

Solon

T I M E S

April 8, 2021 · \$1

Volume 42 / Number 39

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Photo by Michael Steinberg

Imam Abdul Wajid Outubuddin, of Pepper Pike, leads Friday prayer for area Muslims last week emphasizing the importance of Ramadan, the Islamic Holy Month which begins Tuesday and lasts 30 days. The prayer took place at the Signature of Solon as it has each week as plans are finalizing for the completion of the Chagrin Valley Islamic Center's mosque on Liberty Road in Solon. The mosque is scheduled to open in early summer.

Muslims ready for another virtual Ramadan

By SUE REID

Area Muslims next week will begin marking their second year of Ramadan during the coronavirus pandemic, taking a holiday traditionally rooted in gatherings of community, friends and family and giving it a virtual twist.

"All Ramadan activities this year are virtual due to COVID-19," said

Solon resident Ashley Ahmad, a member of the Chagrin Valley Islamic Center. "We are trying to incorporate fun activities for the kids with contests and prizes."

The Islamic holy month based on the lunar calendar, Ramadan begins April 13 and lasts 30 days.

"Ramadan is the holiest month of the year," Mrs. Ahmad noted. "It is

truly a time to reflect on our faith and remember God and all of the blessings in our lives."

In past years, Ramadan has been observed with community prayers and large gatherings of people each night for meals following the all-day fast.

Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, breaking the fast often as a community in the evening.

In past years, for 20 of those 30 days, they ate together as a community.

For last year's celebration, prayers took place outdoors at Signature of Solon in a drive-in fashion.

It was hoped that this year's celebration would take place with services in the mosque being built

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Golf back in full swing at Grantwood course

By SUE REID

Grantwood Golf Course is open and in full swing for the season, seeing an increase in play compared to previous years.

Thanks to good weather, despite last week's one-day snowfall, the course opened earlier than normal on March 9, said Stephanie Koval, Grantwood program coordinator. Typically, the course opens at the end of May.

"The weather looked so good and worked out for us," she said.

The number of golfing rounds is higher than usual for this time of year, Ms. Koval continued, and the pandemic is one of the reasons. In addition, the closure of the Golf Dome in Bainbridge has brought more golfers to Grantwood's driving

range this winter.

"Rounds are definitely up for opening earlier," she said. "We are doing really well."

Ms. Koval said more people are sharing golf carts this spring, although there is an option of one cart per player for an added cost. Pandemic health guidelines last year before vaccines were available recommended one person per cart.

Spirits were also high in the month of March after the opening, with "everyone flooding in," she said.

Grantwood also gained more memberships, she said.

"Golf is on the rise again compared to 10 years ago," Ms. Koval said.

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Tree plantings, brush pickups signs of springtime in Solon

By SUE REID

Despite the snowfall last week, the Solon Service Department has its sights set on spring.

Director Mark Hawley outlined initiatives heading into spring, beginning with the start of the mulch and compost sales for residents.

That began last week and will continue each Monday, Wednesday and Friday through the beginning of October. With this program, residents can come to the service garage, 6600 Cochran Road, 8-11 a.m. and noon to 3 p.m., and purchase mulch or compost for \$10 a yard. Residents can load the mulch into the vehicle or have the service crews do so, Mr. Hawley said.

The department also plans the annual Dumpster drop beginning June 2. A choice of a 10-yard or 12-yard

receptacles can be requested online by residents. This program, which is a free service and provided on a first-come, first-served basis, runs through the beginning of October. It is aimed at those residents who may wish to do a house cleaning or small landscape project. There will be three Dumpster drops a day. "It fills up very quickly," Mr. Hawley said. "It was a huge success last year."

Crews are expecting the delivery of the city's spring street trees this week, and plan to start planting April 8. A total of 55 trees will be planted throughout the city, and range in variety from elms to maples, depending on the location.

The order has also been placed for flowers, which will be planted

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Local school chiefs give state report card bill mixed reviews

By **JULIE HULLETT**

Chagrin Valley and Geauga County public school superintendents have varying views on a proposal in the state legislature that would reform annual report cards to districts.

