

SHOTS FIRED B2  
A PATIENT IN POLICE CUSTODY FIRES GUN

SCAM B3  
CALLERS TARGET TEMPLE COMMUNITY

The Philadelphia Inquirer

CITY, SUBURBS & SOUTH JERSEY

# PHILLY & REGION



Champions Park Playground, 910 Tustin St. in Northeast Philadelphia, is known as an exemplary model of playground accessibility and “universal design.” Elizabeth Robertson / Staff Photographer

## Philadelphia lags behind suburbs on accessible playgrounds

**Cost and space are often factors limiting potential improvements.**

By Nate File  
Staff Writer

To Thomasina Lee, it was clear that the mother and her child could not understand each other.

Lee, a North Philly resident, was at a local playground when she saw a boy crying and frustrated with his mother. Lee is an early childcare educator and recognized that the boy was nonverbal and neurodivergent. He was trying to communicate with his mother, but she couldn't understand what he wanted.

“You could see the tears well up in her eyes,” Lee said.

The mother got frustrated and ended up leaving the playground with her son. Lee understood their struggle.

“I’ve been there before,” she said.

Lee’s 10-year-old son, Taahir, is autistic. He uses a communication device to tell her what he wants and needs, and Lee said she

wished that the mother and son at the playground had something similar. The experience inspired her, and she cofounded a nonprofit called Taahir’s Village that donates communication boards to Philly playgrounds.

“We need to create an inclusive environment for everyone,” she said.

Parks and playgrounds in the Philadelphia region are continuing to prioritize accessibility with new designs that accommodate special needs, as well as retrofitted additions like communication boards. But while Philadelphia is making efforts to boost its accessibility, cost and space constraints mean it still lags behind the suburbs.

**A universal right**

According to Dan Hendey, senior education manager for the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society, the designers of the first American playgrounds mostly did not consider that children with disabilities might want to use them.

“Population wasn’t always taken into account... but as our profession



A boy tries out one of the sensory play panels at the new Warminster Community Park playground. General Recreation Inc.

has grown, we’ve realized that there’s sometimes just simple things we can do increase accessibility,” he said. That can include wider pathways that fit wheelchairs, parking lots for those who need to drive to the playground, communication boards, sensory play panels, or fencing that makes

neurodivergent children feel contained and safe.

The Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society recently launched a park finder tool through its PA Good For You initiative, which people can use to locate parks with accessible features. It is available at

→ SEE ACCESSIBILITY ON B3

## Aramark workers authorize a strike at ballpark

**The employees are calling on Aramark to provide “family-sustaining wages” and health-care coverage.**

By Mike Newall  
and Henry Savage  
Staff Writers

They arrived hours before first pitch, ready to strike, and the Aramark food and retail workers who voted overwhelmingly Sunday to authorize a work stoppage at Citizens Bank Park said their demands for higher pay and better health care boiled down to a simple message.

“The message is that we’re not accepting pennies no more,” said Samantha Spector, 44, of Northeast Philadelphia, who works as a concessions bartender at the stadium. “They need to bring their money to the table.”

While streaming in for the Phillies’ night game against the Braves, nearly 83% of Aramark employees working at Citizens Bank Park voted to go on strike amid contract negotiations, joining workers at Wells Fargo Center who held brief walkouts twice in April.

With no scheduled game or event at Lincoln Financial Field Sunday, the nearly 1,000 Aramark employees who work Eagles games will continue to vote throughout the week. Those tallies are expected by Friday, said Bethany Holmes, communications director for Unite Here Local 274, the union that represents the workers.

Holmes would not disclose how many votes were cast at Citizens Bank Park Sunday, but she said the union represents about 800 workers there, where a strike watch now starts.

“The negotiating committee could call for a strike at any time,” she said.

The employees are calling on Aramark to provide “family-sustaining wages” and health-care coverage for members.

“We remain committed to bargaining in good faith to reach a settlement that works for all parties,”

→ SEE ARAMARK ON B2

## West Chester’s president glad to be back on campus

**R. Lorraine “Laurie” Bernotsky said she’ll soon launch a listening tour to plan the university’s next chapter.**

By Susan Snyder  
Staff Writer

R. Lorraine “Laurie” Bernotsky is hardly new to West Chester University, but she’s brand new to the president’s role there this semester.

After having spent more than a quarter century on the campus — her first 15 years as a political science professor and later provost — she left in 2022 to serve as acting president of Pennsylvania Western University, another school in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, formed in 2022 through the merger of Edinboro, Clarion, and California.

Bernotsky, 57, who will earn \$456,000 annually as West Chester’s president, returned home this summer and began her new role July 1, taking over for Christopher



R. Lorraine “Laurie” Bernotsky talks about her new role as West Chester University president. Tyger Williams / Staff Photographer

Fiorentino, who retired, though now is in line to become interim chancellor of PASSHE.

Born in Philadelphia and raised in the Lancaster area, Bernotsky got her bachelor’s degree from then-Messiah College (now a university) in political science, a master’s and doctorate from Oxford

University, and another master’s from Temple University.

