

The Prince George's Post



A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY Since 1932

Vol. 79, No. 48 December 1 — December 7, 2011 Prince George's County, Maryland Newspaper of Record Phone: 301-627-0900 25 cents

Health Insurance Premiums Keep Rising

Report Shows A 50 Percent Increase From 2003 to 2010.

By EMILY HOOPER
Capital News Service

COLLEGE PARK — Although Maryland has been a leader in implementing health care reform, family health insurance premiums in the state rose by 51 percent over the last seven years, more than the national average, according to a report released Thursday.

The report by the Commonwealth Fund, an independent research organization, shows that, nationally, premiums for private-employer family health insurance increased 50 percent from 2003 to 2010.

In 2010, Maryland's average premium cost was \$13,952, above the national average of \$13,871. The District of Columbia had highest annual family premiums at \$15,206.

Maryland is one of the first states to implement the health care exchange, which will allow both individuals and small businesses to shop and compare for the most competitive coverage. Expanding access to coverage is only one piece of the puzzle.

Yet the increases are understandable, said Vincent DeMarco, president of Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, because the reforms that affect affordability won't be implemented until 2014.

Carolyn Quattrochi, executive director of Maryland's

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State Slow to Report Gun Background Check Problems

By ANDREW DAMSTEDT
Capital News Service

WASHINGTON — Maryland is one of 23 states that has been lax in reporting mental health and substance abuse records to a national database used to run background checks on gun purchasers, a coalition of mayors found in a report released this week.

The Mayors Against Illegal Guns report found through its analysis of FBI data of submissions to the National Instant Criminal Background Check

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Hoyer, Norton Announce \$68 Million Award for Frederick Douglass Bridge

By PRESS OFFICER
Rep. Steny Hoyer's Office

WASHINGTON, DC — Congressman Steny Hoyer (MD-5) and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC) announced that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has awarded \$68 million to the District of Columbia for construction of a new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge. Hoyer and Norton worked to secure the funding, a cornerstone of the South Capitol Street revitalization project, through the National Corridor Infrastructure Improvement Program included in the 2005 Surface Transportation Authorization Act (SAFETEA-LU).

"A new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge is critical to improving safety and accessibility for Fifth District commuters and all those who visit our nation's capital via South Capitol Street," said Congressman Hoyer. "It is also an important component of the South Capitol Street Gateway project and Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, which are working to help bolster the revitalization and economic recovery of the surrounding neighborhood. I am proud to have worked with Congresswoman Norton to secure the funds for this vital initiative."

Congresswoman Norton said, "This is the bridge we are having to build appropriation by appropriation. In fact, I was at the South Capitol Street Bridge just yesterday for a press conference with the Iron Workers, the Painters and other unions to bring attention to the overdue repairs for the bridge and the prime opportunity to make those repairs now, when so many of our workers are unemployed. We shored up this bridge with a prior appropriation. The plan and design for a new South Capitol Street Bridge has long been ready, and the time has now come to build the bridge."

Hoyer and Norton have worked for years to obtain incremental funding for the Frederick Douglass/South Capitol Street Bridge, successfully securing \$123 million in the 2005 transportation reauthorization bill, and nearly \$20 million since 2002 for the rehabilitation of South Capitol Street and the Frederick Douglass/South Capitol Street Bridge through the appropriations process. Specifically, the funding announced today will be utilized for right of way acquisition.

Hoyer and Norton have long worked together to make the case to Congress that federal funds are necessary for the Frederick

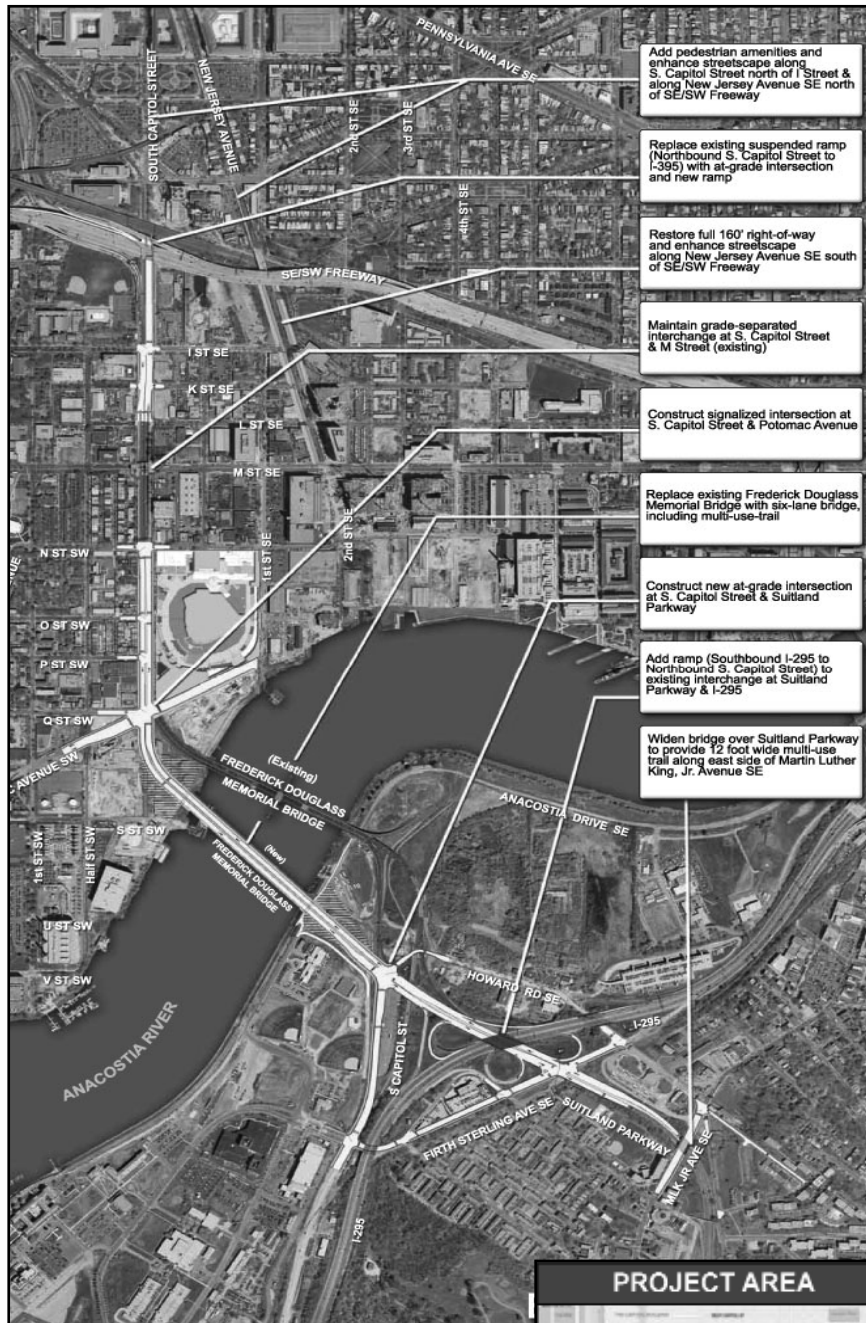


PHOTO COURTESY
The Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge, otherwise known as the South Capitol Street Bridge, carries South Capitol Street over the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. It was constructed in 1950 and named after abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

Douglass/South Capitol Street Bridge both for South Capitol Street's historic significance as a major artery into the nation's capital and because the bridge is indispensable to the thousands of federal workers who come into the District for work every day.



Md. Weighs Fracking's Potential Impact

Debate Has Swept Across States Where Gas Reserves Lie

By GREG MASTERS
Capital News Service

GARRETT COUNTY — Garrett County resident Dana Shimrock was relieved when Maryland put the brakes on drilling in the natural gas-rich Marcellus Shale before a single well could be drilled.

"They had just completed a well not far from me across the border in Pennsylvania," Shimrock said. "I knew they were ready to roll over here into Maryland, and I really felt that we weren't ready for that."

Shimrock is one of many Western Maryland residents concerned about the controversial gas extraction process known as hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," which some say threatens the environment and public health.

But many others in Maryland, including Delegate Wendell Beitzel, R-Garrett and Allegany, feel the potential economic benefits of Marcellus Shale drilling outweigh the environmental risks.

Landowners will get "huge sums of money" from leases and gas royalties, drilling will bring jobs and Garrett County will benefit from a severance tax on the gas that is produced, Beitzel said.

"Now we have an opportunity to lift this area up, as we are witnessing in some of our neighbor states," he said.

The public debate over

See FRACKING, Page A3



Artist Byron Williams creates gourd sculptures at his Accokeek home. Williams uses a variety of hand-picked natural materials, as well as vibrant dyes to embellish gourds. Capital News Service photo courtesy of Byron Williams

In Artists' Hands, Lowly Gourds Grow Into Decorative Sculptures

By SARAH MEEHAN
Capital News Service

WASHINGTON — Most people think of gourds as fall decoration or food, but several Marylanders see them as art.

"I put some pretty spectacular colors on the gourds themselves, and then I do a little bit of basketry," said Accokeek Creek Baskets and Gourds owner Byron Williams. "I tend to let the gourd shape show through. I think of it as emphasizing the gourd as opposed to emphasizing my artistic ability."

Williams is a member of the Virginia Lovers Gourd Society, whose publicity coordinator

shares his aesthetic sense of homegrown art.

"You look at and you say, 'What does this gourd seem to want to have on it?'" said Gail Ratliffe. "It comes from the shape of the thing itself."

Maryland does not have its own gourd society, but gourd artists in the state follow similar traditions, including Pasadena resident Nancy Worley.

