

12/24/2010

ON CAMPUS BILL ARSENAULT

Delaware finds room for Acker

The 6-foot-3 center is averaging 7.7 points and leads team in blocked shots.

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Sarah Acker is finding her way with the University of Delaware women's basketball team.

Acker (Nanticoke) is a 6-foot-3 junior center. She began her career at St. Joseph's, but transferred to Delaware and is slowly becoming a key performer for the Blue Hens, who are 6-2 after a 64-55 loss to Penn State on Sunday night. Acker has played in six games and started two. She's averaging 7.7 points and 7.1 rebounds and leads the team in blocked shots with 14. She also has 10 steals and five saves. Against Penn State, she started and played 30 minutes and had six points, six rebounds, three assists and two steals.

"Sarah has been a great addition to our team," coach Tina Martin said. "She is a strong post player who can score on the blocks down low. She has very good hands and she has a physical presence for our team."

After playing in 31 games and starting 30 as a freshman at St. Joseph's, she didn't play last season.

"Sarah was away from basketball for over a year and she is currently working herself into shape," Martin said. "She has a nose for the basketball and has helped us tremendously with our rebounding. We are very excited to have her in our program and we are looking for great things from her in the future."

Acker showed her potential playing with St. Joseph's in the tough Atlantic-10. She averaged 11.9 points, 8.7 rebounds and had 46 blocked shots and was named to the league's All-Rookie Team and was named Big 5 Rookie of the Year. At Nanticoke, she averaged 22 points, 18 rebounds and 10 blocked shots in her senior year and helped the Trojans posted a two-year mark of 58-2.

Byorick seeing action

Former Nanticoke standout Aly Byorick played at Xavier, but transferred to Lehigh after one season. After sitting out a season for the transfer, she missed all of last season with an injury.

Now, Byorick is back on the court.

This season, the 6-foot guard has played in 12 games and started nine for Lehigh, which has won six consecutive games on the way to a 7-5 overall record.

Byorick, averaging 21.5 minutes of action a game, is averaging 4.6 points with 17 rebounds, seven steals, five assists and three blocks. She's hit 16 of her 46 three-point attempts.

Byorick was a two-time all-state performer at Nanticoke and left as the all-time career scorer with 2,271 points.

10/23/2010

Clinton's local visit to boost Kanjorski

The former president will appear Tuesday for the area congressman in Nanticoke.

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As U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski heads into the final stretch of his latest re-election campaign, he is getting some help from old friend, former President Bill Clinton.

The 42nd president will visit Kanjorski's hometown Tuesday afternoon to host a campaign rally in the Greater Nanticoke Area High School's gym.

"I am extremely honored to have President Clinton here to campaign for me again this year, and I look forward to bringing him to my hometown," Kanjorski said. "Nanticoke is where I grew up, where I began my career in public service, and where I still live with my wife, Nancy. I look forward to having Northeastern Pennsylvanians from across the region join President Clinton and me in Nanticoke."

This will be the first time this year Clinton has campaigned for Kanjorski.

Students from all Greater Nanticoke Area Schools will be released early on Tuesday as final preparations are made for Clinton's visit, Superintendent Tony Perrone said Friday.

Elementary students will be released at 12:30 p.m. and junior high and high school students will be dismissed at 11:30 a.m. Classes will be held as normal on Monday and Wednesday.

Perrone said he considers it an honor to have Clinton visit Nanticoke and the school.

"He was a statesman. A real true statesman. I think it is a wonderful thing for the community," he said. Perrone hopes students will come back to the school to hear Clinton speak.

“I would rather see the kids come there than anybody else. They would learn what democracy is and learn the good and bad things. They see all the ads on television and everything is so negative. I would like them to see something positive,” Perrone said.

Tickets are not needed for the event. Doors will open at 4 p.m. and the public is encouraged to start lining up at 1 p.m. Tuesday.

Clinton rallied voters for Kanjorski in November 2008 at Wilkes University.

It could not be determined if other local or state Democratic candidates will attend the rally.

The campaign staffs of Democratic governor candidate Dan Onorato and U.S. Senate candidate Joe Sestak are reviewing schedules

10/22/2010

Clinton to campaign in area for Kanjorski

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Former President Bill Clinton will be campaigning in Nanticoke on Tuesday afternoon on behalf of U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, the longtime lawmaker said Thursday night during the Luzerne County Democratic Committee meeting at The Woodlands.

According to two party sources, Kanjorski told county Democratic leaders that the former president would be in the congressman's home town trying to help him get re-elected.

One source said Clinton and Kanjorski would appear at Greater Nanticoke Area High School at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The 13-term Democrat faces Republican challenger Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta in the general election on Nov. 2. This election is the third time Kanjorski and Barletta are battling for the 11th Congressional District seat.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Dan Onorato may also attend the rally, one of his staffers said.

Kanjorski spokesman Ed Mitchell did not return calls for comment.

Clinton campaigned for Kanjorski at Wilkes University in November 2008.

10/15/2010

GNA, teachers OK pact with no raises for a year

A refinancing will bring a saving of \$300,000, the School Board announces.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

Officials from the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board announced at Thursday night's meeting the district and the teachers union agreed on a new three-year pact this week.

Board members voted unanimously to accept the deal and took time to thank the union for its cooperation during the negotiation process they described as “professional.”

Board member and contract negotiator Robert Ranieri said the representatives from the teachers union came to the table with a “good attitude” and consideration for “the tough economic time.”

“They knew what a hard time taxpayers are having and they buckled down,” he said.

According to Ranieri, the teachers accepted a zero-percent raise in the first year of the three-year contract, a 1.35-percent hike in year two and a 1.45-percent hike in year three.

The contract's effective dates are from September 2010 to August 2013.

“This was the easiest settled contract,” he said. “There was professionalism on both sides,” he added.

In other votes, the board agreed to authorize a refinancing measure through the PNC Bank, which will reduce district debt by over \$300,000. District business manager Al Melone said the representatives from PNC have been helpful in identifying low-interest reinvestment opportunities in the current bond market.

The district has done a good job of making its debt payments on time, which helped improve its overall municipal bond rating from A to A-plus in the market, he said.

Board Vice President Ken James lauded the continuing success of the girls softball team.