With about 17,100 students, West Chester is the largest university in the system and has remained one of its strongest. Bernotsky recently talked about carving out West Chester’s next chapter.

→ SEE BERNOTSKY ON B6

## Peter Pan takeover of Megabus routes brings minor changes

**Philadelphia passengers will see some improvements, particularly at bus stops.**

By Ximena Conde  
Staff Writer

A summer bankruptcy filing of one of the country’s major private bus companies has had ripple effects in Philadelphia and the larger region.

Coach USA began Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings in June, citing a drop in ridership that never recovered from the pandemic. Coach sold a slew of its bus lines in an effort to preserve thousands of jobs and “ensure uninterrupted passenger transportation services to millions of passengers throughout the United States and Canada,” said the company in a statement.

The shake-up has resulted in some minor changes for Philadelphia Megabus riders.

Megabus, which Coach USA owned, saw its routes servicing

Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia taken over by Peter Pan Bus Lines on Aug. 16.

Peter Pan, a family-owned company that has been operating for almost 100 years, has said the move was part of a fleet modernization, which includes better WiFi and seats, as well as more frequent service. Additionally, the company said it has hired 75 drivers, bought 45 new buses, and reduced fares by close to 40%.

The Peter Pan takeover of regional Megabus routes has meant marginal changes for passengers locally.

After the Filbert Street bus station in Center City closed, riders started grabbing their Megabus at the stop at Spring Garden and North Front Streets. With the Peter Pan takeover, Megabus ticket holders will be able to catch the bus “100 yards” away at 520 N. Columbus Blvd., said a Peter Pan spokesperson.

The change will mean that Megabus ticket holders will be able to use Peter Pan amenities,

→ SEE MEGABUS ON B2



# Bernotsky

→ CONTINUED FROM B1  
This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

## How does it feel to come back as president?

It's been two years I've been gone, and this place, of course, is amazing, and lots of great things kept happening. What I realized, it's not like returning to West Chester. It's coming to West Chester with new eyes.

For the students I'm welcoming, I want them to fall in love with West Chester because I realize I love this place, and being way away from it a little bit helped me remember. That gives me sort of a directional point — how can I do everything I can to make sure our new students, our current students, have every opportunity to fall in love with this place.

## What made you fall in love with it?

We have a very strong shared governance. We work collaboratively ... Certainly, just the good fortune we have about where we are located and who our community partners are.

Students who come here have access to an incredible array of not only what West Chester has to offer but major cities around it.

## Have you noticed anything different since you've been back?

Our new sciences and engineering center and dining hall were just opening when I left, and so yesterday, I got to go in. I got to see students on the learning stairs.

## The learning stairs?

We know students want to sit ... between classes. They need places to plug in their phones. We came up

with this notion. They have cushions built in and charging ports, and it faces this two-story or more video wall.

## What have you been focusing on since you got back?

I've been reconnecting with as many people as I can. I've also been gearing up for a listening tour I intend to do this fall.

One of the things I was hearing from the folks involved in the interview process ... was a theme around wanting to be part of figuring out the next chapter for West Chester.

We have tremendously talented people. We have good financial sustainability. We have a lot of good things going on for us, high demand for the institution, good enrollment. So, how do we carve out what that next chapter looks like?

## What did you learn from your time at PennWest?

There were three campuses, Edinboro, Clarion, and California. ... They had only been integrated a couple months. So it was figuring out how do you take three distinct campuses ... and find the common ground of how to work together, how to achieve together.

I'm very team-oriented already. It was a chance to learn in broader ways with teams that were very different.

## How would you describe your leadership style?

A good leader adapts their style based on who they are interacting with. You sort of meet people where they are. I am a very team-based person. I am very interested in having more people at the table and including more voices. There are some core values that I at least strive to make sure are central to



R. Lorraine “Laurie” Bernotsky, West Chester University president, shows the “learning stairs” at the Sciences & Engineering Center and The Commons. Students can relax and plug in. The stairs face a two-story video wall. Tyger Williams / Staff Photographer

my leadership style. And at the top of that list would be DVR — treating people with dignity, value, and respect. Leading with compassion, leading with humility, and having a sense of humor.

## What are your priorities for the academic year?

There's a pretty obvious one. Our housing needs. We know that we need more housing than what we have ... just to meet our current enrollment. If we had maybe 500, maybe 800 more beds over time. We definitely want to be able to do that.

## Are you talking about a new residence hall?

Depends. Is it a new residence hall? Is it renovating something? (Between university-owned and affiliated housing, West Chester has about 5,000 beds.)

We are trying to get permission

to get some swing space so we can start renovating in a phased approach our current housing. To do that, we are trying to put 128 temporary [modular] housing units ... [in Lot M. That would require approval from the West Goshen board of supervisors.]

The other one [is] we have done a lot here to shore up our supports for students, but I think that we need to stay focused on that. That has to remain a top priority. In higher ed, we're still getting our head around what does the post-pandemic student need. Instead of saying are these students ready for college, we need to say are we ready for these students? Are we student-ready?

