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## RECOGNIZED FOR SERVICE

Ocean Pines Association General Manager John Viola recognizes Lisa Jarman's 15 years of service. She was one of several employees whose efforts on behalf of the association were recognized at the staff holiday luncheon at the Yacht Club on Dec. 19. In addition to Jarman, other long-time employees who marched to the podium were Debbie Donahue, 15 years, Earl Hall, 20 years, Nobie Violante, 25 years, James Brasure, 30 years, and Robert Grant, 30 years.

# OP assessments could go up

Increase of \$40 possible, with \$25 of it being used to help pay for firehouse

By Tara Fischer  
 Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) The Ocean Pines Association's proposed fiscal year 2026/2027 budget could raise membership assessment fees by \$40, if the community's board of directors approves the spending plan later this year.

Ocean Pines Association General Manager John Viola said during the neighborhood's Dec. 20 board of directors meeting that the new budget for the upcoming fiscal year may raise the

homeowner's association fees by about \$40.

Of the proposed \$40 assessment increase, approximately \$25 would be dedicated to funding the community's new firehouse. Viola described the cost as "moderate" given the scope of the project.

"With all the pre-planning and all the work, we have a very good building, and everybody will be happy," Viola said.

The community is gearing up to construct a new fire house, an initiative that will replace the existing structure located at 911 Ocean Parkway. The updated building will be situated at the same address.

The replacement of the Ocean Pines

Volunteer Fire Department's South Side Station has been a desire of the community for some time. The original structure, which officials say is now inadequate to properly service the fire and EMS teams, was built in 1981.

Besides leaks, drainage issues, and mold concerns, the existing structure's engine bay doors are a mere 12 feet wide and not spacious enough to fit the modern, and much larger, fire trucks. The new building will address these complaints, with the cost split between OPA and the fire company. A referendum was passed during last summer's board of directors' election, which authorized the community to spend up to \$3.4 million

See EARLY Page 3

## Berlin begins police chief recruitments

Town names interim chief to fill in following departure of long-time Chief Downing

By Tara Fischer  
 Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) The Town of Berlin is officially searching for the next Chief of Police, announcing the job posting for the department's leadership position has been released following Chief Arnold Downing's retirement.

A Dec. 26 press release notes that town officials are seeking "qualified candidates to advance the department's focus on community-centered policing, public safety, and operational excellence."

The announcement comes amid a leadership transition following the retirement of longtime Police Chief Arnold Downing last month. Lt. Robert Fisher has been appointed Interim Chief of Police and will serve in that capacity until a permanent chief is selected, according to the municipality's announcement.

Officials say that Fisher brings "extensive experience" to the role and is committed to prioritizing "community partnerships and upholding the department's core mission and values of integrity, respect, and service."

Fisher has served with the Berlin Police Department for about 30 years. During that time, he has taken on a variety of roles, including collision reconstructionist, drone operator, and member of the department's bicycle patrol unit. He previously served on the Town of Berlin SWAT team and is also a certified firearms instructor.

In addition to his operational background, Fisher has contributed to the

See CHIEF Page 3

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# Early budget review reveals assessments could increase

Continued from Page 1 on the project.

The new fire house is set to break ground in February and will take about 60 weeks to complete. Of the \$40 hit homeowners could soon take on their assessments, the majority of those dollars will go toward the creation of the enhanced facility.

The remaining \$15 of the proposed assessment increase would address higher water and wastewater costs. Viola explained that the Ocean Pines Association recently received a rate increase similar to what individual homeowners are experiencing. A portion of the increase was allocated to Touch of Italy, the community's food and beverage vendor overseeing the three OPA establishments. Homeowners could also be on the hook for the rate hike, seeing about

\$15 extra reflected in their assessments. Some of that cost, Viola said, has been offset through proposed amenity increases.

Viola added that public safety continues to be a major driver in the association's budget. He noted that safety-related costs now account for approximately 43% of the assessment, a significant increase from roughly 22% about a decade ago. That boost reflects factors such as police pension equivalents, the new firehouse, and what the general manager described as "organic growth" in expenses.

A public town hall meeting to discuss the proposed budget will be scheduled later this month. The OPA Board of Directors is expected to vote on the fiscal year 2026/2027 budget in February.

# Chief of police search starts in Berlin; Interim appointed

Continued from Page 1

department's administrative functions. His experience includes supporting budget development and management. The interim chief has also played a part in the hiring and promotion processes.

The Dec. 26 press release states that this combination of policing experience and leadership positions will enable Fisher to provide stability during the search for the permanent police chief.

"Berlin's police department remains focused on protecting and serving those who live, work, and visit the Town of Berlin," Berlin Mayor Zack Tyndall said in the municipality's statement. "I am encouraged by the level of interest we have already received in the Chief of Police position and confident that Interim Chief Fisher will provide steady leadership throughout this transition while we complete a thorough and thoughtful search for the department's next chief."

The Chief of Police job posting is available on the Town of Berlin's website at [berlinmd.gov/employment](http://berlinmd.gov/employment), where interested candidates can review the position's qualifications, responsibilities, and application procedures. Town officials have not released a timeline for when a permanent chief is expected to be named. The position's salary range is advertised as \$102,273 to \$124,612.

The current search follows the retirement of Chief Arnold Downing, who has served the town for more than three decades. Earlier this month, the Berlin Mayor and Council formally honored Downing during a Dec. 8 council meeting as he prepared to step down from his role.

At the meeting, Tyndall reflected on Downing's long career and his own professional history working alongside him in multiple capacities, including as a

paramedic, councilmember, and mayor.

"On behalf of all of us, I do want to say thank you for your service," Tyndall said at the time. "Decades of service to the Town of Berlin and to the citizens, capping a fundamental career as the chief of police. We couldn't have asked for a better person to serve in that capacity."

Downing began his career with the Berlin Police Department on Aug. 26, 1991. He was appointed acting chief of police in February 2000 and officially named chief in December 2002, becoming both the first African American administrator and the first African American Chief of Police in the department's history.

During his tenure, the department expanded significantly, launching specialized units such as SWAT, a traffic reconstruction unit, five K9 teams, a drone unit, a Defensive Tactics Instruction Team, and a Firearms Training Unit. Downing also championed officer wellness and professional development, spearheading initiatives including enrollment in the Law Enforcement Officer Pension System, a take-home car program, and specialized pay incentives.

One of the most visible accomplishments of his administration was the opening of the new Berlin Police Station in 2018, a project that modernized the department's infrastructure and supported future growth.

Beyond policing, Downing served as a founding member of the Worcester County Child Advocacy Center and as a member of the Lower Shore CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and Worcester Youth and Family Counseling Services.

Those interested in the Berlin Police Department's open leadership role are encouraged to apply.



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# OPA considers board election modifications

The Ocean Pines Board of Directors to weigh changes to summer voting process

**By Tara Fischer**  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2025) The Ocean Pines Board of Directors election could look different next year if the directors approve procedural changes proposed on the last meeting of 2025.

A first reading of potential modifications to the elections and referendum procedures was held at the Ocean Pines Association's monthly meeting on Saturday, Dec. 20. Jeff Heavner, board secretary, outlined the proposed adjustments and explained that the elections committee made the suggestions based on last year's voting cycle.

Each year during the summer months, OPA holds an election for the homeowner association's seven-person board of directors. Those chosen to the seats serve three-year staggered terms. The volunteer committee overseeing these elections has proposed changes based on complications and opportunities for improvement observed during the 2025 board selection process.

"Changes will correct difficulties encountered during the elections process this year," Heavner said.

The first change would involve moving up the candidate filing deadline in certain instances. Currently, when the number of candidates doesn't exceed the number of vacancies available by two, the filing period is extended to accommodate the solicitation of additional candidates.

Under this existing standard, for the upcoming year's board election, if the number of candidates does not meet the criteria, the period to solicit additional filings runs from June 1 to June 19.

The change would tighten the nearly three-week timeframe. Instead, the period to encourage additional candidates would be about seven business days. For the 2026 election, the extended filing deadline would be June 9, rather than June 19.

"This excessive time period was found to adversely affect the proper time of significant voting process events," Heavner said.

Another proposed modification would reduce the hours available for association members to cast their ballots. The new voting deadline would change from the close of regular association hours to noon on the Wednesday before the annual meeting.

Heavner explained that the current timing can complicate overnight

delivery of ballots to the election contractor. Last year, the association partnered with the Pittsburgh-based firm MK Election Services.

Furthermore, the revised resolution would add more detailed guidance on preparing ballots for the association's secure drop box, which is housed at the community's police station, for the weeks leading up to the voting deadline. The updated instructions aim to eliminate confusion that occurred during the 2025 election, Heavner said.

Lastly, if the recommended adjust-

ments pass, the updated resolution will clarify that the post-election committee meeting must occur no later than five days after the annual meeting, typically held in August, a few days following the election to certify results, replacing the current vague timing of "the day of the annual meeting or as soon as possible afterward."

A second reading of the proposed election procedural changes is scheduled for the association's next board of directors meeting, on Saturday, Jan. 24 at 9 a.m.

## Ocean Pines staff honored for milestone anniversaries

(Jan. 1, 2025) Several Ocean Pines Association staff members were recognized for their years of dedicated service during the annual Holiday Luncheon, held Friday, December 19, at the Ocean Pines Yacht Club.

The following employees were honored for reaching milestone service anniversaries:

- Joe Bailey – 5 years
- Sandra Milito – 5 years
- Dustin Berkey – 5 years

- David Quinones – 5 years
- Michelle Hitchens – 10 years
- Lisa Jarman – 15 years
- Debbie Donahue – 15 years
- Earl Hall – 20 years
- Nobie Violante – 25 years
- James Brasure – 30 years
- Robert Grant – 30 years

Ocean Pines Association General Manager John Viola thanked staff members for their continued dedication and commitment to serving the Ocean Pines community.

