



Bills enjoying riches at linebacker spots

Clemson's Spector is leading tackler in first preseason game | PAGE C1

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Mental health aid for Black men bumps into culture

Few seeking help after Tops shooting

By ANGELEA PRESTON
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Samuel Herbert, 73, was watching the news this month when he saw that there would be a healing session at the Frank E. Merriweather Library on Jefferson Avenue for anyone who wanted to discuss how they were dealing with the trauma and aftermath of the May 14 mass shooting at Tops Markets on Jefferson Avenue.

He hesitated when he walked in and saw a small group of women and no men. He was disappointed.

"I didn't think I'd be the only man there. I thought I was in the wrong place for a second," Herbert said.

But what Herbert saw in that moment was a microcosm of the challenges mental health professionals face in reaching Black men who need help. In Buffalo, that challenge has the potential to become a crisis as countless people struggle with the effects of the mass shooting, which authorities have said was committed by a white supremacist.

The problem can be traced through data and studies:

- A study released in 2021 by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that a little over one in four women (25.6%) received any

mental health treatment in the past 12 months, compared with 14.6% of men.

- According to the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious psychological distress – such as major depressive disorder – than white Americans.

- Research has repeatedly found that lack of access, racism and bias within the health care system have made some people in the Black community less likely to seek treatment.

For Black men, it often comes down to a single word: mistrust.

"There are things in our collective history that sometimes the world wants to dismiss, not talk about, take out of our history books. But we know from all of those stories that are passed down from generation to generation, like the Tuskegee experiments," said Kevin Beckman, vice president of Home Health at BestSelf Behavioral Health.

The Tuskegee syphilis study took place between 1932 and 1972 in Macon County, Ala. Researchers recruited 600 Black men, of whom 399 were diagnosed with syphilis and 201 were a control group without the disease. Those with syphilis were deliberately left untreated for 40 years, during which researchers observed

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Lawmakers push bill to upgrade security at Chautauqua Institution

By CHARLIE SPECHT
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Two state lawmakers from the Southern Tier are pushing a bill that would beef up security at the Chautauqua Institution after the assassination attempt that wounded author Salman Rushdie.

The bill would give "peace officer" status to the institution's security force, which currently carries guns but does not have the legal authority to make arrests.

"Our world has become more violent again," said State Sen. George Borrello, R-Sunset Bay, who is pushing the measure with Assemblyman Andrew Goodell, R-Jamestown. "All we're doing



News file photo

Chautauqua Institution is a not-for-profit educational center nestled on 750 acres along Chautauqua Lake.

is giving them the opportunity to defend themselves and use their resources."

The bill was introduced in 2013 and passed both the Assembly and Senate in 2014, when former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo vetoed it. In his veto memo, Cuomo noted that the proposed legislation was one of seven bills granting peace officer status to quasi-police agencies across the state.

"I again ask the Legislature to work with me to develop such a comprehensive approach to this issue within the broader context of New York State's law enforcement needs, rather than addressing the needs of local government

See **Security** on Page A4



Going against grain, couple reopens Dunkirk drive-in



Photos by Libby March/Buffalo News

Above, projector beam streams into the night from a back room in the concession stand. At top, Gina Beckley works the concession stand with her granddaughter, Kierra Beckley, 13, as Jake Steinhoff of Fredonia orders snacks.

Closed for 30 years, it's rebuilt, updated

By MARK SOMMER
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Caped canine Krypto the Superdog flew across the hulking Van Buren Drive-In screen on a recent Saturday night, as car wheels on gravel announced late-arriving moviegoers.

The showing of "DC League of Super-Pets" seemed apt, since it has taken something of a superhuman effort by Dan and Gina Beckley, at a cost of around \$1 million, to revive the long-shuttered drive-in in Dunkirk. The outdoor theater was closed for 30 years, the remnants of a toppled screen from a tornado that swept through town 10 years ago



Radios for rent at the Van Buren Drive-In in Dunkirk. The drive-in recently reopened after being shut for 30 years, going against a national trend of drive-in closings.

strewn across the grounds.

During that time, the theater grounds were reclaimed by nature, rendering the two remaining structures – the original 1949 concession stand and ticket booth – barely visible. A brush hog cleared the growth and began the process of bringing the Van Buren Drive-In back to life.

