



CAMDEN CITY NEWS

The Honorable Dana L. Redd
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Office of the Mayor
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Camden, New Jersey

Camden celebrates \$200,000 grant to restore derelict neighborhood



Standing in front of an abandoned and very heavily polluted Camden Labs building on the city's south side Monday afternoon, New Jersey officials including U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez celebrated a \$200,000 federal grant for neighborhood improvement.

The money comes from the Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfield Planning program, and the city will use it to focus on a clean-up strategy for dilapidated areas in the Mt. Ephraim area – already a part of the federal Choice Neighborhood program.

"These are legacies of failures of the past that now have to be borne by the present," said Menendez. "Look, New Jersey has a history replete with areas like this which have been successfully reclaimed. It's just going to take a lot of effort to do it."

Menendez indicated that based on the scale of the city's vision, full area revitalization could take at least five years.

U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross, also on hand Monday, said that for too long, the city has been talking about change. But with the Choice neighborhood program funding, and now the EPA money, it's finally happening.

"What you're seeing now is the state, the county, the city and federal all coming together because they all understand how important this is now," said Norcross.

In 2012, Camden was awarded a Choice Neighborhood planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to devise a citywide revitalization strategy, which was just submitted on Feb. 8.

If accepted by HUD, Camden could potentially qualify for a second Choice Neighborhood grant of more than \$30 million to implement its strategy.

Nando Micale, a principal designer with Wallace Roberts and Todd, helped develop Camden's Choice strategy. He said initial feedback on the plan found that significant contamination at the Camden Lab site would be a difficult short-term problem to overcome, but this new infusion of funding would go a long way to developing a solution.

"This is a major milestone of development, which is significant in that neighborhood particularly because of its proximity to public transportation," said Micale. "It moves the ball forward on figuring out remediation."

Camden Mayor Dana Redd, who also attended Monday's announcement, said that nearby Whitman Park is also heavily used, and that revitalizing the whole area might attract new business.

She also hoped the EPA money was a sign of larger federal aid to come.

"The [EPA] planning grant, we're hopeful, is a prelude to the implementation grant award," said Redd. "It's very important to the work that we're doing here in Camden to address blight and abandoned buildings but also to improve the quality of life for our residents."

Menendez said that with the EPA award, Camden was "primed for the Choice Neighborhood Grant."

"I will be advocating for their application when they make their final presentation," said Menendez. "On the federal level, I'm looking at a lot of different pots of potential resources once I see the city's full implementation."

Camden genetic research center gets \$14M NIH grant

The Coriell Institute for Medical Research in Camden announced it has won a \$14 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to advance the work of the institute, which maintains a diverse collection of samples from human genetic diseases.

The five-year "biobanking" grant from the NIH National Institute of General Medical Sciences supports the NIGMS Human Genetic Cell Repository at Coriell, a collection of more than 11,300 cell lines and 5,700 DNA samples representing a variety of diseases, chromosomal abnormalities and healthy individuals.

"The advent of faster, better and cheaper DNA sequencing is ushering in an exciting genomic era in which biobanks are more essential than ever before," said Dr. Michael Christman, chief

executive of the Coriell Institute. “Biobanks with high-quality, characterized specimens are helping scientists better understand many human diseases. This collection is a powerful resource for scientists studying rare genetic diseases, like progeria and Duchenne muscular dystrophy, as well as other disorders such as metabolic diseases and hereditary cancers.”

Referenced by nearly 6,000 peer-reviewed scientific publications, the NIGMS Human Genetic Cell Repository at Coriell includes samples accounting for 890 unique diseases. Within the last year, scientists at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the United States Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases and Harvard Medical School cited biospecimens from the NIGMS Repository while examining a prospective connection between the Ebola virus disease and Niemann-Pick Type C, an extremely rare genetic disorder.

“Coriell harnesses more than six decades of biobanking expertise and facilitates numerous research studies at medical and academic centers around the world through our various research services,” said Andrew MacKnight, Coriell’s chief strategy officer. “Coriell’s business is growing substantially as infrastructure, capacity and capability make it the go-to place for genotyping, cytogenomics, molecular biology, cell culturing and bio bank services.”

Founded in 1953, Coriell Institute for Medical Research is an independent, nonprofit biomedical research center. A pioneer in genomics, Coriell is examining the utility of genetic information in clinical care through the Coriell Personalized Medicine Collaborative, or CPMC, research study.

