mast wrote lyrics for 17 songs to create “Compassion Street – The Musical,” coming to Middletown on June 22. For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



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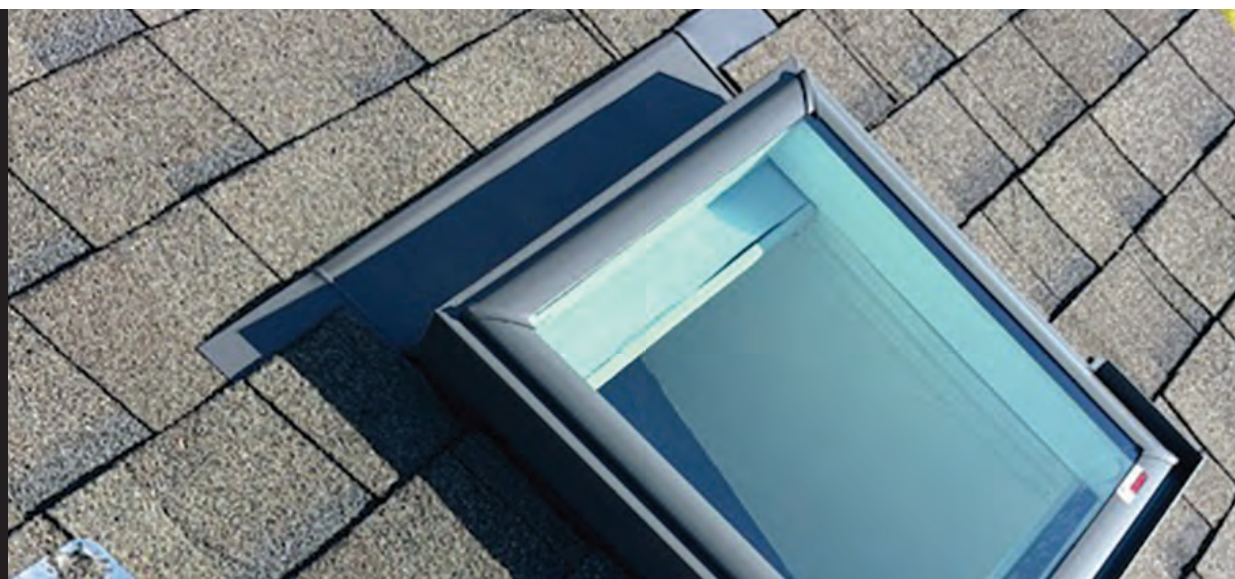
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COMMUNITY

'Labor of love': Sculpting shaping up for Smyrna's Bailey

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

SMYRNA — Creating a sculpture begins with a vision, followed by many more of them.

Eventually, a few of them remain in marble, granite or precious stone.

That's Richard Bailey's process, which has resulted in an array of sculpted pieces since 1963.

"The tools include a hammer and chisel, but first of all, you need a pencil," said the 84-year-old lifelong Smyrna resident. "You have to have an idea. You write the idea down. Then, you make 10 more."

Choosing the "best of the best" of those intentions is how a work develops, he added.

It's a procedure that has worked well for the artist, who has sold more than 800 carvings since he began sculpting as a child.

"What really got me started was when I went to First Presbyterian Church, where my mother was a Sunday school teacher," he said. "So, I asked God, 'What do you want me to do?' He said, 'I want you to work in stone.'"

From that point on, Mr. Bailey determined that it's "fun working for God because he supplies all I need."

His first sculpture was a 100-pound marble rendition of President Abraham Lincoln's head, which Mr. Bailey said took two years to complete and is housed at his residence.

"I love to cut with a hammer and chisel. It's so much fun to knock the rock off and then beat it," he explained. "It's a labor of love to finish the rock. You have to really love the stone to do all the work that has to be done."

"You start with a very coarse grit, and you go to a very, very fine grit, and it's labor-intensive."

Working in the medium has also allowed him to travel near and far to find usable stones — places like Ver-

mont, Arizona, Florida, Maine and Colorado, Mr. Bailey said.

During his sculpting journey, he studied at the Delaware Art Center in Wilmington; The Art Students League and The New School for So-

cial Research in New York City; and in Carrara, Italy. Plus, he's taught stone-sculpting classes for Smyrna High School and the Rehoboth Art

• See **Sculpting** on page 35



At home in Smyrna, Richard Bailey holds a fish he sculpted from marble. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

Sculpting

Continued From Page 34

League.

