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Mold problem could be costly for Centennial

By GARY WECKSELBLATT
STAFF WRITER

Centennial School Board members expressed frustration that mold found in the building planned to house the district's administrative headquarters could cost nearly \$1 million to remove.

Directors used words like "upsetting" and "debacle" to describe contractor change orders that would add \$944,535 to the cost of the project.

"I'd like to buy a pile of plywood and plank the place up," board member Steven Adams said. "That's pretty disgusting."

Director Andrew Pollock said, "This is almost a million dollars, and that's just unacceptable for what we planned for Swan Way. The costs just keep going up and up."

Two years ago the district purchased the 27,630-square-foot, brick building off Jacksonville

Road at 48 Swan Way in Warminster for its administration office.

The site, which cost \$1.7 million, was built in 1980 by the U.S. government for data processing and computer use at the former Naval Air Warfare Center. It is in the process of being renovated.

The current district administration building on Centennial Road near William Tennent High School was built in 1951 and originally housed the Johnsville Elementary

School. It needs a new roof and other mechanical fixes that would cost a minimum of \$2.5 million, according to a feasibility study. A complete renovation would cost \$9 million.

Board members also lashed out at the system in which a low bidder can get the job and use change orders to increase profits.

"There's potential for abuse in the change order process," said Mark Miller, a school district

director and president of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.

Adams said, "Once you're in, you're in, and it's public money. It's a horrible system. It really is."

Grace Heiland and John Yarnall, representatives of Crabtree, Rohrbaugh & Associates, the project's architect, explained the mold problem during the board's meeting this week.

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Season of giving



PHOTOS BY ART GENTILE / PHOTOJOURNALIST

Volunteer Kelly Griffis, of Horsham, picks out toys to package at the Toys for Tots warehouse in Horsham on Wednesday.

Toys for Tots gears up

By MICHELE HADDON
STAFF WRITER

Tucked away from the mall traffic and long lines is a nondescript warehouse in Horsham where Christmas wishes are granted.

Beside wooden shelves stacked carefully with toys, volunteers work tirelessly throughout the holiday season, giving local struggling families something to smile about on Christmas morning.

Pushing a gray cart between the stocked shelves, three girls carefully study a sheet of paper, trying to pick out the perfect gifts for one local family, for children they've never met.

A few volunteers walk up and down the aisles sorting toys by age, while others prepare large boxes filled to the top with presents sure to delight.

The warehouse is home to the Glenside Chapter of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program where new, unwrapped toys are collected and distributed as Christmas gifts to less-fortunate children in the community.

Assistant Coordinator Guy Vogel said he wants to get the word out about their local chapter, so they can help as many

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Francis O'Connor, of Southampton, reaches for gifts to send to children.

Drought watch issued for Delaware River basin

If precipitation occurs and water levels rise back to normal, the watch can be lifted after 30 days.

By KYLE BAGENSTOSE
STAFF WRITER

Delaware River Basin Commission members this week took the unusual step of holding a special meeting via conference call to declare the first basin-wide drought watch since the early 2000s.

The DRBC is a federal entity that brings together representatives of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Delaware and the federal government to plan, regulate and manage water resources within the basin. A drought watch is the commission's first level of concern: A further drop in water levels could lead to a drought warning, and then a drought emergency.

The drought watch will not require residents in basin counties to restrict their water usage at the present time, although the commission on Wednesday urged residents to "maximize water efficiency to preserve and protect the basin's water supplies."

Instead, the watch will primarily affect the control of water supplies in large reservoirs within the basin. The watch will lower the amount of water that can be diverted from such reservoirs for use in New York and New Jersey, and may require releases from the reservoirs to increase the flow of the Delaware River.

DRBC spokesman Clarke Rupert said a basin-wide drought watch hasn't occurred since the early 2000s. He added that the commission has been closely monitoring conditions in the basin as water levels have fallen over the past few months.

Rupert said the commission first was concerned with supplies in the lower part of the basin, as reservoirs like Blue Marsh Lake in Berks County and Beltzville Lake in Carbon County approached drought watch levels. Rupert said Blue Marsh remains above drought watch levels while Beltzville is below, adding that both would need to fall below a drought watch level to trigger a lower basin drought watch.

But because a trio of reservoirs in the upper part of the basin fell below drought watch levels this week, the commission decided to issue a basin-wide watch.

Rupert said what comes next is a game of wait-and-see. If precipitation occurs and water levels rise back to normal, the watch can be lifted after 30 days. If water levels continue to drop and the drought watch is elevated to a drought warning, additional measures could be taken.

Rupert said a main concern is the Delaware River's salt front — where the freshwater of the upper Delaware River

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53° Cloudy. Afternoon
38° showers. B3

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Helping neighbors in need at the holidays since 1988.

Donors and how to contribute.
B6

Today's total:
\$6,599.00

Changes after bariatric surgery go beyond weight loss

Janessa McCracken weighed 307 pounds and was in a "dark place" when she decided to get bariatric surgery at Grand View Health Bariatric and Metabolic Institute in West Rockhill.

By JENNY WAGNER
STAFF WRITER

Janessa McCracken keeps one pair of Lucky Brand jeans front and center on a shelf in her closet.

The 36-year-old Lower Salford resident recently donated about 15 garbage bags of other clothes, shoes and accessories, but she still hangs onto that one pair of jeans.

They don't fit her anymore — in fact, the size 26 jeans could fit about

two of her now. They serve as a reminder of where McCracken's journey started and how much she has changed since she had bariatric surgery one year ago last week. Now she wants to help others with their journeys.

"I never thought in a million years that someone's life could change as much as (mine) has in 365 days," McCracken said. "It's like I blinked and I'm suddenly 150 pounds lighter."

McCracken weighed 307 pounds and was in a "dark place" when she decided to get bariatric surgery for weight loss.

"I had promised myself I would never do bariatric surgery," McCracken said. "Being an oversized person, you have enough stigma in your life."

Dr. Michael Fishman, McCracken's surgeon and the head of the Grand View Health Bariatric and Metabolic Institute in West Rockhill, explained that many people see bariatric surgery as "the easy way out" of diet and exercise.

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