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# Food and beverage initiatives on track in OP

Pines officials say projects to enhance establishments will continue over winter

**By Tara Fischer**  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) Last month, the Ocean Pines Association Board of Directors received updates on several major capital projects, including ongoing improvements to the community's food and beverage facilities.

At the Ocean Pines Board of Directors meeting on Dec. 20, OPA General Manager John Viola said that the planned food and beverage-related initiatives, in partnership with Ocean Pines restaurant operator Touch of Italy, were reported as moving forward, with the projects maintaining a "green" status.

The projects to remain on track include an outdoor pavilion at the neighborhood's Clubhouse Bar and Grille. Viola said OPA is continuing to work with TOI and Vista Design, with construction expected to begin this winter and finish in May, just in time to welcome patrons for the summer season. He added that some interior work is also being planned for the bar area.

In October, the board approved

proceeding with the Clubhouse's pavilion engineering designs from Vista Designs for \$51,000. That project will include the construction of an outdoor shade structure where golfers can pick up refreshments during their rounds. Officials maintain that the pavilion will speed up play, as golfers can quickly grab drinks or a snack at the new space rather than going all the way inside.

Touch of Italy owner Bob Ciprietti said at the October meeting, where the initiative was green-lit, that a potential menu at the new facility could include hot dogs, burgers, and wraps.

The Yacht Club kitchen project also remains in good standing, Viola said. According to the general manager, meetings have been held with TOI and Vista Designs, and contractors have already expressed interest.

"Hopefully they will be able to start doing their work," Viola said, noting the anticipated project timeline of this winter through May.

For the Yacht Club, the endeavor will include installing an outdoor structure, a pizza oven, and a grill to improve service at the pool and outdoor deck. In October, the board unanimously approved proceeding with the procurement of engineering drawings from Vista Design for

\$40,800. At this meeting, Ciprietti said that this past summer posed challenges in maintaining quality service while keeping the food fresh.

"It was hard to keep the food hot, no matter what we tried," Ciprietti said. "The thought is if we had a really good outside kitchen there, we could create a better experience for everybody and improve not only the food service but the drink service."

Furthermore, plans for the Ocean Pines Beach Club in Ocean City remain in the planning phase, though construction has been pushed back. Viola said Touch of Italy originally intended to complete some work on the lower level this winter, but has since delayed that portion of the project.

"[Ciprietti] updated me the other day and said they probably won't do that until next year along with the other work upstairs," Viola said.

While construction is now expected to occur next year, Viola said planning, permitting, and related preparations will continue in the meantime.

The project will include remodeling the entire first floor, including a new kitchen and bar. The Beach Club will also receive a new restaurant on the second floor with an ocean-view deck. Furthermore, the downstairs area will receive an upgraded deck

with a tiki-bar-style structure.

An elevator will also be added to ensure the facility remains compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

In October, the OPA board voted to proceed with obtaining basement plans and engineering designs for the Beach Club from Atlantic Planning and Development for \$75,000. Officials said at the time that the improvement work had been long overdue.

"So everyone knows that building, if you have been over there, that building is tired," said OPA Board President John Latham. "We were going to spend money on it anyway. Having a partner to share those expenses will be nice."

The Beach Club, Yacht Club, and Clubhouse projects are part of an effort to upgrade Ocean Pines' food and beverage facilities, with costs shared between OPA and Touch of Italy. Under the agreement, Ocean Pines is responsible for structural improvements, while TOI funds interior components such as kitchens and bar equipment.

Once the architectural and engineering plans are finalized, OPA staff will solicit construction bids and present the final cost figures to the board for review and approval.



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# Project timeline moved up at OP golf course

By Tara Fischer  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) The Ocean Pines Association's Board of Directors unanimously approved a \$406,000 capital request last month to accelerate portions of the irrigation system replacement at the community's golf course.

Ocean Pines Association General Manager John Viola and Golf Course Superintendent Justin Hartshorne presented the request at OPA's Board of Directors meeting on Saturday, Dec. 20.

The pair explained that while the work was already scheduled over a four-year timeframe, moving some sections forward now would allow the association to achieve cost efficiencies and address the most significant problem areas.

The irrigation replacement project began in 2024 and focuses on updating the neighborhood golf course's

over 50-year-old failing irrigation system. Phase one included work on hole one, the fourth tee, hole nine, the practice range, and the pump station, for a total cost of \$934,000.

The second phase, currently underway, covers holes four through eight and is expected to finish around March 2026, with a projected cost of \$810,500.

Now, rather than having the vendors hired to work on the initiative leave only to return later, officials have said they will use the contractors already on site to complete other planned portions of the irrigation replacement project. The hope is that this strategy will optimize efficiency.

"We've been phasing in the project," Hartshorne said. "We have just been piecing together, as we go, different sections of the golf course. So, we're basically looking to, while we have the

contractor on site already doing work, rebid other phases and look at different prices. And based on the bid numbers, if they're good, then instead of mobilizing the contractors again, we use them to complete another section of the project."

Viola emphasized that the project's overall scope has not changed.

"The plan was, we were planning this over four years, which we're still on track," he said. "Again, we found out from dealing with it that we can actually get efficiencies, a better price, while they're here, and we can take care of certain areas where the leaks are the worst. We labeled it as emergency, and we still stand by that."

Board member Elaine Brady clarified that this adjustment affects timing, not the project's scope or total price tag.

"The entire scope of the project is not changing," Brady said. "It's just that you're bringing some other ones in earlier, one for efficiency, and probably to save a little bit of money. Not that we're adding to the project, it's just that the timing has changed."

Viola agreed, saying the modification is designed to save money and streamline work. Following the discussion, the board voted unanimously to approve the \$406,000 expenditure for the irrigation work.

In addition to irrigation improvements, the association has identified other ways to improve OPA's golf course. For instance, at a board of directors meeting in November, Viola said his team is upgrading tee boxes at holes one, two, seven, and eight with Iron Cutter Bermuda grass turf, which the general manager maintained is more durable under periods of heavy play.

Some fairways will also receive the same turf to prevent damage from puddling caused by excessive rainfall followed by boiling from the hot sun, a common issue in late summer on the Eastern Shore.

The accelerated irrigation work is expected to begin in February or March. The contractor is already on site, which officials say will maintain project momentum.

## Investigation reveals house fire in Pocomoke was arson

(Jan. 1, 2025) Arson charges have been filed after a residential fire in Pocomoke last weekend.

At approximately 1:40 p.m. on Dec. 28, Worcester County Emergency Services received a 911 call from a resident in the 400 block of Linden Avenue, reporting that her house was on fire, and she was trapped on the second floor.

A Pocomoke City police officer, a Pocomoke City EMS clinician and a Pocomoke City volunteer firefighter arrived on scene within minutes. These three were able to force entry into the residence and rescue the victim. Firefighters from the Pocomoke City Volunteer Fire Company arrived shortly after and controlled the blaze.

The victim sustained serious injuries and was flown by Maryland State Police Aviation Command to

Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore for further treatment.

Investigators from the Worcester County Fire Marshal's Office responded to the incident. Investigators were able to determine the fire had started inside the residence and was incendiary.

Investigators identified a person of interest, Margaret Jane Benchama.

At around 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 28, Benchama was located and detained. Worcester County Fire Marshal's Office investigators interviewed Benchama, during which she admitted to starting the fire intentionally.

Worcester County Deputy Fire Marshals arrested Benchama on charges of first-degree arson and second-degree arson. She was transported to the Worcester County Jail, where she is currently being held without bond.

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# Land added to Bay Club restoration project

**By Tara Fischer**  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) A 41-acre property off Evans Road near Berlin has officially been added to Maryland's Chesapeake Forest Lands, expanding public access and strengthening conservation efforts tied to the former Bay Club golf course, now known as the Libertytown Branch Tract.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) finalized the acquisition of the property on Nov. 21, 2025, using funding from Program Open Space, a Maryland land-conservation initiative. The parcel connects directly to the 672-acre Libertytown Branch Tract, which was purchased with assistance from the Lower Shore Land Trust and transferred to DNR ownership in 2023.

A press release announcing the acquisition states that the newly acquired land will support the original vision for the Libertytown Branch Tract: public use for community connection, recreational activities, and environmental restoration.

According to the announcement, DNR plans to use approved stabilization funds to improve access to the property, protect water quality, maintain land integrity, and support future trail connections. Once infrastructure is in place, residents will be able to access the forest directly from Berlin for activities such as hiking, birdwatching, and horseback riding.

The acquisition has been described

as a win for both the community and the environment. The parcel supports restoration of forest, wetland, and grassland habitats while buffering critical areas for Forest Interior Dwelling Species — birds that rely on large, uninterrupted forest tracts to survive. The surrounding region has been designated an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society.

In addition to habitat protection, planned restoration projects for the Libertytown Branch Tract include reforestation initiatives, such as an 18.5-acre pollinator meadow and constructed wetlands, to improve local ecosystem health and water quality.

The environmental endeavor has been ongoing. Last year, initiative leaders hosted an information ses-

sion on Jan. 16. Here, officials provided project updates and outlined their mission with the Bay Club transformation.

Alex Clark of the MD DNR Forest Service said at the time that work already completed at the site included the removal of infrastructure like buildings and pavement, the majority of the parking lot construction, and planting trees across 62 acres. Officials have also coordinated with the Berlin and Ocean Pines fire companies to provide them with easy access to the property in the case of emergencies.

Other priorities included finishing touches on the parking area, additional signage, more cleanup, particularly collecting all the golf balls that have found their way into the space's ponds, and working with DNR engi-

neers to ensure the property's bridges are structurally sound.

Community members are encouraged to get involved in the project. Those interested in lending a hand are invited to attend quarterly meetings of the Friends of Libertytown Branch, held at the Berlin Library. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 12, at 6:30 p.m. Residents can also contact the Lower Shore Land Trust to learn about volunteer opportunities and ways to support ongoing conservation efforts.

