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After loss, Elks aim to rebound

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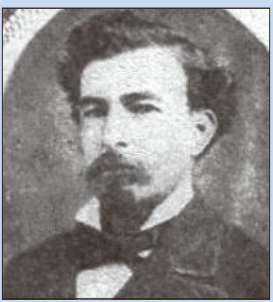
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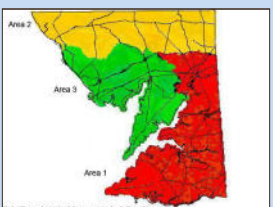
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'An Elkton icon'



Elkton Town Commissioner Mary Jo Jablonski died Thursday morning after battling liver cancer for more than six months, according to her family.



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY KATIE TABELING
A banner reads "Elkton Loves Mary Jo" in front of the Elkton Chamber & Alliance on Thursday shortly after the news had spread that Town Commissioner Mary Jo Jablonski had died.

Town mourns loss of Commissioner Jablonski

By **KATIE TABELING & JACOB OWENS**
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ELKTON — Elkton Town Commissioner Mary Jo Jablonski died at her home Thursday morning, surrounded by her loved ones, according to her family. She was 59.

Jablonski had been battling liver disease and was diagnosed with liver cancer in July, according to family members. Throughout treatment, Jablonski had continued working as the executive director of the Elkton Chamber & Alliance and a town commissioner with

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Elkton home builder indicted

Slagle allegedly took \$200K+ for homes, failed to deliver

By **CARL HAMILTON**
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ELKTON — A Cecil County grand jury has handed up a four-count indictment against an Elkton-based general contractor who stands accused of improperly handling money paid to him by customers during two different home construction projects.

The defendant, Gary Michael Slagle II, 42, of the unit block of Deer Creek Lane near Elkton, is charged with four counts of failure to maintain deposit on a new home, according to Cecil County Circuit Court records. The charge is a felony that carries a maximum 15-year sentence and up to a \$10,000 fine per conviction.

Handed up by the grand jury Feb. 13, the indictment lists Doris Shepard as one of the victims and further indicates that she is "now deceased."

The indictment alleges

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Md. officials air grievances on 301 issues

By **JACOB OWENS**
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CECILTON — Roughly one month after Delaware opened its new bypass toll road for U.S. Route 301, officials on both sides of the border met to discuss the impact that is having on narrow, country roads in southern Cecil County.

When the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) opened Jan. 10 what it calls the U.S. 301 Mainline — essentially a straight-shot highway from the state line to the Roth Bridge over the C&D Canal, bypassing downtown Middletown, Del. — few in Maryland were prepared for the onslaught of traffic that



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY JACOB OWENS
After the opening of the new U.S. Route 301 toll road, traffic on Maryland Route 282, seen here, has doubled due to toll diversion, according to officials.

toll diversion would create. At minimum, users of the new highway have to pay \$4 per trip, with multi-axle vehicles costing upward of \$14.40 and additional costs added for those who don't use E-ZPass and choose

to have their registration billed. For many in Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's counties who use Middletown as a weekly shopping destination, it would mean adding \$8 round-trip to the outing.

That has led hundreds of additional vehicles to utilize routes like Sassafra and Edgar Price roads, along with Wilson Street in Warwick, to avoid the toll altogether. Residents of Warwick, a small residential village near the state line where the speed limit is 30 mph, have complained about the steady flow of traffic that has disrupted their quiet corner of the county.

Joe Zang, mayor of Cecilton just to the west of War-

wick, has become a sounding board for many of the residents' concerns, and he called for all affected entities to attend a Feb. 13 meeting that was previously scheduled for other traffic-related concerns.

Attending the meeting were representatives from DelDOT, Maryland State Highway Administration, Delaware State Police, New Castle County (Del.) Sheriff's Office, Cecil County Sheriff's Office, Cecil County government, and the towns of Cecilton and Galena.

According to numerous officials who attended the

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Perryville approves Great Wolf hotel incentive package

By **JANE BELLMYER**
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CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY JANE BELLMYER
Steve Jacobsen, right, vice president of domestic development for Great Wolf Resorts, and Chris Rogers, a principal planner with AECOM, listen as town attorney Fred Sussman explains the amendments made to the Economic Development Agreement ahead of its passage Tuesday night by the mayor and town commissioners.

