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MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2023

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A life of helping people

Neil Oberto retires from Catholic Social Services

BY KENT JACKSON
 STAFF WRITER

When Neil Oberto started working for Catholic Social Services in Hazleton in 1989, the agency had four offices and its food pantry was a cupboard.

This year when he retired as director, the agency had

grown into the former Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church convent and school. The pantry now takes up the church basement, where people can select food from shelves as if they're shopping.

As the agency expanded with the needs of the com-

munity, its mission changed. A homeless shelter, called Divine Providence, started operating seven years ago.

The agency also has a family center for community events; teaches life skills to young adults with mental health needs as they age out of foster care, offers services for expectant mothers and hosts Christmas programs with food and presents.

Other programs to which Oberto devoted much of his

INSIDE: Celebration planned to honor Oberto in April. **A5**

time have ended.

The agency no longer handles adoptions, foster care or counseling.

Oberto began as a counselor, but from the start he said his job description had a

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JOHN HAEGER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Neil Oberto talks about his years with Catholic Social Services during an interview at his Hazleton home on Thursday. Oberto retired this year.

WALKING THE EASTER BUNNY TRAIL



FRANK BARR / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER



TOP: Officer Jordan Yanak of the Hazleton Police Department gives some Easter candy to Ravyn Sanders, 4, of Wilkes-Barre at City View Park, Hazleton, on Sunday afternoon. Participants collected candy from each station along the path at the park. The Easter Bunny was also available for photos. **LEFT:** From left, Kylie Tavarez, 7; Aaliyah Lora, 5; and Khloe Lora, 8, pose with the Easter Bunny at the event. **RIGHT:** Leulcian Gerbino, 4, left, and his father Zack make their way through the park collecting candy. To see more photos, visit standardspeaker.com.

LUZERNE COUNTY

Council set to award ARPA grants

Proposed settlement of prison suicide lawsuit also on Tuesday's agenda.

BY ERIC MARK
 STAFF WRITER

Luzerne County Council is set to award 77 American Rescue Plan Act funding grants on Tuesday.

Council is also scheduled to vote on the proposed settlement of a lawsuit brought by the estate of a woman who died by suicide while being held at Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

Rescue Plan

According to the meeting agenda, council will vote on a list of Rescue Plan funding applications that will receive the full amount requested by the applicants last year.

Council will vote on another 36 Rescue Plan funding applications at a later meeting. Those applicants are set to receive partial funding, less than requested, based on funding caps for categories in a plan developed by Councilman Matt Mitchell.

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Pa. appeals court rules medical marijuana covered under workers' compensation

Attorney says two precedent-setting decisions are a 'huge win.'

BY TERRIE MORGAN-BESECKER
 STAFF WRITER

Workers' compensation carriers must reimburse injured employees for the cost of medical marijuana if a physician determines the drug is medically necessary, a state appellate court said.

In two precedent-setting rulings, the Commonwealth Court rejected insurance companies' claims that the

state's Medical Marijuana Act and a federal law that classifies marijuana as an illegal controlled substance barred them from providing coverage.

The rulings are a "huge win" for workers' compensation claimants statewide who are approved to use medical cannabis to treat work-related injuries, but have been forced to pay out of pocket for the treatment, said Scranton attorney Debi Domenick, who represents a Hunlock Creek man who challenged the payment denial.

Domenick, a Lackawanna County commissioner, has



DOMENICK

been fighting for years on behalf of her private law client, Edward Appel, who suffered a serious back injury in a work-related car crash in 2006.

Appel began using cannabis to treat pain shortly after Pennsylvania legalized the drug for medical use in 2016. A physician determined it was a necessary and reasonable treatment, but the insurance carrier for his employer, GWC Warranty Corporation, refused to pay the cost, argu-

ing the Medical Marijuana Act says insurers are not required to cover it. The company also argued that mandating coverage would cause it to violate the federal Controlled Substance Act.

The state workers' compensation board upheld the carrier's denial in Appel's case and a similar case filed on behalf of a Paul Sheetz, a now deceased Reading area man represented by Montgomery County attorney Jenifer Dana Kaufman. Domenick and Kaufman appealed the rulings to the

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EASTER Egg Hunt

REGISTRATION REQUIRED*

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 Prizes, candy, basket drawings!

Special Coupons for Mom & Dad value up to \$2000.00

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