The property remains open for exploration as trail systems continue to be developed.

For more information, contact the Lower Shore Land Trust at 443-234-5587 or visit [LowerShoreLandTrust.org](http://LowerShoreLandTrust.org).

## Grants available for local groups

(Jan. 2, 2026) Worcester County Government (WCG) is accepting grant applications from area non-profit agencies now through Friday, January 23, 2026.

Applications are available to download as a PDF at [www.co.worcester.md.us](http://www.co.worcester.md.us). Once there, the link to the Non-Profit Grant Application can be found under "Important Links" on the right-hand side of the web page.

Completed grant applications should be mailed to the following address: Worcester County Government, One West Market Street, Room 1103, Snow Hill Maryland, 21863, Attention: Senior Budget Accountant Lynn Wright

Applications received after the deadline will not be considered, and applying for a non-profit grant is not a guarantee of funding approval from WCG. Grant awards will be announced by mail following the adoption of the FY27 WCG Operating Budget in June 2026.

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# Fire engulfs property located outside Berlin

(Jan. 1, 2025) Six area fire companies responded to an active fire outside Berlin on Saturday.

On Dec. 27, around noon, the Showell Volunteer Fire Company was dispatched to the 8200 block of Circle Road for a reported residential structure fire. Assisting Showell on the initial dispatch were Berlin, Bishopville, and Willards Volunteer Fire Companies.

Upon arrival, fire was reported extending from the right rear of a single-story residential dwelling. Due to the volume of fire and the need for additional water in a non-fire hydrant area, a tanker task force was requested.

The need for more water brought additional units to the scene from the Ocean Pines, Powellville, Pittsville, Ocean City and Selbyville Volunteer Fire Companies.

The dwelling was not occupied at the time of the fire. Firefighters worked for several hours to bring the fire under control and remained on scene for approximately four hours.

Deputies from the Worcester County Fire Marshal's Office responded to conduct an origin and cause investigation. After examining



SUBMITTED PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

A residence on Circle Road north of Berlin is pictured last Saturday. Investigators determined the incident was accidental and electrical in nature.

the scene, investigators determined the fire originated in a bedroom and the cause of the fire was determined to be accidental and electrical in nature.

The Ocean City Fire Marshal's Office assisted with investigation efforts at the scene.

No injuries were reported. The single occupant of the residence is being assisted by the American Red Cross.

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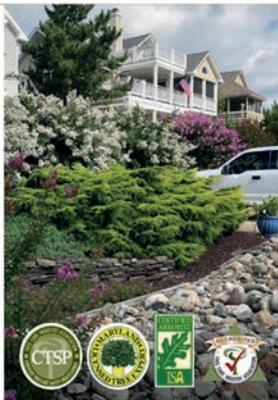
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PHOTOS COURTESY OF WORCESTER COUNTY FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

One of the two recovered former military ordnances is pictured above and below is what the specific type looks like when not subjected to the ocean for decades.

## Military ordnances recently found in Worcester County

(Jan. 1, 2025) Two unexploded military ordnances were recovered by authorities on Sunday.

On Dec. 28, at approximately 8:35 a.m., the Worcester County Fire Marshal's Office was requested to assist the National Park Service at Assateague Island National Seashore following the recovery of a suspected unexploded military ordnance.

Later that afternoon, a second suspected unexploded military ordnance was recovered at a residence on Greenwood Lane in the Ocean Pines community.

The device recovered in Ocean Pines was determined to have originated from Assateague Island and had been transported from the National Seashore to the residence by a member of the public.

Bomb squad units from the Ocean City Fire Marshal's Office responded and coordinated with the United States Air Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team from Dover

Air Force Base, 436th Civil Engineer Squadron. Following evaluation, both devices were believed to be M29A1 Practice Rockets or a variation of the same, a type of military training ordnance commonly known as the "Super Bazooka."

Assateague Island was historically used as a military bombing and training range during

World War II, and unexploded military ordnance may still be present in certain areas.

ent in certain areas. Although designated as "practice" munitions, these devices can still pose serious safety hazards.

Both devices were rendered safe and disposed of properly by EOD personnel. There were no injuries reported in either incident.

The Worcester County Fire Marshal's Office strongly reminds the public that unexploded military ordnance and suspicious devices are extremely dangerous.

Members of the public should never touch, move, or transport any suspected ordnance. If an unfamiliar or suspicious object is discovered, individuals should immediately leave the area and call 911 so trained personnel can respond safely.



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# Mitreic pitches combining school districts

By **Brian Shane**  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) With the promise of state funding for public schools not necessarily assured in the near future, Worcester County Commissioner Joe Mitreic is making an audacious pitch for a money-saving endeavor: consolidate two southern-end school districts into one.

Mitreic said Dec. 16 he believes his elected peers in years past “made a mistake” by authorizing separate middle and high schools for the neighboring towns of Snow Hill and Pocomoke City instead of combining them – decisions he said cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

At his request, the county commissioners last month unanimously agreed to send a letter to the board of education asking officials to explore what such a consolidation might entail. The vote was, 6-0, with Commissioner Diana Purnell absent.

“I know this is a radical thought and, again, I don’t want everybody to get crazy about it,” Mitreic said during the meeting’s open comment period. “This would be the first step in just getting some kind of idea of what would be necessary.”

Added Mitreic: “I know that there’s tradition and there’s people that are gonna chastise me for just that – tradition and all. But we just see the budget soaring.”

He noted that south-end schools are far less populated than northern Worcester schools, a factor he said contributes to the county having the second highest per-pupil spending in the state.

Six of the county’s 14 schools serve students from Snow Hill and Pocomoke City. This academic year, those schools have a combined enrollment of 2,487 students – about 35% of the county’s 6,970 total students, according to school district spokeswoman Carrie Sterrs.

Mitreic (District 7, Ocean City) said he felt moved to propose this “very exploratory and preliminary” idea after attending last week’s winter conference of the Maryland Association of Counties in Cambridge.

There, he sat in on a symposium focused on the complexities of paying for school construction and the potential funding gap counties face as state revenue shortfalls persist. The discussion included direct input from the head of the state’s gatekeeper commission on school construction funding.

“After that seminar,” Mitreic said, “it became very clear that the cost of us maintaining our schools, and building new schools possibly in the future, is going to be borne by the taxpayers of Worcester County.”

State lawmakers in recent years have shifted more unfunded mandates onto counties in an effort to rein in state costs.

Those include increased cost-sharing for property tax collection, wrongful conviction lawsuit payouts, and a mandatory minimum teacher salary of \$60,000 by the 2026-27 school year.

The end result could have a wide-ranging and massive impact on Worcester County Public Schools: reductions in teachers and staff, fewer bus routes and drivers, and less spending on facilities maintenance and food service, among other outcomes. Mitreic said any staffing cuts would occur through attrition and that no one should lose their job.

Athletics could disappear for either the Warriors or Eagles – a gut punch to the identities of the Pocomoke and Snow Hill communities, respectively, should their alma maters ever be shuttered.

Mitreic stressed that the final decision would rest with the board of education and that the idea is a very, very long-term play – one that could take two decades to materialize.

“If you started it today, it would take 12 years for it to start to wean itself out, to just one school district. I certainly don’t want to pile all the kids into one school from both areas today – I understand the problems that could bring on,” Mitreic told OC Today-Dispatch.

“If it took effect today, the ones that are in kindergarten today would graduate in separate schools. The ones that start kindergarten next year

would graduate together,” he added.

Spokeswoman Kim Moses said the Worcester County spent \$28.1 million on Worcester Technical High School in 2007, \$35 million for an addition and renovation of Pocomoke High School in 2008, and \$43 million for an addition and renovation of Snow Hill High School in 2013. Both high schools were built in 1958 on the same blueprint.

Moving forward, it will be up to school officials to dictate a response.

“I look forward not only to discussing this more fully with the commissioners to understand their position, but to gather insight from those communities to inform any long-range decisions about our community-based schools,” Superintendent Annette Wallace said in a statement.

Board of Education President Todd Ferrante, when reached for comment, noted the state’s wealth-based funding formulas leave Worcester County with the second-lowest level of school funding statewide. He declined to comment on the consolidation proposal until the board receives the commissioners’ letter.

“At this point, the commissioners have made a request, and we’ll certainly look into it and we’ll get back to them,” he said.

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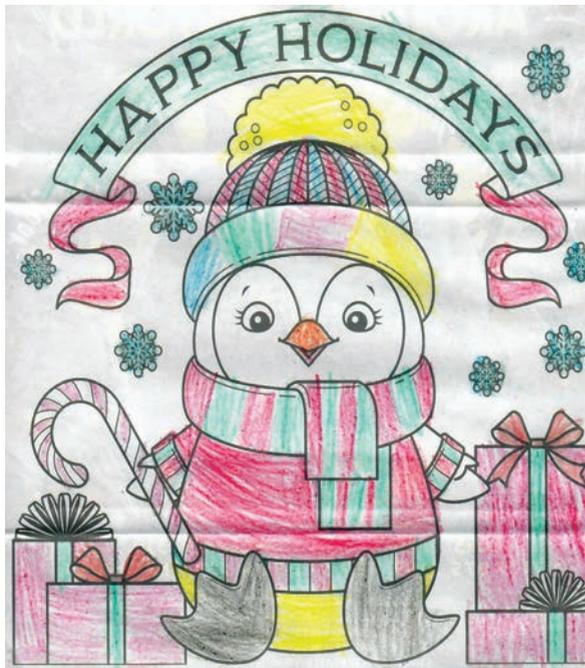


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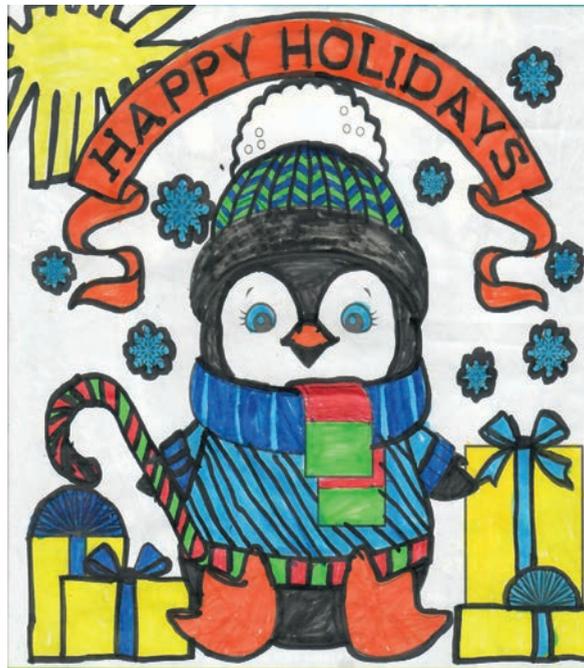
Below are the winners.

