

The Derrick. and The News-Herald • 2026

BUSINESS

Review & Forecast

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Section G — Education

Section

G



Contributed photo

Educators and business representatives talk about workforce needs, employment options and skills employers are looking for during the fourth annual Educator Expo at Oil Region Venango Campus in April. The expo is an example of how VenangoREADY has been integral in strengthening collaboration among employers and schools throughout the region. See the story on Page G2.

Section G of the Business Review and Forecast focuses on the area's school districts, colleges and universities, along with other educational institutions.

The section starts with an overview of the Venango Area Chamber of Commerce's VenangoREADY program, providing insight on the program's effort to broaden access to career readiness for high school students. The program does so via collaboration between local employers and school districts.

Participating school districts include Cranberry, Forest, Franklin, Oil City, Titusville and Valley Grove, along with Christian Life Academy. VenangoREADY broadened the program this past year with the addition of Pathways Adolescent Center.

The section delves into the successes and challenges that school districts had in 2025 and what their plans for 2026 look like.

Also, a listing on Page G5 shows how much of an impact school districts in the region have on the local economy.

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VenangoREADY prepares students

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

VenangoREADY continued to expand its impact in 2025, strengthening collaboration between local employers and schools throughout the region. The program recognized 70 students earning VenangoREADY or ForestREADY designation, bringing the alumni network to more than 250 graduates since its launch four years ago. Participating schools span the Venango Technology Center footprint, including Christian Life Academy, Cranberry, Forest, Franklin, Oil City, Titusville and Valley Grove area school districts.

The program broadened access to career readiness programming with the addition of Pathways Adolescent Center. The Chamber also continued engaging program alumni through regular email communications and shared resources to maintain connections to the local workforce after graduation.

The 4th annual Educator Expo, hosted at the Oil Region Venango Campus in April, brought together 30 business representatives and more than 70 educators and education partners to discuss workforce needs and career opportunities. Educators toured Altium Packaging, Community Ambulance and the Venango Technology Center Nursing Program, while also connecting with 19 local businesses and organizations at the Expo.

Program growth was further supported by the hiring of Hannah Plowman as workforce and education coordinator in May 2025. In addition to her new role, Plowman is currently participating in the Venango Chamber's nine-month Leadership Venango program, further developing her leadership skills



as she grows into her responsibilities supporting VenangoREADY and other workforce initiatives.

2026 Plans

In 2026, VenangoREADY will focus on increasing program visibility and employer engagement while continuing to align education with workforce needs. Planned efforts include updated marketing materials, branded swag and refreshed presentations for students and educators to improve program awareness.

Employer participation will expand through Career Corner, a video series designed to introduce students to local businesses and career opportunities in Venango County and surrounding areas. The series will

highlight real-world career pathways and employer expectations.

VenangoREADY will continue distributing career posters featuring local occupations, expanding school partnerships, and facilitating job shadows, mock interviews, career events and classroom presentations. These efforts are designed to further prepare students for successful transitions into the workforce.

VenangoREADY will also host its 5th annual Educator Expo on April 9 at Komatsu Mining Corp. in Franklin. The event will again bring together educators, employers and workforce partners to strengthen relationships and highlight regional career pathways and workforce needs.

What's New

To better engage students directly, VenangoREADY launched a dedicated Instagram account highlighting program opportunities, local careers and employment pathways.

VenangoREADY continues to enhance how career readiness resources are shared across the region. A monthly education email connects educators and employers with internships, scholarships, job openings, career events and other student opportunities.

The program has distributed more than 20 career posters highlighting local jobs and industries to participating schools, helping students better understand career options available close to home. Additional posters will be developed in partnership with

interested employers.

VenangoREADY also supports experiential learning through its Job Shadow Guide, developed and updated by Leadership Venango project teams. The Chamber actively facilitates school-employer connections to support mock interviews, job shadowing, career fairs and presentations.

Looking Back

VenangoREADY was launched by the Venango Area Chamber of Commerce in Spring of 2021 as a voluntary career readiness certification program designed to better align education with workforce needs. Kat Thompson was hired in the Fall of 2021 to manage the new program. The program is also guided by the Chamber's Education Committee, composed of employers, educators and education partners who provide oversight and industry insight.

Students earn VenangoREADY or ForestREADY designation by demonstrating proficiency in six essential workplace skills: communication, work ethic, teamwork, tactfulness and manners, critical thinking and problem-solving, and understanding supervision and the world of work. Seniors who complete the program receive a graduation cord and certificate and become part of the VenangoREADY alumni network.

Since its launch, VenangoREADY has grown steadily, serving students across multiple school districts. The program remains focused on preparing students for successful entry into the workforce while supporting the long-term talent needs of local employers.

Funding delays to cyber costs, Cranberry schools adapt

School district had to adjust to fallout of state budget impasse

BY RANDY BARTLEY

Staff writer

The state budget impasse in 2025 that tested the limits of school districts statewide could be summed up in the words of Cranberry Area School District Superintendent Bill Vonada: It was "by far the biggest issue facing this school district and others."

He pointed out the district's budget must be passed on time and the state is supposed to do likewise by the end of June, but lately that has not happened. "It puts school districts in a tough spot. We don't know what we are going to get from the state in the way of subsidies."

In the past, Vonada said, Cranberry has always budgeted what it had received the prior year. This year, though, the district budgeted what Gov. Josh Shapiro sought for the budget, and "thankfully, we got what we expected to get from the governor."

During the impasse, Cranberry and other school districts had to draw from their respective reserve accounts.

"We lost interest on that money and that is money we will never get back," Vonada said. "There is just no way to make it up."

The lack of cash forced the district to look closely at finances.