He recommended the district and the taxpayers foot the bill for the team rings. He added the district should establish a policy of purchasing awards for any athletic, academic, or art student or team that achieves a state championship.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone announced the school conducted several drills in the last few weeks and he was pleased with the outcomes for student safety.

The school conducted a bomb scare and everything “worked perfectly,” he said. All of the students were out of the

buildings in 10 minutes, he added.

The school also had drug sniffing dogs scour two school buildings and they were found to be clean. He congratulated the parents and the students for their cooperation.

10/15/2010

Police conduct planned sweep at Nanticoke schools

Citizens Voice

Police from Nanticoke and Kingston conducted a pre-planned sweep with K-9s through Greater Nanticoke Area schools on Thursday morning, Nanticoke police said.

No illegal drugs or weapons were found, Nanticoke police Detective Capt. William Shultz said.

The random search came less than a week after a bomb threat was made at the school, though it was not connected, Shultz said.

Shultz said Nanticoke police's K-9 unit recently assisted police on the west side with a sweep at Wyoming Valley West schools, and a similar sweep was pre-planned for Thursday in Nanticoke.

Students were not allowed to leave classrooms during the search, which occurred between 8 and 9:30 a.m., Shultz said

10/9/2010

Schools searched after threat

Anonymous call prompted evacuation and search of district buildings.

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Police canines searched Greater Nanticoke Area school buildings on Friday after an anonymous caller phoned 911 issuing a bomb threat.

Police officer Mike Roke said the threat was "non-specific" that did not target a particular school building.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone said the phone call was made to 911 at 7:05 a.m. with the caller saying a bomb will detonate at 9 a.m.

As a precaution, the high school, education center, elementary center and Kennedy elementary on Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke, and the K.M. Smith elementary building on Robert Street, Newport Township, were evacuated.

High school students reported to their first period classes before they were evacuated to the football stadium, Perrone said.

He said elementary and middle school students had not arrived for the day and were dropped off at the stadium.

"We searched the stadium before we moved the kids there," Perrone said.

Roke said it appeared the caller used a dead cell phone.

"The Luzerne County Sheriff's Department and the county EMA brought in their canines and swept the buildings, finding nothing," Roke said.

Faculty members and grandparents arriving for the elementary school's Grandparents' Day in the high school's auditorium waited outside as canines and police searched the buildings.

The all-clear was given around 9:35 a.m., allowing the schools to reopen.

"Police and the canines did a fantastic, tremendous job," Perrone said.

The Nanticoke Fire Department had several vehicles on the school campus.

Perrone said several parents arrived at the high school with concerns.

"Parents did arrive because they were worried. They did not interfere and did not fight with us. Everybody worked together," Perrone noted.

Roke said a copy of the 911 call will be analyzed to determine who issued the threat.

10/8/2010

Posted: 9:26 AM

Updated: 2:23 PM

Students, faculty return to school after "non-specific" threat at Greater Nanticoke Area

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Students and faculty members returned to school buildings after what police described as a "non-specific" type of threat was phoned to Luzerne County 911 Friday morning.

School buildings in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District were evacuated just after 8 a.m. when an unknown person called 911 claiming there was a threat in the district.

Officer Mike Roke said the threat was "non-specific" with the caller failing to identify the type of threat or in which school building.

As a precaution, all school buildings in the school district were evacuated, Roke said.

"The Luzerne County Sheriff's Department and the county EMA brought in their canines and swept the buildings finding nothing," Roke said.

Students and faculty members stood outside the school buildings as police and canines searched the high school, middle school, elementary school in Nanticoke, and an elementary school in Newport Township.

Roke said it appeared the caller used a "dead cell phone" to call in the threat.

The Nanticoke Fire Department was at the schools as a precaution.

Students and faculty members were permitted back inside the schools around 9:40 a.m.

"We're going to get the tapes from 911 and see what we could find," Roke said.

10/8/2010

Officials' sharp words ring out over Nanticoke's financial problems The city's police will soon have a cooperative agreement with Warrior Run.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

Financial woes sparked boisterous exchanges at Wednesday night's regular monthly meeting of the Nanticoke City Council. At one point Mayor Joseph Dougherty slammed the gavel to end an argument with city treasurer Al Wytoshek, who accused him of not providing taxpayers with a plan for improving the city's streets.

Wytoshek cornered the mayor, asking him if a specific plan is available for the voters that will tell them what road will be paved next year.

The mayor said the city does not have enough money to make all the necessary road repairs.

"If we had enough money to pave every street we damn well would," the mayor exclaimed.

Wytoshek said the mayor was elected to find ways to get the work done. "That's your job…that's why you were elected," he said.

The mayor accused Wytoshek of "grandstanding."

As part of the city's financial strategy officials were supposed to vote to amend the Act 47 Recovery Plan adopted in January of 2007, but decided to table the vote until more review of the city's finances can be done. The amendments being considered include an increase in real estate millage and an increase in the earned income tax from one to two percent.

Council member James Litchkofski said the city's current expenses require more intense scrutiny. He pointed to the negative effects on city investments because of the recent stock market downturns and high costs associated with trying to "emerge from Act 47."

He fears the city's police and fire departments could end up being reduced to unsafe levels, he said. "I don't want to live without police and fire protection for my family and neighbors," he said.

Litchkofski stressed taxpayers "be patient, stay informed and be involved." If they don't like the way the city is being run, they could vote out the officials.

Council member Jon Metta added the city can't spend what it doesn't have.

"That's how we got in trouble," he said. He added the council will work to "keep a sharp pencil.

In other business, the city adopted the international building codes for residential properties, energy conservation, fire codes, plumbing codes, and other mechanical codes. They also authorized the city solicitor to petition the Court of Common Pleas to allow the increase in the earned income tax from one to two percent.

They announced in January the Nanticoke Police Department will establish a cooperative agreement with the borough of Warrior Run, which will become effective in January.

Residents of the city can pick up new recycling containers on a first-come first-served basis on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. as part of a recycling grant from the state, the mayor said.

10/8/2010

Verdict shocks Patton, Morgan families

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Amy Hynoski Patton said Wednesday's verdict in the case against a former civilian contractor was 'just like we are reliving the nightmare of Nov. 19, 2009 all over again.'

The families of local Navy reservists Brian Patton and Dave Morgan say the acquittal of a civilian contractor in a 2009 head-on crash in Kuwait that killed Patton and severely wounded Morgan came as "a complete and total shock." After a three-day trial in federal court in Norfolk, Va., a jury on Wednesday found Morgan Hanks not guilty of involuntary manslaughter and assault.

