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Not all the news is bad

Isn't it bad enough that tomorrow is Monday?

Don't we need a break from the seemingly endless reports of how bad things are and how much worse they can get?

We agree. Presented here, in no particular order, are some positive points to ponder as you pour another cup of coffee and enjoy the end of your weekend:

- Spring has sprung. OK, maybe that one is at the top for good reason. Though winter is not without its merits, signs of spring — crocuses and robins signaling warmer weather — are practically universally welcomed. The clocks have already sprung forward providing an extra hour of light at the end of the day and those darker mornings will soon dissipate.

- Along with the warmer weather comes sightings of wildlife, from bears to bees. Though bears remain a subject of debate, one cannot help but be impressed by the majestic lumbering creatures and spotting one, for many residents, is still worth the watch, from a safe distance, of course.

On the other end of the size scale, good news was reported by beekeepers in the state who say the bee population appears to be rebounding from a disorder that decimated hives last year. Bees are important in helping the pollination of crops in the Garden State as well as producing honey.

- The latest crop of scholar-athletes was feted Friday by United Way of Sussex County. The outstanding young men and women not only have proven their mental and physical skills but also have demonstrated how well they exercise their heart as they all are deeply involved in community service, setting perhaps the greatest example for their peers.

- And, speaking of community service and charity, the residents of Sussex County have opened their pocketbooks to make sure the doors of the local Red Cross don't close. "Heroes" of all types have raised more than \$21,500 so far, ahead of pace to reach the campaign's \$35,000 goal in another week.

- Schools, businesses and agencies are gearing up for the second annual Foodstock campaign to help restock the county's depleted food pantries. The Herald, United Way of Sussex County and Pass It Along are beginning publicity for the campaign that will culminate on May 16 with a concert on the college's green.

- High school musicals are in full swing. Sets have been struck for several but the curtain will soon open on "Beauty and the Beast," "Annie," "Little Shop of Horrors," "Grease," "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying," and "Cats."

- Montague last week kicked off a year-long celebration of its 250th anniversary.

- Even the economy is not without positive news. Kohl's will open its "innovative" store in Newton on Wednesday. We know that's April 1, but we're trusting it's no April Fool's. And the new Toyota World dealership is expected to open later in April.

- A resilient manufacturing facility, a restaurant owner, social service agencies and a retired pastor were among a score or more of businesses and individuals lauded by the Sussex County Chamber of Commerce at its 24th "Quality in Business, Quality in Living" awards ceremony. Despite trends to the contrary, the attendance set a record for the venue.

Unfortunately, tomorrow we return to your normally scheduled work week and all the news it brings.

But stay alert. It's not all bad.

ON THE WEB: READER POLL

Question

The tax filing deadline is less than a month away. Have you:

Already filed	20.8%	103
Already filed and got refund	30.7%	152
Plan to wait until the last minute	6.5%	32
Will file late	18.8%	93
Working on it	18.6%	92
Aaargh!	4.8%	24
Total votes		496

Comments

People! The tax filing date is the same every year! Why are you planning to file late?

I don't want to pay taxes since it is all going to bonuses of AIG.

I owe, I owe, it's off to H&R Block I go.

Not only did we get our refund, it is already spent.

Hey, AIG and corporate haters — stop counting everybody else's money!

Hey, if Geithner doesn't have to pay why do WE! Where is the choice of send a blank 1040 with Geithner's name on it. "I didn't do it."

I owe. Waiting for the last minute to mail it. Better the interest in my pocket for another three weeks, than in theirs!

Next week's question

Spring has awakened Sussex County's bear population. What do you think when you see a bear?

What the experts tell us about health care reform

COLUMN: NICOLE GUNIA

If you've had to wait for hours in an urban emergency room filled with people suffering from flu symptoms, you know something is wrong with the health care system in New Jersey.

Fifteen percent of New Jerseyans, including one in 10 children, are without health insurance. Meanwhile, small businesses that offer health care insurance to their employees are faced with double-digit price increases each year to maintain that coverage. In the current economy, many of them are faced with the choice of dropping health insurance for their workers or shutting down altogether.