There were 37 cars and 121 people there Saturday night. Some, like Mike Firman of Dunkirk, who had relatives who worked there in the 1950s and '60s, were returning to the Van Buren for the first time since they were young.

Others, like Makayla Brisley and Micaya Burns, both 18 and living in Brocton, 9 miles away, were going to a drive-in for the first time.

See **Drive-in** on Page A6

Huge pandemic fraud sees U.S. prosecutors struggling to catch up

By DAVID A. FAHRENTHOLD
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON – In the midst of the pandemic, the U.S. government gave unemployment benefits to the incarcerated, the imaginary and the dead. It sent money to "farms" that turned out to be front yards. It paid people who were on the government's "Do Not Pay List." It gave loans to 342 people who said their name was "N/A."

As the virus shuttered businesses and forced people out of work, the federal government sent a flood of relief money into programs aimed at helping the newly unemployed and boosting the economy. That included \$3.1 trillion that former President Donald Trump approved in 2020, followed by

a \$1.9 trillion package signed into law in 2021 by President Joe Biden.

But those dollars came with few strings and minimal oversight. The result: one of the largest frauds in American history, with billions of dollars stolen by thousands of people, including at least one amateur who boasted of his criminal activity on YouTube.

Now, prosecutors are trying to catch up.

There are currently 500 people working on pandemic-fraud cases across the offices of 21 inspectors general, plus investigators from the FBI, the Secret Service, the Postal Inspection Service and the IRS.

The federal government has already charged 1,500 people

See **Fraud** on Page A5

CITY & REGION

DIGITAL LEARNING CENTER TO HELP EAST BUFFALO



Derek Gee/Buffalo News

A digital learning center set up by AT&T is designed to help East Buffalo children conquer technical skills in an area with poor internet accessibility.

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Inside: SEE MORE PHOTOS OF THE VAN BUREN DRIVE-IN ON THE PICTURE PAGE, PAGE B7.

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Cloudy, thunderstorms. High 79, low 62. Details on Page B10

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CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

Some men feel they are targeted, resist getting help

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the effects of the disease. Researchers for the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC did not obtain informed consent from the men. Those with syphilis were not told they were just being watched – not treated – for syphilis.

Beckman said another factor is that Black men can feel that society sees them as a threat.

“For so often, Black men will often feel as if we have a figurative target on our back, so we walk into a room, we walk into somewhere trying to get help, we walk into a grocery store, it’s always that initial knee-jerk reaction from someone disapproving,” Beckman said.

“One of the major barriers is that overcoming initial perception that the world has of us just pigeon-holing us, putting us in a single category, we’re either angry or dangerous,” he added. “We’re neither.”

And for those who want the help, there’s also the lack of access.

After the May 14 tragedy, the need for access to resources was apparent, and the county stepped in and provided a Healing Hub at Johnnie B. Wiley Stadium.

But organizers struggled with get-



A sign at a makeshift memorial outside the Tops Friendly Markets on Jefferson Avenue, scene of the shooting that killed 10 black people, reads “There are no words for this heartache.”

Derek Gee/News file photo

ting the community to trust counselors and therapists who do not look like their patients.

Statistics show that around 5% of mental health professionals are

Black.

“It was necessary for us to really push and lead the effort to ensure that there were Black greeters, Black therapists, Black peers, Black staff,

so that when people walked up the steps, they felt comforted,” said Kelly Wofford, director of Erie County’s Office of Health Equity.

Howard Johnson Jr., an Erie

County legislator whose district includes the Tops grocery store, said culture can deter people from seeking help.

“Everybody wants to look strong,” Johnson said. “It’s how we emulate things. We emulate the people we grew up around, so if he’s not getting the help he needs, then I’m not going either.”

Johnson sought counseling after the trauma he experienced after being shot during a robbery.

“You fall down, you hit your knee, they will tell you, ‘Hey, don’t cry, you can’t show that.’ People recognize that as weakness,” he added.

For Herbert, the events of May 14 made him reflect on his own experience with the racism he faced as a child growing up in a part of New York City that was largely white at the time.

He said after hearing the stories from the group and sharing his own experience, he left the session feeling good.

“It is necessary for men to come together. The session was a loving experience,” he said.

