Fall back: Did you remember to set your clocks back?



CHESTER COUNTY

From shy boy to a leader through 4-H

Ronak Suchindra of Chester Springs named winner of 4-H Youth in Action

By Bill Rettew

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CHESTER SPRINGS-When 17-year-old Ronak Suchindra discovered 4-H, nine years ago, he was a shy boy, but he has since become a confident leader and scholarship award winner.

The Downingtown East senior was named one of the winners of the 2025 Youth in Action Awards, which honors four 4-H youth

CHESTER COUNTY

exceptional achievements, impact on their communities and demonstrating that they are Beyond Ready for successful futures.

With the help of 30 middle and high school student volunteers, Ronak has mentored more than 3,000 students globally to help foster a new generation of STEM enthusiasts

Ronak met PennState Extension educator Toni M. Stuetz as an eight-year old. She introduced these space debris?" he asks. from across the country for their him to robots and Legos. He is a

member of the Penn State Cooperative Extension 4-H program. At first, the grade schooler was intimidated but soon had a change

of heart. "It opened up my creativity, so I could express myself," Ronak said. "4-H not only incorporated robot-

ics and creativity but also public speaking issues I'm passionate about such as space debris." Space debris is the waste gener-

ated by space travel and Ronak delved into the unknown and unlocked endless possibilities.

"What can engineers do to catch See LEADER on Page A5



4-H scholarship winner Ronak Suchindra BILL RETTEW-MEDIANEWS GROUP

BUILDING EMPATHY

Poverty simulation draws volunteers from across Chester County to Oxford



ELECTION 2024 COUNTING Election 2024 in Chester County

will wrap up sooner than 2020

By Michael P. Rellahan MRELLAHAN@DAILYLOCAL.COM

The 2024 presidential election promises to be over sooner than you think – at least in Chester County.

While the nation may wait for tight races in Pennsylvania and other swing states to close days after Tuesday, Nov. 5, the vote-counting process here should not be a repeat of four years ago, when it took until the end of the election for staff in the county Office of Voter Services to finish counting

Volunteers from across Chester County take part in a poverty simulation event at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church on Oct. 25. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHERYL MILES - KENNETT AREA COMMUNITY SERVICE

By Jen Samuel FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

OXFORD - Eighty-eight people volunteered to experience life in Chester County while undergoing immense financial hardships during a well-attended poverty simulation event at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church.

"It is important for all of us to work together," said Cheryl Miles, community housing development director at Kennett Area Community Service.

Collaborating nonprofit partners of the simulation included, besides Kennett Area Community Service, Chester County United Way, Serving Inspiring Loving Others (SILO), Oxford's Neighborhood Services Center, CHESCO Bridges Coalition, Lighthouse Youth Center, Orion Communities, Migrant Education of Pennsylvania, Chester County the sanctuary of St. Christo-Partnership to End the to Homelessness, Chester County Intermediate Unit, and United Way of Southern Chester County.

"This is a group of nonprof-

People learn how to survive if impoverished during a simulation event in Oxford on Oct. 25. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHERYL MILES - KENNETT AREA COMMUNITY SERVICE

its throughout Chester County who work with families experiencing homelessness, experiencing poverty," Miles said.

Working together inside pher's Episcopal Church, the 88 volunteers from across the county took part in the simulation by assuming the identity of a person living in poverty.

Miles said the goal of the simulation was to empower the community to better understand poverty and how it impacts people with lived experiences.

The 88 volunteers were assigned into families facing various hardships including long work hours without reasonable childcare options, the problems which arise when seeking support

at various social service agencies that operate only during limited week-day timeframes, and the everyday struggles of food insecurity.

"We call it a simulation. We want people to know this is not a game," Miles said. "We want to build empathy."

There were 22 nonprofit team members who assumed the identity of various important community roles for the volunteers to interact with during the simulation. These societal roles included a nurse, a banker, a police officer, a grocer and prospective employers. There was even a pawnbroker.

Throughout the morning, the volunteers navigated real-life scenarios through the morning, with limited resources, while faced with critical decisions which not only impacted their futures, but the livelihood and well-being of their entire families.

