

Caggiano announces reelection campaign

Cites Bristol downtown progress as top priority

By Don Stacom
Hartford Courant

Bristol Mayor Jeff Caggiano, who took office amid a massive local Republican victory two years ago announced Wednesday evening that he's running for reelection.

Caggiano told supporters at Main Street Pint & Plate that he wants to be mayor while 10 major construction or renovation projects in and around downtown take shape this year.

"Shovels in the ground will speak much louder than long-standing signs on empty lots," Caggiano said.

In his first term, the long-awaited downtown revitalization has made progress: Contractors are

clearing the ground for Wheeler Health's headquarters on the site of the former Bristol Centre Square mall, and KindCare is completing its new 60,000-square-foot, five-story assisted living center several blocks to the north.

He told the Courant that further advances downtown will be the measurement of his performance if he wins.

"The number one most import-

ant part of the scorecard is whether we've finally revitalized downtown: Our long-term fiscal stability, our future economic development, success with quality of life issues — they all depend on whether we bring back the heart of our city after 62 years," he said.

"I truly believe we can grow the population by 2,000 or 3,000 people as we bring young people and keep the elderly and retirees,"

he said.

A chief goal of fostering new downtown apartment complexes and commercial development is to create an atmosphere where young professionals want to live, and where elderly residents can afford housing when they downsize from single-family homes.

Caggiano was chairman of the

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An empty parcel at 53 Benton St. currently owned by the Hartford Land Bank. The parcel is slated to be repurposed for urban farming use.

Finding solutions

By Stephen Underwood | Hartford Courant

Three Hartford properties are slated to be repurposed into working urban farms in an effort to find new uses for vacant lots and alleviate food deserts in the city.

Parcels located at 53 Benton St., 176 Clark St., and 138 Irving St. will be converted for urban agriculture.

The Hartford Land Bank owns the vacant properties, all of which once housed structures that were torn down due to blight or unsafe conditions.

"The city gave us a number of vacant lots deemed unsuitable for development but have other potential uses," said Arunan Arulampalam, CEO of the Hartford Land Bank. "We've been knocking on doors and asking neighbors what they would like to see on them. These are areas that are considered food deserts where there's not a lot of green space."

The Hartford Land Bank identifies and acquires vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties in the city to help rehabilitate and

Turn to Solutions, Page 3

In Hartford food deserts, three vacant properties may be repurposed for urban farming



An empty parcel located at 176 Clark St. COURTESY PHOTOS

Platt High coach faces charge of voyeurism

Allegedly recorded student changing in school bathroom

By Mike Mavredakis
Hartford Courant

A coach at Platt High School in Meriden was arrested on Tuesday after he allegedly attempted to record a student changing in a school bathroom in January, according to police.

The Meriden Police Department began investigating an act of voyeurism at Platt in January after they received a complaint from Meriden Public Schools. A female student reported they saw a cellphone recording in a bathroom while she was preparing to change after practice, according to Meriden Mayor Kevin Scarpati.

Daniel Barillaro Jr., 23, who was an assistant boys and girls diving coach at Platt High School, was identified as a suspect in the case. His phone was seized and analyzed during the investigation. Officers found no additional evidence of voyeurism or other victims while analyzing his phone, police said.

Police obtained a warrant charging him with voyeurism. He was arrested on Tuesday after turning himself into police and released on a \$5,000 bond. He is scheduled to appear in Meriden

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Man charged with negligent homicide

Hit-and-run crash killed Trinity College student in 2022

By Mike Mavredakis
Hartford Courant

A Hartford man was arrested in connection with a 2022 fatal hit-and-run crash in Hartford that killed a Trinity College student, police said.

Karanja Thomas, 45, was arrested by the Hartford Police Department on Wednesday on an active warrant.

On the night of March 31, 2022, Hartford police responded to the intersection of New Britain Avenue and Henry Street across from campus for a serious motor vehicle crash involving pedestrians. Officers found three women, all Trinity students, who were hit by a car. All three were transported to an area hospital.

