

A New Year's note to News and Sentinel readers...

The Parkersburg News and Sentinel will not publish a print edition on Thursday, New Year's Day. This follows the paper's policy of not having a print edition on major federal holidays, such as New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Our newsroom will remain staffed, however, on both the day before and the



actual holiday. Event and breaking news coverage, local sports coverage and obituaries will still be handled and appear on our website on those holiday mornings, and in print on the day after the holidays. Readers who have not linked their newspaper subscription to the website and e-edition can do so by clicking the Today's Newspaper link at the top of newsandsentinel.com.

The Parkersburg News and Sentinel

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Wood BOE approves financial matters ahead of the new year

By DOUGLASS HUXLEY Staff Reporter

PARKERSBURG — The Wood County Board of Education met briefly Tuesday afternoon to approve some financial matters before the new year. "Just making sure our bills are paid and we keep things moving forward," Board President Justin Raber said. The board approved a fee adjustment of \$4,134.75 to be paid to Pickering Associates

due to the Williamstown High Restroom and Concession project going past the substantial completion date, payment of bills for projects at the Erickson All Sports Facility including a change order for a road bore for a water line and a transformer pad required by the state Division of Highways and payment of \$702,919.08 to Turf Alliance LLC for the construction of the baseball and softball complex at Erickson.

■ SEE BOE, PAGE 10A



Wood County Board of Education President Justin Raber along with board members Debbie Hendershot and Randy Modesitt vote on financial matters Tuesday during a brief meeting of the board.

Up In Smoke

"While the use of traditional tobacco products in the United States (US) has declined in the past five decades, tobacco use levels in WV continue to rank among the highest in the nation." 2025 Annual Legislative Report

Report: Increased use, diminished resources plague tobacco cessation efforts

By STEVEN ALLEN ADAMS Staff Reporter

CHARLESTON — Gov. Patrick Morrisey has preached the need for healthier lifestyles for West Virginians since taking office last year, but a report released earlier this month by a state task force raised concerns about high usage of tobacco products. The West Virginia Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Task Force released its 2025 Annual Legislative Report at the beginning of December, detailing the state's ongoing struggle with high nicotine consumption rates and diminishing resources. According to the report, West Virginia's tobacco use constitutes a severe public health crisis, characterized by tobacco and nicotine use rates that are among the highest in the nation, particularly the alarming prevalence of e-cigarette use among youth. "While the use of traditional tobacco products in the United States (US) has



declined in the past five decades, tobacco use levels in WV continue to rank among the highest in the nation," according to the report. "Conversely, use of electronic vaping devices (e-cigarettes) has been rising. "In (West Virginia), 10.1% of adults reported current use in 2023 compared to 9.3% in 2022," the report continued. "Furthermore, e-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among youth. This plight accentuates the need for the public health initiatives outlined in this report." When it comes to youth tobacco use, 6.2% of high school students reported using smokeless tobacco products according to the West Virginia Department of Education's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 9.8% of high school students reported smoking cigarettes or cigars, and 27% reported using electronic vaping products with 48.8% of

high school students reported trying a vape product at least once. When it comes to adults, 20.4% are current smokers compared to the national rate of 12.1%. The use of smokeless tobacco products by adults in West Virginia was the second highest in the nation. And the percentage of adults using vape products was 10.1% compared to the national rate of 7.7%. West Virginia's high use of tobacco and nicotine products has real health consequences, with the state having the second highest rate of tobacco-associated cancers in the nation at 228.2 cancers per 100,000 people. The residential maternal smoking rate in the state was 153.4 per 1,000 births. This high tobacco usage inflicts a significant toll on the state, costing over \$1 billion annually in direct health care expenses and placing a taxpayer burden of \$1,587 per household.

■ SEE TOBACCO, PAGE 10A

New Year's Meal Plans Food has always played a vital role in life's rituals

By GWEN SOUR Staff Reporter

PARKERSBURG — As the new year begins, many people mark the transition with long-standing food traditions while also setting practical goals tied to health, eating habits and daily routines. For Ingrid Dengra, who grew up in the Catalonia region of Spain and now lives in Parkersburg, New Year's Eve still includes a familiar ritual: eating 12 grapes at midnight. In Spain, the tradition involves consuming one grape with each chime of the clock to represent the months of the coming year. The practice is believed to bring good luck if completed before the final bell. "It's fast, and you really have to pay attention," Dengra said. "Everyone's