Worley sells gourds burned with ornate designs at the Maryland Renaissance Festival, and she said she does her best business in the fall because it is

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INSIDE

County Council Approval

The Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III and the County Council signed the Economic Development Incentive (EDI) Fund proposed by County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III. This bill establishes an Economic Development Incentive Fund, specifies the purpose and uses of the Fund
Community, Page A3

How to Prepare for Childbirth

For some women, the thought of labor and delivery causes a lot of anxiety. However, preparing mentally and physically early in pregnancy can help with a smoother delivery. Many women choose a childbirth partner. This is a person who can provide support through pregnancy, labor, and delivery.
Opinion, Page A4

Make It In America

Congressman Steny H. Hoyer toured UPS's Landover packaging center and their state-of-the-art job training facility. Hoyer met with and addressed UPS drivers and package handlers. He discussed how House Democrats' Make It In America plan will create jobs, strengthen our economy, and restore the American dream.
Business, Page A5

Movie Review

"Happy Feet Two" is such a messy, giddy collage of undisciplined storytelling and half-developed subplots that I'm amazed I enjoyed it as much as I did. Like its predecessor, the sequel gets by largely on goofy energy and good-naturedness, not quote-unquote "strong writing" or "clear ideas."
Out on the Town, Page A6

Earth Talk

Dear EarthTalk:
Given the preponderance of carcinogenic chemicals out there today, is it true that eating certain foods like garlic or onions can actually help prevent cancer?
-- M. Stone, Boston, MA
Features, Page A7

Towns and NEIGHBORS

In and Around Morningside-Skyline

by Mary McHale 301 735 3451

Notre Dame Marching Band practices at McNamara

The Marching Band of the Fighting Irish—400 strong!—rehearsed at Bishop McNamara High School's Tyoka Jackson Field the day before Notre Dame took on the Maryland Terrapins at FedEx Stadium. For an hour and a half, in full dress, they put on a great show.

It was free and open to the public. I wish I'd known. From 1946 to 1950, I attended St. Mary's College, across the highway from Notre Dame, and saw every single home game. Of course, I knew all the words to "Cheer, cheer for old Notre Dame!"

Dating back to 1845, the Notre Dame Band is the oldest college band in continuous existence in the United States and has been honored as a "Landmark of American Music" by the National Music Council.

The band rehearsed at McNamara Friday morning, played at a pep rally on the National Mall Friday evening and presented a concert on the Steps at the United States Capitol on Saturday afternoon.

And that night they played while Notre Dame crushed Maryland 45-21.

Neighbors

Joshua Loufik, son of Dennis and Sharon Loufik of Ridgecrest Drive in Skyline, has graduated with honors from the University of Maryland with a degree in Criminal Justice. He is currently working for the U.S. Marshal Service.

Joint Base Andrews celebrated this year's American Indian Heritage Month on Nov. 30, with songs, dance, speakers, displays and food samplings. Maj. Marlo Repeta and Senior Airman

Edward Yannett are two American Indian airman stationed at Andrews, were involved in the planning.

You should've had your hair done at Hair Force, in Clinton, on Oct. 28, you'd have thought you weren't in Maryland anymore—the entire staff of ten or so was dressed in Wizard of Oz garb. As for the proprietors of the shop, Jean Casamento was The Good Witch and her daughter Tara Belvrud was Dorothy. Tara's daughter was Toto. Carol Swenton, of Morningside, was a Wizard and former Morningsider Diane Zirkle was a Munchkin. There was even a Yellow Brick Road.

Coming up

NavOceanos Leftovers are meeting for lunch at the Greenbelt American Legion on Dec. 2. If you worked at Navy Hydrograph Office or Naval Oceanographic Office—both of which used to be in Suitland—and want more information, call Ben Surratt at 301-736-8054.

The Dr. Samuel A. Mudd House, in Waldorf, invites you to their 10th Victorian Christmas Dec. 3 and 4, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., with Civil War-era Christmas trees and decorations, holiday refreshments, Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus showing their old-fashioned toys and, on the grounds, the Civil War re-enactors camping out. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$2 for children. For information, 301-645-6870 or 301-274-9358.

The Children's Choir of Mount Calvary Church, in Forestville, will perform at the Pageant of Peace on the Ellipse at President's Park at 8 p.m. on Dec. 8. Ms. Ruffin will direct the choir and then join the kids when they sing "O Holy Night."

May they rest in peace

Carolyn Gotshall, 77, of St. Petersburg, Fla., and formerly of Allies Road in Morningside, died Nov. 5 in Brooksville, Fla. She was born in Washington, the daughter of the George E. and Virginia Vaughan Stine. Her husband of 62 years, Russell W. Gotshall, died May 29, 2011. She was the mother of Lamont Gotshall, Beverly Marquis, Cornell Gotshall, Russell Gotshall and the late Sherri Theilbar Gotshall. Survivors include 11 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Edward J. Wisniewski, 98, formerly of Suitland and a very active member of the Knights of Columbus for about 50 years, died Nov. 4 in Mechanicsville. He retired from the U. S. Naval Hydrographic Office, in Suitland, in 1968. He was head usher at the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, and at the Knights of Columbus in Forestville he always worked the Wednesday night Bingo. He was the husband of the late Mae Wisniewski, father of Robert E. West, grandfather of Steven, Bryan, Mark and Victoria West, great-grandfather of two.

Milestones

Happy birthday to Jill Flaherty Kimmel, Nov. 22; Ray Call, Avanna Williams, Ayanna Williams, Andrew Gryskevicz and Mary Gaither, Nov. 25. Darryl Moss, Nov. 26; Thomas Shipman, Sr., Nov. 28; Devin Kane Blade, Nov. 29; Ramona Britt and Patricia Branch, Nov. 30; Mary Doyle, Susan McKay and Jon Foster, Dec. 1.

Happy anniversary to Gary and Ivy Kline on Nov. 28.

Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards' Legislative Update

Congresswoman Edwards Votes "No" on Fiscally Irresponsible Republican "Balanced Budget" Amendment

Washington, D.C. — Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards (D-MD) voted against the Republican sponsored H.J. Res 2, "Balanced Budget" Constitutional Amendment, which was defeated in the House 261-165, as it didn't reach the two-thirds majority needed. This legislation not only attempted to ensure there is a balanced budget every year unless three-fifths of the Congress votes for a specific excess of outlays over receipts; but it also would have required a three-fifths vote of the Congress to simply raise the debt ceiling. In addition to requiring \$1.6 trillion more in spending cuts than the Republican budget passed earlier this year, it would limit Congress' ability to adapt to fiscal, environmental, and other emergencies.

"The Republican majority's pattern of economic negligence continues. Instead of focusing on job creation, my Republican colleagues wasted valuable time on an irresponsible and partisan 'balanced budget' amendment that would have had catastrophic consequences for the American people and our economy," said Congresswoman Edwards. "Had this resolution passed, the results would have been devastating: losing 15 million jobs; doubling the unemployment rate; cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans' benefits drasti-

cally; and risking default by requiring a super-majority in Congress to pass any debt ceiling increase. It is clear that under Republican leadership in the House, ideology continues to trump sound fiscal and public policy. Democrats have balanced the budget in a way that is equitable, responsible, and promotes economic growth. I look forward to working with my colleagues to do it again as we continue to focus on creating jobs in America."

The following are several reasons why H.J.Res 2 was bad policy:

- Increases risk of default by making it even harder to raise the debt limit — Only three months ago, the nation faced the economic consequences of risking default on the nation's obligations during the debt ceiling increase debate. Nonetheless, the amendment would raise the possibility of default by increasing the difficulty of raising the debt limit by requiring a 3/5th supermajority vote.

- Threatens even great budgetary cuts than the Ryan Budget. This BBA requires even greater spending cuts than those in the Ryan budget, which House Republicans adopted on April 15. According to the nonpartisan Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, adoption of this BBA could force Congress to cut all programs by an average of 17.3 percent by 2018. If revenues are not raised and all spending cuts are spread proportionately, Medicare would be cut by about \$750 billion, Social Security by almost \$1.2 trillion, and veterans' benefits



by \$85 billion, through 2021. If policymakers limit cuts to some programs, other programs would have to be cut more deeply.

- Allows courts to intervene on budgetary decisions — The amendment does not define how the Constitutional requirement for a balanced budget would be enforced, opening the door to courts intervening in federal budget decisions. Courts are ill-suited to make these decisions, and the elevation of budget disputes to Constitutional questions will add complexity to an already challenging process and could lead to shutting down all federal operations, even emergency services, if a federal budget shutdown is mandated by the courts.

- Would impact all federal spending, including Social Security and other trust funds — The Amendment applies to all outlays, including those from trust funds with receipts from prior years. That means Social Security spending is subject to the total limit on outlays, putting in jeopardy the retirement guarantee made to our seniors who contributed throughout their working years.

Neighborhood Events

NBC4 SAFE AND SECURE COMMUNITY SHRED EVENT COMES TO PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

County citizens and residents are encouraged to bring their personal documents to the NBC4 Community Shred at the Prince George's Community College on December 3, 2011

LARGO, MD — Prince George's County Government will serve as co-hosts along with NBC4, PNC Bank, Shred-It and Prince George's Community College at the NBC4 Safe and Secure Community Shred on December 3, 2011. This is the sixth free shredding event that will be held at the Prince George's Community College.

County citizens and residents can bring up to five archive boxes or trash bags of their personal documents to the event scheduled from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. All vehicles must be in line by 11 a.m. in order to discard their items. No documents will be accepted by walk-in.

The public is invited to bring all types of paper, empty binders, unwanted and expired credit cards and computer disks (disks may be shredded offsite). Paper with staples and paper clips will also be accepted. Business or commercial material will not be accepted.

"Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States and document shredding is one of the most important ways the public can protect their identity," said Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III. "I strongly encourage all County citizens and residents to join me at this free shredding event and to take a proactive step in protecting their sensitive and personal information."

PGCPS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS TESTING FOR TAG PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

UPPER MARLBORO — The Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) Talented and Gifted Office is currently accepting applications from private school students for Testing for PGCPS Talented and Gifted (TAG) program eligibility. The testing is for students who are county residents and currently in grades 1-7 in private schools.

To request the Private School Testing Application, please call or email the TAG Office at 301-808-3790, TAG Program Specialist Scott

Brenner at sbrenner@pgcps.org or TAG Supervisor Theresa Jackson at tjackson@pgcps.org.

The applications and supporting documentation are due in the TAG Office no later than Jan. 12. Late applications will not be accepted.

The testing is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 18, at 8:30 a.m. at Kenmoor Middle School, located at 2500 Kenmoor Drive in Landover. The snow date for testing is Feb. 25. Only applicants will be tested; there will be no walk-ins.

For more information, contact the Talented and Gifted Office at 301-808-3790 or tjackson@pgcps.org.

OAKCREST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RECEIVES GRANT

LANDOVER -- Oakcrest Elementary School has received a \$5,000 Educator for a Day grant from Walden University to enhance classroom education, provide educational technology and supplies, or sponsor special educational activities. Oakcrest was one of only five grant recipients nationwide and the only school in the northeast region. The other schools were located in New Orleans, Los Angeles, Houston and Marietta, Ga. Walden received applications from more than 250 schools.

"We are so happy that our grant will be able to make a difference, so that they can reach even brighter futures," said Jeff Sweiter, public relations manager at Walden University. Oakcrest plans to use the grant to enhance its Artist in Residency program and other efforts that focus on math, reading and science.