It is no different than how you run your household budget," he said. "If you stop getting paid, you will have to make some financial decisions in your house."

"It is no different for a school district. The school district didn't get paid for five months. We were forced to make some financial decisions that were not popular."

School districts in Pennsylvania can't generate revenues other than through taxes, and Vonada pointed out that probably 75% of his

district's budget is for salaries and benefits.

"If you are going to make any significant cuts in your budget, that is where you have to look and that is really the last place you want to look," he said. "Inevitably, that hurts the students."

As an example, he cited art, music and athletics as important programs to the students.

"They are the easiest to cut, but look at the impact it has on the kids who love those areas," Vonada said. "These programs are an identity for the school and the community. Friday night, you go to the stadium and there will be hundreds of people out there to watch football game."

"In the long run, there has to be a better way to fund schools than the property tax."

Cyber schools

A continuing problem for Pennsylvania's public schools are cyber schools.

"Look at it from a business standpoint," Vonada said. "If you provide a better product than another provider, there should be no argument. We can provide a service better than an outside cyber school at a fraction of the cost."

"I understand that is a matter of school choice, but it is still a choice. We have a viable choice for the student to use."

The inequity is in the state funding formula, under which the state subsidy follows the student to the cyber school of choice. The district pays the difference between the state subsidy and the tuition charged by the cyber school.

Vonada said the cost last year to Cranberry in outside cyber tuition for about 50 students was \$800,000.

"In other schools, with bigger populations, the cost may be double," he said. "The students are not leaving because (Cranberry) is putting out a bad product. The most frustrating part is that we have no control over the student's choice. We do have a fantastic cyber program in house to offer the students."

Cyber schools also have attracted teachers from public schools.

"We have lost three teachers," Vonada said.

"I don't fault those people if that's where they feel they need to be. That is just more undo

competition for the school district, and that is all taxpayer-funded."

Mental health

Schools are facing an increasing challenge in mental health.

"We have a social worker on our staff and we subcontract additional social-worker service through the intermediate unit," Vonada said. "We also have a full-time, in-house school psychologist."

He said the district's Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency money will be spent to fund a social worker. "That is an unfunded mandate. We have to have a social worker, but the state doesn't pay for it," he said.

"We are also mandated to have a school police officer, but they don't pay for it."

Programs

Vonada said there is a lot more to students than state test scores.

"We have always been proud of the way our kids leave here — socially and morally," he said.

"For example, we bring in community volunteers for Career Day to interview the students, and we participate in Venango Ready. That program provides the skills the kids need in the workforce or in life. It gives the kids knowledge about what is available in our area for them. They will be career ready."

Today, college is not the right option for everyone.

"We want to offer knowledge that the kids can use in their real lives," he said.

"It is a matter of community involvement. The Robotics Club goes to the World competition every year in Dallas. That is a considerable expense and they fund-raise for it. The community always comes through for them."

Vonada said the all of the district's sports and academic programs are thriving. "Our journalism program is fantastic and our Conservation Club, Science Club, music program, chorus and band all produce kids who can compete on the state level."

The Conservation Club annually raises pheasants that are eventually fed to the students. "This also is a learning experience for the science students," he said. "It gives the kids an opportunity to get out of the school and get dirty."

The high school permits a Bible Club to meet on campus that attracts dozens of students. The school also allows booster clubs, ranging from football to chorus.

Technology

The district changed its policy on cellphone use this year. No cellphones are permitted in the elementary school and at the high school the phone must be kept in the student's backpack.

"AI can be scary, but there are also some benefits to it," Vonada said. "If you type something in, you can have everything you wanted to know about the subject in five seconds. On the flip side, if you go on social media you don't know what is real or what is AI. The reality line becomes blurred."

"AI is becoming so good that teachers won't be able to tell what was generated by students and what is AI. That is a challenge."

Education's future

As the district looks toward the future of education, Vonada said all it can do is "forge ahead," but "the best place for any student is in a brick-and-mortar school — not only for the academics, but also for socialization. Here you have a live person teaching you, a person who cares about you. You have to build those personal connections."

"Academics are obviously the most important thing we do. We could put out the smartest kids in the world, but if they can't work with others they will be in the unemployment line. You have to look at the whole kid. We need to train productive students."

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PennWest launches new schools, AI center in student-centered push

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

PennWest University achieved significant institutional milestones in 2025, bolstering its academic foundation and positioning the institution for long-term success.

A major component of the university's student-centered progress was the launch of three new academic units: the School of Business, the School of Education and the School of Nursing. These schools were created to strengthen academic identity, elevate program visibility and deepen connections to regional workforce demands.

The university also officially opened the PennWest

AI Center for Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies. The center provides access to AI literacy, applied learning and workforce-aligned credentials through certificates and classroom integration.

At the Clarion campus, the fall semester was highlighted by strong academic and cultural engagement. A visit by actor, author and advocate Sean Astin convened students, faculty, alumni and community members for conversations on leadership and civic engagement. Golden Eagle Athletics added momentum with conference recognition and postseason success.

Looking ahead to 2026, the university is focused on sustaining momentum across

its California, Clarion, Edinboro and Global Online campuses.

"Our work remains centered on students," President Jon Anderson said. "Ensuring access to high-quality programs that lead to careers, leadership and lifelong learning is at the core of every decision we make."

A central priority has been finalizing the academic program array to ensure alignment with workforce demand. University leaders spent the past semester reviewing offerings, engaging faculty, staff and students throughout the process to ensure clarity on how programs prepare graduates for the job market.

The university also continues to invest in facilities and

infrastructure while strengthening leadership capacity. Darren Wagner was appointed as vice president for strategic enrollment management, and searches are underway for a provost and vice president for academic affairs, as well as a vice president for finance and administration.