One of the students, identified as 20-year-old Jillian Hegarty,

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The DRIPBaR is heading to Connecticut

Trendy Hollywood stars tout IV vitamin therapy

By Pam McLoughlin
Hartford Courant

Two entrepreneurs are bringing The DRIPBaR, an IV vitamin therapy franchise, to Connecticut and planning to open 10 locations across the state.

Michael Reyes and his partner in the venture, Michael Usiak, plan to open a spot first in Fairfield County and second in Hartford County, opening a franchise in West Hartford late this year or early 2024. Eventually, they will bring the business to New Haven and Litchfield counties as well, the men said.

The business serves customers by delivering vitamins directly

into their bloodstreams, rather, they said, than relying on a fraction of the absorption from vitamins taken orally.

"We are excited to be bringing the first DRIPBaR location to Connecticut, and we see the growth opportunity with more individuals being health conscious and focusing on their physical and mental health," Reyes said.

"There is a need for more alter-

native and progressive health treatments in Connecticut, and we want to be tactful regarding how we drive that growth," he said.

Reyes has multiple franchises in the health and wellness arena and Usiak has a background in both the insurance and health and wellness fields, the latter in behavioral health, the men said.

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POLICE BRIEFS

USPS offering \$50K reward for information in armed robbery

The United States Postal Inspection Service is offering a reward of up to \$50,000 for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of suspects involved in an armed robbery of a postal worker in Waterbury in January. A USPS letter carrier was approached by two suspects near the 100 block of Beverly Avenue in Waterbury around 5 p.m. on Jan. 31. The two suspects were described as men between the ages of 18 to 20 and wearing black clothes, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service said. The suspects reportedly fled the scene in a black SUV with tinted windows, which could possibly be a Jeep Grand Cherokee. Anyone with information is asked to contact the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at 1-877-876-2455 and say “law enforcement.” All information will be kept confidential. — Mike Mavedakis

2 state troopers, firefighter injured after icy conditions lead to crashes

Two state troopers and a firefighter were injured on the scene of separate crashes in Hamden and Cromwell on Wednesday morning, according to the Connecticut State Police. There were several crashes Wednesday morning as Connecticut saw some icy road conditions following a bout of rain Tuesday night. There were reported injuries in at least four crashes Wednesday morning, state police said. Troopers responded to a report of a crash on Route 15 South near Exit 60 in Hamden at around 4:30 a.m. on Wednesday. A trooper was struck by a car while inside their cruiser, state police said. Minor injuries were reported in the crash.

The highway was closed for a short amount of time. Troopers from Troop H responded to a report of a rollover crash on Route 9 near Exit 22S in Cromwell before 7:30 a.m. on Wednesday. Minor injuries were reported in the crash and one person was transported to an area hospital, state police said. While on the scene of the crash in Cromwell, a trooper and firefighter were struck by a car while outside of their vehicles. The two responders were injured in the crash and transported to an area hospital, state police said. The off-ramp to Interstate 91 North was shut down. “Anytime a motorist sees any emergency vehicle on the side of the road they should slow down well below the speed limit and, if safe, move over to the lane farthest from the emergency vehicle(s),” Trooper Pedro Muñiz said in a statement Wednesday. There were also reported crashes with injuries in Meriden and Manchester on Wednesday morning, state police said. Troopers responded to a one-car crash where the vehicle was overturned on I-691 West near Exit 5 in Meriden after 5 a.m. One person was transported to an area hospital with minor injuries, state police said. State police also responded to a one-car rollover crash in the median of I-84 East near Exit 62 in Manchester before 7 a.m. There were serious injuries reported in the crash, but the extent of the injuries is unknown at this time, state police said. — Mike Mavedakis