"The Morgans and I both discussed this and it comes as a complete and total shock. We were both optimistic as to the outcome. It feels just like we are reliving the nightmare of Nov. 19, 2009 all over again," Patton's widow Amy Hynoski Patton said Thursday.

U.S. prosecutors argued at trial that Hanks, 25, of Newport News, Va. was illegally speeding down a two-lane road in a Kuwaiti desert on Nov. 19, 2009, when he attempted to pass an eight-vehicle military convoy at the crest of a hill, crashing head-on into the military police vehicle Patton was driving. Patton, 37, of Nanticoke, was killed in the wreck, while Morgan, 35, of Wilkes-Barre, suffered a permanent brain injury.

While it was obvious Hanks was responsible for the crash, the jury apparently didn't feel his actions were criminal in nature, said Wilkes-Barre attorney William Anzalone, who represents the Patton family in a civil case filed against Hanks and his employer.

Anzalone attended the three day-trial with Hynoski Patton, Patton's brother, Robert, and Morgan's parents. A Philadelphia law firm has filed a civil lawsuit against Hanks on behalf of the Morgans.

"Obviously, the families are disappointed, but they realize this was the criminal justice system and the burden of proof is high. These were serious charges. The U.S. government put on a very good case. The jurors realized Hanks was clearly responsible, but it didn't rise to the level of criminal conduct. It was difficult to prove it was intentional."

Anzalone noted several jurors cried after delivering the verdict.

The road in the Kuwaiti desert where the crash occurred was two lanes, one for each direction of travel. It's the only paved road that links Kuwait to southern Iraq. It had a posted 45 mph speed limit.

Anzalone said government crash experts estimated Hanks was traveling 77 to 90 mph. A defense expert said he couldn't give a specific determination, but estimated Hanks was traveling 30 percent faster than Patton, Anzalone said.

Witnesses testified that while it technically is a no-passing zone, passing is very common on the road, Anzalone noted.

Military members in the convoy testified several vehicles had passed the convoy prior to Hanks' attempt, Anzalone said.

Anzalone said the civil cases against Hanks and his employer, Combat Support Associates, will now be aggressively pursued with attorneys seeking monetary damages for the families. The burden of proof will be less, he said.

"The civil arena is entirely different," Anzalone said.

10/7/2010

Nanticoke council balks at accepting recovery changes

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Council opted Wednesday to delay a vote to accept changes to the city's financial recovery plan in order to get more accurate information.

Councilman James Litchkofski said all the city's expenses might not have been included in a recovery plan amendment drawn up by the city's consultant, Pennsylvania Economy League, and with factors such as the stock market and its effect on municipal pensions, city officials don't want to jump into accepting the amended plan.

Nanticoke was declared Act 47, or financially distressed, by the state on May 25, 2006, and council adopted the recovery plan on Jan. 29, 2007. The state requires the plan to be updated if the city experiences a significant change in circumstances - which it has, PEL Executive Director Gerald Cross said.

The amendment contains a real estate tax increase, but its size is up in the air.

The distressed designation allowed Nanticoke to raise the earned income tax to 1.5 percent, but unless voters adopt a home-rule charter, it will have to go back to the state's limit of 0.5 percent when the city gets out of Act 47.

According to the recovery plan, that would mean raising real estate tax from 1.457 mills in 2010 to 6.364 mills in 2013 to make up the difference. If voters choose home rule, the real estate tax will still have to go up to cover expenses, although not as much: from 1.457 mills in 2010 to 2.67 mills in 2013, the target year for emerging from Act 47.

"There's no good side to this equation. If we go home rule, we get killed. If we don't go home rule, we get killed," resident Michael Stachowiak said.

Litchkofski stressed that it will not just be members of council making decisions about the city's future: ultimately it will be up to residents to determine what kind of government they want.

Home-rule study committee member Linda Prushinski said the first formal hearing will be held Tuesday, Oct. 12, at 7 p.m. to get testimony from past and present council members. The public hearing will be in city hall. In other business, Solicitor William Finnegan said the agreement for Nanticoke to provide full-time police service to neighboring Warrior Run is drawn up and needs the borough's approval. The municipalities forged a verbal agreement in July for Warrior Run to disband its police force, which has four part-time officers, and have Nanticoke, which has 13 full-time officers, take over. And Nanticoke's police force remains at 13, despite the retirement of Kevin Grevera: Dougherty swore in new officer Chad Southern of Wilkes-Barre and promoted Detective Robert Lehman to Grevera's position as captain of detectives.

10/4/2010

Nanticoke's move from distressed status could be costly

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Nanticoke could shed its distressed status by 2013 and return to financial health but it might come at the cost of a big tax increase.

Pennsylvania Economy League, the city's financial recovery coordinator, prepared an update for the city's recovery plan that will be up for public hearing Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. in city hall.

The new plan reflects the success the city has had since being declared Act 47, or financially distressed, by the state in May 2006, according to Joe Boyle of the Pennsylvania Economy League.

"The city has made terrific progress. Council and the administration have done a great deal, and the plan reflects that," he said.

But under the new plan, will residents' taxes go up?

"The answer to that is, I don't know. It depends on what council decides to do," Boyle said.

The state limits municipalities to 0.5 percent earned income tax. Being declared Act 47 allowed Nanticoke to raise it an additional 1 percent, to 1.5 percent. However, when the city no longer has Act 47 designation, the ability to raise the earned income tax goes away.

The income tax revenue is very important: without the approximately \$1.3 million extra, the city couldn't operate, Boyle said.

An option that would allow the city to keep the higher income tax is home rule, which is currently being explored by a study commission elected in May.

If Nanticoke doesn't go home rule, Boyle said the only other way the city can raise revenue is through property tax. Currently the city levies 1.457 mills of real estate tax. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Without the 1.5 percent earned income tax, the city would have to raise real estate taxes to 6.364 mills - 337 percent.

According to the recovery plan, regardless of whether Nanticoke goes home rule or not, its expenses will increase from \$3.97 million in 2010 to \$4.33 million in 2013. To make up the difference, the city will have to raise real estate taxes by 83 percent anyway, going from 1.457 mills in 2010 to 2.67 mills in 2013.

