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PLUM EXPLOSION

Shapiro directs DEP to investigate

At least three other agencies seeking answers for blast that killed 6 people in Plum Saturday

By Ford Turner
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

HARRISBURG — Gov. Josh Shapiro has directed the state Department of Environmental Protection to investigate the Saturday

home explosion in Plum, adding to an already considerable government effort seeking answers in the blast that killed six people.

A spokesperson, Will Simons, said Mr. Shapiro and his wife, Lori, are continuing “to pray for

those who lost their loved ones and will continue to do everything in their power to support the Plum community.”

The Saturday morning explosion on Rustic Ridge Drive is under investigation by the Allegheny County Fire Marshal’s Office and state Public Utility Commission, with other involved agencies including DEP, the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials

Safety Administration, and the utility Peoples Gas. The cause remains unknown.

The fire marshal’s office has said that it is aware the owners of the home that exploded “were having hot water tank issues” and that information would be part of the investigation.

The Rustic Ridge housing

SEE **PLUM**, PAGE A-2

DOJ targets housing provider

By Michael Korsh
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

After a yearslong inquiry into Philadelphia-based property manager AION Management, the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a complaint alleging the company has violated the Fair Housing Act.

The DOJ is arguing that the company’s denial of assigned parking spaces for prospective residents — including at two apartment complexes located in Pittsburgh — constitutes discrimination on the basis of disability.

The agency filed suit on July 7 on behalf of the National Fair Housing Alliance, Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania and Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh, who filed the initial complaint to the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2021.

Seeking an injunction to prevent the company from further alleged discrimination — as well as monetary damages for the three groups acting as plaintiff — the DOJ claims AION’s practices were “willful and intentional, and in reckless disregard for the law,” according to the lawsuit.

“As we have this new type of

SEE **HOUSING**, PAGE A-10



Lucy Schaly/Post-Gazette

Plum youth football player Jayden Bruce takes a selfie with rookie Broderick Jones Thursday during Steelers training camp at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe. The Steelers invited the Plum players after a house explosion Saturday killed one of their teammates, Keegan Clontz.

JOY IN TIMES OF SORROW

Steelers host Plum’s youth players in honor of their late teammate

By Brian Batko
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A player in a purple jersey walked off Chuck Noll Field at Saint Vincent College all smiles after catching a pass from a Steeler on Thursday — but it wasn’t a Baltimore Raven.

“George Pickens threw me a

go-ball!” yelled a middle schooler from Plum’s youth football program Thursday afternoon as the entire team and coaching staff visited Latrobe for the final day of Steelers training camp.

The Plum Mustangs were guests of the Steelers, invited earlier this week after their

community was devastated by the fatal house explosion Saturday that killed six, including 12-year-old Keegan Clontz, their teammate who wore No. 40.

Their head coach, Joel Kline, organized a bus to bring his 39 players to practice. They met Steelers coach Mike Tomlin beforehand, then had just about

every player walk over to them afterward, signing autographs, taking selfies and talking ball.

“It’s amazing. I can’t thank the Steelers enough to get these kids’ minds off it for a little bit, what they’ve been through,” Mr. Kline said, sporting a No. 90

SEE **STEELERS**, PAGE A-2

Pentagon calls for reforms at academies

By Lolita C. Baldor
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military academies must improve their leadership, stop toxic practices such as hazing and shift behavior training into the classrooms, according to a Pentagon study aimed at addressing an alarming spike in sexual assaults and misconduct.

U.S. officials said the academies must train student leaders better to help their classmates, and upend what has been a disconnect between what the cadets and midshipmen are learning in school and the often negative and unpunished behavior they see by those mentors. The review calls for additional senior officers and enlisted leaders to work with students at the Army, Navy and Air Force academies and provide the expanded training.

The report, which was released Thursday, says that too often discussions about stress relief, misconduct, social media and other life issues take place after hours or on the weekends. The report recommends that those topics be addressed in classes and graded to promote their importance.

SEE **PENTAGON**, PAGE A-6

Northwest Canada residents retreat as wildfire nears

The Associated Press

YELLOWKNIFE, Northwest Territories — Thousands of residents fled the capital of Canada’s Northwest Territories ahead of an approaching wildfire Thursday, some driving hundreds of miles to safety and others waiting in long lines for emergency flights, the latest chapter in Canada’s worst fire season on record.

The fire, boosted by strong winds, was within 10 miles of Yellowknife’s northern edge, and people in the four areas at highest risk were told to leave as soon as possible, Fire Information Officer Mike Westwick said.

Officials worried that winds could push the flames toward the only highway leading away from the fire as long caravans of cars evacuated the city of 20,000, and although some rain was forecast, first responders were taking no chances. Mr. Westwick urged residents in other areas to leave by noon Friday.

“I want to be clear that the city is not in immediate danger and there’s a safe window for residents to leave the city by road and by air,” Shane Thompson, a government minister for the Territories, told a news conference. “Without rain, it is

SEE **CANADA**, PAGE A-4



Bill Braden/The Canadian Press via AP

People without vehicles line up to register for a flight to Calgary, Alberta, Thursday in Yellowknife.