The grant was awarded during the school's own Educator for a Day program on Thursday held as part of American Education Week.

Guest educators included Staff Sgt. Annette R. Johnson from the D.C. Army National Guard, retired Army Sgt. Harvest Sampleton and Susan Alison Keady, a faculty member in the George Washington University Department of Theatre and Dance.

Walden is an online university that offers more than 60 degree programs with more than 300 specializations and concentrations. The award was given through the Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership.

Brandywine-Aquasco

by Ruth Turner 301 888 2153

ALL DAY CARE

When School's out we're in at World View Christian Center. World View Students: \$10 and Non-World View Students: \$25. We offer "WII", "XBOX", Field Trips and Super Fun Days. Hours of operation are from 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM. Telephone number is (301) 372-0053, info@world-viewchristiancenter.com or www.worldviewchristiancenter.com.

PERFORMANCES

Come out and enjoy an evening filled with performances by PGCPS Students. There is a \$5.00 entrance fee payable at the door. Children are free with a paying adult. The performance will be on December 7, 2011 from 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM at Dr. Henry A. Wise, Jr. High School. The school is located at 12650 Brooke Lane in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Toys will be collected for needy children. Please help make this a holiday wish come true. Bring a new unwrapped toy. Proceeds will go to the PGCPS Foundation. It is very important that you RSVP on line. Go to www.princegeorgescountypublicschools.com.

FUN NIGHTS

Fun Nights are back every first Friday of the month at Greater Works International Church Youth Center from 7:30-10:00 PM. Come out and enjoy Bible Teaching, Games, Food and Fun. The Youth Center is located at 8329 Old Marlboro Pike, #A11 Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SYSTEMS, INC

CSS is neighbor helping neighbor in Southern Prince George's and Northern Charles Counties working to meet our community needs for food, shelter, and other Social Services. Volunteer and become part of a community that cares. Opportunities are varied. Call (301) 372-1491.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAY WISHES

Happy Birthday to Peggy Canada, Gwendolyn Deville, Jennifer Etheridge, Stephanie Eugene, Grace Ford, Phillip Hill, Karon Johnson, Richard Johnson, Madeline Pinkney and Kimberly Sampson.

SYMPHONY OF SOUL

WINTER CONCERT

Please come and support the Symphony of Soul for a farewell performance in the MKL Winter Concert at Bowie State University on Wednesday December 7, 2011 to our move to the new Fine and Performing Arts Center. The Concert is free. For more information contact the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at 301 860-3750.

MENTORING

Find out if mentoring is for you. Talk to family and friends about mentoring. Encourage them to learn more about mentoring. Support youth programs in your community. Discover the rewards of mentoring today at www.pgcps.pg.k12.md.us/~dfamcoms.

USHERS ANNIVERSARY

The Ushers of Good Hope Fellowship will celebrate their 43rd Ushers Anniversary at 10:30 AM on Sunday morning worship service December 11, 2011 at Nottingham Myers Church located at 15601 Brooks Church Road in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, Rev. Daryl L. Williams, Pastor.

WET BASEMENTS STINK !!

Mold, mildew and water leakage into your basement causes health and foundation damage. What can be done to fix the problem? Allstate American Waterproofing is an honest, hardworking local company. We will give you a **FREE** evaluation and estimate and a fair price. We have repaired thousands of basements in the area; we can provide local references. When your neighbors needed waterproofing, they called Allstate American. Why don't you? Call now to receive a 20% discount with your **FREE ESTIMATE**. MHIC#36672

CALL 1 800 420 7783 NOW!

COMMUNITY

Practical Money Skills

By Jason Alderman

Deadline approaches for mandatory IRA withdrawals

Reaching your 70th birthday is cause for celebration. But thanks to our quirky tax code, a potentially more important milestone arrives six months later. IRS rules say that you must begin taking required minimum distributions (RMDs) from your IRAs and other tax-deferred retirement accounts beginning in the year you reach age 70 ½.

Failure to make these mandatory withdrawals by December 31 each year can result in severe penalties, so if you or someone you know are approaching that threshold, read on:

Congress devised IRAs, 401(k) plans and other tax-deferred retirement accounts to encourage people to save for their own retirement. You generally contribute "pretax" dollars to these accounts (except for Roth plans), which means the money and its investment earnings are not subject to income tax until withdrawn.

In return, Congress decreed that RMDs must be withdrawn — and taxed — each year after you reach 70 ½. Furthermore, unless you meet certain narrow conditions, you'll have to pay an excess accumulation tax equal to 50 percent of the RMD you should have taken — plus take the distribution and pay taxes on it.

In a few cases you can delay or avoid paying an RMD:

If still employed at 70 ½, you may delay RMDs from your 401(k) or other work-based account until you actually retire, without penalty; however, regular IRAs are subject to the rule, regardless of work status.

Roth IRAs are exempt from the RMD rule; however Roth 401(k) plans are not.

You can also transfer up to \$100,000 directly from your IRA to an IRS-approved charity. Although the RMD itself isn't tax-deductible, it won't be included in your taxable income and lowers your overall IRA balance, thus reducing the size of future RMDs.

Another way to circumvent the RMD is to convert your tax-deferred accounts into a Roth IRA. You'll still have to pay taxes on pretax contributions and earnings; and, if you're over age 70 ½, you must first take your minimum distribution (and pay taxes on it) before the conversion can take place.

Ordinarily, RMDs must be taken by December 31 to avoid the penalty. However, if it's your first distribution you may wait until April 1 the year after turning 70 ½ — although you still must take a second distribution by December 31 that same year.

Generally, you must calculate an RMD for each IRA or other tax-deferred retirement account you own by dividing its balance at the end of the previous year by a life expectancy factor found in one of the three tables in Appendix C of IRS Publication 590:

Use the Uniform Lifetime Table if your spouse isn't more than 10 years younger than you, your spouse isn't the sole beneficiary, or you're single.

Use the Joint and Last Survivor Table when your spouse is the sole beneficiary and he/she is more than 10 years younger than you.

The Single Life Expectancy Table is for beneficiaries of accounts whose owner has died.

Although you must calculate the RMD separately for each IRA you own, you may withdraw the combined amount from one or more of them. The same goes for owners of one or more 403(b) accounts. However, RMDs required from 401(k) or 457(b) plans must be taken separately from each account.

To learn more about RMDs, read IRS Publication 590 at www.irs.gov.

Jason Alderman directs Visa's financial education programs.

To Follow Jason Alderman on Twitter:

www.twitter.com/PracticalMoney



Baker, County Council Sign \$50 Million Economic Development Incentive Fund

By PRESS OFFICER
County Executive's Office

Upper Marlboro, MD— Yesterday, Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III and the Prince George's County Council signed CB-4-2011, the Economic Development Incentive (EDI) Fund proposed by County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III. This bill establishes an Economic Development Incentive Fund, specifies the purpose and uses of the Fund, and provides for the financing and administration of the Fund. An appropriation of \$50 million over the next five fiscal years has been designated for the EDI Fund. This includes \$7 million that has been proposed for the Fund in FY 2012.

With the theme of "Employ. Develop. Invest," CB-4-2011 was signed at Hunter Mill AME Church in Suitland. Located on Silver Hill Road across from the Suitland Federal Center and near the Suitland Metro station, this church bought the surrounding



FILE PHOTO
Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III and the Prince George's County Council signed CB-4-2011, the Economic Development Incentive.

retail development space over 10 years ago and replaced a pawn shop with Rite Aid. It is this type of economic development progression that the EDI Fund was created to stimulate and accelerate. A 2-minute highlight video of the Bill signing ceremony can be seen here:

<http://pgcvideo.co.pg.md.us/ExeVideo/EDI-Fund-Signing-11-17-11.wmv>

Fracking from A1

fracking has swept across states such as Pennsylvania, New York, Texas, Colorado and Wyoming, where reserves of natural gas lie deep underground, trapped bubble-like in shale formations, as well as North Dakota and Montana, home to the oil-bearing Bakken Formation.

Energy companies have made shale oil and gas deposits profitable to explore by drilling horizontally into the shale layer and injecting a pressurized mix of water, sand and chemicals to crack open the rock, releasing trapped oil or gas.

This "fracking" process has led to a boom in shale gas, which has increased as a share of domestic natural gas production from 4 percent before 2005 to more than 30 percent through October, according to the Energy Information Administration.

But the boom has been accompanied by claims of drinking water contamination and other environmental concerns.

The Marcellus Shale spans 95,000 square miles from Tennessee to New York and underlies a portion of Western Maryland — including all of Garrett County and part of Allegany County — at depths of up to 7,000 feet.

Residents of Western Maryland, where permits for Marcellus Shale drilling have not been approved or denied by the state, can see fracking close-up by looking across the border into Pennsylvania or West Virginia.

Shimrock, who is the library director at Garrett College, said a Pennsylvania friend's water well overflowed with sludge when fracking took place nearby. Another friend told her that his family had been promised 30 years' worth of gas royalties from the well on their land, but after three years the royalties have decreased drastically.

"Unfortunately, I haven't seen a lot of positive, and much negative, in the way of the impact that this has had on communities and on individuals who have agreed to this kind of procedure on their properties," said Shimrock, who now regrets leasing gas rights to her 50-acre farm in 2006.

In June, Gov. Martin O'Malley issued an executive

order calling for a study of Marcellus Shale drilling by August 2014 and creating a 14-member advisory commission to develop recommendations.

The study period makes it unlikely that Maryland will allow energy companies to drill in the Marcellus Shale any time soon.

"The whole process set up by the executive order and the commission was more one to delay this activity," said Drew Cobbs, executive director of the Maryland Petroleum Council. "The length is way longer than it needs to be."

A poll commissioned by Cobbs' organization and conducted by Gonzales Research & Marketing Strategies in September found that 74 percent of Maryland voters and 70 percent of Western Maryland voters favored the development of natural gas resources in Western Maryland.

But whether Maryland will allow drilling is a "very open question," said Delegate Heather Mizeur, D-Montgomery, who is on the governor's commission.

"Personally, I come at it probably leaning more towards the side of I would rather there not be any drilling," she said.

Mizeur was the lead sponsor of a bill in the last legislative session that would have imposed a moratorium on fracking until the completion of a two-year study. The bill stalled in the Senate after passing the House.

Beitzel, who opposed Mizeur's bill, worries the delay will make Maryland less competitive than neighboring states with much larger shares of the Marcellus Shale.

