

The Journal Times

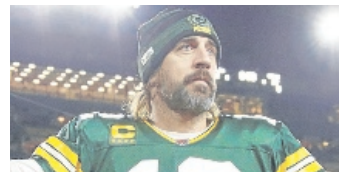
High schools

Prairie girls beat Tremper; Horlick boys get first win **SPORTS, PAGE B1**



Packers

Rodgers expects to decide future quickly after season **SPORTS, PAGE B1**



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AMBULANCES | PART 2 OF A SERIES

When payment doesn't cover costs

Ambulance, fire chiefs blame Medicare/Medicaid for inability to pay EMTs well

RACHEL KUBIK
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A bill was issued for \$975. Four dollars and change was repaid. And there's nothing that can be done about it.

"I almost wanted to frame the check, because to me it was a joke,"



Molnar

0.5% of its billing for its essential service from Medicare/Medicaid. "What am I going to do with \$4? It costs me more than that to pay two people their hourly wage plus all our expenses for payroll."

said Christopher Siebeneich, chief of North Central EMS & Rescue Squad, 3204 Washington Ave., the private ambulance company that received the check for less than

North Central EMS & Rescue Squad has been facing staffing troubles, as have other organizations that staff emergency medical technicians across the state.

In the past, North Central EMS has had five full-time employees on its payroll. Now it's down to one or two part-timers, and the company pretty much only works planned events. If you call for a ride to a medical facility, Siebeneich will have to answer "No." He doesn't have the staff for it.

Siebeneich blames low Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement

as a contributor to not being able to pay better and give raises to staff who want it.

"We don't get the return that we need to cover that expense," he said. "They're only going to pay us so much based on whatever their algorithm says; we have to just accept it."

But his workers? "People don't want \$15 to \$17 an hour. It's not desirable in this COVID climate. They want more money and hazard pay."

Please see **CARE**, Page A3

Ambulance series

Part 1: Racine County has long been facing shortages of EMTs. Costs are rising as a result.

Parts 2, today: When payment for emergency medical services far undercuts actual costs.

Part 3: How an aging population is severely driving up demand for taxpayer-funded emergency services.



MARK HERTZBERG, SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL TIMES

FOXCONN CONTINUES HIRING

Nia Bell fills out paperwork at a Foxconn Industrial Internet job fair Wednesday at the Racine County Workforce Development Center, 1717 Taylor Ave. The company reports it has immediate openings for 100 electric assemblers at a starting pay of \$16.50 per hour, and is promising wage increases after 90 days. This year, for the first time, Foxconn received tax credits (to the tune of \$28.8 million) for hiring 579 full-time workers in 2020. The company could receive another \$8.3 million in tax credits if at least 747 full-time workers are hired in 2021.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Power of genome for early diagnosis

Key materials for sequencing made at Illumina in Madison

DAVID WAHLBERG
Lee Newspapers

MADISON — At the west end of University Research Park on Madison's West Side, workers brew a potion with a powerful purpose.

Their flasks and tanks resemble those at breweries, but these workers aren't fermenting yeast to make beer. They're using harmless strains of E.coli bacteria to grow enzymes for genome sequencing.

San Diego-based Illumina has a major share of the global DNA sequencing market, and the company's manufacturing center in Madison makes enzymes — proteins that speed



AMBER ARNOLD, LEE NEWSPAPERS

Will Wayland, a manufacturing specialist at Illumina, checks valves on a fermentation tank. The company's facility in Madison makes enzymes for use globally in its DNA sequencing machines.

up chemical reactions — to run its sequencing machines. With 180 employees, the hub also produces what is called "library prep," or kits to prepare blood or saliva samples for sequencing.

"We're producing all the reagents and tools for everything the company does," said Bill Checovich, general manager at Illumina's Madison campus.

In 2011, Illumina bought Epicentre Biotechnologies, a Madison company founded in 1987. Epicentre developed a technology, called Nextera, to simplify and speed up preparation of samples for DNA sequencing, which is now part of Illumina's products.

In a building that opened in 2019 on Genomic Drive, workers make about 40 different enzymes. They induce E.coli cells to produce the desired proteins and purify the mixtures by passing them through centrifuges, filters and columns.

In the fermentation room, equipped with a 1,000-liter

Please see **GENOME**, Page A3

TOP 10 OF 2021

Racial tensions at local schools

LAUREN HENNING AND ADAM ROGAN
The Journal Times

In 2020, the U.S. saw racial tensions boil over after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody. The fallout, both in terms of strife and in attempts to bring about change, continue. The same can be said for schools in Racine County.

For Burlington Area School District, the racial reckoning that began in summer 2020 came to a head after the

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction ruled this April that "racial harassment at

BASD was severe, pervasive and persistent" and required the district submit a corrective action plan to right its wrongs.

That reckoning was sparked primarily by the actions of now-former Burlington parent: Darnisha Garbade. After she brought forward allegations of racist bullying suffered by her children in Burlington schools, BASD said it investigated but claimed to have found nothing. DPI clearly didn't come to the same conclusion, leading to an ongoing litany of policy reviews and meetings for the district as it aims to create a more welcoming atmosphere.