### Winner Ages 5 & Under



**Cali Clites**  
Age: 5

### Winner Ages 6-9



**Carter John Sears**  
Age: 8

### Winner Ages 10-12



**Aubrey Banach**  
Age: 11



# Sheriff's salary move nixed by commission

## County officials support Crisafulli's request for new body camera contract

**By Brian Shane**  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) Sheriff Matt Crisafulli's request to increase starting salaries for new hires recruited as transfers from other law enforcement agencies went nowhere with the Worcester County Commissioners last month.

Crisafulli had asked to increase deputy pay by 5%, for entry-level deputy sheriff to sergeant. That would bump annualized starting pay from \$63,132 to \$66,210, or \$31.83 an hour.

The sheriff also sought to increase pay by another 2.5% specifically for veteran police officers hired laterally from other police agencies.

Crisafulli told the commissioners at the Dec. 16 meeting how he didn't bring up the mid-year budget request lightly, and that he's driven by real-time staffing needs and "not by convenience."

"If we cannot compete now, those experienced deputies, will already be hired elsewhere," he told the commissioners.

The Worcester County Sheriff's Of-

fice is down 12 positions, including vacant posts and staff on medical leave. Another two deputies expected to join the force soon are still in the police academy, according to the sheriff.

Crisafulli said the \$354,281 cost would be largely offset by existing vacancies, bringing the net cost this fiscal year to \$106,239.

The sheriff had tried a month ago to bring this same request before county leaders, but that discussion was tabled by a vote of the commissioners at the request of Commissioner Caryn Abbott, who said she needed more information.

Following this latest rejection, the sheriff's office must now sit tight until the annual budget cycle reboots in the spring before making any new funding requests. Crisafulli told OC Today-Dispatch that the denial will stymie his hiring efforts by "potentially a year or two."

Police departments across Delmarva lately have been locked in a de facto arms race for hiring, offering increasingly starting pay and incentives to recruit from an ever-shrinking pool of candidates – a battle that Crisafulli says his office is losing.

Two Worcester deputies have quit this year to join other departments for

more pay, while other lateral candidates abandoned applications with Worcester County to follow more money elsewhere, according to the sheriff. At the same time, a handful of experienced deputies this year opted to retire early.

When it comes to hiring, Crisafulli drew a stark contrast between old hands and fresh horses: New recruits face a steep learning curve during their first to three years on the job – and that's after navigating the lengthy process of background testing, academy training, and field instruction.

Veteran sheriff's deputies, on the other hand, arrive fluent in police work, understand the culture of law enforcement, and may bring institutional knowledge.

Crisafulli said he started having these conversations with the commissioners months ago.

"We tried to explain to them that all of these other agencies were increasing their pay packages – they were laden with incentives and that we needed to start to do something now, just to be competitive," the sheriff said. "We weren't asking to be the highest paid. We were asked to get into a competitive bracket."

Commissioner Joe Mitrecic moved to approve the sheriff's request and Commissioner Eric Fiori seconded the motion. However, with Commis-

sioner Diana Purnell absent Tuesday, the motion died in a 3-3 tie vote. There was no discussion on the dais.

"Yes" votes came from Mitrecic, Fiori, and Abbott. "No" votes came from Commissioners Jim Bunting, Ted Elder, and Chip Bertino.

Following the vote, Bertino (District 5, Ocean Pines) was quick to note he's open to talking about this again when the county ramps up its financial planning for the new fiscal year. "At budget time, this is a conversation we should have, and I hope you bring it back," he told the sheriff.

Axon contract upgrade OK'd

Also at the Dec. 16 meeting, the last of the calendar year, the commissioners approved the sheriff's request in a 6-0 vote giving him permission to update a contract with body camera provider Axon.

The four-year agreement adds an artificial intelligence software bundle to the county's existing body camera contract with Axon. Crisafulli said by signing the contract now, the manufacturer will honor a proposed discount of \$420,000, bringing the contract addendum to \$1 million.

The sheriff added that his signing the updated contract now amounts to a "placeholder" and he'll bring the fine print of the deal back before the commissioners for review in the near future.

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### WOR-WIC AWARD WINNERS

Wor-Wic Community College recently honored four employees with Excellence in Service Awards. The awards recognized those who have gone above and beyond to support students and the college's mission, foster a sense of camaraderie and positivity, contribute innovative ideas and play an active role in Wor-Wic's success. Above, Thelma Orr, a member of the Wor-Wic Foundation board of directors, and Deborah Casey, Ph.D., president of Wor-Wic Community College, along with Dr. Kimberly W. Purvis (at right), celebrate winners of Wor-Wic's Excellence in Service Awards Lindsay Bowen, Hope Ellis, Donna L. Yackley and Will Preneta.



SUBMITTED PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

### RWWC SDHS DONATION

The Republican Women of Worcester County presented a check for \$1,000 to Stephen Decatur High School Band Director Jimmy McKenzie to help with expenses toward the entire band's trip to Hawaii to participate in the Pearl Harbor Day parade on Dec. 7. Only one high school from each state was chosen to participate and march in the parade and the honor in Maryland was given to SDHS. Above, RWWC First Vice President Carol Frazier is seen presenting the check to McKinzie.



SUBMITTED PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

### LEGION BREAKFAST

During the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 166 November Sunday breakfast, members were happy to serve our ALA Dept of MD President Kyrese Johnson, American Legion Maryland Department Commander Nikki Carnes Randolph and ALA Eastern Division National Vice President Ree Ann Ross, along with other ALA members from across the state who attended the annual conference in Ocean City. Pictured, from left, are Johnson and Auxiliary members Marie Gilmore, Marti Marron, Jessie Parsons and Penny Matthews.



SUBMITTED PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

### WPS COLLECTION DRIVE

On Friday, Dec. 12, students from Worcester Preparatory School (WPS) gathered to donate gifts collected for Worcester County GOLD (Giving Other Lives Dignity) in support of local families during the holiday season.

In addition to participating in the SGA Food Drive, Middle and Upper School students and volunteers chose to further give back by organizing a toy collection for Worcester County GOLD. The initiative reflects the WPS community's ongoing commitment to service and compassion for those in need. Worcester County GOLD, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for local citizens who lack access to traditional means of support. The organization promotes dignity by providing financial assistance to families in crisis, as well as to vulnerable adults and children in foster care.

Pictured, from left, are Head of School Dr. Betsy Hornung, Head of Middle School Jake Perry, students Lillian Ha, Brooklyn DeliGatti, Will Schlesinger, Chase Thompson, Tobi Blaska, Vivian Spraul and Head of Upper School Carol Evans.



SUBMITTED PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

### MALLARD BOWL WINNERS

This year's Mallard Bowl brought the excitement. On the Friday before Thanksgiving break, the Upper School came alive as students from all four classes battled it out for the coveted trophy. The event even included a fun halftime show that kept the energy high. The competition wrapped up with the Freshman class taking home the trophy to their class sponsor, Mrs. Zambori. Congratulations to the Freshmen, this year's Mallard Bowl Champions.



### AFTER SCHOOL ART CLUB

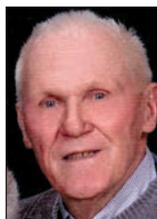
The After-School Art Club at Snow Hill Middle School, an outreach program of the nonprofit Art League of Ocean City, created "Tree of Life" artwork inspired by Gustav Klimt. Led by Mrs. Shockley, the students explored analogous colors and painted layers of "chaos," adding their own positive affirmations like courage, gratitude, and kindness.

SUBMITTED PHOTO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

# Obituaries

## WILLIAM RICHARD SERMAN Snow Hill

William "Bill" Richard Serman, of Snow Hill, MD a beloved figure in the hearts of many, passed away peacefully on December 23, 2025, at the age of 90. Born on May 9, 1935, in Ridgely, MD, to the late Carroll C. and Ida Mae (Roche) Serman.



William Serman

Bill worked for Worcester County Roads for 28 years. He began his career as a Heavy Equipment Operator and retired as Assistant Engineer, leaving behind a legacy of hard work and dedication. A proud veteran of the United States Air Force, Bill served as a K-9 handler in the Air Police, creating a lifelong bond with animals that resonated throughout his life. His passion for animals was evident as he raised dogs, cats, and chickens. Outside of work, Bill loved playing baseball and softball, was an avid coon hunter and a spirited go-kart racer, always seeking the thrill of adventure and the joy of a good story.

He leaves behind his loving wife of 66 years, Charlotte C. Serman: his

children, Katherine Serman Richey and William Gary Serman (Cynthia); brother, Joseph Serman; sisters, Betty Ann Bozman and Patsy Mulligan. He was a proud grandfather to William Thomas Serman, Katie Kidd (Josh), Emily Ann Serman, and Johnny Richey, and his great-grandchildren, Connor and Cooper Kidd.

A funeral service will be held at Trinity United Methodist Church, 8339 Newark Road, Newark, MD 21841 on Tuesday, December 30, 2025, at 12:00 PM where friends may call one hour before the service at the church.