Boyle said in the recovery plan, the police, fire and road departments were kept at levels to provide services people expect. The plan states that there are no significant alternatives to real estate millage increases to cover expenses, unless Nanticoke residents and officials "are willing to restructure and substantially reduce the City's workforce."

Council and residents will have to make some choices about what services they want and how to pay for them, but the plan gives them some options, Boyle said.

"It will be their decision as to how they want to pursue this," he said.

9/26/2010

Longest-serving Greater Nanticoke Area board member dies

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Greater Nanticoke Area School Board member Sylvia Mizdail died early Saturday morning after battling an illness. Mizdail served many roles during her nearly 30 years on the school board – board president, Luzerne Intermediate Unit representative, board secretary and board member. She served as the board's president from 1993 to 2003.

District Superintendent Tony Perrone said Mizdail was the district's longest-serving board member.

Yet district officials and community members said she will be remembered most for her love of the district's children.

"I feel a good school board member has everything to give and nothing to want. That's when you do the best for the kids," Mizdail said in a December 2003 story when she was school board president.

Perrone said he was informed of Mizdail's passing early Saturday morning. She began serving on the board years after both of her children, Brenda and John, graduated from the district. Perrone said when Mizdail was out of town she always called to get an update on district activities and issues. He recalled he talked to her just a couple of weeks ago as she was staying with her daughter near Philadelphia. A board member since 1982, Mizdail helped steer the district through its toughest times in the 1990s when the district was facing bankruptcy, turbulent times with the teachers union and the construction of the district's Educational Center. "She loved the chorus and the band. In fact she went to every play there was and every concert there was," Perrone said. It is too early to tell if the school board will name anything in Mizdail's honor. Perrone said that has to be the board's decision, but he believes she will always be remembered for her dedication. "I think her name is going to live because of all the work she did," Perrone said. Board member Tony Prushinski said Mizdail's support and encouragement was part of the reason he ran for a seat on the board in 2007. He recalled Mizdail telling him that politics were not always a bad thing. "Sylvia said politics could be great thing if it is done the proper way," Prushinski said. Mizdail received 2,034 votes in her last election, November 2009, returning her for yet another term to serve the district, students and parents.

9/17/2010

Nanticoke will vote on financial amendment

Times Leader

City Council discussed several financial issues Wednesday, and council members confirmed the first of two votes on an amendment to the provisions of the city's Act 47 distressed city status will take place during a meeting starting at 7 p.m. Oct. 6.

A public hearing on the amendment will be take place that same day at 6:30 p.m. A final vote will be taken at the Oct. 20 regular council meeting at 7 p.m.

The amendment relates to Nanticoke's 1.5 percent earned income tax rate and the upcoming home rule ballot measure. The amendment would allow the EIT to remain at 1.5 percent while the city's home rule study commission completes its deliberations and to transition down to .5 percent by 2013 if voters deny home rule.

An elected commission is currently studying the way the city government operates and might eventually decide to create a home rule charter for city voters to consider.

If home rule passes, then the city would have more freedom to establish its own EIT rate.

Council member Jim Litchkofski said that regardless of the eventual outcome of the amendment and home rule votes, "we will have to make some very difficult decisions in the future."

Litchkofski said it has become common knowledge the city would either have to reduce staff, cut services, raise taxes or employ some combination of the three in order to stay afloat.

The council also directed City Financial Director Pam Heard to apply for a SAFER grant in order to hire two new firefighters.

The federally funded grant administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency would fund the hiring and salary for two new firefighters over the period of two years.

If the city chose to keep the firefighters on staff after that period, it would be responsible for their compensation.

9/15/2010

\$12.8 M in slots money awarded for county projects

By Robert Swift, Harrisburg Bureau Chief

Published: September 15, 2010 - Citizens' Voice

HARRISBURG – A state authority today awarded \$12.8 million representing the local share of slots revenue from Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs to help pay for 17 municipal improvement and development projects in Luzerne County.

The projects approved by the Commonwealth Financing Authority range from the restoration of the former Sterling Hotel and former First National Bank Building, both in Wilkes-Barre, to a parking decks for a new intermodal transit center for Hazleton.

The authority considered 76 applications for the local slots share for fiscal 2009-10 before deciding on the 17 projects.

The slots share is being distributed on a wider geographic basis in Luzerne County as a result of provisions in the state law that legalized table games at the slots casinos.

This system is designed to give all municipalities in Luzerne an equal shot at getting a share of revenue and advance projects with a countywide impact.

It replaces a system in place for several years where municipalities contiguous to the casino in Plains Twp. received priority consideration for funding.

Some of the projects approved are receiving funding over several years.

The projects include:

- \$2.4 million to continue highway improvements in Jenkins and Pittston Twps.
- **\$500,000 for the culinary institute at Luzerne County Community College in Nanticoke.**
- \$500,000 to continue the Pittston Riverfront redevelopment project
- \$1 million to continue the East Side Landfill Development project in Plains Twp.
- **\$1 million to expand the Health Sciences Center at LCCC in Nanticoke.**
- \$273,000 to complete Phase II of the Welles Street streetscape project in Fort Fort.
- \$1.5 million for the Riverfront Development and Infrastructure project on Market Street in Kingston.
- \$650,000 to install sanitary sewers in the Truesdale Terrace and Witinski Villa sections of Hanover Twp. to meet state environmental requirements.
- \$1.5 million to construct two parking decks above the Church Street intermodal transit center in Hazleton. This project will get additional funding in future years.
- \$680,000 to restore the former First National Bank Building in Wilkes-Barre, vacant since 1974.
- \$290,000 to restore the former Hotel Sterling in Wilkes-Barre, vacant for 10 years, for use as commercial and retail center.
- \$1.3 million for Phase I of the Dallas downtown master plan.
- \$102,000 for the South Valley K-9 partnership in Hanover Twp.
- \$500,000 to restore the Hitchner Biscuit Company building in West Pittston.
- \$275,000 to improve Route 115 in Bear Creek Twp. and Bear Creek Village.
- \$200,000 to demolish an abandoned building on Jones Street in Duryea.

9/10/2010

GNA rehires Perrone for another 3 years

The school board also names James Rinehimer as full-time athletic director.

Ian Campbell - Times Leader

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board members on Thursday night appointed Tony Perrone to another three-year term as superintendent.