Christie's Camden tax breaks reward political insiders

Influential Democrat George Norcross, chairman of the board of Cooper University Hospital, and Gov. Chris Christie chat following a groundbreaking event for the Cooper Cancer Institute in 2012. Cooper University Hospital will receive \$40 million from the Economic Development Authority, mostly for returning 353 employees that it previously moved to the suburbs

CAMDEN — During Chris Christie's first term as governor, he made tax incentives a cornerstone of a promised "New Jersey Comeback" that would lure new businesses to the state.

With New Jersey's job growth still poor at the beginning of his second term last year, the governor doubled down.

New Jersey's Economic Development Authority has handed out more than \$2 billion in tax breaks since 2014, more than the total amount issued during the decade before Christie took office.

The aid has gone disproportionately to businesses in Camden, a city of 77,000 that ranks among the nation's most impoverished. Development projects in the city received \$630 million in future tax breaks last year. Because of those grants, Christie said in his State of the State address, Camden is "seeing a new tomorrow."



As Christie considers a Republican presidential campaign, the prospect of a renaissance for heavily Democratic Camden would offer a useful counterpoint to New Jersey's lackluster economic performance. But a closer look at the grants — which will amount to nearly four times Camden's annual budget — indicates they may do less for the city than advertised and more for Christie's political alliances. The state law that set up the more generous grant program was adopted in 2013 by a Democrat-controlled legislature and signed by Christie.

Most of the jobs coming to Camden are filled by existing employees who currently work just a few miles away. One tax break exceeded the value of the company that received it. Another went to a developer who owes New Jersey millions of dollars in long-unpaid loans. And nearly all the recipients boast notable political connections — either through an affiliation with a prominent southern New Jersey power broker, Democrat George Norcross, or through donations to Christie and the Republican Governors Association during his tenure overseeing it.

New Jersey's Camden incentives raise questions about his administration's stewardship of New Jersey's finances — and whether Christie's claims of revitalizing Camden will resonate with Republican voters opposed to corporate welfare. For conservatives, incentives buck the free market and could undermine New Jersey's prospects for legitimate tax reform.

"Giving huge subsidies to companies moving from the suburbs of Camden to the city is just off-the-charts crazy territory," said Michael Doherty, a Republican state senator. "If you're a high-profile individual, you can get the EDA to make decisions to your benefit."

Christie spokesman Kevin Roberts said in an email that critics of the tax breaks "offer no alternative plans for creating jobs, growing the economy or renewing our urban centers."



Subaru is moving from Cherry Hill to Camden with the aid of some generous tax breaks.

Driving the 4 miles from Subaru's current U.S. headquarters in Cherry Hill to its new home in nearby Camden takes eight minutes. Tax credits granted by the state of New Jersey will make that trip worth nearly \$118 million for the company.

Subaru's short trip is not an exception: Most of New Jersey's incentives for Camden have gone to projects shifting existing employees from nearby locations. Holtec International Inc., a manufacturer of nuclear reactor components, is receiving \$260 million for relocating 160 nearby jobs and adding 235 more. Cooper University Hospital will receive \$40 million, mostly for returning 353 employees that it previously moved to the suburbs. The Philadelphia 76ers will receive \$82 million for bringing 250 jobs across the Delaware River, just a few thousand feet from the Pennsylvania state line.

The low bar for incentive payouts is justified due to Camden's dire circumstances, said Timothy Lizura, president of the Economic Development Authority.

A top economist at Rutgers University's Center for Urban Policy Research, Nancy Mantell, said: "It always concerns me that you're just moving people around, not creating anything particularly new to the regional economy. And this is not going to help the places the companies left."



The 76ers told the AP last year that the team expects to sell a portion of its \$82 million in New Jersey incentives — the NBA franchise doesn't make enough money to use them all. (Photo: File photo)

The scale of New Jersey's generosity has bolstered one profitable new industry: the resale of tax incentives by businesses that can't use them.

Economic development incentives are transferrable under state law. When New Jersey awards tax breaks in excess of a company's tax bill, the recipient can sell them to an unrelated corporation looking to pay less in taxes. The 76ers, for example, told the AP last year that the

team expects to sell a portion of its \$82 million in New Jersey incentives — the NBA franchise doesn't make enough money to use them all.