"It's critically important for community members and stakeholders to thoroughly understand what it's like to navigate systems and See OXFORD on Page A4

the tens of thousands of mail-in ballots cast in that COVID-19 era.

This year, far fewer voters are casting their ballots by mail than in 2020; as of four days after the close of voter registration, 68,373 had cast their ballots for president, U.S. senator, U.S. House of Representative, and state executive and legislative offices, as opposed to the 151,149 who did so then.

Thus, there will be far fewer mail-in ballots to process, making counting less time-consuming. But also, the Voter Services operation that struggled in 2020 to process the new ballots has been replaced by a more streamlined and efficient system that those election workers have grown used to dealing with in the years since.

So the question of who wins the presidential election - along with the other contested races in the county's count should come before the sun sets on Wednesday, Nov. 6.

For politicians in the Democratic and Republican parties, the answer of winner and loser if clear. County Democrats have faith that Vice President Kamala Harris will prevail, while county Republicans are no less sure that former President Donald Trump will win.

"This election was always going to be close in Pennsylvania - particularly when we've had out-of-state billionaires flood the Commonwealth See PROCESS on Page A5

CHESTER COUNTY Second gentleman **Doug Emhoff visits Chester County**

By Bill Rettew

WRETTEW@DAILYLOCAL.COM

WEST CHESTER – With just a few days left until the general election, Doug Emhoff, Second Gentleman and husband of presidential candidate Kamala Harris, visited a private residence in the borough on Friday evening to urge phone bank volunteers to keep at it and knock even more doors.

"There's only one choice and that happens to be my wife," Emhoff said, with a smile, during an informal presentation, as some volunteers continued to finish up calls.

Emhoff told the volunteers that every voter See EMHOFF on Page A4

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INDEX

Business A5 ClassifiedInside Community A3 Crossword Inside Horoscopes......B5 Lottery.....A2

Volume undefined, issue Obituaries A5 Opinion A7 SportsB1



OXFORD From Page 1

bureaucracy as a low-income worker, or person living in poverty, by walking in their shoes," said Rep. Christine Sappey, D-158th of East Marlborough, on Wednesday

She lauded the good work and overall strong turnout at the poverty simulation event.

"Chester County is projected to see significant pledged to build 1,000 growth over the next decade, so it's also important that we plan for an increased need for services and programs that serve a variety of income levels," Sappey said. "We need to support our low-income workforce and keep them on their way to a middle-class life, and we only year-two. need to lift those in poverty out by ensuring adequate expansion of Street Outreach education and job training opportunities."

The state representative said the collaboration between the region's nonprofits and Chester County government is encouraging.

working at the state level to obtain funding via legislation including the Earned Income Tax Credit for people with limited assets, income constraints and the ALICE population to keep the community's low-wage workers from falling into poverty.

for Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed. People who are part of the ALICE population struggle to afford basic expenses including transportation, food and housing yet they earn above the federal poverty line so cannot receive assistance, according to the United Way.

Otherwise known as the working poor, people within the ALICE population are considered particularly vulnerable to economic instability, as previously reported.

"It's important to remember that poverty is not a choice," said Chester County Commissioner Josh immersive experience that Maxwell. "We must work helps participants underto understand that the challenges of housing insecu-

complex and multifaceted and affect individuals and families from all walks of life."

Maxwell said compassion must guide efforts to extinguish these challenges.

"Chester County is committed to making the lives of the working poor fair and equitable as well and helping residents have their needs met," Maxwell said.

Chester County has affordable homes over a decade, Maxwell said, as part of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOUSE AMER-ICA initiative. The county is already one-third of the way to fulfilling this pledge, and the commission noted it's

"We have invested in the Teams, emergency housing coordination and strategic planning efforts," he added.

Chester County Food Bank estimates that as many as 10% of the population, or 50,000 people, suffer from food insecurity in Ches-Sappey added she is ter County, as previously reported.

"Long-term solution for food insecurity is to provide for basic needs across the board, things like affordable housing and transportation as well as quality child care and education," Maxwell stated.

"We must continue to ALICE is an acronym invest in creating affordably priced homes, partner with local nonprofits, and provide critical resources to support those in need," Maxwell said. "We must continue to have conversations with a diverse group of interested parties including government officials, community organizations, housing advocates, and concerned citizens to discuss innovative solutions, collaborative strategies."

