

Altoona Mirror

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Vol. 142 - No. 28 of our 152nd year

THURSDAY

July 16, 2026

Details released on 9/11 event

By MATT CHURELLA
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A moving observance rooted in faith, patriotism and civic pride will take place Sept. 11 at the Jaffa Shrine Center to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks, officials said during a press conference Wednesday.

Patrick White, a past president of the Friends of Flight 93 non-profit organization, who is also the cousin of Flight 93 passenger Louis J. Nacelle II, will be the keynote speaker. Doors for the event will open at 6 p.m., with the Altoona Community Band and the Orpheus Singers of State College performing on the shrine's lanai, just in front of the main entrance, at about 6:15 p.m.

Inside the center, about 6:40 p.m., officials will host a walk of honor saluting local first responders alongside the Gold Star Families taking part in the event, which is free and open for the public to attend.

During that time, the Hollidaysburg Community Chorus will perform three songs along with the walk of honor, and the Altoona Area High School drum line will perform during the presentation of the colors, according to Pam Etters, a local artist who produced the program.

The program itself will start promptly at 7 p.m. with Kera O'Bryon performing the National Anthem and Carolyn Donaldson delivering the welcome message, Etters said, noting the event is expected to last about 90 minutes.

It'll be a mixture of commemorative performances by nationally recognized and local musicians, including Victory Brinker, O'Bryon, Jim White, Brandis Ajay and the Blair Concert Chorale in addition to prayers by Altoona-Johnstown Diocese Bishop Mark Bartchak and the Rev. Gary Dull of Faith Baptist Church throughout the evening, Etters said.

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SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE



Mirror photo by Patrick Waksmunski

Kim Stein (right) shares her water bottle with her mother, Sonja Stein, both of Altoona, as both approach Flowing Spring Station of the Lower Trail after a 40-minute walk/ride on Wednesday afternoon.

MARTINSBURG

Water system gets \$11M in funding

Municipal authority receives money for upgrades to infrastructure

By COLETTE COSTLOW
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The Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority awarded the Martinsburg Municipal Authority \$11 million in grants and loans Wednesday for a new water tank, refurbishment of its existing tank and replacement of pipes.

The 300,000-gallon water tank will sit near the Altoona-Blair County Airport, according to Martinsburg Borough manager Rich Brantner Jr.

Because they recently found out that they received the award, he said the borough will put out bids this fall and start the project in late winter or early spring.

Having a water tank on the airport premises will significantly help out the business, especially if the main waterline breaks, he said.

And with two water tanks, he said both sides of the community can experience better distribution flow and have a backup tank if one fails.

See **Martinsburg**/Page **A5**

Convention Center revises purchase policy

Authority sets \$24,500 as amount that triggers formal bidding process

By KAY STEPHENS
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The authority that manages the Blair County Convention Center has updated its purchasing practices and policies, thereby setting \$24,500 as the amount triggering the need to go through a formal bidding process.

The authority, which met Wednesday, voted in favor of adjusting its prior policy, which set \$18,900 as the threshold for formal bidding.

The updated policy also addresses rules for purchases costing less than \$24,500.

For purchases and/or contracts valued at \$2,501 through \$13,200, the convention center staff will need to secure two quotes, in writing or by phone.

For purchases and/or contracts between \$13,200 and \$24,500, the convention center staff will need three quotes secured in writing

or by phone. But if one of the bids is obtained from the state's cooperative purchasing program known as COSTARS, then only two quotes will be needed.

Under the prior policy, purchases and contracts between \$2,502 to \$10,199 required two quotes in writing or phone and purchases and contracts between \$10,200 and \$18,900 required three quotes, in writing or by phone.

CEO Tom Schilling asked the authority to make the updates in light of higher costs. But Schilling also recommended — and the authority agreed — to retain

the practice of soliciting quotes for items between \$2,501 and \$13,200, even though the state doesn't require it.

After Pennsylvania updated its public works bidding procedures in January to account for inflation, local governing bodies were permitted to make purchases of less than \$13,200 without seeking quotes. But the practice of seeking quotes for purchases of less than \$13,200, as outlined in the convention center's policy, retains the opportunity for price comparisons.

See **Center**/Page **A4**

Heavy smoke from wildfires blankets parts of US

Canadian blazes to impact air quality in Midwest, Northeast

The Associated Press

Thousands of visitors were told to evacuate a remote Minnesota wilderness area accessible only by boat as wildfires send dangerously heavy smoke over the U.S. Midwest and Northeast this week.

More than 100 wildfires are burning in Canada, where a train crew in northern Ontario filmed themselves surrounded by flames before being safely evacuated. Winds are carrying the smoke southeast.

Warnings about unhealthy air conditions Wednesday extended from Minnesota through Toronto and into New York. Unusually hot summer temperatures were expected, too.

The best advice is to stay

MORE INSIDE

▶ Code Red air quality alert issued for Thursday / A2

indoors to avoid both the smoke and the extreme heat, said Tyler Hasenstein, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Chanhassen, Minnesota.

"Those two things coinciding with each other is not good from a health perspective," he said.

Campers evacuated

In far northeastern Minnesota, rangers were trying to warn people that the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness was closed Tuesday because about 17 fires caused by lightning more than a week ago were spreading through the vast wilderness accessible primarily by canoe.

Rangers estimated anywhere from 6,000 to 10,000 people were inside the 1.1-million-acre wilderness, which is almost the size

of Delaware, Superior National Forest spokesperson Joy VanDrie said.

"It's an arduous job," she said of rangers and campers having to canoe for hours or even carry their boats over land to evacuate.

No injuries or deaths have been reported. Rangers were going through every lake and waterway and officials estimated they had about 90% of the people out Wednesday.

See **Wildfires**/Page **A2**

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