PERRYVILLE — Calling it "a major milestone," a Great Wolf Resorts executive was happy that the mayor and commissioners unanimously passed Economic Development Incentive Agreement and Hotel Economic Development Incentive ordinances Tuesday night.

"What's really great is all the government agencies are agreed," Steve Jacobsen, vice president of domestic development for the Chicago-based resort company, said of the votes of Perryville, Cecil County and Maryland officials.

Jacobsen noted that Perryville, the future home of a Great Wolf Lodge resort, was the final voice in that

part of the conversation. "We saved the best for last," he said.

However, approval of the incentives was just the start of a process, as Jacobsen said actual construction of the 450-to-500-room complex to be built off Chesapeake Overlook Parkway is a year away.

"Next is amendments to the general development plan," he said, moments after Perryville adjourned the special meeting called just to vote on the two measures. "Now we have to start drawing schematics, select a general contractor and bid the project out. We still have a lot to do."

See **WOLF**
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LOCAL

BUILDER

From
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that, on two occasions, Slagle failed to “hold sums of money in an escrow account for the building of a custom home for Doris Shepard,” but it does not specify how much money.

Under the state criminal code referenced in the indictment, the charge is defined as “failure to obtain and maintain a corporate surety bond or irrevocable letter of credit or to hold sums of money in an escrow account.”

The indictment identifies 187 Plum Point Road, southwest of Elkton, as the location of that custom home construction site and alleges that Slagle committed his two offenses against Shepard between June 17, 2014, and Jan. 25, 2017.

As for the remaining two counts, the indictment identifies Stanley Kegley as the victim and offers an offense definition that mirrors the one relating to the late Shepard.

The court document indicates that the Kegley custom home is in the 100 block of Gilpin Avenue in Elkton and alleges that Slagle committed his two offenses against Kegley between June 23, 2014, and Jan. 25, 2017.

As with the other two charges, the counts relating to Kegley do not specify the sum of money that Slagle allegedly failed to hold in an escrow account for the building of Kegley’s custom home.

Court records indicate that Slagle was not arrested, but, rather, was issued a criminal summons Feb. 13, the same day that the grand jury handed up the four-count indictment.

Slagle is scheduled for a March 27 initial appearance, according to court records, which show that, as of Thursday, no defense lawyer had filed an appearance in his criminal case.

The Cecil Whig was unable to reach Slagle for comment on his business phone — his company is Generation Contracting Inc. — and



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY CARL HAMILTON

Bill Baker stands in front of his yet-to-be finished Elkton-area home Tuesday, more than four years after the agreed-upon construction completion date. Baker fired the general contractor in March 2015 because construction was way behind schedule and because subcontractors hadn’t been paid. A Cecil County grand jury recently indicted the general contractor, who stands accused of improperly handling customer payment money during Baker’s project and one other job.

through his business email. A queued recorded message informs callers that Slagle’s business phone is no longer a working number.

Court records show that the grand jury indicted Slagle after a Cecil County Sheriff’s Office investigation. CCSO officials and the lead investigator, Dfc. Matthew Blalock, could not be reached, as of Thursday, for additional information about the criminal case against Slagle.

Gilpin Avenue charges
During a phone interview earlier this week, Kegley, 72, told the Cecil Whig that he and his wife signed a contract with Slagle on June 23, 2014, for him to serve as the general contractor in the construction of a custom rancher on a property the couple had purchased on Gilpin Avenue.

Both retirees, the Kegleys were living in a home that was more than 30 years old when they signed the contract, he said, noting that it was their desire to downsize.

The couple gave Slagle two \$35,800 checks, or draws, during the construction project, according to Kegley. The first check was to pay subcontractors for excavating and pouring the concrete basement, Kegley said. The second \$35,800 check was for framing work, he added.

By the time Slagle asked for a third check, however,

concerns for the Kegleys had already arisen.

“We received a registered letter from the concrete company, saying they had not gotten paid by Slagle. He (Slagle) told us it was just a misunderstanding and that they would get paid,” Kegley recalled. “It was his intention to pay them later, even though they should have been paid with that first draw.”

The Kegleys declined to give Slagle a third check because the construction project was moving way behind schedule and because they had learned that other subcontractors also hadn’t been paid.

“The house was suppose to be finished on Nov. 15, 2014. Here it was January (2015), and nobody was even working on the house anymore,” Kegley said, adding that he and his wife fired Slagle on Jan. 15, 2015, through a registered letter sent to Slagle by their lawyer.