President Obama has promised health care reform and the details of a plan will be hashed out in Congress. Now, more than ever, it is time for health policy experts and everyday people alike to strive to understand the issues underlying our healthcare crisis.

To this end, the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters (NJAHU) recently held its first-annual State of the State Healthcare Symposium in Trenton. A panel of lawmakers, policy experts and health care and insurance industry leaders tackled the difficult issues facing New Jerseyans in front of 500 members of the public in attendance.



NICOLE GUNIA

Our goal in putting together this symposium was not to find one easy solution to the health care crisis, which isn't feasible. But we wanted to create a venue to give experts from varying points of view the opportunity to address each other and the issues in a public forum.

And in the process of facilitating discussion among the experts and educating the public, we met another goal: improving our own understanding of everyone's point of view.

So, for the millions of New Jerseyans whose lives will be affected by health care reform, here is what we heard:

The high cost of health care affects the high cost of health insurance.

While this may seem like an obvious point, it is much too important to overlook. If we can reduce the cost of health care, insurance premiums will come down, as well. Yes, there will be disagreements about where health care costs can be cut. But we can all agree that we need to look closely at our system to eliminate wasteful spending.

Universal health care is not the issue. Some are for it and some are adamantly opposed, but the fact is a European-style national health care system is not on the table. According to one panelist, Steven Goldman, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance, "President Obama was not in favor of universal health care; he was in favor of universal coverage for children."

Any plan that is likely to be proposed will look to keep the majority of

Americans, who now get their health insurance through their employers, enrolled in employer-based plans.

About 15 percent of the population remains uninsured, and that costs everyone.

Panelist Michael D'Agnes, president and CEO of Raritan Bay Medical Center, pointed out that a number of New Jersey hospitals, particularly in urban areas, have closed or are on the brink. Emergency rooms must treat patients regardless of their ability to pay. Uninsured patients often turn to the emergency room for non-emergency conditions, driving up healthcare costs. This brings us back to the first thing we learned: everything hinges on healthcare costs.

These are just a few of the nagging issues highlighted at the symposium.

The NJAHU is continuing the conversation by sponsoring a television series of "One on One Healthy Living with Steve Aduabato" episodes, airing in June and July, in which health care professionals will discuss health care reform in depth.

We are also planning next year's State of the State Healthcare Symposium, building upon what we have learned and what initiatives are undertaken in Trenton and Washington this year.

We expect there will be plenty to talk about.

(Nicole Gunia, a resident of Flanders, is immediate past president of the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters and a broker sales representative at Benefitmall, based in Livingston.)

Abuse not just for rich and famous

COMMUNITY COLUMN: JAMIE BERNARD

kind of reaction serves only to condone and perpetuate domestic and sexual violence.

Brown is innocent until proven guilty in a court of law and hopefully, if convicted, he will get the help he needs because in most cases abusers do not change without professional help. Rhianna, like many abused women, may leave him and reconcile with him many times because leaving an abusive relationship is a process, not an event. And it can be a complex process, particularly for someone so young, requiring strength, courage and sometimes sheer willpower to gradually give up the hope for change and leave someone you love.

Each individual's situation is different, and from the outside we cannot know which actions a victim may take that are safe or what might end in tragedy. Judging a violent relationship from the outside can be very risky business.

The findings of several large studies indicate that girls with a history of physi-

cal and sexual dating violence are four times more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors, including binge drinking, cocaine use, heavy smoking, and unhealthy weight control behavior. For teens in abusive relationships, sexual and physical violence are often connected, and teens that have experienced childhood or adolescent sexual abuse also have a greater sexual vulnerability, which increases the risks of unintended pregnancy and further abuse.

In a 2007 report, the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence reported that adolescents who experience dating violence were up to 60 percent more likely than their non-exposed counterparts to report one or more suicide attempts. Statistics also show that battered women are at the highest risk of being killed when they attempt to leave their abuser.

Providing safety and support is the best way to help young victims of interpersonal violence. Choosing to use violence in response to conflict or stress is solely the

responsibility of the abuser, and holding abusers accountable is critically important. However, if we are truly interested in preventing relationship and sexual violence, we need to look more closely at the cultural norms that influence our thinking and our opinions, especially those that bring us to the place where we can look at a photo of a brutally battered woman and assume she did something to deserve it.