> The commissioner said there are over 50 food providers with over 100 community partners associated with the Chester County Food Bank operation.

"The poverty simulation offers an eye-opening, stand the complexity and stress of living in poverty,"

rity and homelessness are said Miles. "By walking in said, continues to be a great a lot that's happening behind the shoes of those who face these challenges every day, we can foster empathy and build a stronger commitment to creating real, sustainable change in our community."

> The volunteers explored solutions to address poverty during an ending discussion session among small groups on the experience. Organizers served a light lunch in brown bags that contained either cheese or peanut butter sandwiches.

> Julianne Dods, development director of the United Way of Southern Chester County, said her organization was there working with fellow partner agencies to create "a meaningful, empathic experience."

> "The simulation is pretty interesting," said Aaron Karpas, executive director of Oxford Area Neighborhood Services Center. "It's putting you in a circumstance that you're not used to and seeing if you can navigate the system and try to get some help."

Karpas said Chester County is very diverse.

"There are different economic conditions," Karpas stated. For instance, he said lower Southern Chester County differs completely from some other Chesco areas including when compared to West Chester and Berwyn, a census-des-

ignated place along the Philadelphia Main Line in both Tredyffrin and Easttown townships.

"I say this word a lot," Karpas continued. "Empathy. Put yourself in their shoes sometimes. And if we all help each other, it makes it a lot easier to get people out of trouble."

"Sometimes people don't realize the difficulties that people have in poverty. And it creates a whole lot of stressors," said Leandria Hall, program director of Oxford Area Neighborhood Services Center. She encouraged people to give their time or their support to helping agencies making a difference at the local level. Or to simply seek to understand those who have a poverty background, including teachers when working with students.

The simulation event, she

learning tool.

"You're learning how to survive with the limited resources that you have," Hall said. "And some of the tough decisions you have to make when you don't have a lot of resources. Do I eat? Or do I pay a bill? It's really challenging."

Hall has worked in social services for many years.

"As a kid, I've always been a person who likes to give back and help others," Hall said. "It's kind of my passion, just to make a difference in people's lives."

"We're finding a lot of folks are working and still struggling to pay the basic bills," said Melissa Pacella, executive director of SILO, including rent or mortgages and utilities.

She said for many people of the social service agencies are open and then they are closed when the people who Especially with a church need them are actually available to go.

Pacella said SILO delivers bags of food to people during things will work out. It's just evening hours.

In 2023, SILO served he said. 1,500 people.

"We have a community garden," Pacella said. "And, we install raised gardens in folks' backyards so they can be more empowered and grow their own food."

She said "overwhelming" challenges compile against the working poor.

"One problem often leads to another problem," Pacella stated. "A car that breaks down might mean that you might lose your job because you can't get there. And they're really having to make hard decisions – what challenge gets the priority to be solved."

Mayra Castillo is the vice president of Casa Guanajuato in Kennett Square. She said migrants are coming to Chester County, preliminary, to work in the mushroom industry.

88 volunteers to partake in the poverty simulation last community." Friday.

Of the people working in mushroom farms and packaging facilities, Castillo said they work in the cold and they work in humidity, depending on the season.

"They get up really early in the morning," Castillo said. "They leave their children to go to work. They leave their children unattended. There's

EMHOFF From Page 1

closed doors that some of our community doesn't know, because these individuals are invisible."

Soyica White joined the board of the United Way of Southern Chester County in May.

"Having served as a workforce development professional in the local communities," White said, "I saw the need firsthand. I work with the families."

In this role, White has helped people navigate the every day complexities of just living, he said, and taking care of a family – of the basics: housing, food and emergency support.

"Helping them with their careers, it's impossible not to address the other needs as well," White said.

Faith plays a huge role in while they're at work, a lot helping families overcome obstacles, he said.

"Faith plays a huge role. family. You have that support and motivation from others as well as our Creator that a matter of walking the path,"

"We, who are discovering what God has for us – our job is to trust and stay the course," White said, "no matter what."

Willa Hightower is also a board member of United Way of Southern Chester County. Like White, she took part in the poverty simulation on October 25 at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church.

Both White and Hightower assumed the identity of impoverished people.

