

Park to roll out Spanish-language center

Roving van will help visitors interpret Patapsco Valley

By **TAYLOR DEVILLE**

As the demographics of Patapsco Valley State Park users change, a nonprofit is trying to make the park in Baltimore and Howard counties more accessible to Spanish-speaking people and bring them into the fold as decision-makers and collaborators.

That's the impetus behind a Mobile Interpretive Park Center, a roving van that is expected to start traversing the park next June.

A spokesman for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources said project details were being ironed out.

"Instead of them maybe coming to the visitor center, we're going to them," said Dave Ferraro, president of the Friends of Patapsco Valley State Park, the group launching the interpretive center.

About 30% of day users — those who patronize the park often and stay for long hours — speak English as a second language, Ferraro said.

"That's a change; we've seen this grow in the past five years, and it's a welcome

change," he said.

Updating park signage with both English and Spanish interpretation, for which state park organizations are continuing to seek grant funding, is a starting point, "but I think that this is meant to be an interactive experience ... where they're able to actually interact with a person or objects or a video rather than a stationary sign," said Lindsey Baker, executive director of Patapsco Heritage Greenway Foundation, which in the summer provided a \$50,000 grant for the interpretive center.

The interpretive center, a Mercedes Benz sprinter van that will be staffed by Spanish-speaking park rangers, will feature Maryland Park Service publications, maps and brochures on park programs and stewardship opportunities; a monitor that displays bilingual park programming, and a white board with daily updates and trail maps.

It will also function as a mobile first-aid station and transport the Maryland Park Service's Scales & Tales program, giving park patrons a chance to see live, nonreleasable birds of prey and reptiles and discuss wildlife and natural resources stewardship.

The Patapsco park offers many free programs, but Angela Hayes, who joined the

Friends board as treasurer in October, said "they're not really taken advantage of by" Latino park users.

"We have to communicate better with them" to figure out "what's going on with them, in terms of not being able to attend these free programs," Hayes said, adding it could be an issue of promotion or scheduling them at times that may not be ideal for Hispanic families.

Schedules are sent to the Friends organization's email subscribers, "but if you're not on the email list, then you don't really know," Hayes said, adding, "these programs can't happen without [good attendance] numbers."

Operating the van, including its purchase, customization and costs to staff it, is estimated at \$165,000.

The hours the van will run are still being determined, but Ferraro said it will be available weekends during the park's high season in the warmer months of spring and summer.

He hopes to extend the interpretive center's use to schools and festivals in the area and make it a "pretty visible piece of infrastructure."

The van is similar to programs rolled out by the Chesapeake Conservancy's Roving

Ranger team at Sandy Point State Park in Queen Anne's County and at national parks in San Francisco, Ferraro said.

"It's exciting, it's kind of a progressive thing," he said. Working with the Maryland Park Service and Patapsco Heritage Greenway, "we all realize that this constituency, they need to be represented here at the park, they need to be served here at the park."

The ultimate goal is to get more ESL, or English as a second language, speakers in leadership roles with the Friends organization and other Patapsco park boards, "and help us plan for what they want to see at the park," Ferraro said.

"Patapsco Heritage Greenway really sees the mobile interpretive park center as a piece of, and an extension of, outreach efforts to Latinx populations in the overall heritage area," Baker said.

Patapsco Heritage Greenway is partnering with the Friends group to hold its inaugural Festival Del Rio Patapsco at the park on June 21 where a ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held for the interpretive center.

"The more people we can pull into this and spread the news, not just by Friends, hopefully the more" park stewards can effectively engage ESL speakers, Hayes said.

Search over for new state health deputy

Job filled after controversial posting touting high salary

By **MEREDITH COHN**

The Maryland Department of Health has filled a crucial leadership job after an advertisement for the post drew controversy for offering an unusually high salary for such a position.

Dr. Alyia Jones will become a deputy secretary and head of the state's Behavioral Health Administration, which oversees state mental hospitals and community programs for substance use, among other services.

Jones is a psychiatrist and previously worked at Bon Secours Hospital in Baltimore, where she served for seven years as chief of psychiatry and chair of behavioral health.

A post in the fall offered pay that could reach nearly \$465,000 — more than three times the last deputy's salary and far exceeding the pay for all other state agency administrators. Jones will earn \$375,000, the Health Department reported.

Health Secretary Robert Neall said last week he wanted a psychiatrist to fill the role, which has become vital as demand for behavioral health services and opioid-related overdose deaths have skyrocketed.

