



**AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT**  
Wedding announcements grow more creative as couples try to express their personalities, pique guests' interest **SCENE**

**\$1,386**  
of savings in today's Sun  
Year-to-date savings total: **\$35,342**

**Beach towns endure Senior Week rowdiness and underage drinking to boost business; teen party Gansler attended exposes the tradition**

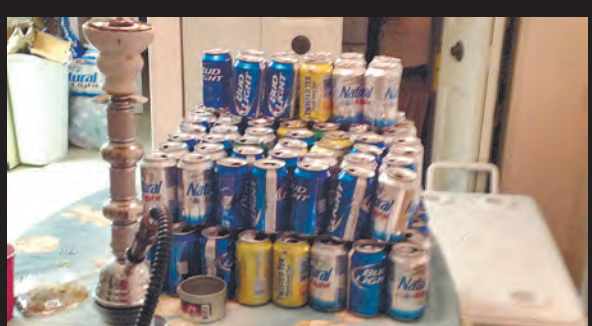


Maryland attorney general Doug Gansler (white shirt with cellphone) is seen at a Senior Week party this summer.

# FROM HAVOC COMES PROFIT



KARL MERTON FERRON/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO  
Ocean City beaches, shown in August, are swarmed by recent high school graduates in early June.



REALTOR'S PHOTO  
This was the scene a Realtor found in the kitchen of a rental property during Senior Week.

BY JEAN MARBELLA, LIZ BOWIE AND KEVIN RECTOR | The Baltimore Sun

**OCEAN CITY** — Brent Ashley may have aged into the enforcer role at a certain point, but he still remembers when he was the miscreant. "I was halfway up the stairs and felt the hand on my shoulder," Ashley said of the night about 40 years ago when he got kicked out of a motel for his own Senior Week infraction: trying to sneak a girl into his room. A longtime rental property owner, and a city councilman in the beach town where thousands of high school graduates descend every June, Ashley, 62, views Senior Week the way many here do: as "a necessary evil." "All the revenue we bring in is important to Ocean City," he said. "If you don't rent to young people in June, you aren't going to rent to anyone. The young people can be a pain, but you are cultivating the

future guests. So you have to go with it a little bit." For the stretch of beach towns running from Ocean City north into Delaware, putting up with rowdy teens means landlords, restaurants and stores can make thousands of dollars over a three-week stretch before family vacation season picks up. The four- or five-decade-old tradition of "June bugs" swarming to the shore for a week of sun and not-always-legal fun is in the spotlight after photos emerged of Maryland Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler, who is running for governor, in the midst of a wild party thrown by Landon School boys in June. The photos put in stark relief an uncomfortable truth: Many parents, property owners and other adults implicitly accept the underage drinking and See **SENIOR WEEK**, page 10

**SUN INVESTIGATES**

# Free money raises doubts

Sides debate propriety of Balto. County's loan forgiveness program

BY ALISON KNEZEVICH AND MICHAEL DRESSER  
The Baltimore Sun

The transformation of a vacant, 12-story eyesore into a gleaming office building has brought workers, shoppers and diners to the northern edge of downtown Towson — thanks in part to a public financing package that waived repayment of millions of dollars in loans to a developer. The county makes so-called conditional loans that do not require repayment if certain conditions, such as job creation, are met. The \$3.5 million in conditional loans to Caves Valley Partners for the Towson project would rank as the largest ever forgiven; others have provided \$300,000 to demolish vacant Pikesville buildings and \$40,000 to renovate a bank branch in Randallstown. While backers say such loans help spur development, some lawmakers and business owners are raising questions about the county government's lending strategy because it lacks written guidelines and isn't advertised, so few businesses know about it. Critics also say the loans are a waste of public funds and unfairly favor some businesses over others. "I think it's corporate welfare," said state Sen. Jim Brochin, a Towson Democrat. He questioned the value of the Caves Valley deal for taxpayers as well as one for the renovation of the Greene Turtle restaurant in Towson. He said such loans amount to the government selecting which businesses should succeed. See **LOANS**, page 21

## SUMMARY OF THE NEWS

### Linda's journey

Linda Hershey lost her nose to cancer. In a series of operations over the past six years, doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital have worked to rebuild her face with pieces of her forearm, forehead, skull, blood vessels, rib and ear — and a cadaver. Her arduous journey has been chronicled in photographs by The Baltimore Sun's Algerina Perna. **ARTICLE AND PHOTOS, PGS 14-15.** Find online story exclusives at [baltimoresun.com/lindajourney](http://baltimoresun.com/lindajourney)



### Maryland eyes major expansion of its wildlands

DNR proposing to set aside 'last great places'