\$82M grant approved for 76ers facility in Camden

In at least one case, the value of the tax credits outstripped the value of the business that received them. In November, a Maryland medical testing startup, DioGenix Inc., received a \$7.9 million tax incentive to relocate to Camden. Two months later, DioGenix sold itself for between \$8 million and \$10.9 million to a buyer that announced it would resell the tax breaks for at least \$6 million.

Lizura said he was unaware of DioGenix's upcoming sale when it received its state tax credits but called the sale evidence of success. The incentives are awarded only when companies meet their job and investment obligations.

"If a capitalized company comes in and buys a startup company and they live up to the approval we had, how great is that?" he said.

DioGenix's buyer, Amarantus Biosciences Holdings Inc. of San Francisco, has been unprofitable since its founding in 2008, has less than \$2 million in assets and warned investors in November that there is substantial doubt about whether it can stay in business, according to Securities and Exchange Commission filings. The company did not return phone calls from The Associated Press over several weeks.



New Jersey Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney, D-West Deptford., right, gestures as New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, left, talks with influential Democrat George E. Norcross III, at a 2014 groundbreaking ceremony in Camden, for the KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy school that Norcross' family foundation is funding. Many of Christie's recent tax involve projects connected to Norcross, the Democratic power broker. (Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE)

Many of the tax breaks involve projects connected to Norcross, the Democratic power broker, whose tacit support for Christie is widely viewed as vital to his 2009 victory over then-Gov. Jon Corzine.

Norcross is on the board of Holtec, the nuclear equipment manufacturer. He also sits on the board of Cooper Hospital, which both received a grant and is the indirect beneficiary of two more — one to build housing for its students and the other to DioGenix, which the state authority said moved to Camden to work with Cooper.

[EDA approves \\$260M for Camden proposal](#)

Some recipients also have business relationships with Norcross and his family. Over the last three years, Cooper has paid more than \$1 million to Norcross's insurance brokerage and more than \$2 million to a law firm partially owned by his brother Philip, though the hospital's financial statements said those relationships predate George Norcross's tenure on its board. Along with his firm's work for Cooper, Philip Norcross's firm represented the Philadelphia 76ers for the negotiation of the team's \$82 million in tax credits.

Dan Fee, a spokesman for Norcross, said in an email that there's nothing wrong with his interest. "He's been an active and regular cheerleader for companies to relocate to the city, so it's not a surprise that he has relationships with many of their leaders — he's been personally advocating for them to move to Camden."

Lizura said it's the board, not Norcross, who decides what deals get made.

"Each approval stands on its own merits," said Lizura, the head of the Economic Development Authority, "The more cheerleaders, the better."

A political committee supported by employees of Lockheed Martin, another recipient of a Camden grant, pumped more than \$100,000 into the governors' group during Gov. Christie's tenure. (Photo: Courier-Post file)

As money has flowed to development in Camden, some trickled back into politics. The lead investor in the 76ers, Joshua Harris, donated \$50,000 to the Republican Governors Association during the time Christie ran it, and other part-owners of the team have given tens of thousands more to the group or to Christie's campaigns. A political committee supported by employees of Lockheed Martin, another recipient of a Camden grant, pumped more than \$100,000 into the governors' group during Christie's tenure.

No donations are as notable as those from Pennsylvania developer Israel Roizman. Last February, the state awarded incentives worth \$13.4 million to Broadway Associates 2010 LLC, a real estate development company he controls. The project in question: refurbishing 175 low-income housing units that deteriorated under two decades of Roizman's ownership.

Roizman received the tax breaks despite having failed to repay a state loan on the nearby Camden Townhouses development. A company he owns owes New Jersey's Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency a total of \$6.2 million in unpaid principal and interest on a loan that has been overdue by several years.

The agency does not consider the loan in default because it is still hoping to work out a repayment deal and does not believe it would gain much by foreclosing, spokeswoman Tammori Petty said.



Gov. Chris Christie greets residents at a gathering in Camden last September. Christie has made frequent stops in the high-crime city, stressing his efforts working with local Democratic lawmakers, including Mayor Dana Redd. Under Christie, New Jersey has paid more than \$2 billion in state tax breaks since 2014, often to corporations with notable political connections and at least one developer who already owed millions of dollars in unpaid state loans, an Associated Press review found.

Roizman is one of the region's top political donors, giving as much as \$100,000 each year and raising six-figure sums for national candidates. Though his contributions have overwhelmingly supported Democratic entities — Roizman was a campaign bundler for President Barack Obama — he cut a \$10,000 check to the Christie-led governors association in late 2013, just before Christie became chairman and a few months before receiving his tax breaks. Last year, when Christie was at the helm, he gave the group the same amount.