He was preceded in death by a brother, Carroll Serman and a son-in-law, Sam Richey.

In lieu of flowers donations in his memory may be made to Trinity Garden of Memory, C/O Nancy Bounds,

P.O. Box 36, Newark, MD 21841 or Newark Vol. Fire Co., 8338 Newark Road, Newark, MD 21841.

Condolences may be sent by visiting [www.bishophastingsfh.com](http://www.bishophastingsfh.com).

## LINDA ABBOTT LYNCH Berlin

Linda Abbott Lynch, age 79, passed away on December 23, 2025 in Salisbury, Maryland. Born on July 25, 1946 in Salisbury, Maryland, she was the daughter of the late William Abbott and Eleanor (Hancock) Abbott.

Linda graduated from Stephen Decatur High School and attended Hood College. She married in 1967 and worked in the family business, the Commander Hotel, until officially retiring in 2015.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her son, John B.

Lynch, III.

She is survived by her beloved husband of 58 years, John Lynch, Jr., her son William Lynch, his wife Amanda and their children, Jack and John.

A service was held at Makemie Presbyterian Church in Snow Hill on Tuesday Dec. 30, 2025 at 2 p.m. with a one hour visitation prior to the service. A graveside was held at the conclusion of the service with a reception to follow inside the church.

Letters of condolence may be sent to the family via [www.burbagefuneralhome.com](http://www.burbagefuneralhome.com). Arrangements are in the care of The Burbage Funeral Home in Berlin.



Linda A. Lynch

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- 7 JAN 2:00PM-3:00PM MSO-101: DEMYSTIFYING THE SYMPHONY (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
This is the first of a four-session program at the Ocean Pines Branch. 410-208-4014.
- 8 JAN 2:00PM BINGO**  
Ocean City Branch.
- 14 JAN 2:00PM-3:00PM PASTA MAKING WORKSHOP (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
Hands-on pasta basics with pasta to take home at the Berlin Branch. 410-641-0650.
- 15 JAN 2:00PM-3:00PM HERBAL HEALTH (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
Explore herbal wellness & take home curated tea at the Pocomoke Branch. 410-957-0878.
- 15 JAN 4:30PM-5:30PM MD 250: COLONIAL SILHOUETTE CRAFT**  
107 W Green St., Snow Hill, MD.
- 20 JAN 2:00PM-3:00PM GLASS PAINTING (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
Local artist, Jean Frank, teaches us how to paint on glasses at the Ocean City Branch. 410-524-1818.
- 21 JAN 12:00PM-1:00PM LINKEDIN WORKSHOP**  
with Worcester County Tourism & Economic Development  
107 W Green St., Snow Hill, MD.
- 21 JAN 5:30PM-6:30PM MD 250: DECODING THE CENSUS (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
Virtual Program: Discover how census records can unlock your family's past. 410-632-3495.
- 22 JAN 2:00PM-3:00PM IN CONCERT: NOTES ON THE BEACH**  
Celebrate 50s & 60s music, from Elvis to the Beatles at the Ocean Pines Library.
- 23 JAN 10:00AM-11:00AM CAST 28 COFFEE TASTING & DEMONSTRATION (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
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- 28 JAN Register prior to Jan 28. VIRTUAL ESCAPE ROOM - WARSHIP MYSTERY (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)**  
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# Opinion

Please send all letters and other editorial submissions to editor@baysidegazette.com by 5 p.m. Monday.

## School investigation information shortage

As the rumor mill turns with greater momentum every day, facts are scarce about the apparent investigation into ... well, there's the problem.

Beyond knowing that the public school system is connected to whatever the Maryland State Prosecutor's office is looking into and that Worcester County sought the investigation into some aspect of the schools, there's not much definitive that can be said.

We have reported or are reporting on two searches the state office has conducted, one at the home of a school system employee and another the Worcester County Board of Education offices in Newark, but the most important factors — the what and why of it all — we don't know for a fact and no one who does know is talking.

One of the reasons for this reluctance is because an investigation is not an indictment. The former is the pursuit of answers, while the latter is an expression of belief based on those answers.

Until the state's investigators make their determination, the responsible approach dictates that it's better to say nothing than to say something that turns out to be wrong.

## Berlin looking outside

The Town of Berlin is doing the right thing by seeking its new police chief from outside the town's ranks, simply because it lets town officials work with a much deeper pool of talent.

This isn't to say the town's personnel aren't good at what they do, but the chances of finding the one person who ticks all the boxes rises in proportion to the number of resumes received.

This is a good, well paying job, and no one should be surprised if numerous qualified people in the region are considering applying for it. Here's hoping that the mayor and Town Council have a tough time deciding.

## Warning led to suspension

By Tara Fischer  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2025) Maryland drivers could have their licenses suspended if there is reason to believe a medical condition may affect their ability to drive safely — a state protocol that affected an Ocean Pines resident over the summer, following a routine traffic stop.

Larry Roberts, a former Ocean Pines resident who now lives in West Ocean City, shared the experience of his former neighbor, who was pulled over while searching for an address in the wooded community. Roberts said the woman, 83, had slowed to more than 10 miles per hour below the posted speed limit while looking for a dog groomer.

"The thing is, when you're looking for an address, a lot of places don't have their address posted," he said.

According to Roberts, the police officer who conducted the traffic stop issued only a warning. However, about a week later, the woman received a letter from the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) informing her that her license had been suspended pending medical and driving evaluations.

Roberts added that the letter indicated there was reason to believe a medical condition could affect the woman's ability to maneuver a vehicle safely, and that until required evaluations were satisfied, her driving privileges would remain revoked.

Roberts assisted his former neighbor in appealing the license suspension. At the MVA office in Salisbury, she completed written, cognitive, and physical analysis. She was then referred to additional testing from a contracted specialized driving assessment site near Queenstown. Here, the woman underwent further cognitive evaluations and behind-the-wheel examinations, which she was required to pay for. She was given another road test back at the Salisbury MVA.

Ultimately, Roberts' former neighbor was able to reinstate her driving privileges. However, the process was months-long, he said, beginning in June, when the traffic stop occurred, and concluding with the license being returned in November.

Roberts said that while the Ocean Pines woman's dilemma was a headache, he understood the intent but noted that he wishes the state would consider updates to expedite the procedure.

"I'm behind them 100% on trying to get some of these people off the road," he said. "...I did some reading on it and gained a little more understanding of what they're trying to do. We just went through the process as it's set up, but I think they need to fine-tune it. And I think it's something that the general population should know about."

Local law enforcement agencies said that the reason behind these occurrences is essential to protecting public safety.

Ocean Pines Police Chief Tim Robinson maintained that incidents like the one involving Roberts' friend are common and necessary to ensure all drivers are safe on the road and added

that his department's actions were consistent with statewide protocol.

"At times when doing traffic enforcement or conducting accident investigations, an officer may make observations or learn details that raise concerns about a driver's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle," he said. "The Maryland MVA has had a process in place where law enforcement may submit a request for a re-examination of a licensed driver.

"We are aware of the potential impact this can make on an individual's ability to drive and their independence, so we don't make these decisions lightly. Anytime we submit one of these, it is due to either one of these observations or otherwise credible information that supports our concern."

Robinson explained that law enforcement officers are authorized to request a driver re-examination through the MVA when concerns arise. The decision on whether a driver's license is suspended or reinstated is ultimately made by the MVA, with guidance from its Medical Advisory Board (MAB), a panel of physicians that reviews medical information and recommends appropriate action.

According to the MVA, drivers may be required to undergo re-evaluation due to medical conditions that could impair driving, such as vision or memory issues, neurological conditions, mental health concerns, cognitive decline, or other health problems. In some cases, drivers are approved to continue driving with restrictions, such as daylight-only operation or periodic re-testing.

The MVA website explains that self-reports are required upon diagnosis, if an individual is afflicted with conditions like diabetes that has caused a low blood sugar episode requiring assistance from another person in the last six months, epilepsy, seizures, a heart condition that has caused unconsciousness in the past six months, stroke, sleep apnea or narcolepsy, traumatic brain injuries, vision loss, alcohol or drug use problems, schizophrenia, weakness of the hands, legs, or feet, or dementia.

In addition to self-reports, concerns may be brought to the attention of the MVA for possible medical review by the MAB from judges, court referrals, physicians, law enforcement agencies, hospitals, or private citizens.

While health conditions and aging can affect an individual's ability to operate a vehicle safely, the State of Maryland offers tips to address these issues, helping extend how long a person can drive.

For instance, the webpage for Zero Deaths Maryland, an initiative aimed at eliminating vehicle-related fatalities, offers strategies for people to assess their driving abilities and reduce impairments.

The website notes that if someone struggles to read signs or handle headlight glare, they can be proactive by ensuring eyeglass prescriptions are up to date and scheduling yearly appointments with an eye doctor. If there are coordination or flexibility concerns, an aging driver should speak to a physician.

### BAYSIDE GAZETTE

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Phone: 410-723-6397 / Fax: 410-723-6511.

- EDITOR** ..... Stewart Dobson
- EXECUTIVE EDITOR** ..... Steve Green
- ASSOCIATE EDITOR** ..... Bethany Hooper
- STAFF WRITERS**.....Tara Fischer, Brian Shane
- ACCOUNT MANAGERS** ..... Mary Cooper, Renée Kelly,  
.....Terri French
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- SENIOR AD DESIGNER**..... Kelly Brown
- PUBLISHER**..... Christine Brown
- ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT** ..... Gini Tufts

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# Elections director closes out 40-year career

**By Brian Shane**  
Staff Writer

(Jan. 1, 2026) Over four decades of elections in Worcester County, every ballot cast, every certified result, every dispute resolved – they all passed through Patti Jackson’s hands.

“I always say, your vote is your voice,” she said.

Now, with another election cycle complete, the 65-year-old Jackson is stepping away from the job she’s held for most of her adult life. When this year ends, so does her 40-year career with the county Board of Elections. She’ll retire Dec. 31.

