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UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Wyoming Valley
Challenger
League is
headed to the
Little League
World Series



Morgan Qualters takes a swing during Wyoming Valley Challenger baseball batting practice on Wednesday. **PHOTOS BY JASON ARDAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

By Tom Fox
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WILKES-BARRE — Smiles and celebrations.

That was the way last Saturday could be described at Evercor Field at the Bog as teams and players of the Wyoming Valley Challenger League held their final regular season games under a sun-splashed setting.

Everyone got a hit. Everyone got their chance to round the bases. Even Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins mascot, Tux, got in on the fun, fielding some balls on the outfield green.

Yet, there was a different buzz surrounding this day.

One that presents itself with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In two weeks, the Wyoming Valley Challenger League will be at the pinnacle of the youth sporting world, gracing Volunteer Stadium in South Williamsport for the 2025 Little League Challenger Division Exhibition Game, where the 15 local players will face off with Woburn, Massachusetts on Aug. 23.

The Little League Challenger Division is a program for individuals with physical and intellectual challenges. Players from ages 4 to 22 years old can participate. There are more than 950 Challenger



Michael Piazza, 7, of Avoca, takes a swing during practice Wednesday.

programs in 10 countries and more than 300,000 individuals participate in the Challenger Division, according to Little League Baseball.

“It’s one of those things where it’s really a once-in-a-lifetime thing,” said Stephen Cheskiewicz, a board member whose son, Mike, also participated in the Challenger League. “Sam Ranck from Little League said it best in one of his statements when he said people have to cherish this because it’s something that’s going to last forever. WVIA is going to be broadcasting it, so the legacy is

going to be out there forever. To have something like on, on the world stage, to go from this field — this little team that could — it’s literally the pinnacle of the Challenger League to have this happen. It’s absolutely insane that we are going to the World Series.”

This isn’t a year in a making.

It’s more like six years of hope, positive thoughts and a story that’s straight out of Hollywood.

Cheskiewicz, who also serves as the league’s social media guru, has pretty much told that story in photo form through the sands of time.

Six years ago, the league was in trouble. The money wasn’t there. Numbers were dwindling. There was no permanent home.

It was Mayor George C. Brown and city council that started the upturn, agreeing to lease the Bog to the league for \$1 per year.

The momentum continued when Columbia Care made a sizable donation, which included the beautiful scoreboard that sits in center field.

The community bonded together, raising close to \$200,000 to make improvements to Evercor Field; a field that is just as picturesque as some of the local Little League facilities around the area.

Today, baseball at the Bog is flourishing. More than 130 kids are involved in the league — including partnerships with organizations like the Penguins and the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders.

“We have certain requirements that we must meet through the ADA,” Cheskiewicz said. “It’s expensive. Back then, you kept thinking to yourself, how we gonna get the money? Slowly, we were able to get grants and the mayor was amazing. It’s quite overwhelming. It’s a labor of love. Mayor Brown is incredible and amazing with our kids. It’s part of

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Where are school taxes on the rise?

Only 5 area school districts are not raising property taxes

By Christopher Doyle
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With the school year just weeks away, so is the next round of school property tax bills in Luzerne County.

Five school districts are not raising property taxes, as the beneficiaries of better financial practices and more liberal state education funding; three are raising taxes on Luzerne County property owners between 1.5% and 2.5%, as part of modest increases; and four districts are raising property taxes between 3% and 7%, with some of those facing sudden new capital expenses or a trying financial position. All districts are also waiting to see whether the General Assembly cuts education funding from the Gov. Josh Shapiro’s proposed budget before they assess

BERWICK AREA

The Berwick Area School Board adopted a balanced, \$57 million budget that raises taxes 1.66% on Luzerne County homeowners to \$13.13 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The median Berwick Area homeowners in Luzerne County, who own a home assessed at \$183,300, would see their tax bills rise \$39.28.

Eligible Berwick Area homeowners in both Columbia and Luzerne counties could save \$350.19 off their tax bill through homestead exclu-

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As electric bills rise, data centers may share blame

By Marc Levy
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARRISBURG — Amid rising electric bills, states are under pressure to insulate regular household and business ratepayers from the costs of feeding Big Tech’s energy-hungry data centers.

It’s not clear that any state has a solution and the actual effect of data centers on electricity bills is difficult to pin down. Some critics question whether states have the spine to take a hard line against tech behemoths like Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Meta.

But more than a dozen states have begun taking steps as data

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