After Slagle’s termination, subcontractors came after the Kegleys for money owed to them.

“I had liens on the property totaling \$42,000 from four different subcontractors,” Kegley said. “The money we gave him (Slagle) in the two draws, it had been spent on other things. He pocketed the money — \$71,600.”

The Kegleys were forced to hire a lawyer to handle the

situation with the liens, he told the Whig.

After firing Slagle, the couple handled the building of their rancher.

“At that point, it was just framed and DuPont paper (house wrap) was up. But the siding, the drywall, the plumbing, the electric, it all needed to be done,” Kegley said. “So we decided to finish it ourselves.”

Hiring out some of the jobs and tackling some on their own, it took Kegley and his wife about a year to complete their rancher, he said.

“He (Slagle) failed to live up to his end of the deal, so we finished our house ourselves, and he still owes us (\$71,600),” Kegley said.

Plum Point Road charges

Elkton-area resident Bill Baker, 65, is not listed as a victim in the indictment filed against Slagle. But according to Baker, he serves as a representative of the late Shepard, specifically as executor of her estate.

Baker told the Cecil Whig that he and his wife, Lori, had partnered with Shepard to have a \$375,000 house built at 187 Plum Point Road, where they planned to live together. Plans for the house included a mother-in-law apartment for Shepard, under the same roof as the living quarters for the Baker family.

The arrangement was

made after Baker and Shepard already had been good friends for more than 20 years, he explained.

During those two decades, Shepard’s health declined and Baker and his family took care of her, he said. Baker took Shepard to all of her doctor appointments and routinely checked on her when she lived alone, he said. At some points, he added, Shepard lived with the Bakers, who have two adult children.

“She had horrible health. She had vascular disease and had suffered two strokes,” Baker said, adding, “I promised Doris that she was never going to a nursing home. So we decided to buy a home together.”

The Bakers paid \$80,000 to purchase the 1.2-acre parcel on Plum Point Road, which is close to the Elk River, but the land was put in Shepard’s name, according to Baker.

In the spring of 2014, Shepard and the Bakers hired Slagle as the general contractor in the construction of the home, which, according to the agreement, was to be completed by October 2014.

Shepard paid Slagle a total of \$100,000 in two checks — one for \$82,000 and the other for \$18,000 — on June 17, 2014, near the outset of the project, which included excavation and concrete work for the basement, Baker said.

At Slagle’s request, Baker, acting as power-of-attorney for Shepard, gave him \$50,000 in late October 2014, according to Baker, who said the progression of the project “was not up to contract speed.”

In January 2015, some three months after the house completion deadline had passed, the Bakers and Shepard learned that “people, the subcontractors, were not getting paid,” according to Baker.

Baker learned that the concrete company had filed a lien, seeking payment of \$40,000, he said. Because there had been no payments, that company had walked off the job, leaving approximately \$13,000 in basement work left to be done, he added.

The other subcontractors

that took action included a lumber company seeking \$50,000, a plumbing company seeking \$10,000 and a siding company seeking \$30,000, according to Baker.

In March 2015, approximately five months after the house completion deadline had passed, the Bakers and Shepard fired Slagle.

Afterward, Baker hired a lawyer to help fend off the various liens, according to Baker, who told the Whig that it cost him more than \$40,000 in legal fees to resolve them.

At age 84, Shepard died Dec. 31, 2015 — some 14 months after the home completion deadline had passed, Baker noted.

(Shepard died inside an Elkton-area home that the Bakers bought, Baker said. The Bakers made that house purchase because they had sold their original home and because, with the construction project dragging on, their planned new home on Plum Point Road was not finished.)

Today, the Plum Point Road house looks similar to how it did when the Bakers and Shepard fired Slagle in March 2015, according to Baker. What remains of the house wrap on the un-sided outer walls is in tatters.

“It’s only a third of the way built. I’m either going to have to bulldoze it or finish it,” Baker said.

In December, according to Baker, he was awarded \$50,000 through the State of Maryland’s Home Builder Guaranty Fund, he said. The fund, which is overseen by the Consumer Protection Division, allows consumers to seek compensation for losses resulting from an act or omission by a registered builder who constructs a new home for a consumer.

Baker plans to use that money to advance his home construction project on Plum Point Road, he said, adding that he likely will handle some of the work himself. Baker noted that he recently received a county building permit.

“I have one year to finish the project,” Baker said, adding, “This has been a four-year, ongoing nightmare.”

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