And, while selling marble tabletops to more than 100 antiques dealers during his career, he also authored a 204-page, 175-picture book, "A Sculptor's Miracles."

Those interested in his artwork can view a 10-piece display at the Smyrna Opera House, 7 W. South St. In addition, Mr. Bailey has rough-

ly 200 items for sale, which can be seen via appointment at his 90 Smyrna Landing Road home.

He offers marble top replacements and finishing services for antiques, as well.

For information, email marbleartman@gmail.com, call 302-653-4810 or 302-399-9777, or visit richardh-bailey.com.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



Richard Bailey stands next to his first sculpture, a rendering of Abraham Lincoln created in 1963. For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/ CRAIG ANDERSON

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COMMUNITY

Carry the Load feels the love in Smyrna

Memorial Day proponents make stop in First State

By Craig Anderson

Middletown Smyrna Independent

SMYRNA — While the Carry the Load bus arrived behind schedule May 1, its travelers were no less welcomed when stopping for the night at Pratt Farm Lodge.

The bus was greeted by members of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8801 and others, who provided food, drink and an opportunity to freshen up.

Jason Santos, the East Coast manager for the Carry the Load national event, said he and the contingent were grateful.

“The Smyrna-Clayton (area), really over the years, has been just fantastic,” he said. “We were greeted with open arms, and it feels like home.”

Mr. Santos and his travel partners are on a mission to promote the virtues of Memorial Day with a trip that began April 28 in West Point, New York, and concludes in Dallas on May 26.

Twelve national cemeteries are on the list of stops, as well, he said.

“Our primary mission is to restore the true mission of Memorial Day — providing awareness and just giving the people the opportunity to reflect on what the day is about, the sacrifices of those who have gone before us,” he added.

“And not just the sacrifices of our military but also our hometown heroes, our first responders, our police, our firemen, (emergency medical services) and their families,” he said.

The day after the visitors arrived, Post 8801 leaders brought in various

veterans organizations to the Carry the Load gathering at their 4941 Wheatleys Pond Road location. The post has hosted the Memorial Day initiative every year since 2021.

Also, visitors could walk 1.8- or 4.2-mile loops to salute veterans who have died serving their country. Approximately 150 people took part in the event in some way, spokesperson Arlene Collier-Mankin said.

According to its website, “Carry The Load is a non-profit organization that exists to preserve the sanctity of Memorial Day through community gatherings and storytelling to unite Americans in appreciation for the sacrifices made by a few who carried the load for all.

“What started in 2011 as a grassroots effort by two veteran U.S. Navy SEALs has now grown into a nationwide movement with people honor-

ing and remembering our nation’s heroes throughout the year.”

For information, visit carrytheload.org.

Staff writer Craig Anderson can be reached at 302-741-8296 or canderson@iniusa.org. Follow @DSNAnderson on X.



Attending the Carry the Load event are, front row, from left, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8801 members Bruce Furman and Al Patillo. Back row, from left, are Stephen Williams Jr., Lisa Kochel and Arlene Collier-Mankin. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON



The Carry the Load bus visited Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8801 in Smyrna on May 1. For video with this story, visit baytobaynews.com. MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/CRAIG ANDERSON

MIDDLETOWN HIGH TRACK AND FIELD



Middletown High's boys won their first-ever DIAA Division I track and field title on May 17 at Dover High. The Cavaliers 800 meter relay team of Brandon Jervey, Logan Elmore, Zamir Miller and Messai Manor won the final event of the meet to clinch the title. PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDDLETOWN HIGH TRACK AND FIELD



Middletown High's girls finished second at the DIAA Division I track and field meet May 17 at Dover High. Taylor Stone won the 100- and 300-meter hurdle titles, and the high jump. PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDDLETOWN HIGH TRACK AND FIELD

MIDDLETOWN HIGH TRACK AND FIELD



Zamir Miller was part of Middletown High's boys track and field state championship squad. SPECIAL TO THE MIDDLETOWN SMYRNA INDEPENDENT/GARY EMEIGH



Middletown High's Taylor Stone won three individual state championships. PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDDLETOWN TRACK AND FIELD

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