

Money **VF OUTLET STORE PLANS GRAND OPENING AT NEW LOCATION / A8**

Weekend

'HEATHERS' IS WICKED FUN

Dark musical comedy takes center stage at Genesisius



READING EAGLE

THE DRUG CRISIS

Pa. official expects rise in deaths in next 2 years

Efficacy of treatment programs, naloxone use could affect forecast

By **FORD TURNER**
READING EAGLE

The State Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Secretary on Wednesday said that she expects drug deaths in Pennsylvania will increase in each of the next two years after 2017 saw a total of about 5,260, which itself was more than double the number three years earlier.



Jennifer Smith

Jennifer Smith, speaking to the *Reading Eagle* after a public appearance in Reading, said she hopes her prediction is wrong.

"Probably another two years of increases," she said. "That is the prediction, based on the environment today."

The accuracy of the prediction, she said, will depend on a number of things. They include the use and effectiveness of programs that refer drug abusers into treatment; processes for handling drug abusers who arrive in hospital emergency rooms; and the widespread availability of naloxone, a medicine that can reverse the effects of deadly opioid drug overdoses.

A key factor, she said, is the market for illicit drugs like heroin and fentanyl.

"A lot of it has to do with the flow," she said.

While drug death-counting organizations have made no formal announcement of the toll for 2017, Gov. Tom Wolf used the figure 5,260 early this year.

Smith said it was a good estimate.

Pennsylvania had 2,488 drug deaths in 2014, 3,505 in 2015 and 4,884 in 2016.

A Lebanon County resident, Smith took the helm of the drug agency in early 2017. Her predecessor, Gary Tennis, was fired by Wolf without a [See *Drug deaths* >>> A4]

'Safe place': Berks Counseling Center praised. **B3**

PARENTS GET PROBATION

Couple did not seek medical help for daughter, 2, who died of pneumonia



READING EAGLE: BILL UHRICH

By **STEPHANIE WEAVER**
READING EAGLE

Jonathan D. Foster told a judge Wednesday that he's believed the same thing and reacted the same way to things his entire life.

And after 35 years, he'd seen only successes for his family, who had all lived healthy and happy lives despite their religious beliefs not to seek medical care.

"Why would I question the effectiveness of my actions?" he said. "But after the death of my daughter, I struggled greatly with many things."

Foster said that 2-year-old Ella Grace's death — and the criminal charges, jury trial and involuntary manslaughter conviction that followed — sent him and his wife, Grace A. Foster, on a renewed search for answers.

As they stood before Judge M. Theresa Johnson to be sentenced, the Upper Tulpehocken Township couple said that journey led them to realize they had been blindly following Faith Tabernacle Congregation's beliefs about medical care instead of thinking for themselves.

They asked the judge for mercy as they try to rebuild their family.

"God is gracious and very merciful and will always give us a chance to repent," Grace Foster said. "That's what I believe God is giving us. He gave us this trial to give us a chance to change our ways and to give us a chance to live better before it's too late."

After taking a 15-minute recess, Johnson returned to the courtroom and sentenced the couple to five years of probation.

The judge called it one of the most difficult cases she's ever had to address in her more than 20 years in the criminal justice system, much of which was spent as a prosecutor.

Johnson said the couple's statements, and the fact that they, like Ella, were born into the tight-knit religious sect without exposure to life outside of it, factored into her decision not to send them to jail.

She stressed that the sentence in no way lessens the importance of young Ella's life.

"They followed the church and its beliefs, and because of those beliefs, they have come to experience a loss that none of us can understand and describe," Johnson said. "I don't think there is anything the court can do to punish them any more than their own actions have

Jonathan D. and Grace A. Foster, center and right, are joined by supporters as they leave Berks County Court on Wednesday after they were sentenced to five years of probation in the death of their daughter Ella Grace, 2.

punished themselves."

'We will protect children'

Johnson's decision went against prosecutors' fervent argument for a prison sentence in the case.

Assistant District Attorney Katie Lehman recommended one to five years in state prison, followed by five years of probation. Her request fell within the standard range of nine to 16 months for involuntary manslaughter, which carries a 10-year maximum.

[See *Parents* >>> A4]

TODAY

Berks & Beyond

VEHICLE CRASHES INTO JEFFERSON TWP. HOUSE

Four people are injured when an SUV rolls over and hits the porch. The home's occupants were unharmed. **B1**



State

JURY DELIBERATES IN COSBY ASSAULT CASE

Meanwhile, defense lawyers are criticized for "victim-shaming" the comedian's accusers. **A5**

REPUBLICANS GO LIVE WITH DEBATE

GOP gubernatorial candidates clash over attack ads with three weeks to go before the primary. **A5**

Sports

EAGLES ARE 'OPEN FOR BUSINESS'

General manager Howie Roseman says the Birds won't hesitate to make moves. **C1**

Life

PHOTOGRAPHER PUTS HEART INTO BOOK

Will Stanton tells the stories behind his pictures in "Corazon: From the Heart of Latin America." **E1**

Weather report
Partly sunny;
winds: 8-16 mph. **A10**

47° 66°



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