"The oil companies will be reaching their production levels that are necessary in the market in order to meet the demand. And if they do that, they're just going to bypass Maryland," he said.

Safety and Environmental Impacts Weighed

Fracking is an unconventional gas extraction method that carries risks, such as well blowouts, fracking fluid spills and unsafe disposal of flowback — the toxic, briny wastewater that rises to the surface. The Environmental Protection Agency recently announced it will start developing standards for the disposal of fracking wastewater.

"Together, united as One County, working together as the Executive and Legislative Branches, we have made a bold declaration to the State, region, nation, and the world that, 'Prince George's County means business!'" said Baker. "With the EDI Fund, we are going to Employ by creating new jobs and retaining current jobs in the County. We are going to Develop new business opportunities, incubator companies, and small and minority owned businesses that will lead to new industries in the County. And we will Invest in those projects and companies that will help to growth and expand our tax base, so we can increase our investment in education, healthcare, public safety and the environment."

The EDI Fund is intended to elevate the county's economic development profile and signal to the development community that Prince George's has turned a significant corner. The EDI Fund's potential return on investment will not be measured

solely by financial returns to the fund itself — rather, it will be measured primarily by tangible measures like job creation, increased commercial tax revenue, and the achievement of key development goals. Under CB-4, special priority will be given to projects that maximize Local Minority Business Enterprise (LMBE) participation and hiring opportunities for County residents.

"I am proud of the Council's work with County Executive Baker to establish this Economic Development Incentive Fund in Prince George's County," said Council Chair Ingrid M. Turner. "We are confident that our work together to enhance economic development in the County will support the kind of development both the Council and County Executive agree needs to happen. This is a plan that sets a clear vision for development opportunities and policies that will strengthen our communities with redevelopment and revital-

See MILLION, Page A8

eliminate that leakage," Vanko said.

Wait and See for Landowners

The Maryland Department of the Environment has received eight Marcellus Shale drilling permit applications, most in Garrett County.

In recent years, energy companies have also sent "landmen" to talk with landowners in Western Maryland about leasing their property for Marcellus Shale gas production. About 127,000 acres of land in Garrett County — almost a third of the county — have been leased since 2007.

Many of those who signed the first leases in 2006 and 2007 now feel they did not have enough information and were undercompensated, said Paul Roberts, a small business owner in Garrett County and a member of O'Malley's commission.

"Because it was so difficult to get information about how these things worked, people didn't know," Roberts said. "And so hundreds of people signed and agreed to leases that paid them \$5 or \$7 an acre at a time when, in Pennsylvania, a typical price was \$3,000 an acre."

Shimrock was among those who agreed to receive \$5 per acre per year when she signed her 5-year lease, she said.

"The people who live in my community feel that we were really, I'll say ripped off," she said. "Also feel a little bit chagrined that we really should have known better."

Shimrock joined an organization called Citizen Shale to warn other landowners to educate themselves about fracking before signing a lease.

Garrett County resident E. Marshall Stacy said during an October Marcellus Shale advisory commission meeting that landowners should consult with lawyers and the local farm bureau to negotiate leases with fair compensation and environmentally protective provisions.

Stacy favors drilling — he would use the lease money and gas royalties to help his children start a summer camp on his farm — and said the potential benefits outweigh the risks.

"If the guys come and are drilling at my place, I'm going to be right there watching them, and making sure they're not spilling something or the trucks are not leaking as they come and go," Stacy said.



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COMMENTARY

THE PRINCE GEORGE'S POST

A Community Newspaper for Prince George's County

James N. Martin, Jr, MD
*President, The American Congress of
 Obstetricians and Gynecologists*



How to Prepare for Labor and Delivery

For some women, the thought of labor and delivery causes a lot of anxiety. However, preparing mentally and physically early in pregnancy can help you have a smoother delivery.

Many women choose a childbirth partner. This person can be a spouse, partner, friend, or relative who can provide support through your pregnancy, labor, and delivery. He or she can accompany you to prenatal visits and childbirth classes. You can practice breathing or relaxation exercises together, and on delivery day, your partner can coach you through contractions and help carry out what you've learned in your classes.

Some women also choose to have a doula, or professional labor assistant. Doulas support both women and their childbirth partners and can take some of the pressure off during a long labor.

Childbirth education classes help prepare women for what to expect in labor and delivery. The techniques taught in popular classes, such as Lamaze, Bradley, and Read, can vary, but the idea is the same—that fear and tension make pain worse. They aim to relieve pain through education, emotional support, relaxation techniques, and touch. Your doctor can give you information on the different types of classes available.

During childbirth classes, you will learn about a number of different ways to approach labor and delivery. Topics that may be addressed include having a natural childbirth vs. using pain relief medication during labor, episiotomy, breastfeeding after delivery, and who will be in the delivery room.

If you choose to work with a midwife, ACOG recommends using a certified nurse-midwife (CNM) or certified midwife (CM). Unlike lay midwives, CNMs and CMs are accredited, have passed a national certification exam, and are trained professionals. They work with qualified doctors to care for women and their babies through early pregnancy, labor, delivery, and the weeks after birth.

Women must also consider where they will deliver. It is important to be in a setting where trained emergency medical staff are available in case any complications arise that threaten the life or health of the mother or baby. Therefore, ACOG recommends that all births take place in a hospital setting or a birthing center within a hospital complex.

Discussing these details beforehand can ease confusion at the time of your delivery. You can make a list of options that appeal to you and share them with your doctor for review. He or she can let you know if your preferences conflict with hospital policy. ♀

To Be Equal
Marc Morial, President and CEO
National Urban League



Alma Brown Receives Equal Opportunity Day Special Recognition Award

"Let us work not as colored people nor as white people for the narrow benefit of any group alone, but together, as American citizens, for the common good of our common city, our common country."

Ruth Standish Baldwin, co-founder with George Edmund Haynes of the National Urban League in 1910.

Last week, as we have done for the past five decades, the National Urban League presented the Equal Opportunity Day Award – its highest commendation – to outstanding Americans who personify the League's mission and have been champions of equal opportunity, civil rights and social justice. Equal Opportunity Day is always a high point of the year for us – a chance to take a deep breath, celebrate our progress, and recognize the people and organizations that have supported us over the years. It is even more special when we have a chance to recognize someone who has been a part of our volunteer family for as long as the recipient of this year's Special Recognition Award, National Urban League board vice chair, Alma Arrington Brown.

In 1996, Alma Brown and her husband, Ronald H. Brown were one of Washington's most dynamic power couples. After years as a National Urban League official and success as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Ron had been appointed by President Clinton the first African American Secretary of Commerce. Alma was building a career of her own. She was well on her way to becoming senior vice president of Chevy Chase Bank while lending her talents to numerous local and national civic causes, including the National Urban League.

Ron's death in a tragic plane crash while on a trade mission to Croatia in April of 1996 changed everything. Alma's personal grief was shared by an African American community that was proud of Ron's rise from the hard streets of Harlem to the innermost circles of power in

Washington. Her loss was also felt by a mourning nation that was coming to know her husband as a tireless champion of economic empowerment for all Americans. But instead of allowing herself to be broken by the tragedy, Alma Arrington Brown, realized that it was now up to her to uphold Ron's legacy and to inspire their children, Tracey and Michael, by redoubling her own commitment to equal opportunity and social justice.

In addition to her day job as senior vice president of Chevy Chase Bank, she serves as Vice Chairman of the National Urban League board and has become a national leader in public and community service. Alma Brown has been a program specialist with the National Black Child Development Institute, program director of the National Council of Negro Women and Director of the Office of International Business. She has hosted her own public affairs show on Washington's WKYS-FM and remains active in the United Negro College Fund and the Girl Scouts of America. She has also worked to get more progressive African American women elected to public office and has supported efforts to end domestic violence. She established the Ronald H. Brown Foundation and the Ron Brown Scholars Program in honor of her late husband. Their son, Michael Brown, is a member of the City Council of Washington, D.C., and their daughter, Tracy Brown, is an attorney with the Cochran Firm. The next generation of the Brown family are following in the family tradition and making their marks in the legal and political worlds.

A graduate of Fisk University, Alma Brown credits her success to the closeness of family and the values of empowerment and self-sufficiency that were instilled in her by her mother and that she shared with her husband, Ron Brown. It was a great honor for me, on November 16th, to present the National Urban League 2011 Equal Opportunity Day – Special Recognition Award to Alma Arrington Brown.



Open to the Public
The Prince George's County Genealogical Society
 The Prince George's County Genealogical Society Library houses 5,500 volumes, many periodicals, surname files, family group sheets, Bible records and microfilms. The library is housed in a circa 1961 Bowie ranch-style house. The library is open to the public 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. each Wednesday except the first Wednesday of the month (10 a.m. to 1 p.m.) and also on the last Saturday of each month 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Research tours for groups may be scheduled on days other than Wednesday if prior arrangements are made with the archivist or staff. The Prince George's County Genealogical Society was founded in 1969 and is the oldest county genealogical society in continuous existence in the State of Maryland. As the Society grew so did the need for a Library. Initially the Founding and Charter members loaned books from their personal libraries to one another. As the Society acquired books through purchase or gift, a Library Committee was appointed and the Librarian transported the small collection to and from meetings. In 1981 H. Ivan and Dorothy T. Rainwater, long time Bowie residents, were instrumental in finding a home for the Library in Bowie. Acting in concert with Bowie City officials, the Library has been housed in the Belair Mansion, the Belair Stables Museum and now shares space with the Curator of the City of Bowie in a house owned by the City. The Library is comprised of a reading room, staff office and stacks room. While the Library is open to the public, only Society members may borrow books, periodicals and video and audio cassettes. Members may borrow 8 books, unlimited periodical issues and the cassettes for one month at a time. Regardless of a member's residence, they can access the library and perform their research in the comfort of home.

Child Watch
 by Marion Wright Edelman



Cuts in Education: A Failing Choice

Aristotle got it right when he said, "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth." Once upon a time America professed to believe in a strong public education system—at least for some children. And we still talk about public education as the great equalizer and pathway out of poverty but continue to fall far short in assuring millions of poor children, especially those of color, upward mobility.

As if children and families were not suffering enough during this economic downturn, many states are choosing to balance budgets on the backs of children and to shift more costs away from government onto children and families who have fewer means to bear them. That is a shameful trend in public education today. Even when students are in school, they're getting less than they used to. Of the 46 states that publish data in a manner allowing historical comparisons, 37 are providing less funding per student to local school districts this school year than they provided last year, and 30 are providing less funding than they did four years ago. Seventeen states have cut per-student funding more than 10 percent from pre-recession levels, and four—South Carolina, Arizona, California, and Hawaii—have reduced per student funding for K-12 schools more than 20 percent.