Enrollment efforts remain a major focus, with undergraduate admissions advancing a multi-channel strategy that includes personalized outreach, competitive scholarships and expanded transfer pathways.

"We are stronger together," Anderson said. "This spring is about building on the work already underway and continuing to move PennWest forward."

Tax hike shapes Valley Grove School District

BY DAN GEOHAGAN

Contributing writer

The Valley Grove School District saw a few changes in 2025. They include a tax increase, along with new curricula and school board members, as well as relocation of the district's administrative offices.

During May's combined board work session and voting meeting, Stevie Harry, the district's business administrator, presented a slideshow that illustrated the proposed budget included a tax hike equal to the Act 1 Index of an increase established by the state Department of Education.

In an email exchange with the newspaper, Harry said the increase that was given final approval at the meeting "falls within the maximum allowed under the state's Act 1 Adjusted Index, which permitted the district to raise taxes by up to 5.9% without requiring voter approval."

"The Act 1 Index is determined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and varies by district," Harry's email continued. "It is based on a combination of factors including a district's aid ratio — which reflects its reliance on state funding — and its local tax effort, or how much the district already taxes its residents. Districts with fewer local resources or a higher existing tax burden are often permitted higher index rates, allowing them to raise additional revenue locally to meet educational needs."

After the action by the board, the tax rate for district residents increased to 13.6001 mills for the 2025-26 school year.

Harry previously told the newspaper that there were three key financial challenges that led to the need for a tax hike.

She said state subsidies are the lowest in a decade, the district is entering a "new, more costly" transportation contract, and a new contract with "our professional staff includes necessary compensation increases and the costs of healthcare continue to rise."

Harry also said the increase "reflects the need to keep up with rising costs while preserving the programs and services our students depend on."

The increase in taxes means a \$100,000 home, for example,

would cost the homeowner an additional \$75.64 on the annual tax bill, according to Harry.

The budget includes expenditures of \$17,721,080 and revenues of \$17,337,067, which will require the use of \$384,013 to balance the spending plan.

Harry said even with the tax hike, Valley Grove still has the lowest millage in Venango County.

Curriculum

Superintendent Kevin Briggs, in speaking with the newspaper, said the school district adopted two new curricula: one for math; the other for science.

Briggs said the reason the district updated the math curriculum to "Reveal Math" from McGraw Hill is because it was time for an update. The new curriculum also includes more activity-based learning and incorporates "Aleks" online interventions.

For the science portion that was updated, the district adopted a new science textbook series called "Elevate Science" from Savvas Learning Co., to align with Pennsylvania's transition to the Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy and Sustainability (STEELS) standards.

STEELS significantly changed both what students are expected to learn and how science is taught, according to Briggs.

Board transitions

Valley Grove saw board members Bill Copley and Todd Carson not run for another term. They were replaced by Megan Douglas and Devin Eisenman. Incumbents Melanie Anderson and Joane Beach were elected to stay in their current places on the board.

Moving and HVAC

In January 2025, the district relocated its administrative offices from Wiley Avenue to Valley Grove Elementary School.

Additionally, an emergency HVAC improvement project was completed at the elementary school, which included replacement of four rooftop units and updated control systems.

The project was awarded to Johnson Controls at a total cost of \$148,375.

Franklin Area navigates change

BY HELEN FIELDING

Staff writer

The Franklin Area School District saw 2025 unfold with numerous internal changes and planning for projects.

In a major public-facing update, the Franklin Area School Board began live-streaming its meetings in the summer, which were drawing a large number of public views by the end of the year.

Initially, the only board meetings streamed were the committee of the whole. However, after the success of those livestreams, the panel decided in December that it would begin live-streaming all public meetings of the board committees as well, which includes all committees except personnel.

Early in the year, the board also updated the responsibilities of its governance committee, which had been largely inactive for the past several years.

The committee will now be more active in reviewing certain policy updates and making recommendations to the committee of the whole, and it will additionally be active in providing orientation to new board members and providing information to those interested in running for the office.

In March, then-board President Sabrina Backer traveled to North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany with the 2025 International Education Study Group, a project of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) and the American Council on Germany, which aimed to allow the Pennsylvania representatives to gather ideas and recommendations from the German education system to bring back home.

The German delegation later attended the PSBA-PASA (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators) School Leadership Conference in October.

Also at that conference, the Franklin Area School District made a presentation about its experience in starting an in-house preschool program from the ground up. The preschool program was filled to capacity in the 2024-25 school year. As of May, there was a "lengthy waiting list" for this school year, according to Superintendent

Eugene Thomas.

In November's election, Dennis Baker and Peggy Hamm were newly elected to the board along with the reelection of incumbents Andy Boland and Tracey Leyda.

In the first half of 2025, the district continued its goal of trying to improve the school environment and reduce disciplinary referrals for the 2024-25 school year, an effort that was successful, according to data presented in the district's annual "Year In Review" in October. Minor infractions decreased from just over 1,200 in 2023-24 to just over 800 in 2024-25, and major infractions went from 426 to 409.

One of the initiatives the district encouraged was having teachers communicate and work directly with parents in handling minor student infractions or behavioral issues, and trying to handle more behavioral fractions in-classroom rather than immediately sending students to the office.

The reason given was it empowered teachers and also helped build a better teacher-student relationship.

Staff attendance also improved by about 20%.

Going into 2025-26, the district aims to improve student attendance as well as continue to decrease disciplinary referrals.

Looking further ahead, the district's comprehensive plan for 2025 to 2028 is to improve mathematics growth, as well as improve literacy in kindergarten through second grade.