"We face a number of challenges in behavioral health, including the ongoing opioid crisis," Neall said in a statement. "Managing the vast array of clinical and therapeutic treatments services, public awareness and prevention programs and other related efforts is no easy feat. To have found someone who understands Maryland's unique challenges is invaluable."

At Bon Secours, Jones led 22 service programs, including the nation's first court-involved diversion program, the health department said. She also served on Baltimore's Heroin and Prevention Task Force, the Maryland Hospital Association's Behavioral Health Task Force and Maryland's Forensic Advisory Workgroup. She earned a master's in business administration from the University of Maryland and a medical degree from the University of Virginia.

The proposed salary for the position had raised eyebrows among state lawmakers and some in the behavioral health arena, who said such a state position is rarely filled by a psychiatrist. There is no requirement the job be filled by a medical doctor.

Psychiatrists have been in short supply and national associations say the problem is likely to intensify in coming years as more people report some kind of mental health condition. A state agency already reported that the Health Department had been boosting psychiatrist pay, particularly at rural state-run hospitals, beyond \$200,000, to keep doctors in their positions.

The position had been empty since April, when Barbara Bazron left for a similar job in Washington, D.C. She held a doctorate in philosophy and worked as a family therapist and earned \$154,000 last year, according to a database maintained by The Baltimore Sun.

Neall contends a doctor will help an agency better integrate services for mental health and substance use disorders. And it will help operations at the agency, which has faced legal challenges that included an order to reduce delays in providing psychiatric beds for mentally ill criminal defendants.

"As a psychiatrist, it will be personally rewarding to make a difference in the public behavioral health care delivery system, an institution that has such great influence over the way behavioral health care services are delivered in this state," said Jones in a statement. "I am thankful to Secretary Neall for his forward thinking and for calling for a physician to lead this administration."



Reginald Jones, 8, left, and his mother, LaCheryl Jones, both of Baltimore, dance Saturday during the annual Kwanzaa celebration at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore. The museum has held special events for Kwanzaa for years.

Making kids feel like 'royalty' for Kwanzaa

Reginald F. Lewis Museum family celebration teaches youngsters about the holiday

By **JEFF BARKER**

Jessica Hebron wore her crown Saturday to the spirited Kwanzaa celebration at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture.

The custom-made head cover — depicting a child gazing up at the sun — is part of her persona as "Culture Queen," a high-energy performer aiming to inspire pride and cultural awareness in African American children through singing and dancing.

The crown Hebron wore during her 40-minute program wasn't intended only to keep her in character. She wanted the kids in the audience of about 100 people to feel like royalty.

"I am a tower of royal power," she had them chant.

An author as well as entertainer, Hebron, 35, who is from Prince George's County, said it's important for kids to have an early, positive sense of themselves.

"We live in a world that doesn't support that," she said in an interview. "I get to give them permission and power to celebrate being their beautiful black selves."

Cultural education is a big part of Kwanzaa, the seven-day celebration of family and community rooted in African traditions.

The Baltimore museum has for years held special events for Kwanzaa, which began Thursday and ends New Year's Day.

"This is an important tradition," said City Council President and mayoral candidate Brandon Scott, who was among the attendees. "Because when you're thinking about Kwanzaa, you're thinking not just about yourself but a collective purpose as a group."

The daylong celebration at the Lewis Museum typically draws as many as 1,500 visitors, museum officials said.



Kalimah McKeaver, 15 of Washington, straightens a display of African-inspired crafts she made. Her company, DinkraStylez, was part of the museum's African Marketplace.

"This is one of our signature events," said Jackie Copeland, the museum's executive director. "It really is a family celebration."

The event is filled with kids, parents and grandparents who return year after year.

Among Saturday's celebrants was Imani Edwards, who brought her 7-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter for the second year in a row.

"We follow around the Culture Queen," said Edwards, who lives in Washington. "She's just empowering. It's great for my kids to see a brown face that's just so positive and fun, and they can sing her songs. They go to independent schools which are predominantly white."

Hebron spotted Edwards after her show and gave her a hug.

"Oh, my God. She travels so far to come to see me and bring her kids," Hebron said. "She intentionally makes sure that she takes her kids to programs that teach about

their culture."

Kwanzaa was established in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, an Eastern Shore-born advocate for civil rights and black empowerment. It is rooted in seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

Saturday's celebration was designed to be interactive. Among the highlights was an opportunity for kids to play drums and to learn about New Generation Scholars, a youth leadership program. In the scholars program, Baltimore kids use the arts — such as film or music — to explore broad themes and encourage critical thinking.

Sharayna Christmas, the program's leader, said it shares an important Kwanzaa theme of working not just for individual gain, but collectively to better families and communities.

"It ties in well," she said.