The AP asked Roizman how he received additional money from New Jersey despite owing the state so much money.

"Why don't you call the state and let them explain that to you?" Roizman said, and then hung up.

New Jersey housing officials said that near the end of its multi-decade loan to the Roizman Camden development, the property ceased being profitable. Because Roizman did not personally guarantee the loans, the state has no recourse against the developer himself

Sicklerville teen, Mekhi McMillan, reported missing in Camden



Mekhi McMillan

CAMDEN -- Police are looking for a missing Sicklerville teen who may be in Camden.

Mekhi McMillan, 15, was reported missing from his home on the 100 block of Summer Lea Drive in Sickerville on Monday, according to authorities.

He is described as black, 5 feet 7 inches tall, 158 pounds, with brown eyes and black hair. He may be wearing a blue or white shirt, khaki pants and red, black and green sneakers.

Mekhi has been reported missing once before and is known to frequent North Camden, police said.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Camden County Police Department tip line at 856-757-7042.

Camden Man, Already Imprisoned, Pleads Guilty To Slaying another Man



A Camden man already serving 47 years in prison for killing a man during a carjacking inside an Atlantic City casino parking garage has pleaded guilty in a separate double murder case.

Phillip Byrd pleaded guilty Monday to conspiracy to commit murder in the deaths of Antwan Brown and Travon Kinard in 2011.

- [Academy Road Closed After Apt. Building Blaze](#)

Prosecutors say he was linked to that crime by a cellphone recovered at the scene. Raheem Simmons pleaded guilty to aggravated manslaughter in March 2014 and admitted shooting the two men.

Byrd and Simmons pleaded guilty in 2013 to fatally shooting a man and wounding a woman during a carjacking at the Trump Taj Mahal in September 2011. Simmons received a 30-year prison term in that slaying.

State rejects applications to transform two Camden public schools into charter schools



| [South Jersey Times](#)

CAMDEN -- The New Jersey Department of Education last week rejected a pair of applications to convert two Camden public schools into **charter schools**.

The applications had been submitted by the schools' principals. Timothy Jenkins, principal of MetEast High School, had been seeking to transform the facility into the proposed MetEast Charter High School. Meanwhile, Davida Coe-Brockington, principal of the Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy, was proposing turning the school into the Camden Arts Charter School.

In both cases, state education officials were unimpressed by what they found in the applications.

"The application did not demonstrate the founders have the organizational capacity to convert from a functioning public school to charter status," read a letter to Jenkins from Department of Education Commissioner David Hespe. "The proposed program was heavily reliant on developing community partnerships and creating a comprehensive internship program for students.

"There was little evidence in the application that the founders have the support of the community to implement this program that is vital to the educational program."

Hespe had similar concerns about Coe-Brockington's proposal.

"The application did not provide sufficient evidence that t could effectively implement an arts program in a charter school," read the letter. "The application was poorly written and did not demonstrate the founders have the organizational capacity to convert from a functioning public school to charter status."

Both letters were released to the principals last Friday. Neither Coe-Brockinton nor Jenkins responded to a request for comment Tuesday.

Brendon Lowe, a spokesman for the city school district, released a statement this week saying officials "respect" the state's decision.

"We respect the NJ DOE's decision, just as we respect our principals' desire to increase their autonomy," said Lowe. "Principals Jenkins and Coe-Brockington are talented educators, and we will continue to work with them and all of our school leaders to make sure they are best positioned to help their students and staff is successful."

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[Larry J. Powell Jr.](#)

Larry J. Powell Jr. AGE: 42 • Camden On March 14, 2015. Age 42. Of Camden. Loving son of Patricia Blair and the late Larry J. Powell. Loving brother of Joseph Blair, Charles Blair (Donna) and Paula Messineo. Beloved uncle of Amy, Nicole,...

[Robert Tatum \(1935 - 2015\)](#)



Robert Tatum AGE: 79 • Camden Robert Lee Tatum, Sr. affectionately known as "Bobby" departed this life on Saturday, March 14, 2015. He was born April 21, 1935 in Camden, NJ to Hazel Isler. He was the oldest child of 11. Bobby was educated...

Weather: Camden, NJ

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Today

High **44** | Low **30** °F

20% Chance of Precip.

JET