These cuts have major effects on critical learning opportunities. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found funding cuts in Georgia will mean shortening the pre-kindergarten school year from 180 to 160 days for 86,000 four-year-olds. Since the start of the recession, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Texas, and other states have cut funding from early education programs to help close budget shortfalls. New Jersey cut funding for after-school programs. In a 2009 survey of California parents, 41 percent reported their child's school was cutting summer programs. Cuts limiting student learning time are likely to intensify in the coming year. An American Association of School

Administrators survey reports 17 percent of respondents were considering shortening the school week to four days for the 2011-2012 school year and 40 percent were considering eliminating summer school programs. Summer learning loss is a major contributor to the achievement gap between poor and nonpoor children. Districts across the country are beginning to cut extracurricular activities and to charge fees for supplies like biology safety goggles or printer ink.

These education cuts come at a time when American education is in dire straits. The United States ranks 24th among 30 developed countries in overall educational achievement for 15-year-olds. A study of education systems in 60 countries ranks the United States 31st in math achievement and 23rd in science achievement for 15-year-olds. More than 60 percent of all fourth, eighth, and 12th grade public school students in every racial and income group are reading or doing math below grade level. Nearly 80 percent or more of Black and Hispanic students in these grades are reading or doing math below grade level. A recent report by the Education Trust notes more than one in five high school graduates don't meet the minimum standard required for Army

enlistment as measured by the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Among applicants of color, the ineligibility rates are even higher: 29 percent of Hispanics and 39 percent of African Americans are ineligible based on their AFQT scores.

Children should be getting more quality instructional time, not less, to prepare to compete in the rapidly globalizing economy. Instead they're being held back and provided less school days and hours by stopgap solutions to budget problems they didn't cause. Too many adults seem to lack a moral, common, and fiscal sense context for making decisions about what to cut and what to invest in. The Children's Defense Fund's first publication in 1974 was on Children Out of School in America. We documented two million children not enrolled in school, including hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities. As we went door to door interviewing thousands of families in 30 census tracts for that initial study, we never thought to ask the question, "Is your child home today because her school is closed to help balance your district's budget?"

At the Children's Defense Fund we believe education is a basic human right and an essen-

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The Prince George's Post

The Prince George's Post
 P.O. Box 1001 15207 Marlboro Pike
 Upper Marlboro, MD 20772-3151
 Phone 301-627-0900 Legal Fax • 301-627-6260
 Editorial Fax • 301-627-8147
 Contents © 2011, The Prince George's Post

Publisher Legusta Floyd	Subscriptions Anna Curry
General Manager/ Legal Advertising Manager Brenda Boice	Editor Legusta Floyd
Legal Advertising Assistant Robin Boerckel	Web Manager Kylar Quesenberry

Prince George's County, Md. Member National Newspaper Publishers Association, and the Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia Press Association. The Prince George's Post (ISSN 10532226) is published every Thursday by the New Prince George's Post Inc., 15207 Marlboro Pike, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151. Subscription rate: 25 cents per single copy; \$15 per year; \$7.50 senior citizens and students; out of county add \$1; out of state add \$2. Periodical postage paid at Southern Md. 20790. Postmaster, send address changes to Prince George's Post, P.O. Box 1001, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151.

BUSINESS

Congressman Steny Hoyer Tours UPS Facilities, Delivers Remarks on Make It In America Plan

Landover, MD — Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-5) toured UPS's Landover packaging center and their state-of-the-art job training facility. Hoyer met with and addressed approximately 300 UPS drivers and package handlers, many of whom are constituents. He discussed how House Democrats' Make It In America plan will create jobs, strengthen our economy, and restore the American dream. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery: "I am so glad to be here with all of you to tour this wonderful facility and meet some of the hardworking men and women who keep it running. I'm incredibly proud to represent many of you in Congress. "I also want to take a moment to thank you for all of the time and energy you gave to help some of our community's charitable organizations, including the Special Olympics, the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association, and the Boys and Girls Clubs.



FILE PHOTO
Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-5) toured UPS's Landover packaging center and their state-of-the-art job training facility.

"In addition to touring the packaging center, one of the reasons I was eager to visit with you today is to talk to you briefly about an initiative in Congress called Make It In America.

"The recession hit a lot of Americans hard, especially those already struggling to make ends meet. The Make It In America plan is House Democrats' answer to the challenges we face in unemployment and economic recovery, and I have been proud to take the lead on it.

"Make It In America will help create jobs right away and strengthen our economic competitiveness over the long-term. It does so by employing a combination of tax incentives for businesses and investments in education, infrastructure, and the research and development that fuel American innovation.

"Now, Make It In America has two meanings. First, we need to help more of our people "make it" in this country. That is, we need to restore the promise of the American dream for the millions of people who are out of work or are struggling to make ends meet. To do so, we need to "make things" in America — help businesses design and build their products here and sell them at home and around the world.

"Today, I'm going to modi-

fy Make It In America just a bit and add a new meaning. Make It In America can also mean "move it in America." That's where you come in.

"Our plan will help more businesses create their products here and sell domestically and overseas. That will mean more packages for UPS to move around the country and across the world. You have a central role to play in boosting our economy and helping get more Americans back to work.

"Make It In America contains many good, bipartisan ideas, ranging from an infrastructure bank to advanced energy research funding, to investments in manufacturing and other sectors of the economy. By advanced energy, of course, I mean the kind of technology powering UPS's new alternative fuel vehicles, which I had the opportunity to see a few minutes ago.

"One of the central components of Make It In America is strengthening our education system, in particular, preparing more of our students in math and science, and helping encourage them to start thinking earlier about their careers. As great as UPS's "Integrad" training center is, we want to reduce the amount of training businesses have to do by making sure our graduates are already prepared for the tasks required of them in 21st century jobs.

"Make It In America, though, is about more than just a plan for jobs and the economy.

It's about the American dream. The American dream is a contract between generations — that we will take the investments our parents made in America for us and reinvest the dividends in the America we are making for our children.

"People are worried about being able to deliver to their children the same opportunities they received growing up. Make It In America will help us restore the promise of the American dream by enabling us to out-educate, out-innovate, and out-build our foreign competitors for the next generation. President Obama introduced his own plan, the American Jobs Act, in September. Along with Make It In America, it has the potential to put Americans back to work right away.

"Sadly, Republicans in Congress have refused to consider it. The one exception has been a small piece of the President's plan to encourage businesses to hire veterans. I'm glad Republicans were able to work with us on that. I am also gratified to know that UPS is doing its share to recruit veterans, who are some of our nation's most productive, skilled, and reliable people, as employees and franchise owners.

"I am confident that, if we can turn Make It In America into a reality, we can get millions of Americans back to work and help businesses give all of you at ups the chance to do what you do best: move it in America!

"Thank you, and good luck out there today."

GOVERNOR O'MALLEY APPOINTS ROBERT HAGANS TO THE MARYLAND STATE RETIREMENT AND PENSION SYSTEM BOARD OF TRUSTEES

ANNAPOLIS, MD (November 21, 2011) — Governor Martin O'Malley today announced the appointment of Robert R. Hagans to the Board of Trustees for the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System. He will assume the trustee position previously held by Robert Schaefer.

"I am pleased to announce Robert's appointment to the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System Board," said Governor O'Malley. "His steadfast belief in fiscal stewardship and years of expertise in financial management will serve us well as we work together to develop a more sustainable and effective system for all state employees."

Since 2001, Mr. Hagans has served as chief financial officer for the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). In this position he provides strategic guidance and expertise in all areas of AARP's financial management, strategy implementation and policy formulation, in addition to AARP's environmental and physical resources.

Mr. Hagans also has over 30 years of work experience in nonprofits and financial management. Prior to joining AARP, he served as director of finance for Prince George's County Government, where he was responsible for the management of the \$1.7 billion in cash flow of county funds and the \$780 million debt management program. Hagans also served as assistant vice president for Asset Management and Treasury Operations at Howard University and served on the Prince George's County Police and Fire Service Pension Plans Board of Trustees and the Prince George's County Risk Management Committee.

He currently serves as treasurer and trustee on the Board of Directors of Industrial Bank and chairs the Finance Committee of the Board of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington. Hagans is a member of the Executive Leadership Council and a member and mentor of the 100 Black Men of Greater Washington, DC. He is a resident of Mitchellville, MD.



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Gourds from A1

when consumers are most open to her products.

"This time of the year is really good because they're really conducive to Halloween and Christmas decorations," Worley said. "People are just in the mood to think about them."

Worley has created gourd sculptures, pendants and gourd goblets -- or "gourblets" -- from the fruits, and most of her pieces are intended to be decorative.

Williams said his business isn't necessarily seasonal. He crafts and sells sculptural gourds featuring bold dyes, basketry and natural materials like deer antlers and leather all year.

Williams splits his time between Maryland his second home in Saguache, Colo., where he features his gourds and other art in his private Smith Market Gallery. During his time on the East Coast, Williams also spends many of his weekends at the Old Town Farmers' Market in Alexandria, Va., as well as at gourd and art festivals.

"My gourds aren't really designed for the seasonal market, I mean I do sell some raw gourds without having any decorations on them," Williams said. "It has some symbolism in it and some people can appreciate that more than others. ... I don't appeal typically to an impulse audience."

Still Williams said his personalized works make excellent holiday gifts.

"Personal artwork does sell toward the holiday season for gifts, generally for special peo-

ple or something because of the price," Williams said.

Williams' gourds range from about \$40 to \$600, he said, but people pay because they're revered as art rather than as tchotchkes.

"Some people want to have the colors that I put on my gourds in their houses -- it matches the decor, it can be an eye-catching focal point in a room -- so there's a number of different reasons, but my work tends to be more sculptural in form than functional and/or cute," Williams said. "They're generally treated as objects of art, so again, that kind of requires a special market."

Ratliffe said buyers value gourd art because it is so tangible.

"You can feel the art, you can put your fingers in the notches," she said. "A painting, you hang on the wall and you look at it, but a piece of gourd art you hold in your hand."

Decorative gourds come in all shapes and sizes -- ranging from one inch to more than 3 feet in diameter. Worley said she uses different varieties of African hard-shell gourds, which naturally range in size, though most of her works are around 10 inches in diameter.

Williams said he typically works with gourds around the same size.