"I think it is very confusing, but I think that is probably real life," Hightower said of the simulation. "A lot of standing-in-line. And a lot of reliance on transportation."

When asked why she is a board member of the United Way, Hightower answered: "To whom much is given, much is required. And so, Castillo was one of the this is another way in which I can continue to serve the

> Hightower said the experience is also a "full circle" as her father was an executive with United Way while she was growing up. "I believe in the mission," she said.

> In Pennsylvania, part of the United Way's mission is building financially resilient families and thriving communities.

Heather O'Donnell is a

Drake Smith is a Lincoln University senior, Political Science major, former SGA president and took part in do it again for Kamala Harris

nurse.

She attended the poverty simulation on behalf of Chester County's Nurse Family Partnership. In her role, O'Donnell visits young mothers at home during their pregnancy. The visits continue after the baby is born and until the child turns two.

During these house visits, the nurse works to support new parents and answers their many questions about childbirth and raising children, according to the Chester County Health Department.

"Every day with every client that I visit, they're working under circumstances where housing is not available, or nor affordable. They're sharing resources with family and friends if they have them," O'Donnell said.

"We do a lot of resource referral to clients to try to help connect them with public agencies that can possibly assist them make ends meet," she said.

Chervl Miles, the community housing development director at Kennett Area Community Service, earlier this year advocated for housing affordability in the borough during a formal presentation before the Kennett Square Borough Council.

"Housing is such a complex issue in our county as far as availability," Miles said. "There's a lack of it."

And of course in Chester County, across America and elsewhere, everyone needs shelter.

"If you are providing housing, we want you to do right by the people that you serve," Miles said. "We want them to be held to a standard, so that everybody is living in a safe, comfortable place."

And beyond housing, since 2020, food insecurity has increased by 30% in Chester County, as previously reported.

"The numbers are growing," Miles noted while standing outside of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church in the morning autumn sunlight.

She said it is vital for people to have their needs met, to access services, and to have a liveable wage.

"They are our neighbors," Miles said. "Everyone deserves an opportunity to thrive in our community."

"Chester County voters put Joe Biden over the top in the 2020 and we are going to they talk to could decide the the Freedom 14 March to in 2024." Comitta said. "I'm thrilled to support the Harris Walz campaign in any way I can and to be joined by Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff at our phone bank. "Volunteers from all walks of life – college students, working parents, senior citizens, and more – are making the difference. We have just a few days left, if you're interested in volunteering, please reach out to help push Vice President Kamala Harris and Governor Tim Walz to victory."





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election. He also said that Harrisburg. When talking his wife took over for Biden about the impact of Chesjust 15 weeks ago to unite the country.

and that was her," said voters at Lincoln. the self-described proud husband and proud American. "She's a badass woman. "She's working for you,

solving problems for you." Uniting Americans was an Smith said. Emhoff theme.

the aisle- having a to do working the phones. list-that's Kamala," he said. Emhoff said that Repub-

lican candidate Donald behind the Harris campaign, Trump can be distracting.

been paying attention," he said. "Cut through the fog. U.S. Rep. Chriss Do the research. Do your han stood next to Emhoff homework.

"There is one choice. She is ready to be president. She's got the experience."

Some decisions last longer than a four year presidency.

"Who would you like picking the next Supreme Court Justice?" he asked.

ter County, the phone bank volunteer noted that there "We needed a leader are 1,200 registered student

"It shows that the campaign is really focused on the collar counties and they know how important Chester County is to the election,"

Chris Luna, candidate for "Kamala will work across District 13 state House, was

He said that recently there was even more energy and how as a minority candi-"A lot of people haven't date he had realized an

U.S. Rep. Chrissy Houlaand recognized the volunteers.

"The energy is palpable," Houlahan said. "We want you guys to keep it going."

State Rep. Carolyn Comitta noted that Chester County voters might make the difference.

West Chester Borough Councilman Brian McGinnis called voters.

"It was an honor to have the Second Gentleman, Doug Emhoff, visit West Chester to support the campaign efforts," McGinnis said. "His presence energized the volunteers and it shows the crucial role that Chester County plays in this election."

Houlahan, Comitta and Luna are all running for office on Tuesday.