In February, Curriculum Director Christina Cohlhepp's presentation of standardized testing data indicated student performance seemed to be returning to near pre-COVID rates.

She noted students in fourth, fifth and sixth grades, who were just starting school in 2020 during COVID when lockdowns and masking were in effect, are still suffering after-effects in areas such as verbal skills.

Thomas also created an ad-hoc committee in April to review job positions in the district, and a human resources specialist position was created in July.

Facilities projects

Throughout 2025, the

district strategized on how best to plan and budget for future facilities projects.

In January, Thomas told the board that Pittsburgh-based architect and mechanical engineering companies Hucksstein Mechanical, The Efficiency Network (TEN), and HDG Architects were doing a no-cost study of the district's facilities that looked at the current state of the facilities and gave recommendations for needed projects over the next several years.

In August, after putting out a request for bid for energy savings companies, the district signed a contract with TEN to conduct an authorized investment-grade audit using the facilities study, identifying guaranteed energy savings and opportunities for large-scale projects according to the state Guaranteed Energy Savings Act.

In November, the district signed a Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract with TEN.

The first project the school board approved under the energy savings contract was the replacement of the high school's boiler plant and hot water heater, with more projects set to be considered by the board this year.

Other facilities upgrades outside of the energy savings contract included the purchase of a new public address system to replace the outdated and nonfunctional previous system, and the board approved the future purchase of two ovens for Victory and Sandycreek elementary schools that will allow the schools to cook hot food on-site rather than bringing it from the high school. The ovens were not installed before the end of 2025.

The district also did some remediation work to support and make safe the Sandycreek Elementary School building after a truck crashed into the corner of the school in October, and the facility was evaluated for the major renovation repair work that will start in 2026.

The 2025-26 district budget saw taxes raised by one-quarter mill to help cover increased costs, such as insurance and outside cyber education, although the projected budget still contains a nearly \$2 million deficit. However, the 2024-25 budget had also projected a deficit at first, but ended up in

the black by the end of the year, Thomas had said at the time.

Some cost-cutting measures were undertaken by the district in 2025, including the creation of autistic and emotional support classrooms in-house rather than contracting with outside organizations.

Franklin is also for the first time using the Titusville Rockets online campus for its in-house cyber option.

Student activities

Franklin started an Inter-scholastic Unified Sports bocce team in January, a Special Olympics Pennsylvania team in which students with intellectual or developmental disabilities play alongside their peers, and the team held its first home bocce game in January. It later went on to win the Northwest Region Group 2 tournament.

Franklin also entered a newly-formed Venango County school districts' girls wrestling cooperative in November.

A fire club was created to provide students with hands-on experience for those interested in firefighting. Through its curriculum from the state fire commission and through working with local fire departments, the club can provide industry credentials, allowing students to earn firefighter certifications.

Another new club, the Franklin Creators' Club, started manufacturing Franklin-themed products in 2025 under the supervision of school staff and selling them in some local businesses, giving students experience of starting a business from the ground up.

A record 51 Franklin Area High School students attended the Future Business Leaders of America Conference in April, and the Franklin Madrigal choir sang in April at the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association All-State Conference.

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Oil City schools confronted by major decisions in 2025

BY DAN GEOHAGAN

Contributing writer

Oil-City Area School District saw several changes over the course of 2025 that brought new things to its schools.

In addition, The Oil City Area School Board had some changes in its seating, as 2025 was an election year that brought in two new members and retained two incumbents.

The incumbents to stay were Fred Weaver and Tyler Johnson, the latter of whom won two seats. Martha Sterner and John Aldrich were voted in; the other seat that Johnson won was filled by Cody O'Brien after the board conducted a series of interviews to fill the empty seat.

In January of this year, the board approved Superintendent Lynda Weller's retirement, which will take effect in September.

Another major topic handled in 2025 was curriculum.

At the end of 2024, a reading resource committee was formed that was made up of teachers who were looking to find a new curriculum that would help teachers on the elementary level with reading instruction.

The committee of teachers found a curriculum called the 95% Group, which would be implemented in conjunction with another curriculum.

When the teachers originally presented the 95% Group to the board, it was tabled. Later in the year, after a series of discussions, it was deter-

mined the district would not use the 95% Group, after an administrative committee was formed of three administrators that worked with the committee of teachers to find a better program for the district.

One of the biggest issues that the board had with the 95% Group was the price of the program and what it offered for the cost. Not only was the price an issue, but the curriculum would be a supplemental program, meaning the district would need to use other programs to make it more efficient.

The committee of administrators presented the idea of using "Open Court Reading," a curriculum that both administrators and teachers found to be the optimum choice. The panel told the board that it would be

used in conjunction with two supplemental programs that the district was already using.

At a work session meeting that took place in January, the board approved "Open Court Reading" and will also continue to use two supplemental programs called "Heggerty" and "UFL."

Another big topic for last year in the school district was the issue of not having libraries in the elementary schools.

Discussions about the library program in the elementary schools was brought up at the end of the 2024 year and was brought up several times at ensuing meetings.

At first, Weller said due to budget issues it would not be possible for

the district to afford a librarian and also fund STEM classes.

The public and members of the board continued to express how important having a library in the school was and that other districts in the county were able to afford having STEM and a library.

After deliberations and listening to a host of people, the board came up with a plan in which STEM and library could be held in different times of the year for the district.

While the librarian would work at one school and offer services, at another school there would still be a library available for students to check out books, and the library would function under teacher and paraprofessional oversight.