Jackson has had a front-row seat to nearly every major shift in how Worcester County votes, from hand-counted ballots and hulking steel voting machines to today’s electronic voting systems. She’s seen voter registration move from in-person to online, and early voting grow from an idea into standard practice.

Most of Worcester County’s roughly 43,000 voters never see the nuts and bolts of how elections work, or think about it when casting a ballot at one of the county’s 19 precincts. It’s a job that attracts scrutiny almost exclusively when something goes wrong.

“If you had an election every year, I don’t know how you’d survive because it’s a lot of work,” she said. “People don’t realize – they think when an election comes up, you’re busy maybe two weeks before, maybe a week after. It’s a long process. We start planning a year in advance for the next election.”

How important are elections in the Jackson family? When her youngest was born, her 3-year-old son crafted a simple ballot and had the family vote on first and middle names. He’s grown now, living in Pennsylvania, and still calls her on Election Day to say he voted.

Jackson got hired at the Board of Elections in 1985, giving the board a



**Patti Jackson, pictured, stepped down as the county's elections director on the last day of 2025.**  
BRIAN SHANE/  
BAYSIDE GAZETTE

total of two employees at the time: her and former elections director Sheila Jones, a mentor who she later succeeded in 2001.

Her first task was gearing up for the election of 1986. She was 24.

“I remember going to a meeting with the State Board of Elections,” Jackson recalled, “and all the workers, the directors – and we weren’t called directors at the time, we were called registrars – and the lady that was conducting the meeting said, ‘who here has never been through an election?’”

“It was me and another lady,” she added. “She just looked at us and she goes, ‘all I can say is I’m sorry.’ And everyone cracked up laughing. I thought, ‘what have I got myself into?’”

In her early days, ballots were cast using Shoup-brand voting machines that were already antiques. It was up to Jackson to make sure they were delivered from a storage warehouse to polling places; Ocean City had still used the old devices until very recently for municipal races.

“You would go into this huge metal – it looked like a box. And a curtain would close around you, and you choose the

lever. Then when you hit the button to exit or cast your ballot, the curtain would open and that was it,” Jackson said.

Back then, every Election Day vote was meticulously tallied by hand on oversized paper spreadsheets, one column at a time. Jones was there beside her, offering kind guidance: Stay calm. Take your time. We want to be accurate.

Jackson has seen just how thin the margin can get. In the 2014 Republican primary, Worcester County produced what she calls its “claim to fame:” a county commissioner race that ended in a deadlock between candidates Ted Elder and Kathryn Danko-Lord.

As mail-in ballots were counted, the lead swung back and forth before the final tally landed on 214-214. The tie was unprecedented in a Maryland county commissioner race. State election officials consulted the Attorney General before opting to leave the decision to the candidates’ central committee (Elder, now a third-term incumbent, ultimately won.)

Today, paper tallies are long gone. Electronic devices calculate vote totals faster and more efficiently. And, despite

what you may have heard, these computers are not connected to the Internet. Only after polls are closed will the results, pulled from a removable flash drive, get uploaded to the state.

“We’ve invited people that have questioned that to work as an election judge, you know? Then you’ll see it for yourself. A couple people have taken us up on it, but most times it’s, it’s easier to complain than it is to see how it’s done,” she says of would-be conspiracy theorists.

When Election Day rolls around, Jackson tries to visit every polling site, starting before sunrise. She stays out until returns start coming back. Some elections have kept her up until 2 a.m., followed by a full workday the next morning.

Inside her office in Snow Hill, her longtime home away from home, the walls over her desk are cozily decked out in election paraphernalia and old framed political ads.

There’s a headband from Shirley Temple’s 1984 campaign for president; a plastic bag featuring former Gov. Marvin Mandel; a colorful poster for the late Reggie Hanock, a former county commissioner. On an opposite wall hang plaques marking 20, 25, and 30 years on the job.

But now, retirement is calling. Over the years, Jackson has missed many of her children’s school functions. She has 10 grandchildren she wants to see more often. Her departure also coincides with the retirement of longtime deputy director Teresa Riffin, marking a rare leadership turnover at the board.

Jackson says she’ll miss the work and the camaraderie, but it’s time to let somebody younger take over. Her successor, Jocelyn Abbott, will be just the third person to hold the position since the 1960s.

“I’ve been here 40 years,” she said. “I think that’s long enough.”

## OPEN HOUSES

### Jan. 1 - Jan. 8

DAY/TIME	ADDRESS	BR/BA	STYLE	PRICE	AGENT/AGENCY
Fri-Mon 11am-4pm	Heron Harbour, 120th St., Bayside	1BR/2BR/3BR/4BR+	Condos, Towns & SF	-	Nanette Pavier/Holiday Real Estate
Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm	12430 Old Bridge Rd., West OC	2BR/2BA	Single Family from	from \$284,750	Shelly Wilson/Salt Life Community
Fri & Sat Noon-2pm	11500 Coastal Hwy #1614, Ocean City	2BR/2BA	Condo	\$579,900	Lauren Bunting/Keller Williams Realty
Friday Noon-2pm	1 66th St #101 Vintage, Ocean City	2BR/2BA	Condo	\$479,000	Nancy Reither/Coldwell Banker Realty
Friday 2-4pm	6305 Atlantic Ave #301, Ocean City	3BR/3.5BA	Condo	\$1,550,000	Nancy Reither/Coldwell Banker Realty
Saturday 10-11:30am	204 S. Heron Drive #202G, Ocean City	2BR/2BA	Condo	\$575,000	Nancy Reither/Coldwell Banker Realty
Saturday 11am-1pm	104 125th St #106 Lorelei II, Ocean City	3BR/2.5BA	Condo	\$575,000	Nancy Reither/Coldwell Banker Realty
Saturday 11am-1pm	4201 Coastal Hwy #510, Ocean City	Efficiency/1BA	Condo	\$231,000	Power of 2 Team/Hileman Real Estate
Saturday 1:30-3:30pm	6305 Atlantic Ave #301, Ocean City	3BR/3.5BA	Condo	\$1,550,000	Nancy Reither/Coldwell Banker Realty
Sunday 11am-1pm	6305 Atlantic Ave #301, Ocean City	3BR/3.5BA	Condo	\$1,550,000	Nancy Reither/Coldwell Banker Realty
Sunday 11am-1pm	10300 Coastal Hwy #802, Ocean City	Efficiency/1BA	Condo	\$268,500	Power of 2 Team/Hileman Real Estate

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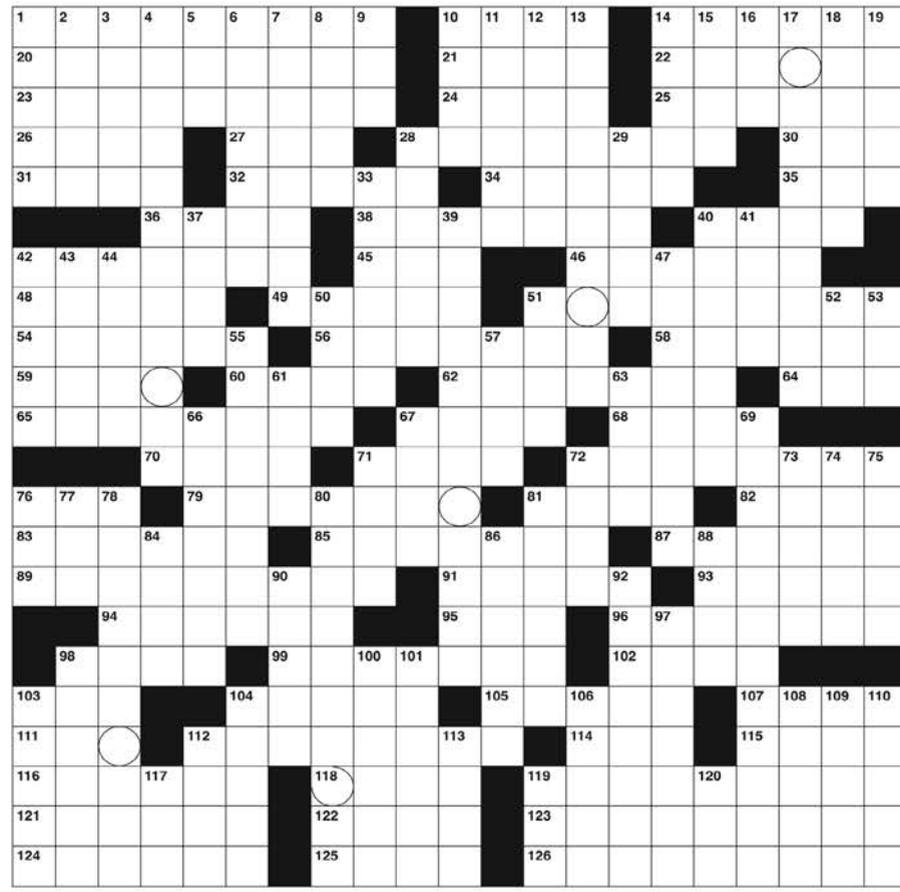


# Puzzles

PRESENT TIME  
BY DAVID KWONG / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

