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BEVERAGES
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Business » B1

WELLNESS
It's a Girlz Nite Out Dance Party
Fit Friday » B3

WINTER SPORTS
PIAA postpones tournaments for 2 weeks
Sports » C1

TODAY'S WEATHER High: 71 Low: 34 » PAGE A6

THE REPORTER

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CORONAVIRUS

Montco sets up makeshift testing site

By Gary Puleo
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LOWER PROVIDENCE » You may have spotted the bright yellow tent that went up Thursday morning behind the long vacant Audubon Elementary School on Egypt Road and assumed they were possibly getting ready for a spring carnival.

In reality, the tent will serve as a medical testing site for the coronavirus (COVID-19) if needed.

"This is just out of an abundance of caution that we've put some assets over there that people may have seen as they're driving by," explained Todd Stieritz, public affairs coordinator for the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety. "The assets were placed at that location to support extended testing capability should the need arise in the future. It's simply part of the contingency plan that's not operational at this time."

As of now, for someone who

is experiencing symptoms and feels they've been exposed to COVID-19 the advice is to call your doctor, Stieritz said.

"We've been encouraging them to stay home and call their doctor, who will then speak to them over the phone and make an assessment and then recommend whether they should come into the office for a visit or not. People definitely want to call ahead," he pointed out, "so the health care facility can prepare for their arrival

TESTING » PAGE 3



The Montgomery County Department of Public Safety has set up a tent behind the former Audubon Elementary School to be used as a testing site for the coronavirus.

GARY PULEO - MEDIANEWS GROUP

CORONAVIRUS

LOOKING FOR POSITIVES

Exton lab conducting more tests; most patient costs to be absorbed



COMMONWEALTH MEDIA SERVICES

Dr. Rachel Levine, Pennsylvania secretary of health, at a briefing Wednesday on the 16 coronavirus cases in the state. Even with capabilities expanded, not every person who wants to be tested can be accommodated. The state now reports 22 cases as of Thursday.

By Shea Singley
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More public health labs across the nation can now test for the coronavirus, COVID-19, and capacities are expanding, but there is still just one testing site for samples taken in Berks County and southeastern Pennsylvania.

Even with capabilities expanded, not every person who wants to be tested can be accommodated. As late as Wednesday afternoon, all 16 cases in Pennsylvania are traceable and no "community spread" cases have been documented.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that, as of Tuesday night, there were 79 public health labs across the country performing COVID-19 diagnostic tests. More commercial labs are in the process of implementing testing capabilities.

"We can't test everybody who may want to be tested."

— Dr. Debra Powell, chief of the section of infectious diseases and medical director of infection prevention at Reading Hospital

Samples from Berks and southeastern Pennsylvania are tested at a state lab in Exton, Chester County.

The state will pick up the tab for testing in Exton, but private tests, when they become available, would be billed to a private insurance carrier. Many carriers have agreed to pay 100% of that cost.

The most recent figure available was that the state lab can perform 150 tests daily. The capacity has been increasing since testing began there earlier this month.

Though the increased testing capabilities mean a wider group of patients can be tested, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's criteria must be met ahead of a test.

"We can't test everybody who may want to be tested," said Dr. Debra Powell, chief of the section of infectious diseases, and medical director of infection prevention at Reading Hospital.

Symptoms for the virus are fever, cough and shortness of breath, and range from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. These symptoms can appear two to 14 days after exposure.

Inside: More coverage of the coronavirus A2, A3, A5, B1

Taking the test

If someone is experiencing symptoms and believes he or she may have been exposed to or have COVID-19, the first step is to call the doctor. This ensures the doctor can take the appropriate measures should the patient need to be seen in person, officials said.

"The first thing we ask everybody at the time of registration is, 'Have you traveled and what symptoms do you have,'" Powell said. "If they have respiratory symptoms and a travel history, then we have additional questions we ask them."

Testing is not done at the hospital, but samples are taken on site, then sent to Exton. It's not clear if patients have gone to

POSITIVES » PAGE 5

CORONAVIRUS

Montco schools ordered to close

By Marc Levy
The Associated Press

HARRISBURG » Pennsylvania's governor on Thursday closed schools and other facilities in Montgomery County, which has been hard-hit by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Gov. Tom Wolf said the order will take effect today for all schools, as well as community centers and entertainment venues. Critical infrastructure, including health care facilities and pharmacies, will remain open.

Pennsylvania has reported 22 cases of COVID-19 infection, and more than half are in Montgomery County, which has more than 800,000 residents.

Wolf said the approach is planned to last for two weeks but

SCHOOLS » PAGE 5

TOWAMENCIN

Officials monitoring coronavirus spread

By Dan Sokil
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TOWAMENCIN » There haven't been any cases of the coronavirus in Towamencin yet, but township officials are preparing just in case.

Supervisors' Chairman Chuck Wilson outlined the township's efforts so far at the start of Wednesday night's board meeting.

"Towamencin Township is in contact with, and monitoring communications with, the Montgomery County Health Department, and state and federal health agencies, who will direct any response to the coronavirus," Wilson said.

"The primary role of the township will be to disseminate information to residents from these health agencies," he said.

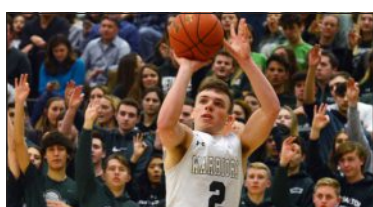
As of Wednesday afternoon, a

SPREAD » PAGE 3

BOYS BASKETBALL

Methacton advances to state quarterfinals

The Warriors rout District 12 No. 3 seed Lincoln with a barrage of three-pointers. **PAGE C1**



OPINION

Canceling St. Patrick's Day parade right call

Officials in Philadelphia take necessary precautions after a coronavirus case is confirmed in the city. **PAGE A4**

IRAQ

Pentagon threatens to retaliate after attack

Two U.S. troops were killed and 14 other personnel were wounded when 18 rockets hit a base in Iraq. **PAGE A6**

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