In the past two years, Garbade made it her mission to bring change to the district, founding the Burlington Coalition for Dismantling Racism. She stepped down from BCDR's leadership this year, giving way to a long-time ally, Laura Bielefeldt.

A Burlington football player was accused of using a racial slur on the field on Sept. 10. He was suspended from participating in extracurricular activities, but that ban was quickly overturned

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Garbade



Bielefeldt

news+ membership **AT JOURNALTIMES.COM/GAMES**

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| COMICS | B6 | LEGALS | B7 | PUZZLE CORNER | B8 |
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Genome

From A1

tank, a caramel-colored liquid containing glucose and other ingredients feeds the E.coli cells. “The more cells you have that are expressing enzyme, the more enzyme you have when you go to break the cells open and purify them,” said Carolyn Pettersson, associate director for manufacturing operations.

Genome sequencing conducted through efforts such as Project Baby Bear in California and BabySeq in Boston has used Illumina sequencers, said Julia Ortega, the company’s director of scientific research. The DNA sequencing lab at UW-Madison’s Biotechnology Center also has Illumina machines.

A study led by Illumina involved 354 infants with sus-

pected genetic conditions at five neonatal intensive care units in five states. Half of the patients had whole genome sequencing within 15 days of admission and the other half got it within 60 days.

In both groups, the sequencing doubled the portion of babies who received precise diagnoses that altered their care, the researchers reported in September in JAMA Pediatrics.

“It really shows the power of the genome to provide a single test that can replace multiple tests that might be done and hopefully diagnose children earlier,” Ortega said.

An Illumina worker checks the density of cells in a fermentation sample at the company’s facility at University Research Park in Madison.

AMBER ARNOLD, LEE NEWSPAPERS



Top 10

From A1

by BASD administration.

Other area schools have faced similar tensions. At Racine Lutheran High School, students called for the private school’s administration to do better to address racism and bullying in its halls.

The issues at RLHS first entered the public eye after a photo circulated of students wearing “Trump’s Wall” T-shirts during a spirit week in the fall, leading members of the immigrant community and its allies to speak out in protest. The students who wore the unapproved shirts were reprimanded, school administrators said.

Around the same time, a text message from a Mount Pleasant Police officer, affiliated with Racine Lutheran High, to an RLHS student was shared publicly. In it, the officer complained about a different student who was raising issues regarding racism in the school, saying “All he wants is clout” and “I can’t wait to catch his (expletive) in traffic.”

About a month later, after two students were shown posing for the “George Floyd Challenge” in



SUBMITTED

Students at Racine Lutheran High School wore unapproved “Trump’s Wall” shirts during spirit week leading up to Homecoming 2021, prompting meetings between school administration, Latino groups and students of color. When this photo was posted on social media and sent to The Journal Times by multiple people, the students’ faces were already blacked out.

a social media photo — showing one white male student kneeling on another white student’s neck, an apparent mockery of how Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer — local groups again raised voices in criticism of the school administration for failing to stamp out ignorance, bullying and racism in its halls.

After the photo was shared among RLHS community members, several students had their parents take them home from school since they “didn’t feel comfortable” being at Racine Lutheran.

A new group, Students 4 Dignity, was formed to bring about change.

Care

From A1

According to a report from the American Hospital Association: “For Medicaid, hospitals received payment of only 90 cents for every dollar spent by hospitals caring for Medicaid patients in 2019. In 2019, 63 percent of hospitals received Medicare payments less than cost, while 58 percent of hospitals received Medicaid payments less than cost.”

A study by the Wisconsin Policy Forum suggested one solution to shortages in emergency medical care could be to increase Medicaid reimbursement for ambulance transports to 100% of the Medicare rate. But that would take action from government entities.

In January 2022, reimbursement under the state’s Medicaid program is expected to rise to 80% of the Medicare rate.

Of that coming increase, “This was significant in light of the many competing health-related entities and initiatives that could benefit from greater Medicaid reimbursement and it would be a heavy lift politically to increase it further,” WPF’s

study concluded, “but doing so would provide additional revenues to fire departments and EMS (emergency medical services) agencies that could be used to boost responder compensation.”

This isn’t a new phenomenon and has been a problem for the last several years. Kansasville Fire and Rescue Chief Ron Molnar also expressed concern about low Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates.

Molnar, whose department is volunteer-run, said a response call may result in a bill to the insurance company of \$800 to \$900. Health insurance may reimburse the department, or whatever entity the service provider is, \$600. And that’s “if you get lucky,” he said.

With shortages in supplies, vehicles and personnel, costs could be even higher. Every time the department answers a call, it could be impactful to revenue, Molnar said.

“If we’re getting reimbursed \$400 less than we should, 10 times a day, that’s \$4,000 a day,” Molnar said. “Some agencies would say you’re not even breaking even. How long can you stay in business if you’re losing money, insurance and supplies?”

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