David Kwong is a magician in Los Angeles. When he was 7, a magician at a pumpkin patch fooled his father, a biochemist ("the smartest man in the world" in the son's eyes), with a magic trick. That's when David knew what he wanted to be when he grew up. David's traveling show, "The Enigmatist," concluded a successful run in London last month. — W.S. Note: Once the puzzle is complete, the circled letters, when read from left to right, will spell a punny two-word phrase.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Some Arctic transports
  - 10 S.E.C. football powerhouse, for short
  - 14 1950s hangout with a jukebox
  - 20 Game piece made of four squares
  - 21 "The Kite Runner" protagonist
  - 22 Skulks
  - 23 Joins gradually
  - 24 "Doggone it!"
  - 25 Treatment
  - 26 Blue colorant obtained from the indigo plant
  - 27 Wrangler alternative
  - 28 Brightly colored Mediterranean flowers
  - 30 Rap's Run-\_\_\_
  - 31 Course catalog?
  - 32 When Aries transitions to Taurus
  - 34 Sweetly, on scores
  - 35 "I'll pass"
  - 36 Input of certain mining
  - 38 Montalbán who played Khan in "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan"
  - 40 Timer setting
  - 42 Areas of influence
  - 45 Mental health org.
  - 46 Fraudulently make seem like
  - 48 Covers completely
  - 49 Wyoming peak
- DOWN**
- 51 Like a corporation with a new logo, perhaps
  - 54 Comment from someone caught in the rain
  - 56 Yellow avenue in Monopoly
  - 58 A bit off, say
  - 59 Hyatt alternative
  - 60 Hard-boiled genre
  - 62 TheForce.net for "Star Wars," for example
  - 64 Dark side
  - 65 Former big name in browsers
  - 67 U.F.O.-watching org.
  - 68 By way of, informally
  - 70 Kemo \_\_\_ (the Lone Ranger)
  - 71 Sailor's patron
  - 72 Fleetwood Mac hit named for a Celtic goddess
  - 76 Daddy
  - 79 Eponymous British financier James \_\_\_
  - 81 By saying this you mean well
  - 82 Wrap seller
  - 83 Adopted, as a pet
  - 85 Wasn't folded in a suitcase, say
  - 87 Developed, as baby teeth
  - 89 Sci-fi miniaturizer
  - 91 Emanations
  - 93 Boldly face
  - 94 Kind of cipher in which A becomes B, B becomes C, e.g.
  - 95 Guardians, on a scoreboard
  - 96 Bit of birdspeak
  - 98 Damp, mildewy quality
  - 99 They hold water
  - 102 Silence
  - 103 Lying faceup
  - 104 \_\_\_ Park, Calif.
  - 105 Air
  - 107 Disney subsidiary
  - 111 A little help?
  - 112 Evaded, as a sensitive issue
  - 114 Some pings, in brief
  - 115 "Fie on \_\_\_!" (Shakespearean cry)
  - 116 Skips over
  - 118 Few and far between
  - 119 Regulars at parks with ramps, informally
  - 121 Reply after having one's memory jogged
  - 122 Some time ago
  - 123 "What's done is done!"
  - 124 Stick (to)
  - 125 Garden interloper
  - 126 Church parts crossing naves
  - 11 \_\_\_ Gorman, "The Hill We Climb" poet
  - 12 Copy
  - 13 Iced-tea-and-lemonade refreshments
  - 14 Spending romp
  - 15 Output of certain mining
  - 16 Counterpart of a sub
  - 17 Fast start?
  - 18 Father, familiarly
  - 19 Mentally overpower, with "out"
  - 28 Like most moccasins
  - 29 Great Dane of cartoons, informally
  - 33 More livid
  - 37 Keister, in Leicester
  - 39 2015 chart-topping hit for the Weeknd
  - 40 Symbolic for its time
  - 41 Shoe company with an iconic checkerboard design
  - 42 Descendant
  - 43 Apple: Fr.
  - 44 Is without
  - 47 Rabid in appearance
  - 50 Woman's nickname that sounds like two letters
  - 51 Rice-A-\_\_\_
  - 52 "Borderlands" director Roth
  - 53 Hiding place
  - 55 Gene pools?
  - 57 Org. with its own alphabet
  - 61 Abbr. not found on most smartphones
  - 63 "Aren't \_\_\_ lucky one?!"
  - 66 It has a lot of secretaries
  - 67 Shirt collar stiffener
  - 69 Where to find six "presents" in this puzzle?
  - 71 Knock 'em dead
  - 72 Coolidge who sang the theme for "Octopussy"
  - 73 Just getting started with
  - 74 Green shade
  - 75 What Joe Montana was in the '80s
  - 76 A TD scores six of these
  - 77 "Fancy, that!"
  - 78 Prickly denizen of coral reefs
  - 80 Famed lawyer in the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial
  - 81 Most minimal
  - 84 Some Korean exports
  - 86 Calmed deceptively
  - 88 Baseball slugger's stat
  - 90 Bird used to deliver messages on "Game of Thrones"
  - 92 Blueprints
  - 97 Author Zora Neale \_\_\_
  - 98 Noodled on, with "over"
  - 100 Girlfriend in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off"
  - 101 Informant
  - 103 "Ta-ta!"
  - 104 Tricky pool shot
  - 106 Someone enjoying a walk in the park
  - 108 Mentally with it
  - 109 \_\_\_ four
  - 110 Fits one inside the other
  - 112 Porcine : pigs :: cervine : \_\_\_
  - 113 Essential
  - 117 It might be good for a change
  - 119 One who knows the drill?: Abbr.
  - 120 Teslas, e.g., for short



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## su | do | ku

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### HARD - 53

Fill in the blank spaces in the grid so that every vertical column, every horizontal row and every 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9, without repeating any. There is really only one solution to each puzzle.

			9		8
		4	3	1	6
6		7			4
	6		4	3	
		5		8	
		7	3		9
7				4	
2	1	3		8	5
	4	2			

### Answers to last week's puzzles

9	8	5	7	3	4	6	1	2
1	3	7	8	6	2	9	4	5
4	2	6	5	1	9	8	7	3
7	4	3	6	9	8	2	5	1
5	1	9	2	7	3	4	8	6
8	6	2	1	4	5	3	9	7
6	9	8	3	5	1	7	2	4
2	7	1	4	8	6	5	3	9
3	5	4	9	2	7	1	6	8

S	T	O	R	M	T	O	P	L	S	U	C	A	R	D	S										
C	H	A	F	E	W	R	A	P	U	P	S	R	E	V	E	R	E								
O	O	H	I	M	S	O	S	C	A	R	E	D	P	A	D	A	W	A	N						
P	R	U	D	E	N	T	M	I	K	A	F	A	V	E	I	F	S								
E	P	A		A	I	D	A	N	R	H	I	N	E	U	N	T	O								
D	E	N	V	E	R	M	I	N	T	M	A	R	S	L	A	N	D	E	R						
						E	L	L	E	N	P	E	T	E	Y	B	A	S	E						
						E	N	O	S	G	O	A	L	N	E	T	G	E	L						
						F	L	I	P	A	H	O	U	S	E	D	R	U	M	L	I	N	E	S	
						A	L	I	E	T	E	T	S	A	R	A	B	C	K	E	N	O			
						V	E	S	T	S	L	I	S	A	V	A	P	E	F	E	W	E	R		
						O	S	H	A	S	L	R	M	A	L	L	R	C	A	E	M	T			
						W	H	A	T	A	H	O	O	T	N	O	T	E	X	A	C	T	L	Y	
										T	R	Y	N	E	G	A	T	O	R	N	E	A	L		
						S	P	I	L	T	D	W	E	L	L	N	O	T	I	P					
						I	O	W	E	Y	O	U	O	N	E	G	A	I	N	E	D	A	D	A	Y
						C	L	A	D	P	R	O	S	E	A	L	E	V	E						
						K	E	N	M	E	A	D	C	O	L	D	I	N	E	R	T	I	A		
						B	A	T	H	I	N	G	A	L	T	E	R	E	D	S	T	A	T	E	S
						A	X	I	O	M	S	C	U	R	S	I	V	E	A	G	E	N	T		
						Y	E	N	T	E	T	B	A	N	E	O	S	U	D	S	Y				

# Calendar

Please send calendar items to [editor@baysidegazette.com](mailto:editor@baysidegazette.com) by 5 p.m. Monday. All community-related activities will be published at no charge.

## Thursday, Jan. 1

### 32ND ANNUAL AGH PENGUIN SWIM

Princess Royale Oceanfront Resort, 9100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, 12 p.m. Annual event supporting Atlantic General Hospital. Cost is \$30 until Dec. 30 and \$35 Dec. 31 and Jan. 1. 410-641-9858, <https://secure.qgiv.com/event/penguin-swim2026/>

## Fri., Jan. 2

### OC MAHJONG CLUB

Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, 10:30 a.m. Join in for a fun morning of playing tile Mahjong. Feel free to bring your own tile set. All adults welcome. 410-524-1818, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### CURRENTLY READING BOOK CLUB

Worcester County Library - Ocean Pines Branch, 11107 Cathell Road, 1 p.m. Drop in and discuss what you are currently reading and share it with the group. Get some great ideas for what to read next. 410-208-4014, [www.worcesterlibrary.org](http://www.worcesterlibrary.org)

### NEW YEAR'S JOURNALS: CREATIVE ART AND WRITING

Worcester County Library - Pocomoke Branch, 401 Fifth St., 2 p.m. Fire up your creativity with inspiring prompts, inventive writing and spontaneous art. Journals and supplies provided. For ages 12-18 years. Registration required: 410-957-0878, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### FIRST FRIDAY- JANUARY 2026

Art League of Ocean City, 502 94th St., Ocean City, 5-7 p.m. Art League of Ocean City's free monthly unveiling of new artwork. 410-524-9433

### KIGHTS OF COLUMBUS BINGO

Fridays - Knights of Columbus, 9901 Coastal Highway, behind St. Luke's Church. Doors open at 5 p.m., bingo starts at 6:30 p.m. Light snacks available before bingo and at intermission. 410-524-7994

## Sat., Jan. 3

### SATURDAY WRITERS

Worcester County Library - Berlin Branch, 13 Harrison Ave., 10 a.m. Novice and established writers gather to share their creative writing projects. Structure includes critiques and appreciation, market leads and writing exercises. Drop-ins welcome. 410-641-0650

### PAWS & READING

Worcester County Library - Berlin

Branch, 13 Harrison Ave., 1 p.m. Young independent readers can practice their literacy skills by reading aloud to a friendly trained dog. Stop by to sign up for a time slot. Best for children ages 6-11 years. 410-641-0650