House Bill 200 was introduced by state Reps. Phil Robinson, D-Solon, and Don Jones, R-Freeport, to address what they called flawed metrics and punitive measures in the current district report cards handed out annually by the Ohio Department of Education and based on a number of factors including student standardized test results.

Rep. Robinson said that the current report card is confusing and often the grades do not reflect what actually takes place in the classroom, such as continuous improvement. One of the biggest changes is that HB 200 would remove letter grades from the report card and replace them with six performance ratings, such as exceeds expectations, meets expectations and in need of support. Although area superintendents said they were not satisfied with the current overall letter grade designation, they questioned whether this bill would make significant changes.

“I think it’s a better PR tool, honestly,” said Chagrin Falls Superintendent Robert Hunt. “With the letter grades, I think that was very misleading to the public, but I honestly don’t believe this report card, or these report cards, have a significant impact on teaching and learning in school districts.”

Rep. Robinson said that the six new ratings are more “targeted” than the letter grades and they would be easier for everyone to understand and assess. With the current report card, he said that the letter grades confuse parents, and they are not sure how to assess the information. The new performance ratings, however, would help schools respond and improve where necessary.

“Are we going to do the same thing for kids? Because we’re not. We still grade kids with letter grades, and that’s where I think the hypocrisy comes in, to an extent,” Superintendent Richard Markwardt of West Geauga Local School District said. “If districts are going

to continue using letter grades for students, but then they say, ‘Well, we don’t want letter grades for ourselves,’ I think there’s a degree of hypocrisy.”

Superintendent John Stoddard of Berkshire Local Schools described the revised evaluation system as a “good idea.” He said that simplifying complicated measures down to a single letter grade is challenging and does not help a district determine what to improve for its students or how to make changes.

Rep. Robinson said that there were six goals with this legislation, including simplifying the report card, making it comply with federal guidelines and replacing the punitive approach with a proactive approach. Other goals included making the measurements fair and equitable, eliminating the design to pit schools against each other and only reporting on necessary information. He said that Ohio is one of 10 states that still uses a letter grade system to measure success of individual school districts.

“In the same way that kids are more than a letter grade, schools are more than a letter grade,” Rep. Robinson said. “The schools can better serve children with a better evaluation. That is at the heart of what we’re trying to do. We’re trying to find ways to simplify but keep accountability.”

He said that the state report card is at the heart of essential education policies in Ohio, such as which schools are eligible for the EdChoice voucher program, school takeovers through academic distress commissions and charter school accountability. Rep. Robinson also said that the report card impacts property values and real estate taxes as families in some cases use it to determine where they want to buy a house.

He gave two specific examples of changes in the gap closing and achievement categories. In the gap closing category, there are many subgroups of students. The progress of one subgroup can greatly impact the letter grade of that whole category, so subgroups with less than 20 students would be eliminated.

Superintendent Lynn Campbell of the Orange

City School District said that as the size of subgroups decrease, they are less representative of the students, so eliminating the smaller subgroups is a positive change.

Berkshire’s Mr. Stoddard agreed with the subgroup proposal. “This would be a good thing for our district. The student performance from these subgroups is already reflected in the report card. The subgroups are another area that is set up to only hurt schools. Schools do not get credit, or increased scores for excellent performance in subgroups, they are only used to pull scores down.”

Rep. Robinson said that HB 200 would also make changes to the achievement category. The performance index is on a scale of 1-120 currently, but it is nearly impossible to get a perfect score. Instead, he said that the performance index would be based on 2018-2019 school data and the maximum score would be the average of the top 10 percent of districts. That number would be updated every five years by the Ohio Department of Education. The superintendents also supported this change.

“I think change in this area is not a bad thing,” Dr. Hunt said. The top score “120 was pretty much impossible to achieve and utilizing the performance of high-performing schools to set the bar makes a little more sense.”

Dr. Markwardt said that there is a “demonstrable correlation” between the socioeconomic status of a district and the achievement of its students. For this reason, state report cards can come across as an “apples to oranges” comparison of different districts.