VTDC expands services, acquires homeless shelter

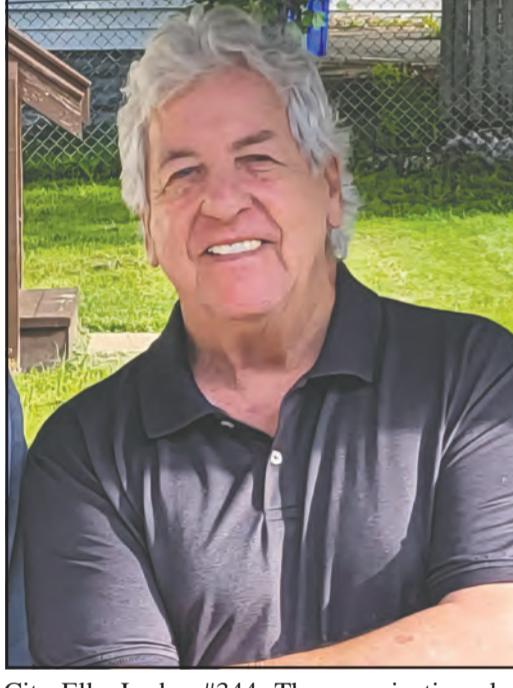
SUBMITTED ARTICLE

The Venango Training & Development Center, Inc. (VTDC) significantly expanded its reach in 2025, finalizing a merger with a local homeless shelter and launching a new mental health employment initiative.

After 14 months of collaboration, Emmaus Haven of Venango became a subsidiary of VTDC on June 17, 2025. Emmaus Haven, a private nonprofit, operates a 16-bed men's homeless shelter in Oil City. The merger expands VTDC's supported housing programs and its mission to help disabled and disadvantaged individuals reach their potential.

Emmaus Haven operates as a low-barrier program, assisting men in developing housing stability plans while staff help them find employment and permanent housing. In 2025, under the leadership of supported housing director Frank Feroz, the shelter provided services to 47 men.

VTDC credited the successful transition to financial assistance from the Dr. & Mrs. Arthur Phillips Charitable Trust, the McElhattan Foundation, the HUD Communities of Care Emergency Solutions Grant, the United Way of Venango and Titusville Region, Bridge Builders Community Foundation, and the Oil



City Elks Lodge #344. The organization also recognized the many churches, businesses and private citizens who donated funding, food and clothing.



VTDC officials applauded David Betts, board president; Barb Feroz, executive director; and the original Emmaus Haven board for their dedication since the shelter

opened in April 2021.

"They truly showed how a community came together to address an unmet need and made a difference," the organization stated.

In addition to housing, VTDC expanded its workforce services. In June, the organization was contracted by Venango County Human Services to pilot the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. IPS is an evidence-based approach helping people with serious mental health or substance abuse conditions find competitive jobs.

Under the leadership of Joanne McGuire, VTDC's new IDD program officer, the program partners with the county, the Regional Counseling Center and Hand in Hand, LLC. To date, the team has provided support to seven mental health consumers.

Looking ahead to 2026, VTDC plans to pursue contract packaging and business service development while seeking new funding to expand services.

On Jan. 23, 2026, VTDC will celebrate its 53rd anniversary. Started by a group of families in Venango County with children with special needs, the organization continues to provide training and business services throughout the northwest and north central regions.

Titusville schools addressed buildings, cyber issue, finances

BY JOSHUA STERLING

Contributing writer

The Titusville Area School Board in 2025 oversaw a number of improvements to the structure of school buildings and its student offerings, as well as dealing with a major cyber security breach, and keeping its fiscal cool through protracted state budget impasses.

High school roof

Opening the year's meeting schedule, the district's board of school directors heard updates on a project to replace approximately 12,000 square feet of roofing at Titusville Area High School.

A large 30-year-old section of the building's roof, covering the natatorium and band rooms, equating to about 20% of the total roofing structure of the school, was replaced by Strongland Roofing Systems, which bid a little more than \$500,000 for the project.

The old roof had been showing signs of its age, causing concerns for the roof's continued viability.

Additionally, planning progressed over the course of several months for a redesign of Titusville Area Middle School's main entrance. This followed a previous-year's project to construct a new security vestibule at the high school.

The middle school's security upgrades include the construction of new offices and a security officer station that has wide views of the entrance and hallways, along with a new visitor entryway that funnels traffic into the principal's office.

The entrance's physical appearance will change noticeably, as it will push out almost as far as the bus circle. The design is, however, intended to blend with the school's existing architecture.

Near the end of the year, the district saw what is likely the final design concept prior to an anticipated construction, sometime this year.

Cyber security breach

Along with several surrounding school districts in January 2025, Titusville's districtwide student information system was hit with notification of a cyber security breach.

Parents were alerted in a letter from the district to a "cyber security incident" related to the system, which potentially included student data.

PowerSchool, the information system used by the Titusville Area School District and 18,000 other learning institutions internationally, notified the district of the incident on Jan. 7, according to the letter and email sent to Titusville households.

"I get to watch these students work through the trials and tribulations of a real business. Their commitment to everything has been amazing."

Adam Huck

Student-run Enterprise Coordinator

"It's been a very impactful experience for our students," Adam Huck, the student-run enterprise coordinator at the high school, told the board.

He said, with his own family background in the manufacturing sector, it's also personally satisfying to see the enterprise get off the ground and into real partnerships with local producers.

"I get to watch these students work through the trials and tribulations of a real business. Their commitment to everything has been amazing," Huck said.

At the time, Titusville Rockets Manufacturing had, on machines within the high school, crafted products for Grand Valley Manufacturing, Precision Profiles, and Forest Scientific Corp.

The students had been working on an order of 500 finishing medals for the 2025 Roughneck Gravel Roubaix bike race. For this project, Precision Profiles donated the medals material and the Ribbon Factory donated the ribbon.

