



Wilkes-Barre City Council member Stan Mirin connects during the first City vs. County Sultan of Swat Home Run Derby at Kirby Park on Saturday. JASON ARDAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

THAT BALL'S OUTTA HERE!

W-B employees beat Luzerne County employees in home run contest

By Michael P. Buffer
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WILKES-BARRE — Brian Hontz blasted seven home runs, leading a team of city employees to an 8-3 victory in Saturday's home run derby contest against Luzerne County employees at Kirby Park.

It was the first event in the inaugural Babe Ruth Sultan of Swat Home Run Derby, celebrating Babe Ruth's 650-foot home run in a barnstorming game on Oct. 12, 1926 at Artillery Park, just outside Kirby Park. A

women's derby competition and men's competition followed.

Mayor George Brown and Luzerne County Manager Romilda Crocamo placed a friendly wager on the contest. Crocamo, a New York Yankees fan, will have to wear a Philadelphia Phillies jersey. Brown is a Phillies fan.

"I have to wear it in public," Crocamo said. "I'm going to buy one today. Bryce Harper. Because he really wanted to be a Yankee. It's up to the mayor."

The mayor also got a trophy to take back to city

hall. "She's going to let me know when she gets it. She told me she's going to call me when she decides to wear it, so we can get another photo op," Brown said. "It was nice. It was all friendly. Some of the guys didn't know how to hold a bat. But they had a great time. And that's what it's all about showing the city and the county working well together."

Hontz, a Department of Public Works employee, played baseball at Coughlin High School and has been playing softball for 14 years. "I grew up playing base-

ball, went to college for a year and picked up softball right after," Hontz said. "I do whatever can so I don't have to run. Not a huge fan on running."

All fees and event sponsorships directly support the Geisinger Children's Miracle Network.

"I'm very excited and it's for a great cause," Crocamo said.

"Next year, we'll have it again," Brown said. "Two years after that will be the 100-year anniversary."

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Diocese marks Hispanic Heritage Month

By Geraldine Gibbons
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SCRANTON — Fifteen different nationalities and 13 different churches were represented at a Mass at St. Peter's Cathedral to celebrate National Hispanic History month Saturday.

Following the service, more than 200 participants made their way across the street to the Diocesan Pastoral Center for a meal and traditional entertainment.

Many carried signage representing their home church or patron saints as they walked.

Rev. Jaime Perez, who serves at two diocesan churches, said the annual event provided a chance for

Spanish-speaking Catholics to come together.

Spanish-speaking churches throughout the Diocese have different customs and even celebrate different religious holidays. In addition, the churches are spread out geographically, he said.

So, the opportunity to come together once a year and attend a Spanish Mass celebrated by Bishop Joseph C. Bambera reflected faith and unity, he said.

Bishop Bambera said the annual Mass celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month is one of the most meaningful of the year.

This year's celebration focused on the Eucharist and its unifying power, Bambera said.

He said the Hispanic community is much appreciated and a vibrant part of the Diocese's faith community.

"We're richer for it and so blessed," he said.

George Xelo, of Wilkes-Barre, donned a tiger outfit for the special Mass, a traditional costume symbolizing strength. Xelo's family came from Mexico in the late 1980s and settled in New York state. Recently the family moved to Wilkes-Barre and is enjoying participation in the Catholic community there.

Xelo said it was his first time attending the annual celebration and he especially enjoyed the music.

Sandra Martinez, of Kingston, said it was her

first time in Scranton and she was impressed with the cathedral and the church.

She pointed out that although it seemed as if participants were wearing costumes, it was not really the case.

"It's just our traditional clothing," she said.

National Hispanic Heritage Month began on Sept. 15 and will run through Tuesday. It celebrates the history, culture and contributions of those who come from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America.

The theme for 2024 is "Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together."

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GOP widens county registration advantage

In Lackawanna County, Democrats still hold a lead

By Jeff Horvath
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Luzerne County Republicans have widened their voter registration advantage over Democrats there after claiming it last month for the first time in decades.

Data updated Monday by the Pennsylvania Department of State showed 88,621 registered Luzerne County Republicans compared to 87,673 registered Democrats, a difference of 948. That GOP registration lead stood at just 83 on Sept. 23,

the date of the data update that saw Republicans gain the advantage over Democrats in the county for the first since the 1970s.

In the Democratic stronghold of Lackawanna County, meanwhile, Democrats maintain a considerable registration advantage over Republicans despite the GOP cutting into that margin slightly in recent weeks.

The county's 78,620 Democrats outnumbered its 50,868 Republicans by 27,752 as of Monday, down from 28,037 on Sept. 23.

Democrats' diminishing statewide registration advantage also shrunk over that period, from 338,396 to 325,485, continuing a downward trend. The

Democratic Party had a statewide registration advantage of 916,274 when Republican Donald Trump won Pennsylvania and the presidency in 2016.

With Trump and Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris currently battling for votes ahead of the Nov. 5 General Election, Republicans remain well represented in Northeast Pennsylvania's more rural counties.

Compared to Democrats, the GOP had voter registration advantages of 16,928 in Bradford County, 8,278 in Pike County, 25,152 in Schuylkill County, 10,660 in Susquehanna County, 12,279 in Wayne County and 6,326 in Wyoming County as of Monday.

Democrats maintain a significant registration advantage over the GOP in Monroe County, 50,780 to 42,577, the most recent state data shows.

All of those numbers will fluctuate as more residents register to vote or change their party affiliations. The registration deadline is Oct. 21.

Prospective voters can check their registration status or submit a voter registration application online by visiting www.pavoterservices.pa.gov. They can also mail or deliver their completed application to their county's voter registration office.