"Each gourd is different than every other gourd, even when they're growing on the same vine. They're different sizes, they're somewhat different shapes, their texture is different," Williams said. "I can, without fear of a contradiction, tell anybody that buys one of my pieces that they have a one-

of-a-kind item."

Crafting gourds into works of art is no quick process -- it takes between six and nine months for gourds to season before artists can begin designing them. During that time the gourds develop a thick layer of mold, which artists must first bleach and then scrub to remove. Once they've dried again and the interior is removed, they're ready for dyeing, burning and embellishing.

"What's really very rewarding to me is I plant the seed for what turns out to be my canvas and I watch the vines grow -- I take part in every aspect of this art," Radcliffe said. "It's more than just starting with a white canvas, a flat plane. You have the challenge of a 360-degree canvas."

Ratliffe noted that raw ornamental gourds typically appear as autumn decorations, but she said they can be transformed into works of art appropriate for any season.

"Ornamental gourds are more popular (in the fall) because it's all part of that whole pumpkin and orange thing going on, but a lot of people don't realize that ... you can dry those also, so you don't have to rebuy them every year," Ratcliffe said. "You can turn them into your own year-round ornamental gourds."

Although people can decorate with gourds any time of year, Worley said she thinks the fall and winter holidays the most suitable time to display them around the house.

"It's just nice to have something organic in your home to celebrate the season," Worley said.

OUT ON THE TOWN

ERIC D. SNIDER'S
IN THE DARK

Movie Review

"Happy Feet Two"

"HAPPY FEET TWO"

B-

Rated PG for some rude humor and perilous situations. 1 hr., 40 min.

"Happy Feet Two" is such a messy, giddy collage of undisciplined storytelling and half-developed subplots that I'm amazed I enjoyed it as much as I did. Like its predecessor, also directed and co-written by George Miller ("Babe: Pig in the City," the "Mad Max" series), the sequel gets by largely on goofy energy and good-naturedness, not quote-unquote "strong writing" or "clear ideas."

As we recall from re-reading our review of the first movie, the emperor penguins of Antarctica used to express themselves primarily through song, and frowned upon dancing, until one of them, a kid named Mumble (voice of Elijah Wood), taught them the power of dance, or something. The sequel commences with Mumble now happily married to Gloria (Alecia Moore, aka Pink), and the whole tribe cheerfully singin' and dancin' all the live-long day. Now, wouldn't you know it, because it's a sequel and history must repeat itself, Mumble and Gloria's shy little hatchling, Erik (Ava Acres), doesn't dance. He feels like an outcast because of it. It's a classic reverse "Billy Elliot" scenario.

Meanwhile, in the part of Antarctica where the penguins have Latino accents, our feisty friend Ramon (Robin Williams, using an exaggerated accent) is trying to woo a sexy new female, Carmen (Sofia Vergara, using her regular speaking voice). Also, an exotic new penguin named Sven (Hank Azaria) has arrived. He has a Scandinavian accent and can fly! A penguin who can fly! He looks suspiciously like a puffin, not a penguin, but maybe that's a spoiler? Anyway, Ramon is jealous of the attention received by the glad-handing, Harold Hill-like Sven.

Meanwhile, in the ocean are two tiny krill named Will (Brad Pitt) and Bill (Matt Damon). Will wants to leave the massive krill swarm and move up the food chain -- really live a little, you know? He and Bill flit in and out of the rest of the film, occasionally intersecting with whatever the main plot happens to be at the moment, and sometimes seeming like they're in their own movie altogether.

Meanwhile -- there is a lot of mean while in this movie -- a shifting ice formation has trapped all the emperor penguins in a giant valley, preventing them from accessing the sea and thus food. (Climate change is apparently the cause, though that point isn't underscored.) It's up to the handful of their kind who weren't home when it happened to help them get out and



PHOTO COURTESY ROTTENTOMATOES

Happy Feet Two returns audiences to the magnificent landscape of Antarctica in superb 3D. Mumble, the Master of Tap, has a problem because his tiny son, Erik, is choreo-phobic. Reluctant to dance, Erik runs away and encounters The Mighty Sven-a penguin who can fly! Mumble has no hope of competing with this charismatic new role model. But things get worse when the world is shaken by powerful forces. Erik learns of his father's "guts and grit" as Mumble brings together the penguin nations and all manner of fabulous creatures--from tiny Krill to giant Elephant Seals--to put things right. -- (C) Warner Bros

find a new site for their colony.

Whew! That's a lot for one movie. (I didn't even mention the flashbacks to Sven's encounter with humans, or the intimidating elephant seal that harasses Mumble.) The trapped penguins are the real story; everything else is included for funsies, and to give the characters from the last movie something to do. It is clear that "Happy Feet Two" is not one of those sequels that are rushed into production because someone had a really, really good idea for a story.

That being said, it's consistently amusing, sometimes

deliriously fun, with slick and vibrant animation. It has upbeat messages about helping one another and the value of every individual. The musical numbers, primarily existing pop songs but some written for the film, are made even catchier than before by the addition of choreography. One of the original songs is, I kid you not, an operatic aria -- characteristic of the film's likably weird, try-everything-and-see-what-sticks mentality. It won't be the best cartoon of the year; thanks to "Rango," it won't even be the most eccentric. But it'll do, penguin. It'll do.

The Third Annual Maryland National Hoops Classic Kicks December 28-30 at Northwestern High School

Team Lineup

Outstanding High School Basketball Competition for Holiday Season

The Maryland National Hoops Classic is a three-day holiday tournament featuring eight (8) high school basketball teams going head-to-head in this highly competitive Holiday Basketball Classic.

From Wednesday, December 28 through Friday, December 30, 2011 at Northwestern High School, 7000 Adelphi Road, Hyattsville, Maryland, spectators will experience high school basketball at its finest.

Games are scheduled at 3:00 p.m.; 5:00 p.m.; 7:00 p.m.; and 9:00 p.m. each day.

First Day Game Match-Ups:

3:00 p.m. National Christian Academy, Fort Washington, MD, is returning a powerhouse team, with several new and exciting prospects. 6'4 Sr. Guard - D. Thomas is considering a scholarship offer from Wagner College; 6'5 Sr. Forward - D. Moore scored 39 pts in a game last year; 6'8 Jr. Forward - Z. Douglas is being recruited by Big East, ACC, Atlantic Ten and CAA schools; and 6'2 Soph. Combo-Guard - J. Davis is under the watchful eyes of several ACC and Big East Schools. VS.

Glenelg County Day School, Ellicott City, MD 2010 was the inaugural season of Glenelg Country, Coach Kevin Quinlan, where he led the boys' basketball program to a 26-4 record and its first ever MIAA B conference championship. In his second season, Coach Q will lead the Dragons to another first as he prepares the defending MIAA-B champions for their

big move up to the A conference. With stand-outs like 6'8 Sr. C. Moune, Glenelg is positioned to move in to the MIAA-A Conference with a competitive edge.

5:00 p.m.

Henry Wise High School, Upper Marlboro, MD, were the winners of the MNHC '10 Winter Tournament over Archbishop Carroll. Wise has a new Head Coach, Rob Garner, who says that the Pumas will be ready to defend their Title, with outstanding players like 6'3 Guard - K. Shivers, 5'10 Guard - C. Thompson and 6'6 Forward - W. Langston, and a strong supporting cast. VS.

Old Mill High School, Millersville, MD, has a strong blend of three returning seniors: 5'11 G - G. Salmond, 6'2 G - B. Hinton and 6'3 Forward D. Jackson.

7:00 p.m.

North Mecklenburg High School, Huntersville, NC, is known as "The College Basketball Players Factory of North Carolina." Coach Louis is very proud of the fact that over 45 young men from his basketball program have gone on to collegiate programs over the past ten years.

Team Captain is 5'10 Guard - S. Wiggins, is a Div. I recruit who led the City of Charlotte in assists for the 2010-11 season;

Newcomer 6'7 Senior Center, J. Stepolie is making his debut on the basketball court, but he is an experience Offensive linebacker for North Mecklenburg's football team and is being recruited by Div I schools Univ. Pitt and Temple, and returning 6'5 Junior, Forward - Tahjai Watt, also a



FILE PHOTO

The Maryland National Hoops Classic is a three-day holiday tournament featuring eight (8) high school basketball teams going head-to-head in this highly competitive Holiday.

Div. I recruit.

You can expect to see a hard-working team effort out of North Mecklenburg. VS.

Riverdale Baptist, Upper Marlboro, MD, is the 2011 NCSAA (National Christian Athletic Association) Champions. Under the leadership of Coach Lou Wilson, Riverdale Baptist returns four of their starting lineup: Sr. Guard - K. Hill, Sr. Guard O. Lewis, Sr. Forward M. Durant and Sr. Forward B. Peel. Peel has committed to attend Central Connecticut State University in the Fall. Coach Wilson plays a pressure defense with a strong 10 man rotation.

9:00 p.m.

Northwestern High School, Adelphi, MD, The Wildcats believe they have the pieces in place to be a contender in the County 4A League. Northwestern (11-12 last season) has two returning starters N. Speller and J. Prince, both of whom are listed on the Maryland and Washington, DC High School Leader Board as

"2012 Players to Watch." VS.

DuVal High School, Lanham, MD, is a seasoned team who is returning 4 starting players on their lineup. In addition their bench, is also very strong with Juniors J. Robinson, (transfer from Bowie H.S.) and M. Sellers (transfer from DeMatha) who should both see a lot of playing time.

Major sponsors of the Maryland National Hoops Classic include: Dixie Sporting, WPGC 955, Russell Athletics, Old Line Bank, NAI The Michael Companies, IAABO, Mosscape, and Cincture. All of the sponsors, large and small, have made it possible for The MNHC to bring this competitive High School Basketball Holiday Tournament to the Community.

Tickets are still available at each participating school. Please visit the MNHC website for more information:

www.mdnationalhoopsclassic.org

The Edge of Sports

by DAVE ZIRIN

Tebow Redeemed?

"You are what your record says your are." It's a classic lunchpail NFL phrase, courtesy of retired coach Bill Parcells. It means forget how good you or your team think you are. Forget your stats. Forget all the ways you came up just short. The end results define the entire journey. It's the amoral slogan of the sports world's soul. It allows us to cheer for unsavory individuals and root for teams that vacuum our wallets clean. You are what your record says you are, and winning excuses all.