### OCEAN PINES FARMERS & ARTISANS MARKET

Saturdays - White Horse Park, 239 Ocean Parkway, 9 a.m. to noon. Shop for everything from fresh local produce to unique handmade artisan goods. Also featuring family-friendly activities, music and unique shopping experiences. Open to the public, year round. 410-641-7052, <https://www.oceanpines.org/web/pages/farmers-artisans-market>

## Sun., Jan. 4

### SEWING FOR A CAUSE

Sundays - Buckingham Presbyterian Church, 20 S. Main St., Berlin, 10:30 a.m. to noon. Learn how to sew while making a difference. 410-641-0234

### JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES MEETING

Sundays - Berlin Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, 212 West St., Berlin, 10 a.m. [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org)

## Mon., Jan. 5

### STORY TIME: NATIONAL BIRD DAY

Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, 10:30 a.m. Crafts, songs and stories. For ages 0-5 years. 410-524-1818, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### MOVIE MATINEE

Worcester County Library - Ocean Pines Branch, 11107 Cathell Road, 2 p.m. Come see a movie you may have missed in the theaters. 410-208-4014, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### T.O.P.S. OF BERLIN - GROUP #169

Mondays - Atlantic General Hospital, Conference Room 1, 9733 Healthway Drive, Berlin, 5-6:30 p.m. Take Off Pounds Sensibly is a weekly support and educational group promoting weight loss and living a healthy lifestyle. Rose Campion, 410-641-0157

### BRIDGE

Mondays - Ocean City 50plus Center, 104 41st Street, Ocean City, 12:30-3:30 p.m. Reserve a spot: Tish, 410-804-3971. [www.Worcoa.org/oceancity](http://www.Worcoa.org/oceancity)

### DELMARVA WOMEN'S A CAPELLA CHORUS

Mondays - Ocean Pines Community Center, 239 Ocean Parkway, 6:00-8:00 p.m. All ladies who love to sing invited. Elissa, 410-641-8050; on social media; or [delmarvachorus.org](http://delmarvachorus.org).

### OVEREATER'S ANONYMOUS

Mondays - Worcester County Library - Ocean Pines Branch, 11107 Cathell Road, 7-8 p.m. No dues or fees. 410-459-9100

## Tues., Jan. 6

### OC KNITTING GROUP

Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, 10:30 a.m. Bring whatever project you happen to be working on. 410-524-1818, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### BABY TIME

Worcester County Library - Snow Hill Branch, 307 N. Washington St., 10:30 a.m. Songs, rhymes and stories. Stay after to socialize with other families. For ages 0-2 years. 410-632-3495, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### STORY TIME

Worcester County Library - Berlin Branch, 13 Harrison Ave., 10:30 a.m. Story time geared for ages 0-5 years featuring seasonal themes designed to support early literacy skills with stories, songs and finger plays. 410-641-0650, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### STORY TIME: WINTER

Worcester County Library - Pocomoke Branch, 401 Fifth St., 10:30 a.m. Songs, rhymes and stories. For ages 0-5 years. 410-957-0878, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### MASTER GARDENERS PLANT CLINIC

Worcester County Library - Ocean Pines Branch, 11107 Cathell Road, 11 a.m. Master Gardener Ginny Rosenkranz talks about all things plants. Bring any questions and feel free to show your plants as well. 410-208-4014, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### 3-D SNOWFLAKES

Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, 2 p.m. Learn how to make a three dimensional snowflake. Registration required: 410-524-1818. [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### AFTERSCHOOL ART

Worcester County Library - Ocean Pines Branch, 11107 Cathell Road, 4:30 p.m. Design 3D art. This month the group will be making 3D snowmen using clay. For ages 6-11 years. 410-208-4014, [worcesterlibrary.org](http://worcesterlibrary.org)

### CROSS FARMS POP-UP FARMERS MARKET

Tuesdays - Flower Street Field across from Henry Park, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Accepting Maryland Department of Agriculture FMNP (WIC & Seniors) Checks and Maryland WIC Fruit & Vegetable Checks. Also offering a "Produce Bucks" program, which doubles purchases for eligible residents. <https://www.face->

[book.com/theberlinfarmersmarket](http://book.com/theberlinfarmersmarket).

### BEACH HEROES-OC

Tuesdays - Volunteer beach clean-up group meets from 9-10 a.m., year-round. Trash bags, grippers and gloves provided. Check the Facebook page "Beach Heroes-OC" for weekly meeting locations. All are welcome.

### JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES MEETING

Tuesdays - Berlin Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, 212 West St., Berlin, 7 p.m. [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org)

### TAKE OFF POUNDS SENSIBLY

Tuesdays - Worcester County Health Department, 9730 Healthway Drive, Berlin, 3:30-4:30 p.m. TOPS is a weekly support and education group promoting weight loss and a healthy lifestyle. 410-289-4725

### OC KNITTING CLUB

Tuesdays - Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, 10:30 a.m.

### ARGENTINE TANGO PRACTICE

Tuesdays - Experienced dancers and others interested in watching or learning more are welcome, 7-9:30 p.m. No partner required. Info: [TangobytheBeach.com](http://TangobytheBeach.com).

### ZUMBA TONING TUESDAYS

Tuesdays - Northside Park, 200 125th St., Ocean City, 5:30 p.m. Zumba with optional light weights. [zumbajoyceoc@gmail.com](mailto:zumbajoyceoc@gmail.com)

### WEIGHT MANAGEMENT AND WELLNESS GROUP

Tuesdays - Holy Trinity Cathedral, 11021 Worcester Highway, 2-2:45 p.m. Use the weight loss program/app/plan of your choice. Free and open to everyone. 410-641-4882, [www.htcanglican.org/activities](http://www.htcanglican.org/activities).

## Wed., Jan. 7

### CHICAGO THE MUSICAL

Ocean City Performing Arts Center, 4001 Coastal Highway, 7 p.m. A universal tale of fame, fortune, and all that jazz, with one showstopping song after another. Tickets: <https://www.etix.com/ticket/p/82998887/chicago-the-musical-ocean-city-oc-performing-arts-center>.

### PUZZLE SWAP

Worcester County Library - Berlin Branch, 13 Harrison Ave., 1-7 p.m. Bring your gently used puzzles and leave with new-to-you puzzles. Don't have a puzzle to exchange but still want one? That's OK too. All puzzles must be complete in their original box. 410-641-0650

### DEMYSTIFYING THE SYMPHONY

Worcester County Library - Ocean Pines  
Continued on Page 20

**CALENDAR**

Continued from Page 19

Branch, 11107 Cathell Road, 2 p.m. This is a four-session course that familiarizes attendees with the music, etiquette and experience of contemporary orchestras. Held Wednesdays in January. Registration required: 410-208-4014.

**WACKY WEATHER**

Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, 4:30 p.m. Explore the science behind wild weather with fun hands-on activities. For ages 6-11 years: 410-524-1818. worcesterlibrary.org

**KIDS PAINT NIGHT**

Ocean Pines Community Center, 235 Ocean Parkway, 5:30-6:30 p.m. All materials and instruction provided. For ages 8 years and older. Cost is \$22. Pre-registration required: 410-641-7052.

**KIWANIS CLUB MEETING**

Wednesdays - Ocean Pines Community Center, 239 Ocean Parkway, 8 a.m. Doors open at 7:30 a.m. Last Wednesday of the month meetings are offsite and information can be found on the website and Facebook. www.kiwanisofopoc.org.

**CASH BINGO**

Wednesdays - Ocean City Elks Lodge 2645, 13708 Sinepuxent Ave. Door open at 5 p.m., bingo starts at 6:30 p.m. Food available before bingo and at intermission. Open to the public. 443-605-5028

**ONGOING EVENTS**

**3RD ANNUAL TRAIN DISPLAY**

Ocean Pines Volunteer Fire Department, North Station, 249 Ocean Parkway, Nov. 23 to Jan. 5. Free entry; donations appreciated. Hours are Fridays, 6-9 p.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 6-9 p.m.; and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. www.OPVFD.com

**TRAIN GARDEN SCAVENGER HUNT**

Worcester County Library - Ocean City Branch, 10003 Coastal Highway, Dec. 1 through Jan. 3. Stop by the Ocean City branch to admire the holiday magic and help complete a very special scavenger hunt. For families. 410-524-1818

**HISTORY-TO-GO**

Snow Hill library, 307 N. Washington St., throughout January. Pick up a History-to-Go kit and learn about ciphers and codes used throughout history. Supplies provided to make your own cipher disk. Pick up between December and February. 410-632-3495

**THE WINTER QUILL POETRY CONTEST**

This year's theme is frozen moments, encouraging young writers to capture a single memory, feeling or image in an original poem. Entries are due by Feb. 2 and the contest is open to ages 6-11 and 12-18 years. Winners will be announced on Feb. 9. All participants are invited to celebrate at a Family Poetry Read-a-lound on Feb. 21. 443-235-5597

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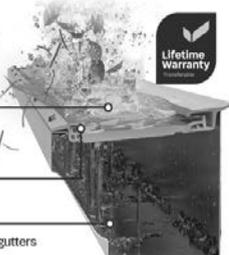
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AZ ROC344027 AR 366920925 CA1035795 CT HIC0671520 DC 420223000087 FL CBC056678 ID RCE 51604 IA C127230 IL 559544 MD MHIC11225MA 213292 MI 262300331 262300330 262300329 262300328 262300318 262300173 MN IR810524 MT 266192 NE 50145-24 NV 86990 NJ 13VH13285000 NM 408693 ND 47304 OR 218294 PA PA179643 RI GC-41354 TN 1098L UT 10783958-5501 VT 1740000871 VA 27058169445 WA LEAF7LH763PG WV WV05692 \*The leading consumer reporting agency conducted a 16 month outdoor test of gutter guards in 2010 and recognized LeafFilter as the #1 rated professionally installed gutter guard system in America.

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