The board had not posted the superintendent's job 150 days before June 30, 2010, so keeping Perrone in the position for another three years was automatic, according to a decision Dec. 12, 2009.

The move came amid a number of personnel actions, including the hiring of James Rinehimer as full-time athletic director, at a salary of \$32,000 a year plus benefits, as outlined under Act 93.

The Rinehimer hiring was not noted on the public agenda, but was added verbally at the end of the list of appointments and positions.

Only board member Ryan Verazin voted no on the appointment of the athletic director.

He said after the meeting that discussions on the hiring had taken place before his November 2009 appointment to the school board, and although the other board members had been involved in the discussions, he did not feel as if he had enough information on Rinehimer or any of the other candidates who had been considered.

He said he had nothing against Rinehimer personally.

The board hired Lisa Kotz as guidance secretary, Christy Emelett as building and grounds secretary and Renee O'Connor as elementary instructional aide at the K M Smith School, all under union rates and with a 90-day probationary period.

Nina Herbst was appointed speech therapist for 2010-2011 under a professional contract agreement.

The board will post the positions of family development specialist, crossing guard and, for the GNA Senior High School, a front-door hall monitor

9/7/2010

Can culinary center be ingredient to revitalize Nanticoke?

Resident wants to seize momentum to form exploratory committee focusing on city's downtown.

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There is a flood of activity occurring in downtown Nanticoke as Luzerne County Community College's culinary institute is just days from welcoming students and the Health Sciences Center will open early next semester. Frank Knorek Jr. wants to seize the momentum of the revitalization to inspire others to form a nonprofit organization to support and focus on the city's downtown.

"My concern is they are focusing too much on a physical revitalization with the streetscape project, rather than focusing on a functional economy, which would be marketing your downtown businesses," Knorek said.

During a meeting last week he said he wants to see if there is enough interest from area leaders, business owners and residents to form an exploratory committee.

He pointed out in the past the city has seen new physical development in downtown when the Kanjorski Center was constructed in the mid-90s, but then the momentum was lost.

"It's a golden opportunity, a chance for business owners to be heard and if it doesn't happen now, it probably won't ever happen," he said.

After studying how Plymouth Alive and the Diamond City Partnership in Wilkes-Barre work to promote those communities, he believes Nanticoke can do the same by holding year-round festivals to draw more people into downtown and get businesses to offer coupon specials to the college students.

To keep the community involved, he pointed out there needs to be a website and lists of events to keep people up to date.

Knorek envisions the committee, what he is calling the Downtown Nanticoke Revitalization Initiative, would have four sub-committees – Design, Organization, Economic Restructuring Committee and Marketing and Promotions.

He's already met with state Rep. John Yudichak's staff, LCCC officials, South Valley Chamber of Commerce officials and reached out to city officials. He hopes these people and regular citizens will attend the meeting so everyone can exchange ideas.

To get involved

Nanticoke Revitalization Exploratory Meeting

7 p.m. Thursday at the Mill House next to the Mill Memorial Library.

9/6/2010

Nanticoke native raises funds for muscular dystrophy research

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A decade ago, Clifton Lewis was a popular class president and athlete at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. Now, he's among the approximately 1 million people in the United States struggling with the affects of muscular dystrophy.

"Ten years ago I was able to dunk a basketball and now I could barely walk," Lewis said recently.

Lewis was diagnosed in 2006 with Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy, a disease doctors determined developed in his late teenage years. The condition now limits his ability to use stairs or walk long distances.

At around 11:45 a.m. today, Lewis will bring his battle with muscular dystrophy into the public eye locally when he participates in a live check presentation on WNEP-TV during a local segment of the annual Muscular Dystrophy Association telethon. Lewis will present a \$14,000 check to the MDA on behalf of a fundraiser recently held, called the Lock Haven Lock Up. He'll be joined by 15-year-old Ashley Heffner, of Swoyersville, who is the Pennsylvania Goodwill Ambassador for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Lewis has lived in Arizona and Florida in recent years, warmer climates that keep him away from winter weather that could lead to a slip and fall. The Nanticoke native returned home for the MDA telethon and the Cheer for a Cure cheerleading competition and walk to benefit the MDA on Aug. 29 at Mellow Park in Blakely.

Lewis said he recently increased his desire to want to raise money locally and be part of the MDA family in his native area.

"All in all, it's a difficult situation to talk about with the people you love - your family and friends," Lewis said recently at his father's florist shop in Nanticoke. "Right now, it's just about acceptance. Before this, I was a little embarrassed and

a little ashamed. I used to be a good athlete and now I'm getting to the point I'm disabled. It's time to move on and help people like myself better their lives."

Raising money for MDA research and changing lives has become his life's work, he said.

"There is no cure," Lewis said. "Until we find a cure, nothing is going to change."

Lewis encouraged residents of Northeastern Pennsylvania to open their checkbooks and be generous this weekend.

Money raised not only goes to research for a cure, but pays for doctors appointments for those with muscular dystrophy, he said.

"Overall, the telethon is the Super Bowl of all events across the nation," Lewis said. "It's not easy. It's not easy raising money for this."

Within the next few months, Lewis plans to start the Clifton Lewis Good Life Foundation to raise money for research, scholarships and help those with muscular dystrophy to purchase equipment they need to live.

A big NBA fan with season tickets to the Phoenix Suns, Lewis is trying to get the Suns to host a Jerseys Off Their Backs fundraiser next season. Stars like Steve Nash would sign jerseys that would be auctioned off at a game. He organized a similar fundraiser with the Florida Marlins.

Lewis' form of muscular dystrophy is a milder version than ones that can ravage a child from birth. However, his long-term prognosis is unknown.

"There is a very small chance I could not get any worse, but there is a likelihood I'll get progressively worse over time. I'm hoping to get a cure before it's too late."

Lewis has an appointment soon to see Dr. Jerry R. Mendell, of Ohio State University, for a new gene cell therapy.

Mendell is the first doctor to perform gene therapy for muscular dystrophy.

Lewis said he began to detect something wrong in his muscles while going to Luzerne County Community College in 2000. While weight lifting, the righthander began to notice he could lift significantly more weight with his left arm.

Then, he started to walk with a limp.

After going to see five neurologists over several years, he was diagnosed with Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy in 2006.

