



Six more weeks of winter

Punxsutawney Phil sees his shadow on Groundhog Day

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Talbot County reports 3 new coronavirus deaths in one day

By CANDICE SPECTOR
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EASTON — The Talbot County Health Department reported on Tuesday three more residents died from the coronavirus in one day, amounting to the largest single-day spike in fatalities locally

since the pandemic began.

The three new deaths reported Tuesday increased Talbot County's pandemic death toll to 20. More than half of those deaths have occurred in the span of roughly one month.

The local health department is reporting 187 residents are actively in-

fectured with the coronavirus. Fifteen people tested positive for the virus in the 24 hours prior to Tuesday and 2,033 have gotten the virus to date.

Hospitalizations have stalled over the past week at 113 total. There have been no new hospitalizations reported among Talbot residents since Jan. 26.

Acting County Health Officer Dr. Maria Maguire has not yet responded to *The Star Democrat's* questions regarding the significant single-day rise in deaths due to COVID-19.

This report will be updated as more information becomes available.

LOCAL

Trappe to hold water system hearings

The Trappe Town Council will hold a public hearing on Wednesday, Feb. 3 regarding a plan to take out \$982,310 in bonds to upgrade the town's water supply system.

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WEATHER



Early clouds
High 39 Low 28
Partly cloudy tonight
Full Weather Page A7

LOCAL

Koh Lecture Series begins

Temple B'nai Israel's 2021 Susan & Barry Koh February Lecture Series includes three virtual lectures focusing on art movements and artists from post-World War II through 1976.

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The Country School goes virtual due to coronavirus cases among students, staff

By CANDICE SPECTOR
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EASTON — The Country School, a private pre-kindergarten through middle school in Easton, announced Tuesday it's closing its doors for two weeks after three people within the school tested positive for the coronavirus.

The school said in an email to families on Tuesday, Feb. 2, the three coronavirus cases occurred among students and faculty across "three distinct grades/classes" during the past four days. Students will learn remotely

for two weeks until Feb. 17 in order to prevent further spread of the virus.

"It is out of an abundance of caution that our community must move to this period of quarantine," Head of School Bill Ennist wrote in the email obtained by *The Star Democrat*.

Ennist said the school "would not be making this decision if it were not necessary to safeguard the health and safety of our community." He said the temporary move away from in-person schooling is to "get ahead of any potential additional transmission risks."

The Country School, which has roughly 300 students, has been in person on-and-off since the pandemic began and has periodically employed precautionary segments of virtual learning, according to people familiar with the school.

Students had just returned for face-to-face learning two weeks ago on Jan. 18 after spending two weeks in a remote schooling model following the holidays.

Ennist declined to answer direct questions about the closure and how the school plans to prevent future coronavirus spread. "The health



FILE PHOTO BY DUSTIN HOLT

The Country School in Easton

and safety of our students and faculty are always our highest priority," he said in an email. The three cases the school disclosed Tuesday had not yet been reported on the

Maryland Department of Health coronavirus dashboard that tracks coronavirus outbreaks in schools. No other Mid-Shore schools are listed as having outbreaks.



'Biggest snowman in Easton'

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A family project on Sunday, Jan. 31, resulted in the "biggest snowman in Easton," according to Josie Mauk. Mauk said she, her husband Brandon Shostak, and their daughters Annalise, 8, and Lillian, 5, along with neighbor Hadley Gowe, 4, built the frosty man in the backyard of their home on Kemp Lane.

"We started in the backyard but ran out of snow, so the girls transported the snowballs by sled to the back of the house," Mauk emailed.

Mauk said her "little snow bunnies" were "very proud of it but very sad it melted away so fast! He was one of three (they) built that day, so they were exhausted" afterwards. From left are Hadley, Lillian and Annalise.

Easton approves 'Home Depot' text amendment, allowing for special zoning exception

By BRAD DRESS
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EASTON — The Town Council approved a special zoning amendment Feb. 1 that could allow for a potential new Home Depot store.

The 3-2 vote overrides the town's comprehensive plan, which restricts stores larger than 65,000 square feet to a shopping center. And the vote comes after Talbot County Council Vice President Pete Leshner voiced strong opposition to the amendment in a final public hearing.

"We do have a sense that Easton is overbuilt with retail space. There are retail spaces in this community that are ripe for development, and the rule, as it stands, encourages redevelopment into those spaces rather than the breaking of new ground," Leshner said. "We shouldn't change the rulebook for one potential applicant. That smacks of picking winners and losers."

Others have welcomed a potential Home Depot to compete with Lowe's Home Improvement, which is located off Glebe Road and Easton Parkway.



AP PHOTO/STEVEN SENNE

In this Jan. 27, 2020 file photo a passer-by, below left, walks toward an entrance to a Home Depot store location, in Boston.

Councilman Elmer Davis said he was voting for the amendment in part because it would allow for economic development that was beneficial for minorities. "It would afford minorities, people who look like me and other people in the community, a job," he said. "I think that's essential economic development."

The text amendment was brought to the town by The Gannon Family Limited Partnership, which has real estate holdings in Easton including a potential location for a new Home Depot or

another home improvement store.

Greg Gannon, the proprietor of The Gannon Family, argued through his lawyer that the amendment simply allows for a Home Depot to apply for a spot on the east side of U.S. Route 50, likely near the Chapel Road intersection, and the comprehensive plan has been tweaked multiple times before.

"I'm pleased with the vote," said Gannon after the call. Council President Megan

See **ZONE**
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Bill Gates wants global response force for future outbreaks, pandemics

Advocates for monoclonal antibodies, mRNA vaccines



Bill Gates speaking about COVID-19, vaccines and future responses to pandemics and outbreaks.

WASHINGTON — Microsoft founder Bill Gates wants to see a new global alert system, mass testing systems and a quick-responding international infectious disease force developed to respond quickly to future pandemics in the wake of COVID-19.

"We need to spot these outbreaks as soon as they happen anywhere in the world. And that requires a global alert system," Gates said.

Gates said in a video presentation Feb. 1 that there needs to be faster international responses to future pandemic such as COVID-19.

"We can get ahead of infectious disease outbreaks," said Gates, who is

co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and top proponent of vaccines worldwide. Gates said there are lessons to be

learned from the coronavirus pandemic.

Those include new mass testing platforms and technology. Gates termed these "mega testing diagnostic platforms." "They can be deployed quickly, cost very little and test 20% of the entire population every week," Gates said in the video which was posted on social media.

The billionaire technologist also wants to see new international global alert system and international response force developed to respond quickly to outbreaks across the world.

Gates also touted monoclonal antibodies, mRNA vaccines as ways to battle COVID and future viruses and diseases.

Unlike traditional vaccines which inject weakened or inactive viruses or

germs into patients, mRNA vaccines send genetic messages to cells to produce more proteins and immune response to viruses, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Gates said mRNA vaccines will be quicker to develop and easier to store than traditional vaccines.

Monoclonal antibodies are proteins produced in laboratories that mimic the immune system's ability to fight off harmful pathogens such as viruses, according to the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. The FDA approved some lab-produced antibodies as coronavirus treatments in November.

Maryland state health officials are also promoting monoclonal antibody treatments for some COVID-19 patients.

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