ROC's self-sustainment

Since the launch of Rocket

about 460 statewide.

For the first time, ROC budgeted a net surplus of \$103,715.

"This is the first time we'll be covering all the ROC costs," district Business Manager Shawn Sampson said of the ROC budget plan in a January meeting.

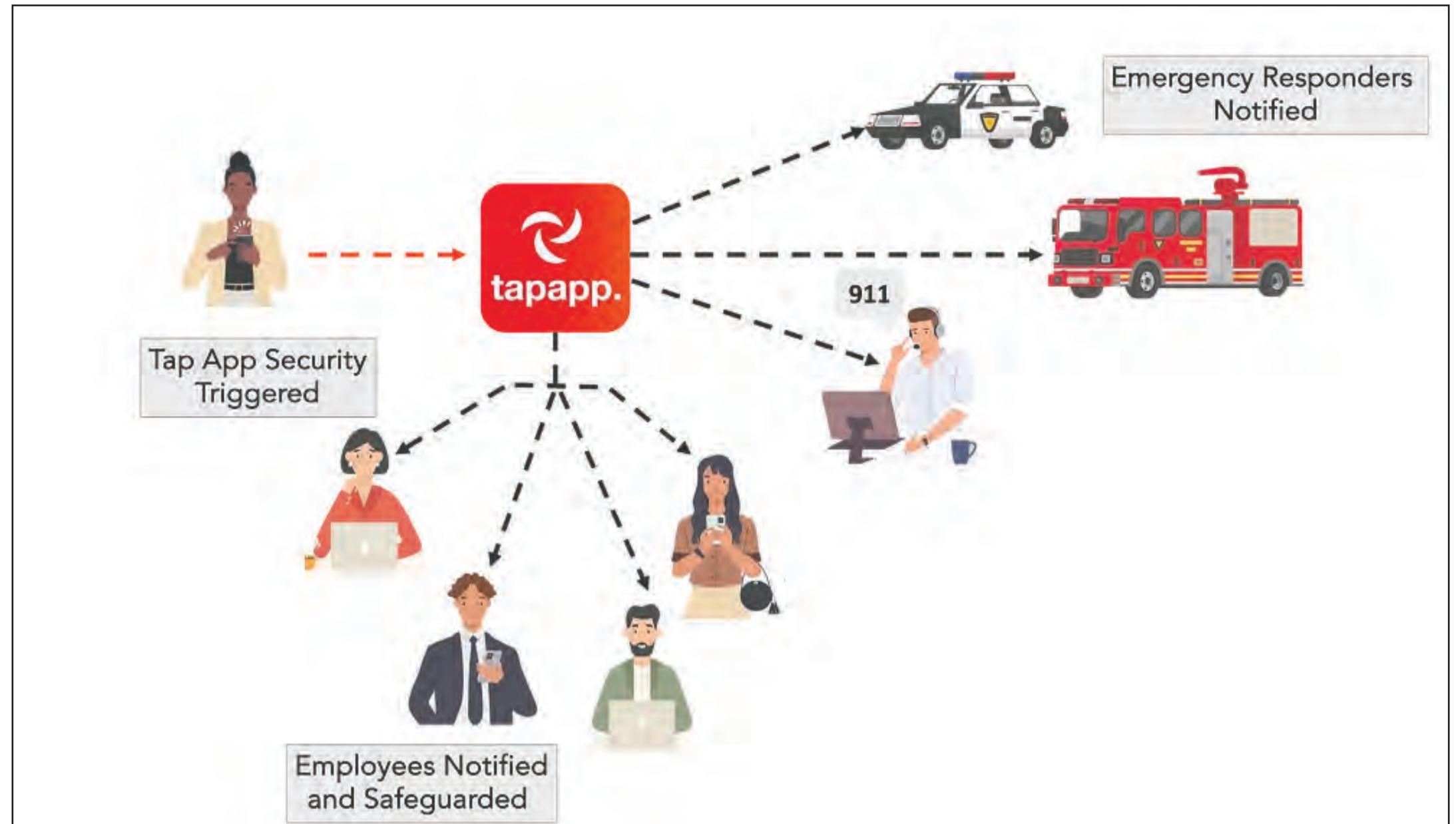
State budget woes

Sampson exercised patience and caution while working to make ends meet during a five-month state budget stalemate.

While several area school districts were forced to take on debt to keep the doors open, through instruments called Tax Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRAN), Titusville held the line as Sampson provided regular updates to the board on discussions at the state level.

The district did draw some funds out of investments, losing about \$180,000 in interest income. However, as discussions were beginning to open up to seeking a TRAN, the budget was adopted by the state in November, unlocking a flow of funding that quickly began making its way to local school systems.

It is not anticipated that the state will reimburse districts for lost revenues and debt payments to cover for the state's lapsed tax and spending plan.



CLPS Consultants expands school threat management

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

A disturbing increase in violent incidents in workplaces and schools has driven a substantial rise in demand for technology and services from CLPS Consultants, a leading crisis, risk and threat management company.

Leading the company's violence prevention efforts in Pennsylvania is Oil City resident Scott Stahl, the CLPS director of risk management. Stahl brings firsthand operational insight to the company, having spent a 30-year career with the Oil City Area School District as an English teacher, coach and principal. His administrative focus on safety and security allows the company to develop solutions that are practical and compliant



for school systems.

"Our goal is to give schools and organizations the tools they need to identify risks early, respond faster and communicate more effectively during critical incidents," Stahl said.

The company's product line has expanded to meet these needs, offering emergency management and reunification planning platforms, threat and behavior assessment tools, and advanced monitoring services that track activity across social media, the dark web and deep net sources.