Mr. Stoddard said that he would like to see the state report card place a value on the promotion of trades and hands-on learning experiences, rather than only relying on test scores.

Dr. Hunt said that HB 200 is an attempt to make progress in the reporting system. If state legislators are working to make a change, he said, “let’s make dramatic reform and do it the right way.”

Dr. Campbell said that the state report card has become an opportunity to “rank and rate” districts. It would make no difference to Orange

if state testing disappeared, he said, because the district already conducts internal student assessments. Orange administers MAP testing (measure of academic progress) and reports the results to parents because the district is accountable to taxpayers, he said.

“No matter what the report card is, I want to see that it’s not blasted on [local media] listing schools 1-100,” Dr. Campbell said. “Anything to avoid all that, it’s a lot of negative attention for schools. We want to stop fueling the media frenzy over it. The report card compares and ranks the schools, but it should address their needs and help us reflect on practices to improve continuously.”

The bill had a hearing in the Primary and Secondary Education Committee. Rep. Robinson said that several groups are supporting HB 200 including the Ohio Parent Teacher Association, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, the Ohio School Boards Association and the Ohio Association of School Business Officials.

State Sen. Andrew Brenner, R-Delaware, recently introduced Senate Bill 145, the companion bill. In this proposal, the state report cards would use ratings of one to five stars instead of letter grades. SB 145 also introduces a new early literacy component. Ohio Excels, a nonprofit organization to improve educational outcomes, supports this bill.

“While we have long supported using A-F letter grades, a rating system popular with parents, who are the primary audience of report cards, we believe using 1-5 stars will be an effective way to communicate student outcomes,” Lisa Gray, president of Ohio Excels, said in a written statement. “Maintaining five performance levels on the report card through a new star system will allow for comparisons over time so we can identify trends and growth. Keeping five levels also allows for simple updates to more than a dozen state policies that rely on report card results.”

There was a hearing for SB 145 in the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee last week.

Auburn maps tentative Memorial Day plans

By **SAMANTHA COTTRILL**

AUBURN — The township is working through a tentative schedule for this year’s Memorial Day celebration, trying to get as close to normal as possible during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

With vaccines now available to all adults over the age of 16 and plans underway to offer the Pfizer vaccine to local high schools, poor weather may be the only factor getting in the way.

Trustee Patrick J. Cavanagh said during the Monday meeting that he discussed with Nancy Dolezal, the township administrative assistant, a tentative, simplified version of Memorial Day celebrations, skipping the parade and the museum’s opening to the public to continue accommodating social distancing protocol.

Current plans include keeping the traditional reading of the names at Maple Shade Cemetery

at 9 a.m. then hosting a speaker at the nearby Shadyside Cemetery at 10 a.m.

Mr. Cavanagh said he is still looking into contacts for music and will consider a trumpeter from Kenston High School. He said the township is working through the possibility and safety of having a refreshments tent at Shadyside.

He said the plan is subject to change due to potential outside influences, like the progression of the vaccine rollout and COVID-19 virus or poor weather.

Trustee Chairman Mike Troyan suggested the township use Adam Hall as a plan B, noting there would be enough space in the community center to accommodate the public at a reduced capacity.

Mr. Cavanagh noted the community center could accommodate up to 120 people comfortably, which would be considered a “crowd” under COVID-19 standards if that many people were to attend but would be a potential fallback for the township’s Memorial Day celebration

Ramadan **continued from Page 1**

on Liberty Road. But an opening is planned instead for May or June, due to the limitations of asphalt plants to complete the parking lot, members said.

“We were really hoping to have services there in Ramadan this year,” said Solon resident Masroor Malik, a member of the board of the Chagrin Valley Islamic Center.

Instead, many of the gatherings will be limited to individual families at home, his wife Dr. Simee Malik continued.

“We are definitely doing more things as a family,” Dr. Malik said, “and using technology to connect for spiritual talks and lectures.”

Instead of praying in groups in the evening, lecture series where people connect through Zoom are presented.

“It’s not necessarily the social aspect (this year), but the spiritual aspect,” she said.