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Weather

Partly sunny and breezy.
Daytime high, 73;
tonight’s low, 53.
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Local

Woodland Hills makes initial approval for new charter school

By Megan Tomasic
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A new charter school focused on entrepreneurship could soon become a reality in Allegheny County after the Woodland Hills School District on Wednesday gave some of the first approvals.

Dominus High School: The Charter School for Entrepreneurship's initial application was approved by school directors in a 6-2 vote with contingencies. School directors Michael Rensland and Mike Belmonte voted against the measure. Director Terri Lawson was absent.

The school, which was pitched during a board workshop meeting this month, aims to engage students in entrepreneurial learning experiences that will prepare them for career ownership. It would be located at 703 Rodi Road, which is within the Penn Hills and Woodland Hills school districts.

Once officials with Dominus receive local approval they must apply for a charter from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

It was not immediately clear what contingencies were included in the vote. But several board members raised concerns over the possibility of a new charter school.

"We can't afford this," Mr. Belmonte said Wednesday. "I'm going to vote no tonight. Charter school tuition is the second largest line item on the budget behind state salaries and benefits. We just can't afford this. I appreciate the mission but we can't sustain this trajectory."

In Pennsylvania, public schools are required to cover tuition costs for charter and cyber schools.

For Dominus, the goal is to have the first round of ninth grade students start during the 2024-25 school year. Additional classes would be enrolled each year following that until they reach a maxi-

um of 500 students.

The school, the founding coalition for which includes several local figures such as Leon Ford who in 2012 was shot by a Pittsburgh police officer leaving him paralyzed, would provide entrepreneurial pathways focusing on six industries including retail, culinary, health care, arts and media, law and investing and technology.

Through those pathways, students could create their own business that they would run while attending the high school, officials said during a presentation to the school board this month.

"They don't have to wait until they graduate," Debra Titus, a coach at EntreEd, a consortium for entrepreneurship education, said this month. "They can be involved in incubators and accelerator spaces to help accelerate their trajectory as they're growing as young entrepreneurs and looking to grow their career ownership opportunities."

Wayne Jones, CEO of the Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship, suggested several ways the charter school could collaborate with Woodland Hills.

Those include student collaborations between both schools, hiring Woodland Hills to provide food and special education services, renting out space within the public school district for sporting events or extracurricular activities and permitting Woodland Hills seniors who have completed their graduation requirements to attend Dominus classes for free.

"Our goal is to help young people to determine how to best create a future, therefore a career for themselves upon graduating from high school," Mr. Jones said. "In addition to that the goal is for the students to realize their potential and that vision while they are sitting high school students. So essentially our goal is for them to dictate, therefore to own, their career."

DOJ: Owner of apartments discriminated

HOUSING, FROM A-1

housing provider enter the market, they're either misunderstanding or have blatant disregard for the civil rights protections that advocates have fought and bled for in previous decades — ones that had been considered a standard and a given," said Megan Hammond, executive director of the Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh.

Ms. Hammond said she was contacted in fall of 2019 by a resident of the Alden South Hills, an AION-owned property in Baldwin Borough.

According to court documents, the resident — who uses a wheelchair due to a physical disability — told the Fair Housing Partnership that she was forced to move out of her building after her request for flooring that would accommodate her wheelchair was denied.

This initial complaint led the three organizations to launch their own investigation into AION's reasonable accommodations process.

Over the course of 2020, "testers" toured seven AION-owned properties, including two in Allegheny County, and asked if management would allow tenants with a disability-based need for an assigned parking space to receive one.

In each of the test cases, AION refused to provide an assigned parking space, in many cases telling the testers that handicap spots are first come, first serve.

"It means the difference

between the ability to access your house with some degree of ease and dignity, versus really having to jump through hoops every time you want to come and go," said Joe Wardenski, a New York-based attorney working with the initial plaintiffs.

Following their investigation, the groups filed a formal complaint with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which conducted their own probe before issuing federal discrimination charges against AION on Feb. 24.

Weeks later, AION elected to have the claims resolved in federal court rather than an administrative proceeding, at which point HUD authorized the DOJ to initiate its own civil action by July.

Founded in 2017, AION Management's real estate portfolio includes six apartment complexes in the Pittsburgh area, along with properties in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Indiana and Ohio. Representatives from AION did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The case is being heard in federal district court in Delaware, where the company has an address, according to court records. Mr. Wardenski, the initial plaintiffs' lawyer, said AION has until September to file an answer or motion to dismiss.

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Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette

RIISING UP ON THE SOUTH SIDE Construction crews work on The Park condo building high above the Three Rivers Heritage Trail on the South Side near the Hofbrauhaus restaurant in the SouthSide Works on Thursday. The residential high-rise is expected to be completed next spring.

Oliver Citywide students to attend 4 satellite schools

By Megan Tomasic
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Oliver Citywide Academy students will attend four satellite schools during the upcoming school year rather than returning to the North Side building, Pittsburgh Public Schools officials said.