BY TIMOTHY B. WHEELER  
The Baltimore Sun

The call for the wild is being heard again across Maryland — though not everyone welcomes it. More than a decade after the last addition to the state's wildlands network, Department of Natural Resources officials have proposed a major expansion of the legally protected wilderness areas, including a section of northwestern Baltimore County. They want to preserve from development, cars and even bicycles those spots that still harbor rare plants and animals, ancient trees and other remnants of what Maryland looked like before European settlers arrived nearly 400 years ago. "These are the last great places of Maryland," said John F. Wilson, who is coordinating the agency effort to name additional wildlands. "These are places where you can get as close to solitude as possible in a state like Maryland, on the highly developed East Coast." See **WILDLANDS**, page 22

### Fall back

Did you remember to turn your clocks back an hour last night with the end of daylight saving time?



### TODAY'S WEATHER

PARTLY SUNNY  
**54** HIGH | **29** LOW  
Sunny and chilly Monday **SPORTS PG 10**

### MARYLAND

**STRETCHING FOOD STAMPS:** Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has announced an additional \$10,000 in funding for a program that gives food stamp recipients up to \$10 extra a week if they use their EBT (electronic benefits transfer) cards at city farmers' markets. **NEWS PG 2**

**BUY DIRECT FROM OUR WAREHOUSE**  
**KITCHEN DISTRIBUTORS**  
OF MARYLAND

WE HAVE THE BEST BRANDS, THE BEST QUALITY AND BEST OF ALL  
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FROM THE BELTWAY, NORTH ON I83 TO TIMONUM RD. EXIT. THEN LEFT AT LIGHT TO 2221 GREENSPRING DR.

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OPEN MONDAY THRU SATURDAY



LLOYD FOX/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS

David Brinker, a Department of Natural Resources ecologist, explores Soldiers Delight in Baltimore County, one of the state's richest ecosystems, and one of the most threatened.

# Maryland hears call for the wild

**WILDLANDS, From page 1**

If all get legislative approval, the state's nearly 44,000-acre wildlands system would be expanded by more than half. The last additions were made in 2002.

The move is welcomed by bird-watchers and conservationists, who say that as the state population grows and sprawls, this might represent the last chance to give the highest level of protection from human disturbance to Maryland's remaining natural gems.

"The people here need a place where they can see the Earth, wildlife and plant life as nature left it, or God created it," said Chris Yoder, conservation co-chairman of the Maryland chapter of the Sierra Club.

But some are skeptical because wildland status would bar commercial activities such as timbering and limit some recreational pursuits, including mountain biking. While hiking, primitive camping and often hunting and fishing would be permitted, building amenities such as picnic tables, shelters or paved trails would be prohibited.

"I have some questions — I know my constituents up here have a lot of questions," said state Sen. George Edwards, a Republican who represents Allegany and Garrett counties, where six of the 10 new wildlands would be created.

Others are outright opposed to the wildlands proposal, which covers nearly 27,000 acres in nine counties. On the Eastern Shore, Crisfield Mayor Percy J. Purnell Jr. objects to turning nearby Janes Island State Park into a wildland, saying that "the state's got enough wilderness." He'd like to build facilities on the marshy Chesapeake Bay island to draw tourists there, in hopes it might help revive his town, which was devastated last year by superstorm Sandy.

The only site proposed in the Baltimore area is an addition to Soldiers Delight, an ecologically rich swath of rocky soil and grassy savanna in Owings Mills that officials say is the largest of its type on the East Coast.

Known as a serpentine barren, Soldiers Delight is the last significant vestige of the largely treeless landscape that once stretched from northern Maryland into Pennsylvania, a byproduct of unusual geology and the Native Americans' practice of setting fires there to flush game. The thin, rocky soil — with greenish chromite, asbestos and other minerals in it — provides habitat for 40 rare plants and animals, many of them found nowhere else in the state.

"If you're into biodiversity conservation, this is the real deal," said R. Wayne Tindall, a DNR ecologist who coordinates efforts to restore natural habitat on state lands. He said it's hard to step off any of the unpaved trails through the 1,000-acre tract without stepping on a rare plant.

Soldiers Delight, one of the state's richest ecosystems, is also one of the most threatened. Virginia pine trees and thorny greenbrier bushes have overgrown much of the area, crowding out the scattered oaks and tall grasses that once covered the landscape. With volunteer help, state ecologists are slowly removing the pines and staging controlled fires to burn off the non-native vegetation and re-create the savanna-like conditions.

The state wants to expand Soldiers Delight by 341 acres, with some additions intended as buffers against suburban development and others as more remnants of the rare ecosystem. A hearing on that proposal is set for 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Soldiers Delight visitors' center, 5100 Deer Park Road.