For more information on lectures, prayers and the

online presence during Ramadan, visit cvciohio.com.

Ramadan is also marked by prayer five times a day and a nightfall prayer. Over the 30 days, the entire Quran is read, Dr. Malik said.

That is because Ramadan religiously is the month where the Quran was revealed to the prophet Mohammed through the angel Gabriel, Dr. Malik added.

Zoom will also be used to connect new Muslim families to the community during this month, while others set individual goals.

Solon resident Nadeen Aljijakli Abbass said that for her family, Ramadan means a “time of introspection and extra patience during hard moments.”

It also means gratitude, charitable giving and compassion for those in need, she continued.

“It is a special time to enjoy family and community togetherness to practice being our best selves and to connect with our faith more deeply,” she said.

“We call it the boot camp for your spiritual cleansing or your reset,” Dr. Malik added.

There is always a goal for the month, whether it

is in the event of inclement weather.

“We’ll watch the weather and we’ll just try to be ready,” Mr. Cavanagh said, “but it’s a move back toward normal, and I’d be happy to see it.”

In other news, the township ordered materials for two 2021 road projects.

Trustees approved the asphalt resurfacing of Bartholomew Road from Munn Road to Thorpe Road and Leland Trail with an estimated cost of \$275,000, to be locally funded.

Trustees also approved the reconstruction of Stafford Road at an estimated cost of \$975,000, which will be partially supported by Ohio Public Works Commission funding up to about \$300,000 with the remaining locally funded.

Bids will be accepted for the projects until April 23 at noon, with openings that same day at 12:05 p.m.

The next regular trustees meeting is April 19 at 7:30 p.m. in the township administration building, 11010 Washington St., and via Zoom.

is to give more to charity, understand your religion better or re-set one’s life spiritually, she added.

And because community members are not eating together, Dr. Malik said, some are making special meals and delivering them to friends to still get that sense of community.

“For my family, we make a point to focus more on our religion during this month,” Mrs. Ahmad said. “It is important to us to educate our children about our faith and to be more mindful, with our words and our actions, and by counting our blessings and paying things forward.”

“Ramadan is a time to be a lot more generous,” Mr. Malik added, “and to understand the needs of others and how to help the poor.”

A lot of charitable work happens this month, he said, and more are planned for the future.

“I think of Ramadan as almost like a pause button in the sense that it helps me reconnect with God and with faith,” Dr. Malik said.

“We look forward to next Ramadan and for the time we can get together as a community,” Mr. Malik added.

Police briefs

Speeding, OVI charges pending

A Lakewood man was charged with drunken driving on March 30 in Solon.

At 11:55 p.m., police stopped a vehicle on Route 422 for speeding. It was clocked at 83 mph in a 60 mph zone, according to the report.

There was a smell of marijuana and the driver handed the officer a jar with suspected marijuana from his shirt pocket, the report said. There was an open bottle of whiskey in the car, police said.

Subsequent investigation led the driver to being arrested for OVI. A breath test registered .141 percent BAC.

Connor Ganley, 26, was charged with OVI, speed, prohibited BAC and open container, the report said.

Woman charged with OVI

A Twinsburg woman was charged with drunken driving on April 3 by Solon police.

At 11:34 p.m., police said a woman was passed out behind the wheel of her car on SOM Center Road. Subsequent investigation led her to being arrested for OVI. A loaded pistol was found in the car and the driver had an expired CCW permit, police said.

Chardnae Mitchell, 35, was arrested for OVI and improper handling of a firearm in a motor vehicle, police said.

Man faces weapons charge

A Bedford Heights man was charged with a weapons offense on April 2 in Solon.

At 9:41 p.m., Solon police were investigating a one-car crash into trees at Richmond and Cannon roads and no driver was found with the vehicle. A man was found walking a short distance away, police said, and he kept making movements in and out of his pockets.

Police said they located a 9mm pistol along with a small amount of suspected cocaine. The driver had a revoked CCW permit and is a convicted felon, police said.

Brian Hoyle, 35, was charged with carrying a concealed weapon, having a weapon under disability (convicted felon) and drug possession, police said.