"From there, I tried to stay positive. I landed some good jobs and made some good money and lived the life I wanted to live anyway," Lewis said. "Before you looked at it at a distance. Now it's up close. If we don't raise money and find a cure, people are going to continue to be the same and no one is going to get better. If we all work as a team, we can improve our health and live the good life."

9/3/2010

Nanticoke council fails to get quorum

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A lack of a quorum Wednesday night led to the City Council canceling its meeting.

Mayor Joe Dougherty and Councilman James Litchkofski were present. Councilman Michael Boroski was away attending a mandatory conference for his job. The other two council members, Jon Metta and Margaret Haydock, were absent.

The council was scheduled to discuss approving an amendment to the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program funding for Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts Project. Council was also going to decide if the city could apply for a federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, or SAFER, grant.

The next meeting will be held on Sept. 15.

9/3/2010

Nanticoke asked to back bridge loan for culinary institute

Pa. grant for LCCC to be delayed because of changes in Harrisburg.

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A regional construction company has requested two city entities apply for a \$500,000 bridge loan because a state grant awarded to Luzerne County Community College's culinary institute is tied up in Harrisburg.

Chris Cawley of Northeastern Economic Development Company has requested the Nanticoke Municipal Authority and city council co-sign a \$500,000 short-term loan through Community Bank and Trust of Clarks Summit.

NEDCO, the financial arm of developer Mark Construction Services, Inc., built the \$7.6 million institute using three state grants totaling \$4.5 million.

The remainder of the expenses, \$3.12 million, is being paid by the college through a loan.

One of the grants, a \$1.5 million Local Share Account funded through casino revenues, is being paid in \$500,000 allotments over three years.

This year's allotment was delayed because the agency overseeing the disbursements changed from the Department of Community and Economic Development to the Commonwealth Financing Authority, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township.

The allotment should be awarded before the end of the year after the Commonwealth Financing Authority's board meets, Yudichak said.

The money has already been secured for the college's project, he said.

Nanticoke Municipal Authority Chairman Hank Marks said the authority members will have to approve Cawley's request at a future meeting.

"They (the city) are going to have to sign on to it, but we (the Municipal Authority) will really be backing it and Mark Development as far as the money goes," he said.

Letters from the governor's office and state Sens. Ray Musto and Robert Mellow received by the Authority this week assured the authority the grant money would be forthcoming, Marks said.

The city would need to approve the loan guarantee because the state grants awarded to pay for the institute were awarded to the city and not the community college.

Nanticoke Administrator Holly Quinn said the city is still reviewing its options.

"Nothing has been confirmed at this time. Mayor and council need to vote on that," she said. College Dean of Business and Technologies Gary Mrozinski said the college will start moving in equipment and furniture today in preparation for students to arrive for their first day of classes in the new building on Sept. 13.

8/29/2010

Rail expansion plan will serve Nanticoke industrial complex

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A Nanticoke company will construct a rail track expansion to serve the Whitney Pointe Industrial Park.

Hud Inc., trading as Emerald Anthracite, is accepting bids for the second phase of a \$1.2 million track construction project.

Tom Doughton, corporate engineer for Hud Inc., said the company plans to construct a rail spur at the line in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke to provide freight service to the industrial park.

Canadian Pacific Railway, which manages an active rail line, created a siding at the old Honey Pot rail yards for its traffic and for a tie-in at Whitney Pointe. A siding is a low-speed section of track that branches from a main route.

In 2006, Hud Inc., received a \$900,000 economic development grant from the state for the construction of two-track siding to connect the Nanticoke facility to the Delaware & Hudson rail line at Honey Pot Yard, including the extension of track into the Whitney Pointe Industrial Park.

Doughton said Hud Inc. matched 30 percent of the grant for the \$1.2 million project.

The project includes earthwork, installing 1,500 feet of jointed rail track and two turnouts, placing 4,000 tons of ballast and surfacing 3,600 feet of track.

"We finally got it going," he said.

Ken Pollock, president of Hud Inc., bought the Dan Flood Industrial Park for \$300,000 in June 2004 and turned it into Whitney Pointe, a commercial and residential park in Newport Township and Nanticoke.

The company plans to use the land at Whitney Pointe for industrial and residential purposes, with a four-phase residential community plan already complete.

C.P.S. Direct Marketing and Communications, developer and printer of marketing materials, was the first business to open in the park in 2007, migrating from South River Street in Wilkes-Barre.

Bids for the track construction project will be accepted until Sept. 3.

8/27/2010

Nanticoke student's senior project focuses on safety

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Holly Kile of Nanticoke knows the importance of keeping her community safe as she trains for a career in law enforcement.

That desire to help her fellow citizens is one of the reasons she is chairing the first annual Safety Day in Nanticoke. It will be held noon to 5 p.m. Saturday near the sports fields behind Greater Nanticoke Area school grounds off Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke.

Kile, 17, of Nanticoke is studying law enforcement at the Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center.

Organizing the safety day, in conjunction with the city recreation board, is her senior project.

Becoming a state trooper is Kile's ultimate goal, and she's already practiced fingerprinting, handcuffing suspects and searching crime scenes in her classes at the career and technical center.

Last spring, she and her teammates won third place for processing a crime scene during the SkillsUSA competition at West Side Career Technology Center.

"It was pretty good experience," she said.

Ron Kile, Holly's father and recreation board member, said the day will offer a plethora of information to residents on how to stay safe in different scenarios.

That includes staying away from drugs, conscientious Internet use and staying safe around mine shafts around the area - vital information in an area that thrived on coal production.

"There's a lot of places you shouldn't go," he said.

Sometimes, residents don't realize how much emergency responders can offer to the community, since they primarily communicate with police or fire departments when something goes wrong, Ron Kile said.

"(We're holding this event) so our community has an idea of what's out there and what's available to them," he said.

Saturday's Safety Day event is free and open to the public.

Safety Day events will also feature:

American Red Cross blood drive.

Nanticoke police and fire departments.

Bicycle registration and finger printing.

Hanover Township fire river rescue boat.

Luzerne County sheriff's department K-9 unit and gun safety demonstration.

Fallen Officers Remembered.

District Attorney Jackie Musto Carroll.

Luzerne County Detective Charles Balogh speaking about Internet safety.

Life Flight helicopter.

Speakers from the Nanticoke Drug Task Force.

Luzerne County Community College safety program.