Wednesday's announcement came after the district received state approval for their Future Ready Special Education Plan, which has been in the works since March.

But it also comes months after a 16-year-old student was shot and killed outside the facility last school year. Derrick Harris was killed outside the school on May 21. His classmate, 15-year-old Jaymier Perry, has been charged. The incident occurred after the Jan. 19, 2022 fatal shooting of 15-year-old Marquis Campbell who was sitting in a school van parked outside the building.

"We have heard from the Pittsburgh Oliver school community the deep pain associated with its current facility following the tragic loss of two of its students," Superintendent Wayne Walters said in a statement. "As a result, we will serve Pittsburgh Oliver students in four satellite sites instead of one location, allowing all students to receive full-time emotional support within buildings that also host conventional education classrooms."

Oliver students will now be transferred to satellite buildings that have other schools and programs. Students from the academy, however, will remain separate with different administrators, teachers and support staff.

Students will be transferred based on capacity

limits, including:

- A maximum of 40 students, in grades 6-12, will attend the satellite located in the Greenway Middle School in Crafton Heights
- A maximum of 12 students will attend the satellite at Perry High School in Perry North
- A satellite at the Miliones building in the Upper Hill can serve a maximum of 12 students
- A maximum of 18 students in grades 3-8 will attend a satellite in King PreK-8 in Allegheny Center

Other goals included in the statewide corrective plan is to move the district out of corrective action and create strategies to increase the number of students educated in the least restrictive environment.

Currently, 54% of special education students spend 80% or more of their time in general education classes. Strategies laid out in the plan aim to increase that participation to almost 62%. Officials will also train teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators on inclusive practices while increasing school-based behavioral health offerings.

For Patti Camper, assistant superintendent of the program for students with exceptionalities, the way to create equity in access for all students is to include opportunities for full-time emotional support in comprehensive school buildings.

"This plan," Ms. Camper said in a statement, "ensures we are providing the level of support for our most vulnerable students based on each student's need. For some students that will be within a full-time separate program, while others will be supported in a comprehensive school."

State casino revenues keep climbing post-pandemic

By Jonathan D. Salant
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WASHINGTON — Fueled by large increases in sports betting and online gambling, Pennsylvania casino revenues grew 11.5% during the first six months of 2023, according to new statistics from the industry's trade group.

The state's casinos reported \$2.9 billion in revenues from January to June, compared with \$2.6 billion during the same period a year ago, the American Gaming Association reported.

Seventeen states had a higher percentage increase than Pennsylvania, which trails only Nevada in terms of overall gambling revenue. No. 3 New Jersey reported a 12.1% increase.

Revenues from sports betting in the Keystone State

"While commercial gaming is on track for an unprecedented third consecutive year of record revenue, the lasting impact we're making on our communities through this record growth is even more impressive."

— Bill Miller,
president and CEO,
American Gaming Association

rose 35.3%; online gambling revenues increased 25.6% over the same period in 2022. But slot machines remained the biggest moneymaker, ac-

counting for 43.4% of all gambling revenue in the state.

Gambling revenue nationally rose to \$32.7 billion, up 12% in the six-month period compared to a year ago. As is the case in Pennsylvania, online gambling and sports betting largely are responsible for the growth.

Revenues kept climbing into July, where the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board reported that the state's casinos brought in \$467 million last month, up 8.9% from a year earlier.

Since the first quarter of 2021, as the nation began recovering from the pandemic, casinos have recorded 10 consecutive quarters of revenue growth, and Bill Miller, president and CEO of the gaming group, said that translates into more tax revenues for state and local governments.

"While commercial gaming is on track for an unprecedented third consecutive year of record revenue, the lasting impact we're making on our communities through this record growth is even more impressive," Mr. Miller said.

The state gaming control board reported last month that legalized gambling produced a record \$2.4 billion in tax revenue in the state's 2022-23 fiscal year. That broke the previous high of \$2.2 billion in 2021-22.

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CONSUMERS

Thursday, Aug. 17, 2023

PENNSYLVANIA LOTTERY

For prize amounts and more information, go to:
post-gazette.com/lottery

Thursday's Cash 5
01-04-18-21-40

Thursday's Cash 4 Life
09-14-22-27-39 CB: 4

Thursday's Match 6
01-03-04-37-40-48

Thursday's Treasure Hunt
13-23-25-26-28

Thursday's Pick 5
8-0-6-2-1 (day);
7-5-4-6-1 (night)

Thursday's Pick 4
4-6-2-9 (day); 7-1-1-8 (night)

Thursday's Pick 3
9-7-4 (day); 6-5-6 (night)

Thursday's Pick 2
2-4 (day); 4-3 (night)

Wild ball
8 (day); 2 (night)

Tonight's **CASH 5** is worth an estimated \$350,000.
Tonight's **TREASURE HUNT** is worth an estimated \$134,000.
Tonight's **MEGA MILLIONS** is worth an estimated \$20 million.
Tonight's **MATCH 6** is worth an estimated \$1.25 million.
Tomorrow's **POWERBALL** is worth an estimated \$264 million.