Additionally, CLPS provides emergency instant



Scott Stahl

notification systems and security vulnerability assessment software. Its integrated command-and-control technology enables live management of CCTV cameras, door locks, swipe and access control systems, and public address systems from a single interface.

"Our goal is to give schools and organizations the tools they need to identify risks early, respond faster and communicate more effectively during critical incidents."

Scott Stahl

CLPS director of risk management

In 2026, CLPS plans to expand its footprint beyond the education sector to include places of worship, government facilities and the healthcare industry. The company will also launch the next generation of its social media monitoring platform, ARGO NG. The platform combines advanced artificial intelligence with dedicated intelligence analysts to vet potential threats in real time.

The year 2026 also marks

the company's 20th anniversary. CLPS is led by President Matthew Miraglia, the inventor of the TAP App Security hazard management suite.

Miraglia represents a pairing of seasoned leadership and academic expertise. A former U.S. Marine and retired detective with the Scarsdale Police Department in Westchester County, NY, he previously served on the New York State Counter Terrorism Intelligence Task Force. A

nationally recognized scholar in security studies, Miraglia holds a doctorate in executive leadership, as well as master's degrees in organizational leadership and business administration.

By pairing this leadership with an integrated software ecosystem, CLPS Consultants aims to position itself as a trusted partner for organizations protecting people and property in an increasingly complex security landscape.

A look at area school district finances and enrollment

BY DAN GEOHAGAN
Contributing writer

Allegheny-Clarion Valley School District

Payroll: not available
Number of teachers/professional staff: 85
Number of employees other than teachers: 60
Enrollment figures: 609
District office (location): 776 Route 58 Foxburg, PA
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Dr. David McDeavitt, President Brady Feicht
2025-26 budget: \$19,123,917
Real estate tax mills: not available

Clarion-Limestone Area School District

Payroll: not available
Number of teachers/professional staff: 82
Number of employees other than teachers: not available
Enrollment figures: 780
District office (location): 4091 C L School Road, Strattanville
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Brian Weible, President Robert Smith
2025-26 budget: \$17,191,446
Real estate tax mills: not available

Cranberry Area School District

Payroll: \$9,606,794
Number of teachers/professional staff: 100
Number of employees other than teachers: 70
Enrollment figures: 1,150
District office (location): 3 Education Drive, Seneca, PA 16346
Superintendent/President: Superintendent William C. Vonada II, President Thomas Neely

2025-26 budget: \$24,022,515
Real estate tax mills: 16.6319

Forest Area School District

Payroll: \$5,418,156.26
Number of teachers/professional staff: 47
Number of employees other than teachers: 34
Enrollment figures: 312
District office (location): 22318 Route 62, Box 16, Tionesta, PA 16353
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Amy Beers, President Tim Korchak
2025-26 budget: \$16,069,704
Real estate tax mills: Forest County, 67.04; Venango County, 16.90; Elk County, 46.17

Franklin Area School District

Payroll: \$16,010,000
Number of teachers/professional staff: 178
Number of employees other than teachers: 104
Enrollment figures: 1,730 students
District office (location): Franklin Area School District, Administration Office, 40 Knights Way, Franklin, PA 16323
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Eugene Thomas, President Randy Stachelrodt
2025-26 budget: \$42,013,174
Real estate tax mills: 18.1969
Projects: Boiler and domestic hot water replacement at Franklin Area High School (\$1.7 million)

Oil City Area School District

Payroll: \$13,932,472.35
Number of teachers/professional staff: 185
Number of employees other than teachers: 74
Enrollment figures: 1,782
District office (location): 825 Grandview

Road, Oil City
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Shari Weller, President Shari Neely

2025-26 budget: \$41,018,838
Real estate tax mills: 17.97
Projects: The Oil City Area School District will continue to prioritize school safety and security. During the summer of 2026, the district plans to renovate the middle school entrance to create a secure entry vestibule, improving controlled access to the building. In addition, a visitor management system will be implemented at all five district schools in the coming months to further strengthen safety protocols.

Redbank Valley School District

Payroll: \$8,051,145
Number of teachers/professional staff: 93
Number of employees other than teachers: 66
Enrollment figures: 983
District office (location): Redbank Valley High School, 920 Broad St., New Bethlehem, PA 16242
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Michael Guidice, President Heidi Byers
2025-26 budget: \$23,288,289
Real estate tax mills: Clarion County, 48.3535; Armstrong County, 37.4247
Projects: The district completed asbestos abatement at the intermediate school in several classrooms. The district is currently looking into safety initiatives.

Titusville Area School District

Payroll: \$18,170,000
Number of teachers/professional staff: 162
Number of employees other than teachers: 150
Enrollment figures: 1,733
District office (location): 301 E. Spruce St., Titusville, PA 16354

Superintendent/President: Superintendent Stephanie A. Keebler, President Lynn J. Cressman

2025-26 budget: \$45,326,415
Real estate tax mills: Crawford County, 46.88; Venango County, 18.97; Warren County, 61.87
Projects: Titusville Area Middle School safety vestibule (summer 2026)

Union School District

Payroll: \$5,250,578
Number of teachers/professional staff: 49
Number of employees other than teachers: 53
Enrollment figures: 501
District office (location): 354 Baker St., Suite 2, Ringersburg, PA 16248
Superintendent/President: Superintendent John Kimmel, President John Creese, Jr.
2025-26 budget: \$15,005,541
Real estate tax mills: 63.3173

Valley Grove School District

Payroll: \$6,691,826
Number of teachers/professional staff: 75
Number of employees other than teachers: 52
Enrollment figures: 816
District office (location): 389 Sugarcreek Drive, Franklin, PA 16323
Superintendent/President: Superintendent Kevin M. Briggs, President Brandon Winger
2025-26 budget: \$17,721,080
Real estate tax mills: 13.6001
Projects: No major projects in the district in 2025. The district administration moved into the new district office that was completed in late 2024. The new offices are located inside of Valley Grove Elementary School, at 389 Sugarcreek Drive. The district also listed its previous district office for sale during 2025 and hopes to have that property sold in early 2026.