But this consecrated commandment of sports is being challenged like never before. If you are what your record says you are, what does that possibly tell us about the man with the top jersey sales in the NFL, Tim Tebow? The Broncos quarterback is 4-1. His presence has undeniably revived a moribund team. He has led the Broncos on winning fourth-quarter drives in all four of his victories. If you are what your record says you are, then Tebow at 4-1 must be considered at this moment, one of the best. And yet... he's just awful. I don't write that because Tebow is a Focus on the Family spokesperson who has a series of religiously tinged political views I find abhorrent. I write it because I have been watching football since I was sucking a bottle, and I have two working eyes.

Tim Tebow's completion percentage is 44.8 percent. Take away his magical fourth quarters and the number is closer to 30 percent. This kind of awful is in the "Shaq free-throw percentage, Mario Mendoza batting average" sports hall of fame. But he's not awful in the turgid unwatchable way that, say, a Kate Hudson movie is awful. He's fascinating/awful. He's Reefer Madness awful. He's old Nic Cage in Vampire's Kiss awful. Tim Tebow throws a football like someone heaving a ham-shaped grenade. It needs to be seen to be believed. I've never used this phrase to describe an NFL quarterback, and hope I never have to again, but he's thrillingly campy. Watching him is like watching Sarah Palin be interviewed by someone off the Murdoch payroll. Disaster lurks, but the prurient/erotic ardor of their admirers fills the air around them and you cannot look away. National Review's Rich Lowry once said, presumably while crossing and recrossing his legs, that Sarah Palin "sent little starbursts through the screen." Tebow's fans shake with the same puritanical spasms, as they wear number 15 jerseys with Jesus, instead of Tebow stitched on the back. He's the promise ring of NFL quarterbacks and I see a spectacle from which I cannot avert my eyes.

Thrilling and campy. In the last three games, he's gone 9-20, 10-21 and a simply unreal 2-8 passing the ball. He's inspired sentences like, this one from ESPN's Ian O'Connor: "As a professional football player, Tim Tebow makes no sense. He is among the most unartful dodgers in NFL history, a god-awful quarterback for about nine-tenths of your average game before voila, just like that, he is magical enough to make a New York Jets season go poof in the night."

The Denver coaching staff, who turned to Tebow after a listless 1-4 start, have turned their playbook into an index card. It's the offensive equivalent of the flat tax. And like the flat tax, it fails miserably for the great majority. The Broncos punted eight straight times versus the Jets. Tebow started 6-15 passing. Yet their defense is stalwart and more importantly they believe in Tebow. In other words, they feel that if they can keep the game close, Tebow will find a way to pull it out for them in the fourth quarter. He hasn't let them down. But how?

Denver coach John Fox has broken with decades of NFL orthodoxy by allowing Tebow to use a system that gives the quarterback the option to run the ball. Here he looks in his element, playing with purpose. Tebow is hardly a Michael Vick, but he's big, strong and hits an open hole as good as most running backs. He's rushed for almost 400 yards at about seven yards a carry.

That Tebow has been given the chance to run the option is testament to his coach. It's also a testament to the racial double standards that have historically defined the quarterback position. The best option qbs over the decades like Oklahoma's Jamelle Holieway or Nebraska's Tommy Frazier, were terrific runners and NCAA national champions, albeit with questionable arm strength. They were also African-American and NFL opportunities were nonexistent. If they did get a chance, like the great Brian Mitchell who was a star college quarterback, they were told to change positions. This stereotype of what makes a good "field general" affected white option quarterbacks as well, like Heisman winner Eric Crouch of Nebraska. Despite a set of unorthodox talents, they were told they didn't fit the mold. When running quarterbacks showed up with the proper arm strength--like Donovan McNabb or Michael Vick--the player would be harangued by the press and coaching staff that they had to change their style top-to-bottom if they wanted to succeed in the NFL. They were informed that they had to drop back and run only as a last resort.

It's good to be Tim Tebow. You get to be adored while going 2-8 passing. You get a playbook simplified and tailored to your strengths. You get to prove all your haters wrong. But it's not Tim Tebow who's been redeemed. Not yet, anyways. Not after five games. Its every option qb--black or white--told that the NFL wasn't for them. You are what your record says you are, and Tim Tebow is 4-1. Let's see, if nothing else, if this provides more opportunities for quarterbacks who didn't fit the mold and were blocked at the door.

[Dave Zirin is the author of "The John Carlos Story" (Haymarket) and just made the new documentary "Not Just a Game." Receive his column every week by emailing dave@edgeofsports.com.

Contact him at edgeofsports@gmail.com.]

Calendar of Events

December 1 - December 7, 2011

25th Annual Winter Festival of Lights

Dates & Times: Friday, November 25, 2011 through Sunday, January 1, 2012 5-9:30 pm (daily)

Description: You won't want to miss this season's spectacular drive-through displays! Featuring more than a million twinkling lights, the 25th Annual Winter Festival of Light is a joyful event for everyone. Please bring a canned good with you for donation to local food banks.

Cost: \$5/cars and vans; \$15/mini-buses and limos; \$25/buses; \$10/multi-visit passes for cars and vans. The festival is FREE on December 25.

Ages: All ages

Location: Watkins Regional Park
301 Watkins Park Drive, Upper Marlboro 20774
Contact: 301-699-2456; TTY 301-699-2544

Blankets of Love: Coloring Our Dreams

Date and Time: Monday, October 3-Monday, December 5

Description: Oakcrest Community Center is sponsoring a blanket drive to benefit two assisted living facilities: Forestville Health & Rehabilitation Center and Heartfield Assistant Living Center in Bowie.

The facility is also collecting coloring books, crayons, and soothing sounds CD's to benefit the Prince Georges County Pediatric Unit and the Sub Unit of Mount Washington Pediatric Hospital.

Ages: All ages

Location: Oakcrest Community Center
1300 Capitol Heights Blvd., Capitol Heights 20743
Contact: (301) 736-5355; TTY 301-218-6768

Line Dancing at Seat Pleasant

Date & Time: Beginning November 5, Saturdays, 11:30 am-1 pm

Description: Here's a way to lose weight, release stress, build stamina and start a healthy life style -- all of this while having fun with Ms. Hattie Frazier. Wear comfortable shoes, bring a hand towel and get ready to dance your stress away.

Cost: Resident \$20; Non-Resident \$28; \$6/drop-in fee

Ages: 18 & up

Location: Seat Pleasant Activity Center
5720 Addison Road, Seat Pleasant 20743
Contact: 301-773-6685; TTY 301-218-6768
SMARTlink # 692464

12th Annual Gingerbread House Contest and Show

Date and Time: Friday-Sunday, November 25-27, 12-5 pm

Description: For a sweet treat, come and view an amazing display of edible gingerbread houses. No nibbling allowed! Visitors have the opportunity to vote in the Viewer's Choice Award Competition. No reservations necessary.

Cost: \$1/person Ages: All ages

Location: Darnall's Chance House Museum
14800 Governor Oden Bowie Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD
Contact: 301-952-8010; TTY 301-699-2544

PUBLICLY PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES 2011-2012 DANCE SEASON

CHEVERLY, MD—The Publicly Playhouse 2011-2012 season includes national and international dance performances, beginning with The Philadelphia Dance Company's PHILADANCO on Friday, November 18 at 8 pm, in a leggy jet-propelled performance with soul that celebrates the company's 40th anniversary. On Friday, January 6, at 8 pm, the Playhouse hosts the international tour of the Russian National Ballet Theatre in a classical full-length presentation of "Cinderella" that is full of humor and features a large Russian company trained in the Bolshoi and Kirov traditions.

Saturday, February 4 at 8 pm, Nimbaya! Women Master Drummers and Dancers of Guinea make the Playhouse the only Washington area stop on their first American tour in several years. Formerly called "Amazones", these exciting, energetic artists are celebrated throughout Africa for breaking social barriers to women's independence by performing the dances and playing the instruments that for centuries were restricted to men.

In April, Dallas Black Dance Theatre returns for their annual Playhouse residency with a new program of feisty, fearless and fiery modern dance performances on Friday and Saturday, April 27 and 28 at 8 pm and Sunday, April 29 at 4 pm.

Tickets to each of the four dance companies in this series are \$20, or \$15/seniors, students, DancePass, and groups of 15 or more. There's also an advance ticket savings of half price for one dance company when buying all four prior to November 18.

Area dancers are also part of the season. On Sunday, February 26, at 4 pm, the annual liturgical dance festival PRAISE! features gospel singer Cora Harvey Armstrong of Richmond and exceptional dance troupes from area churches. Saturday, March 17 at 8 pm, the 10th annual World Dance Showcase highlights the broad cultural richness and talent found in our nation's capitol. Tickets for each of these programs are \$12; \$10/seniors and students.

Young dancers are on stage at Bust a Move with Café Groove on Friday, March 2 from 7-10pm, when teens battle for cash prizes and the title of "Prince George's Best Dance Crew", with teen-only admission for \$3. And Sunday, March 4, at 4 pm, the Love 2 Dance Teen Showcase presents hot talent from area schools and studios. Tickets: \$12; \$10/seniors and students

Dance Classes with visiting artists include Nimbaya! workshops on Saturday, February 4, with a Drum Workshop at 10 am and an African Dance Workshop at 12 noon for drummers and dancers age 13 and up; fee: \$15/class. On April 25 and 26 from 7:30-9 pm Dallas Black Dance Theatre offers their annual Master Classes in Modern Dance for advanced dancers on Wednesday, and Liturgical Dance Workshop for intermediate and advanced dancers on Thursday; fee \$15/class or observer. Also, Big Girls Dance Workshops are being held during National Fitness Month, with an African dance workshop on Tuesday, May 8 from 6:30-8 pm, and a Belly Dance Workshop on Thursday, May 10 from 6:30-8 pm; free/one workshop per person, with advance registration required.

The Playhouse is a facility of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Department of Recreation, Arts and Cultural Heritage Division. For more information, call 301-277-1710 or visit arts.pgprks.com

EARTH TALK ... Will eating garlic and onions help prevent cancer?

Dear EarthTalk:

Given the preponderance of carcinogenic chemicals out there today, is it true that eating certain foods like garlic or onions can actually help prevent cancer?

-- M. Stone, Boston, MA

Natural healers have extolled the cancer-preventing virtues of garlic and onions for years, but only recently do we have enough scientific research to draw some conclusions. Several animal studies showing promising results using garlic and other members of the allium family (onions, leek, shallot, and chive) to prevent tumors have led to hundreds of studies involving human garlic eaters. While it is near impossible to pinpoint a direct link between garlic consumption and cancer prevention, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) reports that "several population studies show an association between increased intake of garlic and reduced risk of certain cancers, including cancers of the stomach, colon, esophagus, pancreas, and breast."