Although interpersonal violence occurs every day here in Sussex County, we have been given a unique teaching moment. This high profile couple and their publicity teams are having an impact on the youth in our community. Let's make sure the conversation about the situation with Rhianna and Chris Brown is productive, safe and helpful.

(Jamie Bernard, CSW, DVS, is executive director of Domestic Abuse & Sexual Assault Intervention Services, Newton. For information or assistance, call (973) 579-2386 or the DASI 24-hour Helpline at 973-875-1211.)

Hospice part of health care solution

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

received services from Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice. Additionally, Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice provided over 350 families in our community with bereavement support services.

This health care debate will be with us for some time, so it's important to know what works. Hospice is part of the solution.

Cecelia T. Clayton, MPH
Executive Director
Karen Ann Quinlan
Memorial Foundation

Skiers should take safety precautions

Editor:

The recent death of actress Natasha Richardson underscores the need for skiers to take safety precautions while on the slopes. Ms. Richardson died as a result of a brain injury that may have been prevented had she been wearing a ski helmet.

Many experienced skiers wear helmets and novice skiers should follow suit, particularly youth. This is why we support passage of a bill package (S-168/A3612) which would require children under the age of 14 to wear helmets while skiing. We call on the Assembly Tourism & Gaming Committee to hold a hearing on these bills and take a step toward preventing a tragedy such as this happening to any of New Jersey's children.

The Brain Injury Association of New Jersey is a statewide organization committed to supporting and advocating for individuals affected by brain injury and raising public awareness through education and prevention. A brain injury can happen to anyone at anytime.

For more information on the services and resources of the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, including concussion awareness and prevention, please call the toll-free helpline at 1-800-669-4323 or visit www.bianj.org.

Barbara Geiger-Parker
President and CEO
Brain Injury Association
of New Jersey

Many people make mock trial success

Editor:

We have completed the final round of this year's Sussex County High School Mock Trial Competition, sponsored by the Sussex County Bar Association. High Point Regional High School is the 2009 Sussex County Mock Trial champion. It is an important event for the high school teams, who spend months preparing for the competition, and it would not have been possible without the help of many lawyers and law clerks from the Sussex County Bar.

We would like to thank the

following attorneys for lending their time and energy in coaching the high school teams: Thomas Bracken, Trish Carley, Anand Dash, Andrew Fraser, Donald Hogan, Gary Kraemer, Robert Mattia, Jared McDavitt, Lauren McFadden, James Opfer and Josh Ursin.

We would like to thank the following individuals for acting as courtroom monitors who kept the court proceedings running smoothly: Attorneys Ann Pompelio and Gregory Mueller, and law clerks Nick Vytell, Laura Nazzaro and Meghan Kral.

We would also like to thank the following attorneys for judging the two opening rounds of the competition: Joanne Brandwood, Paris Eliades, Amy Gjselvik, Hon. Gerald Hanifan, J.S.C. (Ret.), Michael Hanifan, William Hinkes, Peter Laemers, David Nufrio, Beth O'Leary, Jacqueline O'Donnell, Ann Pompelio and Faith Ullman.

We would like to thank the following Superior Court Judges for judging the semifinal round: Hon. James A. Farber, J.S.C., Hon. David Ironson, J.S.C., and Hon. William J. McGovern, III, J.S.C. And a special thank you to Hon. Lorraine Parker, J.A.D., for judging the final round.

Finally, we wish to especially thank Jennifer Kovach, president of the Sussex County Bar.

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How to submit Letters to the Editor

The New Jersey Herald welcomes letters from readers on topics of interest in our region and accepts those delivered by e-mail, regular mail or fax.

The Herald reserves the right to reject or edit letters for clarity, length and concerns of taste or libel. Form letters will not be printed. Writers should limit submissions to one per month unless responding to a local topic of interest.

Letters, including those e-mailed, must contain the writer's complete mailing address and telephone number for verification purposes. Only the writer's name and town will be published. Letters become the property of the Herald on receipt.

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