



**Draft day in A.C.**  
Local fantasy baseball league that now includes players from as far away as Utah renews its traditions and rituals. **SPORTS, B1**



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## Permit delays irk gun owners

**SOPHIE NIETO-MUNOZ**  
newjerseymonitor.com

Gun owners rejoiced after the U.S. Supreme Court in June struck down restrictive concealed carry laws, allowing them to apply for carry permits that for decades had been nearly impossible for most New Jerseyans to get.

But nearly nine months after the ruling upended the gun landscape in the Garden State, Second Amendment advocates and gun owners say it's still too difficult to carry their guns in public.

They blame a backlog of thousands of applications, including from people who have waited years

to apply for a permit; a statewide judicial vacancy crisis that has added delays to the application process; a convoluted permitting system that relies on the state's hundreds of autonomous police departments to issue permits; and Democratic lawmakers uninterested in helping gun owners.

"There's all kinds of delays, and it's a problem that exists sprinkled throughout the state," said Scott Bach, executive director of the New Jersey Pistol and Rifle Association.

Sen. Ed Durr said he was a victim of the backlog himself when his permit to carry application

took months to approve. He applied in early October, and it wasn't approved until late January.

Durr is a Republican from Gloucester County who has said he launched his political career after he was denied a concealed

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MATTHEW STRABUK PHOTOS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Alanna Smallwood, 46, of Margate, interacts with a first grade class at Avalon Stone Harbor Elementary School. Smallwood is a school counselor who took the Cape Assist's Virtual Youth Mental Health First Aid Course.

## Not easy being a kid

Social media, other modern factors can affect mental health

**VINCENT JACKSON**  
Staff Writer

Alanna Smallwood, who has spent the past 13 years as a school counselor and a total of 23 years in education, acknowledges the increased pressure young people experience today compared to two decades ago.

For one thing, academics are more demanding, Smallwood said.

"School work today is harder. The content today in fifth-grade

**"Kids make mistakes, and they get recorded and posted online. ... It's a very different world under the microscope."**

**Joseph Faldetta**, director of prevention services for Cape Assist

math, I used to teach at the end of sixth grade and the beginning of seventh grade," Smallwood said. "Kindergarten used to be learning how to play. Now in kindergarten, you are learning to read books."

Technology and social media play a greater role in the lives of youth, Smallwood said. There is more pressure, whether the student is involved with sports with travel teams or with instrumental music. If there are financial

struggles at home, young people will feel that also.

"The kids have more happening," said Smallwood, 46, a Margate resident. "We don't have a lot of outside counselors in South Jersey outside of the schools. The counselors who we do have are full."

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a years-long decline in the mental health of the nation's

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Smallwood uses games, movement and breathing exercises with the children.

## Ukraine demands emergency UN meeting

**KARL RITTER**  
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's government on Sunday called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council to "counter the Kremlin's nuclear blackmail" after Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed plans to station tactical atomic weapons in Belarus.

One Ukrainian official said Russia "took Belarus as a nuclear hostage."

Further heightening tensions, an explosion deep inside Russia wounded three people Sunday. Russian authorities blamed a Ukrainian drone for the blast, which damaged residential buildings in a town just 110 miles south of Moscow.

Russia has said the plan to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus comes in response to the West's increasing military support for Ukraine. Putin announced the plan in a TV interview that aired Saturday, saying it was triggered by a U.K. decision this past week to provide Ukraine with armor-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium.

Putin argued that by deploying its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia was following the lead of the United States. He noted that Washington has nuclear weapons based in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

"We are doing what they have been doing for decades, stationing them in certain allied countries, preparing the launch platforms and training their crews," he said.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry condemned the move in a statement Sunday and demanded an

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### Lasco a national champ

Mainland alumnus Destin Lasco repeats as an NCAA swim champion and helps Cal Berkeley win the team title again. **SPORTS, B1**

### Factory explosion

A fourth person was confirmed dead, three people remained unaccounted for two days after Pennsylvania chocolate factory tragedy. **NATION&WORLD, A7**



### A real horror show

Thousands enjoy the New Jersey Horror Con and Film Festival at the Showboat. **LOCAL, A4**

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