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RAISING AWARENESS



Mirror photo by Patrick Waksmunski

Andrew Beasom of Penfield looks to the flags during the playing of "Taps" at the Overdose Awareness Day Ceremony at James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center on Thursday afternoon.

OD deaths in spotlight

Van Zandt VA Medical Center hosts ceremony to mark International Overdose Awareness Day

By WILLIAM KIBLER

verdose deaths have been going down in the U.S. in the last couple years, but they're still fairly high, and the general decline doesn't ease the bite of individual deaths, as illustrated at a ceremony

outside the Van Zandt VA Medical Center Thursday to mark International Overdose Awareness Day.

Attending the ceremony was Andrew Beasom of Penfield, who led a friend of a friend on a leash — Romeo, an American Staffordshire terrier, pit bull and boxer mix, whose late master was Dominic Falcone of Pittsburgh and Altoona, who died of an overdose around Thanksgiving last year.
"He was a good dude," Beasom said after

the short ceremony near the big flagpole by the hospital's main entrance, after remarks

and a prayer from chaplain Julia Allen. Falcone was kind and compassionate, said Tammy Cooney, a veteran who was a friend of both Beasom and Falcone.

He was also a willing would-be protector, even though, by the time of his death, he was thin and probably "couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag," Beasom said.

A jokester, Beasom once entered Falcone's home, pretending to be fired up, telling Falcone he'd just encountered a group of guys outside who wanted to fight.

Falcone jumped up immediately, ready to

go, Beasom said.

He also once "threatened to beat up a dude who was trying to make me relapse," Beasom said.

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Convicted gunman seeking new trial

Padilla contends defense ineffective in UVA shooting case

BY PHIL RAY

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As of Thursday, it has been 20 years since Miguel Angel Padilla, a native of Mexico, and two friends became upset when they were refused entry to an Altoona after-hours club known



and retrieved a into custody. handgun bearing a laser focus.

Union Avenue.

He then proceeded to murder Mignogna, the owner of the club and a high school mathematics

as the United Veter- teacher, Frederick Rickabaugh, ans Association on a club employee, and Stephen Heiss, an ex-Marine.

Padilla, a 25-vear-Padilla left the scene but later construction called police to report that he worker, went to a thought he had injured someone. nearby car owned Police went to the home of his by one of his friends friend, where they took Padilla

The three victims were wellknown and well-liked, and the three people that included Alfred killings caused a great deal of

grief locally. Former Blair County District

Attorney Richard Consiglio, who led the prosecution of Padilla and who was persistent in efforts to seek the death penalty, said this week the shooting spree that occurred about 2 a.m. on Aug. 28, 2005, "was a terrible.

terrible, unprovoked attack."

Padilla, he said, was a guy who did whatever he wanted, and he believed Padilla was a drug dealer.

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County certifies tourism agency

Commissioners approve Discover Blair County as TPA via unanimous vote

By RACHEL FOOR-MUSSELMAN rfoor@altoonamirror.com

HOLLIDAYSBURG Blair County commissioners certified Discover Blair County as the county's tourism promotion agency by unanimous vote Thursday morning.

Created by the Blair County Alliance for Business and Economic Growth, Discover Blair County will have the full power and authority to represent Blair County in "all matters relevant to and for all purposes of the Tourism Promotion Act," Commissioner David Kessling said during the commissioner's meet-

The state Department of Community and Economic Development states that the purpose of the Tourism Promotion Act is to "support local and regional destination marketing organizations in their efforts to market and promote tourism.'

The commissioners approved a memorandum of understanding between Blair County and Discover Blair Coun-

tification of Explore Altoona approved by Kessling and fellow Commissioner Amy Webster in May. A public hearing was held before the decision, during which supporters of Explore Altoona said decertification would be a mistake and that a replacement agency wouldn't do the job Explore Altoona had been doing.

Last year, Kessling and Webster began to pursue the transfer of TPA responsibilities to a new entity that would work with the Alliance to draw visitors through the development of outdoor assets and recreational trails in the county.

While commissioners subsequently put their pursuit on hold pending negotiations with Explore Altoona, they moved forward in early 2025 to secure sufficient municipal support to decertify Explore Altoona and, more recently, to certify Discover Blair County.

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New CDC acting director named as agency reels

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The nation's top public health agency was left reeling Thursday as the White House worked to expel the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director and replace her with a top adviser to Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The turmoil triggered rare bipartisan alarm as Kennedy

policies that are contradicted by decades of scientific research.

Two administration officials said Jim O'Neill, a former investment executive, would supplant Susan Monarez, a longtime government scientist. O'Neill worked tics, is expected to issue new at the Department of Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush, but he does not scheduled to review standard have a medical background. The childhood shots for measles,

tries to advance anti-vaccine officials requested anonymity hepatitis and other diseases. to discuss personnel decisions before a public announcement.

A flashpoint is expected in the coming weeks as a key advisory committee, which Kennedy has reshaped with vaccine skeprecommendations immunizations. The panel is

Two Republican senators called for congressional oversight and some Democrats said Kennedy should be fired. He is scheduled to testify on Capitol Hill on Sept. 4.

No explanation given for director's ouster

Kennedy has not explained the decision to oust Monarez less

than a month after she was sworn in, but he warned that more turnover could be coming.

"There's a lot of trouble at the CDC and it's going to require getting rid of some people over the long term, in order for us to change the institutional culture," Kennedy said at a news conference in Texas.

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