The event includes Tyme Band and food vendors.

8/24/2010

County starts phone, e-mail emergency alerts

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Luzerne County has launched a new public alert system that will send text messages and e-mails to residents regarding emergencies and weather warnings.

In addition to severe weather updates, the system will be used to send information alerts such as missing children, Susquehanna River conditions, emergency conditions at the PPL Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Salem Township and emergencies related to Marcellus Shale gas wells throughout the county.

"Most people carry cell phones with them no matter where they are. This will allow us to get real-time information directly to people more reliably," said Luzerne County Emergency Management Director Steve Beganich, whose office will send most of the messages.

Weather warnings and watches will be sent automatically once an alert is issued by the National Weather Service, Beganich said.

To sign up for the alert notification service, go to <http://luzerne.alertpa.org>

Beganich noted that those who sign up can choose which alerts they want to receive.

"It's completely up to them what they decide to sign up for. The user can pick what messages they want to get," he said.

Messages can be sent to cell phones, alpha-numeric pagers and e-mail accounts

It is free to use the system, however, standard text message charges may apply through an individual's phone company.

The system, administered by Cooper Notification, is used in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., Beganich noted.

A grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security paid for the system, he said.

In addition to sending messages to civilians, emergency responders will use it as a secondary communications tool for times when their radios are out of frequency range, Bekanich said.

County Commissioner Chairwoman Maryanne Petrilla said she and fellow commissioners urge residents to sign up. "The protection of our citizens from the effects of natural or man-made disasters is of the highest priority. By providing this system, we can ensure that residents receive timely information on pending situations, so that they can respond accordingly," Petrilla said.

8/19/2010

Nanticoke council approves traffic signal upgrade

Citizens' Voice

City council passed a resolution Wednesday to update a traffic signal at Main and Market streets.

The state Department of Transportation estimated the modification cost at \$21,000. The Nanticoke Municipal Authority will pay for the change.

In other matters, council announced two upcoming city events.

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce will host a flea market Saturday, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

The city recreation board is sponsoring a safety day noon to 5 p.m. Aug. 28 at the high school

8/24/2010

Nanticoke resident pitches downtown revitalization committee

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A long-term downtown revitalization plan for the city of Nanticoke can only succeed if business owners and residents band together, according to resident Frank L. Knorek Jr.

Knorek stressed the need for organization and community support as he pitched creating a nonprofit committee solely dedicated to the city's downtown revitalization Friday at the South Valley Chamber of Commerce.

The current \$30 million downtown revitalization project includes renovating the long-vacant Kanjorski Center on Main Street into LCCC's new Health Sciences center. The college's Joseph A. Paglianite Culinary Arts Institute is under construction at Market and Main streets. The building, named after the co-founder of Grotto Pizza, is set to open this fall.

However, Knorek said a group focusing on long-term solutions and identifying the market base that downtown shops will serve are key to making the revitalization efforts lasting successes. With students coming into the downtown area, existing businesses and new businesses should cater to their needs, such as places to have lunch or shop while between classes, he said.

If business owners, city officials and other stakeholders in the downtown area are not interested in making a change, revitalization efforts would fail, he said. This concern was highlighted at the meeting as only one business owner turned out to hear Knorek's presentation.

"You need your residents and business owners to be the driving force," Knorek said.

Dan Kowalski, chamber vice president, said residents need to be amenable to changes that would eliminate eyesores, like the row of empty storefronts, or "broken teeth," along Main Street. However, that is often a struggle in this region. Jeri Stumpf, a community development consultant, said disinterest and apathy is a problem inhibiting redevelopment in many municipalities throughout the state. Those spearheading revitalization efforts need to find a way to motivate people and drum up support, he said.

"How do you deal with apathy?" he added.

To gauge interest and support, Knorek and chamber members will hold a public meeting at 7 p.m. on Sept. 9 at the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, behind Mill Memorial Library at Kosciuszko and East Main streets in Nanticoke.

All residents - especially downtown business owners - are urged to attend, Kowalski said.

"If they're not on board, it's not going to happen," he said.

8/17/2010

Lawsuit pending in death of sailor

Driver who allegedly caused Kuwait fatality had history of speeding, states suit.

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The driver who allegedly caused a head-on collision that killed Nanticoke sailor Brian Patton and seriously injured his passenger last year in Kuwait had a history of speeding and reckless driving, according to a lawsuit filed in federal court.

Morgan Lee Hanks, a former contractor to the U.S. Army, was passing an eight-vehicle convoy and crested a knoll at a high-rate of speed when his Mitsubishi Pajero sport utility vehicle collided with Patton's Dodge Durango, the suit said. The crash occurred in a no-passing zone on a road connecting military camps in Northern Kuwait. Patton, 37, and his passenger David Morgan, 35, of Wilkes-Barre, were on routine patrol the morning of Nov. 19, 2009.

A federal grand jury indicted Hanks, 25, of Newport News, Va., last month on a charge of involuntary manslaughter for the death of Patton and assault resulting in serious bodily injury to Morgan, who suffered a brain injury. Morgan has been undergoing therapy in a facility outside Philadelphia. A criminal trial is set for Oct. 4 in federal court in Newport News.

Patton's wife, Amy, of Nanticoke and Karen Amesbury of Wilkes-Barre, the executrix of his estate, are seeking in excess of \$75,000 in the civil suit. In addition to his widow, Patton is survived by sons Nicholas and Brian.

The suit, filed by attorneys William and Jamie Anzalone of Wilkes-Barre, said the defendants were negligent for, among other things, allowing Hanks to drive when they knew he had a history of speeding and driving recklessly. Named as defendants, in addition to Hanks, are his former employers: Combat Support Associates and CSA Ltd., with addresses in Fort Worth, Texas, and Los Angeles; AECOM Government Services Inc., Fort Worth, Texas; Research and Analysis Maintenance Inc., El Paso, Texas; and SMI International Corp., Colorado Springs, Colo.

Gary Lewi, a spokesman for CSA, said, "As this matter is being investigated, we are not able to comment."

8/14/2010

GNA board upset over senior test scores

Greater Nanticoke Area ranked last out of 35 area high schools in state tests.

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This year's incoming senior class at Greater Nanticoke Area High School came in last out of 35 area high schools in state standardized test scores.