State lawmakers established Maryland's wildlands system in the early 1970s, modeling it on the federal wilderness law passed by Congress in the 1960s. Since then, 29 wildlands have been designated in 15 counties.

Wildlands have generated controversy



Native Americans set fire to the grass to flush game in the once largely treeless landscape.

## Expanding Maryland's wildlands

The Department of Natural Resources is considering establishing 10 new wildlands and expanding 17 existing ones, increasing the size of the state's network of protected wilderness areas by more than 50 percent.



SOURCE: Maryland Department of Natural Resources

BALTIMORE SUN GRAPHIC

before, and some are voicing questions and objections to one or more of the new sites under consideration.

The region's mountain-biking organizations, for instance, say they don't want to lose the right to ride on any more state-owned land. Under state law, motor vehicles and "mechanical transport," including bicycles and snowmobiles, are not permitted on wildlands.

Mountain bikers contend that they don't tear up vegetation or cause erosion any more than horseback riders, who are permitted.

"It just doesn't make any sense to us," said Patrick Miller, an avid biker who's active in Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts, or MORE. He said mountain bikers are "stewards of the land," frequently helping to maintain trails in state parks and forests. Bikers could support more wildlands, he said, if the law were changed to permit them to ride there.

"We think the state's goal should be getting more people into parks, away from television," Miller said. "Keeping people out seems like the wrong direction."

Those seeking to boost outdoor recreation and tourism in Western Maryland are also questioning the proposal to designate the Youghiogheny River corridor a wildland. The "Yough," as it's known, has already been designated as Maryland's first and only wild river, which affords it some legal protection from development and disturbance. It draws whitewater rafters and fly fishermen, but there are no roads or paved trails along its banks.

But a group seeking to boost outdoor

recreation, including cycling, in Garrett County wants to include the river on a planned 150-mile trail that would loop down from Pennsylvania.

"We're not pushing to make it into an interstate highway or anything," said Mike Dreisbach, co-owner of the Savage River Lodge and president of Garrett Trails. But he said planners hope to extend a trail along the river or at least improve a short trail near Friendsville that follows an old rail bed.

"The more people that get to see it," he said of the river, "the more people will want to protect it."

Western Marylanders have chafed at wildlands in the past, noting that the state already owns a large chunk of land in Allegany and Garrett counties. Edwards, who represents the area, said wilderness areas generate little or no economic benefit for the region because access is limited to hikers for the most part and the lands are not available for commercial timbering or other revenue-generating activities.

"You would think the state would want to be a little more helpful in utilizing land they own in poor parts of the state instead of leaving them [alone]," Edwards said.

Purnell urged the state to help storm-battered Crisfield by allowing some amenities to be built on Janes Island. He'd like to start a ferry service to the island so more people would take advantage of its sandy beach on the Chesapeake Bay. He said a shelter, restrooms and a concession stand would help.

Wilson, the Department of Natural Resources' associate director for stew-



Thorny greenbrier bushes, above, and Virginia pines have overgrown much of the native vegetation at Soldiers Delight.



Soldiers Delight's rocky soil — with chromite, asbestos and other minerals in it — provides habitat for 40 rare plants and animals.

ardship, defended the restrictions on wildlands activities and development, but said the state would try to work with those raising questions.

Addressing complaints from mountain bikers, he said there are plenty of other places in the 475,000 acres of state parks, forests and other public lands where they can ride. Janes Island is surrounded by salt marsh, he noted, and the beach has a rare beetle — the Northeastern Beach tiger beetle — which argues against more intensive use there.

Wilson said the Youghiogheny is so special that the state intends to keep access there limited, whether it is designated as a wildland or not.

"Not every square inch of public land is going to be available," he said. "There are resources we are charged with protecting — old-growth forest, habitat for rare and threatened plants and animals, wetlands, high-quality streams."

The Department of Natural Resources has been holding public meetings on the wildlands proposal, which are expected to wrap up Thursday. Written comments submitted by Dec. 9 will be considered by the agency. Officials will decide after that which lands will be proposed to the General Assembly for wildlands designation.

Conservationists back the wildlands additions, noting that the system now constitutes less than 10 percent of state-owned land. They say that besides protecting rare plants and animals, wildlands provide opportunities to learn about nature.

To Ajax Eastman, one of the leaders over the decades of efforts to establish wildlands, they are "spiritual recharge areas."

"You talk about religions," she said. "People like cathedrals — I love wildlands. ... They lift my spirits."

For more on the wildlands and public meetings to discuss them, go to [news.maryland.gov/dnr/2013/09/27/](http://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2013/09/27/). [tim.wheeler@baltsun.com](mailto:tim.wheeler@baltsun.com)