Johnson said the community needs to be reminded that help is available and that not only is it OK to not be OK, but that seeking help is the right thing to do.



News file photo

The amphitheater where the attack on Salman Rushdie occurred. The charming Chautauqua Institution community with its porches, gardens and streets with walkers and bikers brings in 7,500 residents during its nine-week season.

Bill may have better chance of passage

SECURITY • from A1

units in an ad hoc manner,” Cuomo wrote. “For these reasons, I will not approve these bills.”

Rushdie, 75, was stabbed multiple times on Friday, and is expected to lose an eye and has a severely damaged liver, his literary agent said, though Rushdie is able to speak. His interviewer, Ralph Henry Reese, 73, also was injured.

The man accused of the attack, Hadi Matar, 24, of Fairview, N.J., has been charged with second-degree attempted murder and second-degree assault.

Questions have been raised about whether Chautauqua leaders need to beef up security, especially when hosting controversial speakers. Rushdie had a \$3 million bounty put on his head from the leaders of Iran after publication of his 1988 book, “The Satanic Verses,” which depicted the



Mark Mulville/News file photo

State Senator George Borrello, left, and Assemblyman Andrew Goodell, right, are pushing to upgrade the powers given to the Chautauqua Institution security force.

prophet Muhammad in ways the hard-line leaders found offensive.

The New York Times and CNN, citing two sources who declined to be identified, reported that the institution’s leadership had rejected recommendations for security

measures like bag checks and metal detectors, fearing the measures would divide the speakers and the audience.

Gov. Kathy Hochul trav-

eled to Chautauqua County on Sunday to speak with first responders and crew members who helped tackle and disarm Matar. She later spoke with reporters and expressed support for the legislation.

“I know there has been legislation introduced, and I’d be very interested in signing if it comes through this Legislature,” Hochul said.

When the bill was first introduced in 2013, Republicans controlled the State Senate. With Democrats now in the majority, Borrello said he has asked State Sen. Jeremy A. Cooney, a Rochester-area Democrat, to shepherd the bill through the Senate.

“I hope they look at this situation with Salman Rushdie with a sympathetic eye, and I will certainly do my best to educate them,” Borrello said of Senate Democrats.

Missouri halts a solar tax break

BY DAVID A. LIEB

ASSOCIATED PRESS

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — As the U.S. government expands incentives for renewable energy, a decision by the Missouri Supreme Court is moving the state in the opposite direction by halting a solar energy tax break that has been on the books for nearly a decade.

Legislation signed Tuesday by President Biden pumps about \$375 billion over a decade into initiatives intended to combat climate change. Those include expanded tax breaks for the production of clean energy, such as wind and solar power, and for consumers to install solar panels on their property. Democrats passed the legislation through a divided Congress last week, around the same time that Missouri’s highest court struck down a 2013 state law granting a property tax exemption for certain solar energy systems. The court said the tax break wasn’t allowed under the state constitution.

The case involved a privately run solar farm supplying energy for City Utilities of Springfield, which serves Missouri’s third largest city. As a result of the ruling, the company owning the solar energy farm will owe at least \$423,360 in property taxes from 2017 to 2020, said Greene County Collector Allen Icet. It’s not clear how many other solar energy sites across Missouri could be affected by the ruling, or exactly how much tax revenue is at stake.

But the ruling could have a chilling effect on solar energy development in Missouri, just as the federal government is trying to encourage it.

“This obviously would put a big kink and cost in the way of someone trying to lay out a large panel system, if you’ve got to pay taxes on the material generating this renewable, free energy,” said Jon Dolan, executive director of the Missouri Solar Energy Industries Association.

Federal and state governments have long offered some sort of incentives for solar energy. A federal income tax credit for people who install solar panels on their property, or make other energy efficient improvements, has been renewed multiple times since 2005. The legislation signed by Biden extends the tax credit through 2034. The new federal law also includes billions of dollars for tax credits to spur investment in clean-energy manufacturing facilities and to offset the production costs of such things as solar panels and batteries.

Beginning in the early 2000s, many states also financed rebates for residents to make energy efficient improvements. While some of those program have been phased out, states have continued to offer other incentives for renewable energy.

Missouri won’t be devoid solar energy incentives. A new state law taking effect Aug. 28 will offer a sales tax exemption to companies that purchase components to construct solar energy systems.

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