

New Jersey

Sunday Herald

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Sunday



Joining the battle against addiction

Vernon group tackles growing problem

By PHILLIP MOLNAR
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VERNON — Janelle Passafaro said nothing could prepare her for seeing a family member behind bars.

Two years ago, her brother Anthony, now 27, was a college student working at a deli to make ends meet. But one thing was making his life difficult: a high school football ankle injury.

He was struggling even to walk, and what followed were three excruciating surgeries on his ankle in 2008. To deal with the pain, his doctors prescribed him the well-known opiate OxyContin.

Anthony became addicted to the drug, and within a year and a half of stealing from his family and friends, partaking in a short stint in rehab, and dropping out of his engineer-

ing program, he was in jail. Anthony's story is not unique in New Jersey, or Sussex County, but he is actually one of the luckier ones.

So far this year, six Sussex County residents have died of drug overdoses from opiates, according to the Newton-based Center for Prevention and Counseling. The number of Sussex County residents seeking treatment for heroin and opiates steadily rose from 297 in 2001 to 528 in 2008, according to the state Division of Addiction Services.

Opiates are a derivative of the opium poppy and are used in the creation of heroin and a host of pain killers, including OxyContin, morphine and Percocet.

Today, Janelle Passafaro,

34, is doing what she can to help recovering addicts in Vernon with a group she started — along with a handful of other activists — called “On Board.”

On Board met on a recent Monday in the wooden barn of Vernon resident Jamie Rickey. The group of 14 sat in old chairs and couches to discuss what could be done to stop drug use in Sussex County.

Although Rickey uses the barn for teen concerts and Christian worship events, the stale air never quite left the room, even with barn doors open to an on-and-off-again rainstorm. The handful of lamps and overhanging lights barely illuminated the large space.

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Photo By Philip Molinar/New Jersey Herald

Janelle Passafaro, of Vernon, struggled with her brother's opiate addiction problems. Now she attempts to use that experience to help others with On Board. She is pictured outside the Jamie Rickey barn Friday night.

Tough day to keep cool



Photos by Anna Murphey/New Jersey Herald

Phillip Kalt, 13, and Emily Malone, 12, both of Lafayette, cool off in Lafayette Pond Saturday. The temperature in Sussex County reached 93 degrees Saturday, although it felt as bad as 104 degrees with the humidity.

Sticky July sticking around

HERALD STAFF REPORT
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The oppressive heat that returned to Sussex County this weekend should subside with a cold front arriving today, forecasters said.

The temperature in Sussex County reached 93 degrees Saturday, although it felt as bad as 104 degrees with the humidity, Accuweather meteorologist Brian Wimer said.

The company does not keep records for Sussex County, “but it may be close,” Wimer said.

“I know in other parts of the region there will be some record highs this afternoon,” he said.

The National Weather Service issued a heat advisory Saturday for a number of New Jersey locales, including Newton, noting the combination of high temperatures and humidity would create “a dangerous situation.”

It encouraged people to stay inside, drink water, check on elderly relatives and keep pets in a cool environment.

The heat and humidity are expected to continue today, but top out at 86 degrees with a heat index of 92 degrees.

Conditions could also be ripe for a thunderstorm this evening.

A storm that blew through the region Friday night knocked out power to fewer than 1,000 Jersey Central Power & Light customers in the northern New Jersey region, but power was restored to most of them by midnight, a spokeswoman said.

A cold front could bring the temperature down to 60 degrees tonight, before rising to a high of 86 degrees on a sunny and less humid Monday.

By Monday night, temperatures



Lifeguard Justin Hilgart, 16, of Newton, stays out of the hot sun under the canopy of the lifeguard stand on his job at Lafayette Pond.

could drop into the 50s, Wimer said.

The excessive heat is the latest chapter in the unusual weather pattern that New Jersey has been dealing with for the past 12 months.

The state — known for its mostly mild winters — saw record-setting snows in many areas, especially during February when three major storms hit. That was followed by a spring that saw many days of heavy rains and flooding, followed by several stretches of excessive heat that raised drought concerns in many areas.

“It has truly been a wild stretch,” state climatologist David Robinson said Saturday afternoon. “Every once in a while you look back and say the

atmosphere has really been energized, but these past 12 months? Oh my goodness, it has been crazy. The only component that's been truly absent has been unusually cold temperatures, and not just in the winter months.”

Temperature readings of 100 degrees were reported around 3 p.m. Saturday in Point Pleasant, Robinson said, while other shore areas were reporting 98 and 99 degrees. Similar readings were reported in most inland and urban areas.

Heat indexes in most areas ranged from 101 to 106 degrees by late Saturday afternoon.

As temperatures soared toward 100 degrees in some parts of New Jersey, Harry Oliver was trying to make sense of it all as he waited to get sandwiches inside a Toms River convenience store.

“When I complain about the heat and humidity, my wife reminds me that I was begging for this type of weather when I was shoveling all that snow this past winter,” the 47-year-old Lakehurst resident said. “Now I'm looking forward to the snow again.”

Oliver said he and his wife didn't want to cook. “It's hot enough in the house already, even with my air conditioning running 24/7,” he said.

Kristin Kline, a weather service meteorologist at Mount Holly, said this summer hasn't been “record-setting hot” in most places. The off-and-on scorching heat that's been felt in the Mid-Atlantic can be blamed on “a Bermuda high” between Bermuda and North Carolina that is pushing hot, humid air into the region, Kline said.

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Wantage ordered to reach dam deal

By CHRISTINA TATU
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WANTAGE — The nonprofit group that owns Lake Neepaulin and township officials have 30 days to agree on who is responsible for paying back a loan to repair Lake Neepaulin dam, and at least some township residents will be responsible for shouldering that cost, a Superior Court judge has ruled.

Judge Theodore Bozonelis ruled Friday in Morristown that while Wantage Township could issue an additional tax assessment on the lake and beachfront property owned by the Friends of Lake Neepaulin, the group is not solely responsible for paying back the entire \$1 million loan because its members are not the only ones to benefit from the lake.

“There is some indication that houses surrounding the lake benefit,” Bozonelis said. “The tax assessor can say that 80 percent is owed by the Friends of Lake Neepaulin. ... You cannot turn around and say the Friends of Lake Neepaulin are responsible for 100 percent.”

The two groups have until Aug. 31 to reach a decision, which Bozonelis will review during a Sept. 14 conference with both sides.

Whether the dam is repaired or the lake is drained, officials cannot ignore the fact that some residents will be responsible for the cost.

“If the lake is decommissioned and drained, there are certainly going to be consequences. ... If it's drained, someone is going to pay for it. I do know one thing, the (state Department of Environmental Protection) is not going to pay for it,” Bozonelis said.

Township attorney Michael Garofalo was pleased with the outcome and said Friday's decision gives the township more leeway on whom it can tax.

“The municipality may look to the Friends of Lake Neepaulin for repayment and determine if it's reasonable to assess them for the loan, rather than all the residents of Lake Neepaulin,” Garofalo said. He added, “The judge warned us we had to be reasonable in doing that.”

Bozonelis also reversed his decision that township officials could not back out of their decision to act as co-applicant for the loan. However, township officials must still make a reasonable effort to help the Friends of Lake Neepaulin pay for the repair, he said.

“If you cannot come to an agreement, then I will make a decision for you,” Bozonelis warned both groups.

To ensure the Friends of Lake Neepaulin has enough money to help repay the loan, the township

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