Teen sentenced to 7 years in prison for fatal hit-and-run in New Britain

A 19-year-old who pleaded guilty to assault charges for his role in a fatal New Britain hit-and-run has been sentenced to seven years in prison, according to court records. Luis Pagan-Gonzalez, who pleaded guilty to one count of first-degree assault, was sentenced

in court in New Britain on Feb. 2 to 20 years in prison to be fully suspended after seven years — meaning he’ll serve seven years behind bars — followed by five years of probation, court records show. Pagan-Gonzalez was arrested on June 30, 2021, and faced charges stemming from an incident on June 29, 2021, when the then-17-year-old was driving a reportedly stolen Audi, struck a fence post and hit a pedestrian identified as 53-year-old Henryk Gudelski, according to a warrant for his arrest. After hitting Gudelski, the teen driver struck two vehicles that were parked behind East Street in New Britain and ran away from the scene with a person who was a passenger in the Audi, police said in the warrant. Gudelski, an avid runner from New Britain, was taken to a nearby hospital where he died, records show. Police said in the warrant for his arrest that Pagan-Gonzalez’s “reckless operation” of the vehicle led to Gudelski’s death. Pagan-Gonzalez remains in custody at the Manson Youth Institution in Cheshire, where he has been held since July 2021, according to the Department of Correction. — Taylor Hartz

Police arrest suspect after gun, ammunition found at Hamden school

A man was arrested after police located a handgun and high-capacity magazine in the closet of a school in Hamden on Tuesday, hours after an altercation involving two students, police said. The Hamden Police Department responded to Hamden Collaborative Learning Center, located at 670 Wintergreen Ave. in Hamden, for a report of a physical altercation around 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday morning. Staff told police there was an altercation between 18-year-old student Khalil Davis-Yancey and a 16-year-old student who sustained minor injuries. Following an investigation, police

arrested Davis-Yancey and charged him with third-degree assault and disorderly conduct. Police said they were called to the school again around 11:30 a.m. by school security, who told officers they received information there was a handgun inside the school. Officers found the handgun inside a classroom closet. It was determined the handgun, a 9-millimeter, and a high-capacity magazine were placed there by Davis-Yancey, according to police. Both were seized as evidence. Davis-Yancey was located again, arrested and charged with carrying a pistol without a permit, negligent storage of a firearm, first-degree reckless endangerment, possession of a weapon on school grounds and illegal possession of a large-capacity magazine. He is being held in lieu of a \$150,000 bond. — Mike Mavedakis

Cashier accused of stealing \$90K from meat market in Watertown

A cashier was arrested after she allegedly stole over \$90,000 from a meat market in Watertown over the course of several months, according to the Watertown Police Department. Marissa Ganavage, 49, of Watertown was arrested Tuesday and charged in connection with a series of thefts that were reported at Watertown Meat Center from January to October 2022, police said. She allegedly stole over \$90,000 from the meat market by manipulating transactions during her tenure at the store, police said. Detectives discovered the discrepancies during a lengthy investigation into the stolen money. Ganavage was charged with first-degree larceny and was released from custody on a \$50,000 bond. She is scheduled to appear in Waterbury Superior Court on Feb. 14. — Mike Mavedakis

Homicide

from Page 1 was pronounced dead at Hartford Hospital. Another victim was listed in critical but stable condition and the other suffered minor injuries, police said. It was determined that the three women were hit while crossing New Britain Avenue. The vehicle fled the scene. Hegarty was a sophomore at Trinity College studying neuroscience. She was a St. Johnsbury, Vermont, native and was described as a “scholar, a dancer, a leader and a friend to all,” in her obituary. The deadly collision was captured on a surveillance camera. Police identified the car as a gray Volkswagen Touareg, which was located in New Haven the following day. Following an investigation into the crash, detectives identified Thomas as the driver and obtained an arrest warrant. Thomas is facing charges of negligent homicide with a motor vehicle, third-degree assault, second-degree reckless endangerment, evading responsibility resulting in death, evading responsibility resulting in injury and operation of a motor vehicle under a suspended license. He is being held on a \$300,000 judge-set bond and is set to be arraigned on Friday, police said.