To wit, a multi-year study of 25,000 people from Switzerland and Italy found that those who ate the most garlic and onions were up to 88 percent less likely to develop various types of cancer (including cancers of the esophagus, mouth, throat, colon, breast, ovary, prostate and kidney) than those who said they ate little or none. "High onion intake, for example, was associated with a 56 percent lower risk of colon cancer and a 25 percent lower risk of breast cancer compared to no onion intake," reports Karen Collins of the non-profit American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR).

According to Collins, another study found a 32 percent lower colon cancer risk among



CREDIT: THINKSTOCK

Although there is no definitive proof, many studies seem to indicate that consumption of onions, garlic and other members of the allium family (leeks, shallots and chives) reduces the risk of certain cancers.

Iowan women who ate at least one garlic clove a week compared to others who ate one once a month or less, while an analysis of several studies worldwide "linked a 31 percent lower risk of colon cancer with consumption of about four to five cloves of garlic weekly." And the results of several studies conducted in China show that those who eat five cloves of garlic a week are half as likely to develop stomach cancers than non-garlic-eaters. Meanwhile, AICR reports that isolated components of garlic have shown the ability to slow or stop the growth of tumors in prostate, bladder, colon, and stomach tissue.

Just how do allium plants prevent cancer? "Like many vegetables, onions and garlic contain antioxidants that can block highly reactive free radicals from damaging cell DNA and starting the cancer process," reports Collins.

"Laboratory studies have shown that onion and garlic compounds can increase enzymes that deactivate carcinogens in the body, enhancing our ability to eliminate carcinogens before they do any damage."

Some researchers, however, say that study limitations—that is, the accuracy of reported amounts and frequency of garlic consumed and the inability to compare data from studies that used different garlic products and amounts—make a definitive declaration on the topic unlikely anytime soon. And without such definitive conclusive proof of a causal link, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will not allow food purveyors to state the health benefits of the garlic in their products on their labels.

NCI would like to see better-designed human dietary studies using predetermined amounts of garlic to discern potentially

effective intakes as well as more studies directly comparing various garlic preparations. "Given this protective potential, the challenge now is to identify amounts that will provide optimal effects," says Collins. In the meantime, don't skimp on the garlic and onions.

CONTACTS: National Cancer Institute, www.cancer.gov; American Institute for Cancer Research, www.aicr.org.

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Health from A1

Office of Health Care Reform, agreed.

"The fact that we haven't seen the premiums go down is largely a reflection of the fact that we're not there yet," she said.

The report comes at a time when income growth across the country has fallen flat. Insurance premiums are rising faster than incomes for middle-class Americans, as employers are asking employees to pay higher premiums.

Employer-based health insurance costs have risen three times faster than wages since 2000, and an increasing number of middle-class Americans are living in states where health

insurance premiums accounted for 20 percent or more of their income.

"Out-of-pocket costs for premiums and care are consuming a larger share of people's incomes at a time when incomes are down in a majority of states," said study co-author Cathy Shoen.

Without implementation of health care reform, costs will continue to rise, according to the report. The average premium for family coverage could increase 72 percent by 2020, to almost \$24,000.

But that's only if growth rates stay the same.

New payment and assistance reforms in the Affordable Care Act could begin to curb the rising cost of insurance premiums,

said Shoen. Employers and families could save \$2,161 annually by 2020 if annual premium growth slowed just 1 percent.

But critics of the ACA say that the changes coming in 2014 will only drive costs higher, said Marc Kilmer, senior fellow at Maryland Public Policy Institute. That is because health care reform doesn't address the underlying causes of why health insurance is so expensive in the first place, particularly the cost of care itself. Since most health care is paid for by a third party -- either by insurance companies or the government -- there is no incentive to control costs, he said.

Kilmer points to Massachusetts, which, despite

implementing health care reform in 2007, still has one of the highest costs.

"What's happening in Massachusetts is going to happen on the federal scale," said Kilmer. "Insurance coverage will go up, but that doesn't mean costs will go down."

Maryland is focusing in "like a laser" on lowering costs, said Quattrochi, by reforming the way clinicians deliver care. The state is looking at creating financial incentives for doctors who successfully manage chronic diseases and keep patients healthy.

"The law gives states leeway," DeMarco said, "and we are going to use that leeway to make health care as affordable as we can."

Guns from A1

System, or NICS, that Maryland reported 58 mental health records and zero substance abuse records since 1999. Federal law prohibits mentally ill people and drug abusers from owning guns.

"What we're asking for here today is simple and it could save so many lives," coalition co-chairman and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in a written statement. "Americans -- including most gun owners -- want every gun sale to undergo a background check, but we need a system that works."

Maryland law requires all institutions to notify the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene of any individual admitted to a mental health treatment facility, but there is no state law requiring that information be transferred to the federal database.

Privacy issues, logistical problems, lack of funding and lack of leadership contributed to state's failure to report to the database, the report found. Maryland has "many dis-

parate mental health disability databases" and "much of the data is contained within diffuse court systems and much of it is paper-based," Dori Henry, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene spokeswoman, wrote in an e-mail.

The state is working to ease transmission of information that is not legally confidential to the database but that requires significant coding and document review, Henry wrote.

There is a seven-day waiting period in Maryland to purchase handguns so the state can perform a background check, Maryland State Police spokesman Greg Shipley said. There is no waiting period for long guns, so the immediate NICS background check is used, he said.

The state checks 16 databases when performing a background check, he said, including NICS, the national warrant database, and district court records, among others.

In 2007, the state started asking gun buyers to sign forms allowing the state to check with the Department of Health and

Mental Hygiene regarding their mental health history, Shipley said.

Shipley and Henry mentioned that the various state agencies, including the mental health department, Department of Public Safety and Correction Services, the governor's office and lawmakers have been meeting in a work group to see whether there are ways to improve reporting.

"Many records, such as mental health records, are still unavailable to the NICS," said David Cuthbertson, FBI assistant director of the Criminal Justice Information Services division, to Congress Tuesday. "Many states are challenged by existing privacy laws that bar the sharing of mental health information. The FBI in a consulting capacity assists states seeking to draft legislation permitting the sharing of mental health information with the NICS."

The background check requirement was mandated by Congress in 1993 when it established the database of those prohibited from purchasing a gun, which includes mentally ill peo-

ple. The FBI reports there have been 7,514 gun purchase denials, of 882,447 total denials, because of mental health reasons since the database's launch in 1999.

So far this year, the FBI reports that there have been 78,744 background checks performed in Maryland.

In 2007, in response to the shootings at Virginia Tech, Congress approved the NICS Improvement Amendments Act, which provided financial incentives for states to submit records to the database. However, Maryland has been ineligible for a grant because of the federal requirement to provide a reasonable estimate of records that need to be reported, according to the report.

Maryland mayors listed as members of the Mayors Against Illegal Guns coalition are Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Baltimore; Andrew Fellows, College Park; Craig Moe, Laurel; Phyllis Marcuccio, Rockville; and James Ireton, Salisbury. Calls to each of the mayors went unreturned by deadline.

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Million from A3

ization initiatives."

Gauging from the experience in other jurisdictions with similar funds, it is predicted the EDI Fund will be able to leverage private funds by 5:1, 10:1, or even higher ratios. The EDI Fund will also allow Prince George's County to leverage State programs where County participation is required.

Administration of the Fund will be coordinated by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), with many County agencies and entities involved in reviewing and processing applications for financial assistance from the EDI Fund. An internal County team has been drafting administrative procedures for several months in anticipation of the Council's vote today, and many agencies will participate in supporting the Fund's goals. The Economic Development Corporation will serve as the primary intake source for applications for EDI Funds, with the Financial Services Corporation providing underwriting services.

"The EDI Fund will provide much needed revenue to level the playing field for Prince George's County," said Gwen S. McCall, President and CEO of the Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation. "For years, surrounding jurisdictions were able to offer financial incentives to attract and/or retain businesses for their counties. We were limited. We could offer tax abatements, tax credits and land use, but we never had the stimulus funds to encourage businesses to stay or choose us over some other area."

Child Watch from A4

tial tool for evening the odds for all children and promoting upward mobility for children left behind. Education gives you the tools to improve not only your own life but the lives of others and to leave the world better than you found it. How can we expect our children to create a better America if we don't give them a good educa-

The Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of Finance, will work together to provide the necessary financial analysis, monitoring, tracking, and adherence to standard accounting and reporting procedures. Working with the Prince George's Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and Financial Services Corporation (FSC), the CAO will be responsible for determining the rates and terms for the financial assistance provided by the EDI Fund. In order to measure the success of the EDI Fund over time, appropriate accountability metrics will be developed including job retention and attraction, leveraged public and private sector dollars, small business, Local and Minority Business Enterprise participation, and other necessary standards.

"The EDI Fund is exactly what is needed to help create more of the business opportunities that local small and minority businesses have long been awaiting for in this county," said Roland Jones, Executive Director of the County's Minority Business Development Division. "With this fund in place, it will help facilitate a mechanism by which diverse suppliers can become more competitive in the marketplace, while sending a strong message that Prince George's County is committed to the diverse business community."

To protect the county's interests and ensure the highest degree of financial integrity, an independent and objective panel known as the Financial Advisory Council (FAC) will be appointed to provide advice and guidance

on the financial viability of applicants for EDI Funds. The FAC will be comprised of financial services professionals, with four members appointed by the CAO and three by the Council. These individuals will be held to high standards to avoid any conflicts of interest. Individuals interested in serving on the FAC should submit resumes to the CAO.

Under CB-4 as enacted, the County Council will receive 7 days advance written notice of all loans or grants from the EDI Fund. Any grant over \$250,000 is subject to Council approval.

Before a loan closing, the applicant will be required to offer proof of "clean hands," in which all financial obligations (e.g., taxes, fees, etc.) to the Federal, County and State governments are met, and that the individual or corporation is in good standing with the State authority responsible for corporate filings.

The EDI Fund was originally submitted as part of the FY2012 Proposed Budget presented to the Prince George's County Council. The Prince George's County Council will deliver this bill to the County Executive within 10 business days. After delivery, the County Executive has 10 days to sign this bill.

Administrative details of the EDI Fund and will be finalized over the next couple of months. Applications will be accepted and implementation will begin in the first quarter of the 2012 calendar year. For more information on the EDI Fund, please go to

<http://pgcedc.com/busDevelopment/EDIFFAQ.php> or contact the Prince George's County

ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org.

Mrs. Edelman's Child Watch Column also appears each week on The Huffington Post.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to