

featured

Layoffs at IUP tops biggest stories of the year

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IUP students and faculty braved the weather conditions in October to protest the university's retrenchment plan.

Kylee Surike / The Indiana Gazette

While COVID-19 dominated our lives and, by default the news, for most of the year, there were other significant stories that impacted the lives of those in Indiana County in 2020. So, setting aside all things coronavirus, in traditional fashion The Indiana Gazette's reporters and editors recently voted on the five biggest local stories of the year. They follow, in order.

LAYOFFS AT IUP

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania notifies 74 faculty members with tenure or on the tenure track in October that they will be losing their jobs at the end of the academic year in June.

Those faculty members are among members of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties to learn that news in early December at five of the 14 Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions. Not all retrenched positions are full time, said university Executive Director for Media Relations Michelle Fryling. APSCUF represents some 5,000 faculty and coaches statewide.

IUP has experienced a 35 percent decline in enrollment in less than a decade. Enrollment this fall was reported at 10,067, down from a high of 15,668 in 2012-13.



WHITE'S WOODS

White's Woods is at the center of a dispute involving a forestry plan.
Michelle Raymond/ Indiana Gazette

A decade after a previous plan ran into a buzzsaw with a number of White Township residents, the township this year revisits what to do about what it considers a serious invasive and non-desirable plant issue throughout White's Woods.

The area is a 250-acre property nestled between College Lodge, Chevy Chase Heights and the north end of Indiana Borough. The Friends of White's Woods organization reformed this year to oppose the plan, asking a judge to issue an injunction to halt the work. The White Township

supervisors voted in April to look into logging operations on the property, and discussions with Friends of White's Woods and residents have been ongoing ever since.

TODD WALTERS

Todd Walters

A five-year court battle over the mental status of a man accused of fatally beating his mother in their Indiana home ends with his plea and sentencing in Indiana County Common Pleas Court.

Todd Walters, 41, pleaded no contest March 18 to a charge of third-degree homicide while mentally ill, and was immediately ordered to serve 15 to 40 years in prison. Walters beat to death his mother, retired Indiana University of Pennsylvania geography professor Ruth Shirey, 72, on Feb. 20, 2015, inside her Diamond Avenue home.

FATAL SHOOTING

Three people are jailed in October on multiple felony charges that they took part in the fatal shooting of a man and the robbery of four tenants at two homes on Wayne Avenue near the IUP campus.

Indiana Borough police charged Isabella Edmonds, 17, of White Township, a junior at Indiana Area High School, and Isaiah Moore, 20, in connection with the death of Jaedyn Wright, 20, of Pittsburgh. Delmar Chatman, 21, turned himself in not long after the shooting. The purported gunman, Terrion Gates, 18, of Johnstown, remains at large. Wright was majoring in communication media at IUP. Hearings for both Chatman and Edmonds are scheduled for January.

NEW OWNERS

The Indiana Gazette is sold to Sample Media Group after being in the same family for 130 years.

The company, which acquired the newspaper on July 31, has made some significant changes, including combining the Saturday and Sunday editions into a Weekend publication. The newspaper was launched in 1890 and stayed in the Ray/Donnelly family for several generations before being sold to the company run by George "Scoop" Sample, whose company is based in Huntingdon. The Gazette is now owned and operated by the same company that operates The Leader Times in Kittanning, The Daily Courier in Connellsville and The Blairsville Dispatch. Before the acquisition, the most recent president and publisher was Michael Donnelly, who took the helm following the deaths of his parents, Lucy Donnelly in 1993 and Joseph Donnelly in 2000.