## What are the biggest challenges facing West Chester?

I would put housing at the top of that list. We have a wait list right now. A week ago it had 700 students on it. There's more demand, so even

though we are not growing, there is more demand.

## Do you guarantee housing for freshman year?

We can't even do that. We absolutely prioritize it.

Another thing, we were very happy to get a 6% increase in [the state] appropriation. Our board of governors was then able to hold tuition flat again ... But it's still a challenge for us. Even with that, we've got inflationary costs and things like that. It doesn't quite keep up with that appropriation increase.

## You've said West Chester isn't looking to grow enrollment?

If there is anywhere we are going to put energy to grow, it would be in our online grad program. It's a demand that we can meet ... by bringing in more faculty. It doesn't put any pressure on our surrounding community and it doesn't put any pressure on the facility parts of our campus.

## And now for the fun stuff:

**Last book read:** “I just reread *Upstream: The Quest to Solve Problems Before They Happen*.”

**Favorite book?** It's from the Lord of the Rings series. It's *The Return of the King*.

**Favorite movie?** *Love Actually*

**Favorite musician or band?** Tori Amos

**Favorite food?** Maryland blue crabs

**Favorite vacation spot?** Bora Bora

**Motto to live by?** Don't forget to take some risks.

ssnyder@inquirer.com  
215-854-4693  
ssnyderinq

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SUMMARY OF ORDINANCE

Authorizing an increase in the non-electoral indebtedness of the City within the Pennsylvania constitutional limit; authorizing the Bond Committee to sell bonds at public or private negotiated sale, to provide funds toward various capital municipal purposes; providing for appropriations to the Sinking Fund Commission for the payment of such bonds; and authorizing agreements to provide credit or payment or liquidity sources for the bonds in connection with issuance of the bonds, and certain other actions. The following is a summary of the provisions of each section of the proposed Ordinance, Bill No. 240416-A:

**Section 1.** Authorizes the Mayor, City Controller and City Solicitor, or a majority of them (the “Bond Committee”), to incur non-electoral debt and borrow, by the issuance and sale of general obligation bonds of the City (the “Bonds”), a sum or sums which, in the aggregate, shall not exceed THREE HUNDRED FORTY TWO MILLION DOLLARS (\$342,000,000.00), to be expended as provided for in Section 2 of the Ordinance. States that the Bonds may be sold, from time to time, at a private negotiated sale or at a public sale to the highest responsible bidder as authorized by law, at such price and such other terms and conditions not inconsistent with the Ordinance and other applicable law as prescribed by the Bond Committee. The Council finds that, if a private negotiated sale is utilized, the sale of all or any portion of the Bonds at a private negotiated sale or sales is in the best financial interest of the City.

**Section 2.** Provides that the monies raised by the loan or loans authorized in Section 1 of the Ordinance will be used to provide capital funds for and toward the acquisition of interests in real estate, property and equipment and the extension, construction and improvement of facilities and other capital expenditures, including reimbursement of City capital expenditures, for the purposes and in the amounts set forth in the Ordinance.

**Section 3.** Provides that for each issue of bonds authorized under the Ordinance, the determination of the manner of issuance, the maturities thereof, and all other terms, conditions, provisions, and details of each such issuance shall be made by the Bond Committee or, as applicable, as specified in a purchase proposal of any successful bidder(s). Provides that the bonds of each issue will be in the denominations of \$5,000 U.S. Dollars or any whole multiple thereof and in such form as determined by the Bond Committee. Provides that the Bonds shall bear interest payable initially on a date that will not be more than 9 months from the date of issuance and weekly, monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually thereafter until maturity or prior redemption. Provides that the bonds may be subject to redemption prior to maturity at the discretion of the City and in the manner set forth in the Ordinance. States that if any bond issuance under this Ordinance is subject to redemption, a notice of redemption will be sent to the registered bondholder no less than 10 or more than 45 days prior to the date fixed for redemption.

**Section 4.** Creates a sinking fund, to be administered by the Sinking Fund Commission for the payment of principal and interest on all bonds authorized by the Ordinance. Provides that, in each year that such bonds are outstanding, the City covenants to appropriate, from taxes and revenues of the City, a sum equal to at least the interest and principal on such bonds when due. Provides that the City covenants to meet all obligations to make payments when due on unpaid bonds that are issued under the Ordinance out of its sinking fund or through other general revenues or funds.

**Section 5.** Provides that the Bond Committee is authorized on behalf of the City to enter into agreements with any bank, insurance company or other appropriate entity in providing credit or payment or liquidity sources for the bonds, and provides that such agreements may provide for payment or acquisition of the bonds and repayment by the City to such entity paying or acquiring the bonds if the City does not pay the bonds when due. Provides that the Bond Committee is authorized to take all action necessary to effect the Ordinance.

**Section 6.** States that for the purpose of providing notice to the public in accordance with 53 P.S. §12583, a summary of the provisions of each section of the Ordinance is to be published five times at intervals of not less than three days in two daily newspapers having a bona fide circulation within the City of Philadelphia.

Elizabeth McCollum

Acting Chief Clerk of the Council

of the City of Philadelphia