Charge

from Page 1 Superior Court on Feb. 22. Immediately after the allegation, Barillaro was placed on leave by Meriden Public Schools and did not have access to children, police said. He no longer works for the school or district, according to Scarpati. “The Meriden Police Department would like to acknowledge the bravery of this student to come forward and report this incident,” the department said in a release. Scarpati encouraged anyone with further information on this case to come forward and talk to police or members of the Meriden Board of Education. “We also want to just ensure that our students and our staff have the support and, obviously, know that this is a serious event and the city of Meriden takes it very seriously,” Scarpati said. He said that Meriden schools conduct background checks on each employee during the hiring process, and he was not aware of any previous incidents involving Barillaro.

Solutions

from Page 1 return the properties into community assets including gardens, open land, and urban farms. “Turning formerly blighted, unused and unusable plots of city land into working urban farms and community gardens is a great way to give those parcels a functional use in a sustainable manner,” Arulampalam said. Arulampalam said that research shows beautifying vacant spaces also has an impact on cutting crime in neighborhoods and creating neighborhood pride. “Studies show it can lead to almost a 30% reduction in violent crime,” Arulampalam said. “We wanted a plan that would reduce crime while also creating businesses in the community. Each of the three lots will be sold to a specific urban farmer. We will sell the property to them and their business. These farmers have both security plans in place for their crops and sustainable business models.” Herb Virgo, founder of the Keney Park Sustainability Project, is coordinating with the Land Bank to select the three farmers to purchase the lots. The farmers must be local and must submit a detailed business and safety plan for the properties. Much of the food grown will be resold in the community at local farmers markets and grocery stores. “Having beautiful green spaces connects people to the nature around them. The growing of food is so important but also so lacking in Hartford,” Arulampalam said. The concept of urban farming as a solution to hunger has taken off within the last few decades. LEVO International, a nonprofit using hydroponic farming in Hartford, has around 30 urban farmers in the city growing crops from their own backyards. Hydroponic farming involves plants growing in a nutrient solution rather than soil. Oftentimes plants are grown in PVC pipes, which makes urban farming possible since land is often scarce. “Converting space into agricultural space is empowering people to gain that food independence while also gaining economic opportunities,” said Christian Heiden, founder of LEVO International. “Land is scarce in Hartford,” Heiden said. “So we applaud any effort to maximize urban farming and agriculture. It’s exciting to see there’s energy behind urban farming here. We applaud these efforts.”

Mayor

from Page 1 Republican Town Committee when he assembled a slate of GOP candidates for the 2021 election. Democratic Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu and an all-Democratic ticket won every seat on the city council just two years earlier, and even Republicans were surprised when Caggiano’s ticket completely reversed that with a GOP sweep in 2021.

Almost immediately, the new Republican council split and handed Caggiano a political defeat by rejecting the sales contract with Wheeler Health, a move that appeared to imperil a centerpiece of the downtown plan. On Wednesday, Caggiano told supporters that the vote was good for the city. “Today is the anniversary of the vote,” he said. “We look back and see it was a historic vote on downtown revitalization for our city council. After more ‘no’ votes in the first few months of our administration as compared to the entire four years of the previous administration, we came together after an open debate, plenty of public input, and took what was a good plan in the Wheeler Health project and completely turned it on its head to make it a great project.” Caggiano, 54, said the city will adhere to an eight-year limit on the terms of elected officials. During the last election, the GOP suggested Democrats would try