Education and Training Center at Pitt-Titusville awarded funding

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

The Education and Training Center at Pitt-Titusville has been awarded funding from the Bridge Builders Community Foundation for the third consecutive year.

The 2026 award of \$12,560 will support tuition assistance for Venango County residents enrolled in the Pitt-Swanson School of Engineering Manufacturing

Assistance Center (MAC). The funding provides scholarships for students pursuing Basic Machining and CNC Machining training.

"We are deeply grateful for Bridge Builders Community Foundation's ongoing commitment to our students and our region," said Dr. Stephanie Fiely, executive director of the Education and Training Center. "For three years, their support has helped Venango

County residents gain the skills needed to enter or advance in manufacturing careers. This investment changes lives and strengthens local companies that rely on a skilled workforce."

In 2025, 48 individuals enrolled in MAC programs. Six Venango County students received scholarship support from the William & Elizabeth Charitable Fund through Bridge Builders.

The MAC, originally established in 1994 and relocated to Pitt-Titusville in 2021, provides hands-on training in partnership with local employers. In April 2025, the university opened the Peter C. Rossin Manufacturing Center, a state-of-the-art instructional space within the newly renovated J. Curtis McKinney II Student Union.

"The continued growth of the MAC program reflects

the strong interest among both adult learners and high school students in pursuing careers in manufacturing," said Melanie LaLone, workforce readiness and recruitment coordinator.

LaLone noted that expanded outreach has deepened engagement with local school districts and homeschool students, resulting in high completion rates.

The program's curriculum

is guided by the MAC Occupational Advisory Board, comprised of employers who consistently report a need for skilled machinists. By providing accessible training, the center helps local companies expand capacity and strengthen the region's economic vitality.

For more information about MAC programs or scholarship opportunities, visit etc.pitt.edu/programs.



Youth Alternatives Inc. reports 23% enrollment jump

“We will continue to uphold our mission: ‘Empowering Youth, Encouraging Better Futures!’”

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Youth Alternatives, Inc. reported a significant 23% increase in youth enrollment in 2025 compared to the previous year.

The nonprofit, which serves Oil City and Venango County, plans to use this momentum

to drive its 2026 goals. The primary focus for the coming year is serving young people while striving to improve or sustain their academic achievement. The organization also intends to offer local youth valuable experiences they might not otherwise access.

“We will continue to uphold our mission: ‘Empowering Youth, Encouraging Better Futures!’” the organization said in a statement.

Looking back, Youth Alternatives, Inc. was incorporated in 1978, initially focusing on providing outdoor experiences for local youth. Over

time, the organization expanded its mission and locations to include the promotion of academic excellence and fostering empowerment.

Today, the organization remains dedicated to supporting youth as they develop into accomplished adults.



NPRC made major strides last year

SUBMITTED ARTICLE

Northern Pennsylvania Regional College reported a year of significant milestones in 2025, marked by major advancements in student aid, academic partnerships and enrollment growth across its service area.

The college experienced its most successful fiscal year to date, serving more than 1,000 students in academic and workforce development courses during the 2024-25 fiscal year. The Fall 2025 term also resulted in the largest academic enrollment in the institution's history, with more than 170 students enrolled.

“The year 2025 signified the true growth of the college,” NPRC President Susie Snelick said. “We have grown in offerings and student population, which is significant because we are making a growing impact on our amazing communities in this region.”

A pivotal moment came last summer when the college received official approval from the U.S. Department of Education to participate in Title IV federal student aid programs. This allows current and prospective students to apply for federal financial aid using the school code 043159.

This accessibility boost complements a new guaranteed transfer agreement with Wilson College in

Chambersburg. Graduates of NPRC's Associate of Arts in education studies and Associate of Applied Science in early childhood education can now transfer up to 60 hours of credit into Wilson's Bachelor of Arts programs in early childhood or special education.

The agreement is designed to aid paraeducators, allowing them to complete a bachelor's degree remotely and fulfill student-teaching requirements at their current place of employment.

In April, the college was named a local recipient of a \$1 million Dual Credit Innovation Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The funding has allowed NPRC to make dual enrollment courses free for all Pennsylvania high school students through the 2026-27 academic year.

NPRC plans to use the funds to expand course offerings through the Runways Program and asynchronous formats, develop work-ready certificates for high school students and advance toward accreditation with the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships.

The college also received the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) Workforce Development and Innovation Award. The award was presented to Adam Johnson,

NPRC's vice president of workforce development, at the RCCA annual conference in Union, Mo., in September.

The award recognized the college's targeted emergency medical technician (EMT) training program, which addressed regional workforce shortages. The program helped 33 rural community members become nationally certified EMTs, with more than 20 additional certifications possible as students complete testing over the next two years.

NPRC celebrated its fifth annual commencement on May 17 in Corry, recognizing four graduates in person and three in absentia. Warren County native Kara Haight served as the student speaker, while previous graduate Brittany Grajek delivered the commencement address.

Reflecting on the year's momentum, Snelick emphasized the collective effort behind the success.

“We are fortunate to have an amazing student body, impactful community partners, an outstanding Board of Trustees and a very dedicated team of professionals,” Snelick said. “Though 2025 has been an incredible year, I know 2026 is sure to be special.”

For more information on recent announcements, visit regionalcollegepa.org/news.

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