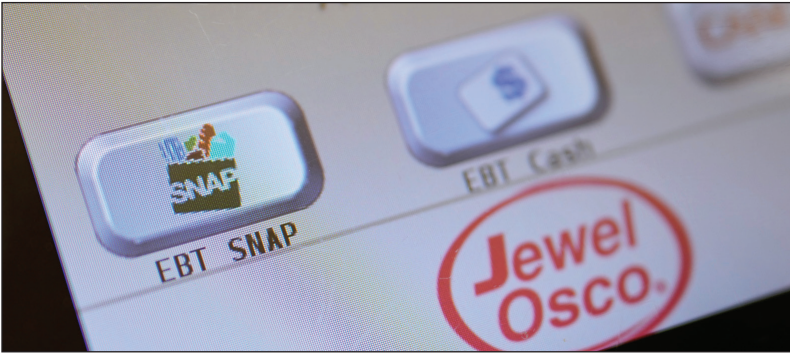
focused on the clock, and no one's talking, but we laugh the whole time." While once largely limited to Spain, the grape tradition has gained wider attention in the U.S. in recent years. Dengra said she has noticed variations circulating online, including people eating the grapes under the table for added luck — something she did not grow up with. "I never heard of that part until recently," she said. Food-centered customs tied to luck and prosperity appear in many cultures around the New Year. Parkersburg resident Sean Rott said cabbage has long been part of his family's New Year's meals, which both his German and Hungarian sides of the family use as a tradition. Rott said that his family associates cabbage and sauerkraut with good luck in the New Year.

■ SEE FOOD, PAGE 10A

SNAP bans on soda, candy and other foods take effect in five states Jan. 1

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Starting Thursday, Americans in five states who get government help paying for groceries will see new restrictions on soda, candy and other foods they can buy with those benefits. Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Utah and West Virginia are the first of at least 18 states to enact waivers prohibiting the purchase of certain foods through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. It's part of a push by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins to urge states to strip foods regarded as unhealthy from the \$100 billion federal program — long known as



food stamps — that serves 42 million Americans. "We cannot continue a system that forces taxpayers to fund programs that make people sick and then pay a second time to treat the illnesses those very programs help create," Kennedy said in a statement in December. The efforts are aimed at reducing chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes associated with sweetened drinks and other treats, a key goal of Kennedy's Make America Healthy Again effort.

But retail industry and health policy experts said state SNAP programs, already under pressure from steep budget cuts, are unprepared for the complex changes, with no complete lists of the foods affected and technical point-of-sale challenges that vary by state and store. And research remains mixed about whether restricting SNAP purchases improves diet quality and health. The National Retail Federation, a trade association, predicted longer checkout lines and more customer complaints as SNAP recipients learn which foods are affected by the new waivers. "It's a disaster waiting to happen of people trying to buy food and being rejected," said Kate Bauer, a nutrition science expert at the University of Michigan.

■ SEE SNAP, PAGE 10A

COUNTDOWN TO NEW YEAR'S

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1 DAY UNTIL NEW YEAR'S

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<p>The Parkersburg News and Sentinel</p> <p>P.O. Box 1787</p> <p>Parkersburg, WV 26102-1787</p> <p>304-485-1891</p> <p>7 48445 05010 4</p>	<p>A look back at stories that clicked the most in 2025</p> <p>A record-setting auction, state and national issues and the continuing investigation into the disappearance of Gretchen Fleming were among the most viewed stories on NewsandSentinel.com in 2025.</p> <p>Details, Page 5A</p>	<p>Democrats renew worries about Trump</p> <p>If history is a guide, Republicans stand a good chance of losing control of the House of Representatives. They have just a slim majority in the chamber, and the incumbent party usually gives up seats in midterm elections.</p> <p>Details, Page 9B</p>	<p>Thank you, Hellen Dolphin of Vienna for being a News and Sentinel subscriber.</p> <table><tr><td>2 SECTIONS</td><td>9B</td><td>Living</td><td>7A</td></tr><tr><td>Classified</td><td>7B</td><td>Lottery</td><td>10A</td></tr><tr><td>Comics</td><td>2A</td><td>Puzzles</td><td>5B</td></tr><tr><td>Deaths</td><td>4A</td><td>Region</td><td>5A</td></tr><tr><td>Editorial</td><td>5B</td><td>Sports</td><td>1B</td></tr><tr><td>Entertainment</td><td>7A</td><td>Stocks</td><td>9A</td></tr><tr><td>Horoscope</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	2 SECTIONS	9B	Living	7A	Classified	7B	Lottery	10A	Comics	2A	Puzzles	5B	Deaths	4A	Region	5A	Editorial	5B	Sports	1B	Entertainment	7A	Stocks	9A	Horoscope			
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