Bristol Mayor Jeff Caggiano walks across the site of the Wheeler Health Facility. He told the Courant that he is hopeful that the renovations and construction in the city will attract more people to visit. COURANT FILE PHOTO

to skirt that rule to protect their incumbents. In that campaign, Caggiano also promoted four-year terms for mayors, but voters rejected it at referendum. “The voters don’t fully trust anybody,” Caggiano said. “One gentleman told me ‘I like you, I’ll probably vote for you, but let me make the decision every two years. What if you stunk? We wouldn’t want to wait four years.’ “ As with many freshman mayors, Caggiano has spent most of his term on economic development. But at the same time, his term was uniquely difficult: Bristol was rocked by the shooting deaths of two police officers in October. The tragedy made national news and

ultimately demonstrated how the city of 60,000 is close-knit. Caggiano and Police Chief Brian Gould became the face of the city at community vigils, the funeral for Lt. Dustin DeMonte and Sgt. Alex Hamzy and testimonials for injured survivor Officer Alec Iurato. “In this small town we all knew someone who was close with one of our three heroes, or maybe you know a family member, or friend of theirs, or know an officer who served proudly with them,” Caggiano told his audience Wednesday. “This strong sense of community is the reason the loss was so very painful for our town,” he said.

“This horrible event changed our city, changed all of us, but one thing it didn’t change was the way the citizens of this city come together to take care of each other and work to make Bristol a better place. And that is what we must all strive for.” Privately, veteran police officers give Caggiano credit for personally ensuring that the survivors of DeMonte and Hamzy get the maximum possible family benefits from the city. He also backed the #BristolStrong campaign that drew hundreds of homeowners to change Bristol’s appearance at night by installing blue lights on doorways, garage overhangs and lamp posts.

Therapy

from Page 1 A statement from the parent company says they are, “Looking to change the way people perceive intravenous IV therapy and turn cellular health into a lifestyle.” The DRIPBaR franchise is undergoing “tremendous growth throughout the nation,” the statement says. Each DRIPBaR location offers what is deemed more than 20 IV lifestyle or health support drips, including the Jet Setter, Time Machine, Restoration, Flu Fighter, and High C, a company statement says. All IV drips are handled by registered nurses under the guidance of a licensed medical director, according to the statement. IV therapy, the company says, offers “beneficial nourishment” for conditions such as colds, headaches, cancer and chronic illness and helps slow the signs of aging. The trendy nutritional supplements provided through IV drips have drawn fans and critics across the country, including from Hollywood mavens. A story last year by the Washington Post notes claims of some of the purported benefits are largely hype. Other stories



Two entrepreneurs are bringing The DRIPBaR IV vitamin therapy to Connecticut. They plan to open a retail outlet in West Hartford by early 2024. COURTESY

have noted there is little scientific evidence to show the benefits of the drips. As the DRIPBaR website notes: “This site offers people health information and informs them about some of their options, but in no way should anyone consider that this site represents the ‘practice of medicine.’ ” “This website is for educational purposes only. It is not intended as a substitute for the diagnosis, treatment and advice of a qualified licensed professional.”

According to the National Institute of Health, multi-vitamin/mineral and multivitamin dietary supplements have been taken since the early 1940s, when those products first became available. Both Usiak and Reyes said they partake in IV vitamin therapy and say it helps them immensely. Usiak said he struggles with fatigue and after he has the therapy he has more energy. “When I get it, I feel different relatively quickly,” he said. Reyes said he likes the business

because it’s having an impact on people who care about their health and wellness. “People are more aware of what they put in their bodies,” Reyes said. “We can impact future generations.” Usiak said the therapy is both rejuvenating and preventative. “The concept has been around for many years (in medical settings), but in a retail setting not so much,” Usiak said. He said the COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to health and the immune system, increasing the demand for IV vitamin therapies and rising healthcare costs are steering people to preventative measures. The men said The DRIPBaR therapy takes place in a cheerful, relaxing, friendly setting. Each drip is made fresh, each client goes through a thorough assessment and if there’s anything questionable, the medical director is consulted, Reyes and Usiak said. The DRIPBaR was founded in 2016 and franchising since 2019. The company has more than 40 locations open and operating and has more than 600 additional locations in different stages of development across 28 states.