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Sordoni selected as United Way's interim CEO

She's worked with the Wyoming Valley chapter in a number of roles

By Bob Kalinowski
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A longtime volunteer and previous board chairwoman of the United Way of the Wyoming Valley is now the interim chief executive officer of the organization.

Jennifer Sordoni will serve in the role until the

nonprofit group selects its permanent CEO.

Sordoni replaces former president and CEO Bill Jones, who recently resigned to become senior vice president with Volunteers of America.

"I am excited to take on this role, and grateful for the opportunity," Sordoni said. "Having been part of this organization for many years, I am committed to ensuring we stay on the path of growth and service to our community. Together with our amazing team, we will continue to advance our

mission and support those who rely on us."

Sordoni has served the organization in a variety of leadership roles for more than 15 years, including as the co-chair of its annual campaign in 2014, chair of its community investment council from 2014 to 2017 and as chair of the board of directors from 2019 to 2021.

"The United Way's mission and work are at the forefront of this decision. The impact the organization has in our community needs to continue seamlessly while we search for our new CEO.

Our staff continues to do an outstanding job in their respective positions, but we need a rudder. The Board felt Jennifer was uniquely qualified to step into this interim role, having just termed off the Board with more than 15 years of service to the organization. Jennifer graciously agreed to fill this role while our search committee begins a confidential search for our new CEO," board Chairwoman Tara Mugford Wilson said.

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Angler files federal lawsuit against PFBC for warrantless searches

Action seeks to strike down state law that allows the searches

By Tom Venesky
CORRESPONDENT

A federal lawsuit has been filed against the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission seeking to strike down a state law that permits waterways conservation officers from entering private property without a warrant.

According to a complaint filed on Sept. 22 in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, Tim Thomas of Susquehanna County claimed Fish and Boat Commission Waterways Conservation Officer Ty Moon entered and searched his property multiple times in 2023 regarding alleged fishing violations that were later dismissed in court.

Thomas contends such actions are in violation of the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, even though a state law permits WCOs to conduct general searches on land and water, including around homes, without any restriction.

Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director Tim Schaeffer is also named as a defendant in the complaint. Commission spokesman Mike Parker said the agency does not comment on open litigation, per PFBC policy.

Thomas, who resides on Butler Lake, is being represented by the Institute for Justice, a nonprofit law firm based in Virginia.

According to the complaint, Thomas and his late wife, Stephanie, purchased the lakeside cabin in 2014.

His wife was diagnosed with cancer in 2022, and Thomas placed several "No Trespassing" signs around the cabin, which is at the end of a dirt road that is a private driveway for the residence. In the complaint, Thomas stated the privacy afforded by the location of the cabin was important to the he and his wife as she underwent cancer treatment.

The complaint outlines a series of events beginning on May 13, 2023, when Thomas' wife was home alone and heard a loud knock on the door, which unbeknownst to her was Moon.

Since she was non-ambulatory due to her cancer treatment, Stephanie did not answer the door, so Moon walked to the rear of the cabin and knocked on the back door, stating "I know you're in there," and "I'm going to call the police."

The complaint states that Moon photographed and searched the backyard, including Thomas' boat which was at their dock, for evidence of potential fishing violations.

The next day, Moon encountered the Thomases while they were pulled over on a road picking flowers, stating he had "been chasing" them and he would "get to the bottom of things."

On May 18, Tim Thomas received a citation in the mail, alleging that he eluded an officer while fishing without a license. On June 14, Susquehanna County Commonwealth Court dismissed the charges.

On Aug. 12, 2023, Tim Thomas was fishing on Butler Lake while Moon watched him through binoculars from the property of a private hunting club, according to the complaint. As Thomas brought his boat back to shore, Moon drove and parked 200 yards down the road from the cabin, walked to the end of Thomas' driveway, past four "No Trespassing" signs to the side of the cabin. He passed within a few feet of the bathroom window while Stephanie Thomas was taking a bath, per the complaint.

Moon approached Tim Thomas at the dock and accused him of fishing with eight rods, in violation of the law.

Thomas informed Moon he was trespassing and requested to move out to the road to continue the conversation. The complaint states that Moon informed Thomas he would be conducting an inspection, and subsequently walked to the dock two more times — and past the bathroom window — seizing eight fishing rods. Moon issued Thomas a citation for fishing with eight rods, which he denied, stating he had six rods — three for fishing and three for depth-position devices.

The citation was upheld during a hearing in district court, but Thomas appealed and was found not guilty during a bench trial before the Susquehanna County Court of Common Pleas on June 5, 2024.

In the complaint, the Thomases stated he and his wife felt less secure in the privacy of their cabin and property after Moon's Aug. 12 search, and they felt their rights were violated because they did not consent to the entry and searches nor did Moon have a warrant.

Tim Thomas did complain to the PFBC following the May 13 entry and search of his property.

According to the complaint, the Fourth Amendment forbids unreasonable searches of a person's house, which extends to the home's curtilage.

Warrantless entries and searches of a home's curtilage are considered unreasonable, while state law authorizes the PFBC, through its WCOs, to enter even private property without a warrant to enforce fishing laws.

"What the officer did to the Thomases was both intrusive and unconstitutional," Thomas said. "You don't lose your constitutional rights simply because you happen to live near a lake. That's why we're challenging the Pennsylvania statute that authorizes these outrageous warrantless searches."

Tom Venesky is a freelance outdoors writer. Contact him at veneskyoutdoors.com.

Roland M. Jermyn Jr.

October 9, 2024

Roland M. Jermyn Jr. of Scranton passed away Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. Roland's wishes were to have no public services. Arrangements are from Andrew Strish Funeral Home, 11 Wilson St., Larksville.