School board member Tony Prushinski was extremely vocal during Thursday's board meeting in his disapproval of the district's Pennsylvania System of School Assessment scores of the 11th-grade students who took the exams during the 2009-2010 school year.

The passing rates were 59 percent in reading, 51 in percent math and 29 percent in science among 11th-graders.

"The scores were disgusting. This is not good at all. When you sit on a board and you're in 35th place, we need answers," he said.

Prushinski noted he was speaking for all nine school board members while voicing his disapproval. He said all board members and Superintendent Tony Perrone should meet with the district principal and high school principal as they try to determine what needs to be done to improve high school students' scores.

Perrone was absent from Thursday's meeting.

"We can't have eight people out of 10 failing. I know we all agree. We were last," he said.

Prushinski was adamant when the 2011 scores are released the scores better improve significantly or there will be a reorganization at the high school.

"Come next August, if something does not change there will be major changes at the high school. We are in here for the children, not the adults," he said.

Prushinski also pointed out that other changes need to be made at the high school, including cell phone, detention and dress code policies. Prushinski commended the eighth-grade students, now entering ninth grade, on their reading and math scores, which were 79 percent and 80 percent. He was disgusted with the science score that showed only 42 percent of all eighth-graders passed.

"I don't understand what happened," Prushinski said.

Fellow school board member Cindy Donlin said she was angry about the high school scores as well, but added people, including the students and parents need to be held accountable. She pointed out that principals are accountable for their teachers' performances and teachers are responsible for their students' scores.

"I don't know how to get this point across to parents, but you have to take some responsibility to be with your child, to sit with your child and help your child learn. There is only so much that can be done in a classroom. The kids in

Nanticoke classrooms are going to be given every opportunity," she said.



8/13/2010

Nanticoke City Recreation Board to host 'Safety Day' Times Leader

'Safety Day,' sponsored by the Nanticoke City Recreation Board, will be presented from noon-5 p.m. Aug. 28 at Nanticoke High School, 425 Kosciuszko St., Nanticoke. Planned are food vendors, bicycle registrations and finger printing by the Nanticoke City Police

Department, the Nanticoke Fire Department's smoke house and distribution of free fire detectors, the Hanover Township River Rescue Boat, Luzerne County Sheriffs Department K-9 Unit and gun safety information, a life flight helicopter, speakers from the Nanticoke Drug Task Force and more. The American Red Cross will also conduct a blood drive. Music will be supplied by Tyme Band. From left are Holly Kile, chairperson, who is organizing the event for her senior project; Robert Katra; James Samselski; Steve Duda; Ron Kile; Tracy Zabrenski; Mike Borowski; and Yvonne Bozinski.

8/13/2010

Greater Nanticoke Area board finds low test scores 'disgusting'

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Greater Nanticoke Area school board member Tony Prushinski couldn't find the right adjective to describe how board members felt when they realized the district had scored at the bottom of the heap among area districts on state standardized tests.

"Mad? Embarrassed?" Prushinski suggested as he tried to capture the board's emotions about the district's low scores on the 2008-09 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment test scores and SAT test scores. "The scores were disgustingâ? We need answers."

The school board members committed Thursday night to evaluating district procedures and curriculum and do whatever it takes to raise test scores by next August. Prushinski said board members had been bombarded with concerns about the district's poor performance since The Citizens' Voice published an in-depth look at testing results among 37 area school districts in June.

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District missed 18 state averages in 21 testing categories on state standardized test, the second lowest in 37 Northeastern Pennsylvania school districts.

Prushinski said the board has met with school administrators and will ensure all policies in the student handbook are followed, including the detention program, attendance policy and dress code. They will also evaluate district practices to determine how students will be better served and motivated to succeed on standardized tests.

"Changes will be made next year. Make no doubt about it. Because we're not going to tolerate it," he said.

Board member Cindy Donlin said while teachers and administrators are accountable for students' success, parents must also accept responsibility to ensure their children are studying and completing assignments at home.

"There's only so much that can be done in a classroom," she said.

Board member Frank Vandermark said while students aren't held accountable for the PSSA results, the incoming Keystone Exams will hold them to a higher standard. Those exams will require students starting in the class of 2015 to pass a series of exams that are taken at the end of courses in order to graduate.

In other matters, the board hired Jessica Piland and Christina Grendzinski as special education teachers and transferred Michele Kordek to an English as a Second Language teaching position.

The board also accepted the resignation of special education teacher Jessica Zmijewski, part-time Spanish teacher Michael M. Golubiewski, and teacher's aide Heather Zegarski.

8/11/2010

Extra innings Sports in brief **King's gets Cardone**

Times Leader

The King's College softball team has added a standout catcher as Amanda Cardone of state champion Nanticoke Area

will continue her academic and athletic careers with the Lady Monarchs. Cardone recently concluded an outstanding career, helping the Trojanettes win the 2010 PIAA Class 2A state championship.

In her final season, Cardone finished the year with a .313 (25-80) batting average with three doubles, three triples, two home runs and 15 RBI. She was also an outstanding defensive player behind the plate. She was named to the Pennsylvania Coaches Association Class 2A all-state team as a first-team choice. Additionally, she was a first-team Wyoming Valley Conference All-Star and was presented the Nanticoke Area "Defensive Player of the Year" Award. A four-year starter for the Trojanettes, Cardone was a shortstop as a freshman before moving to catcher for her final three seasons. She is a three-time first-team All-WVC selection.

An active off-season player, Cardone estimated she has played in over 500 games over the past six years and helped her respective teams to a number of championships, as well as a second-place showing in the Babe Ruth U16 World Series in Concord, N.H. in 2009. She was also selected as the catcher for the All-World Series 2009 National Team.

8/10/2010

Pews saved from demolition find new life in La.

Used at church closed in Nanticoke, pews go to house of worship hit by hurricanes.

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Several Luzerne County Catholic church parishioners felt as if they were losing part of themselves as several churches have been closed during a consolidation process.

Many felt the same way in late June when St. Francis of Assisi, the oldest church in Nanticoke, was demolished due to structural issues.

Pews saved from the demolition of St. Francis of Assisi on Green Street are gaining new life after being donated to a church in a small coastal village in Louisiana.

Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church, in Cameron, La., has been devastated by two hurricanes that struck within three years of each other.

Everyone's home in Cameron was destroyed by Hurricane Rita in 2005, but amazingly the church was repairable. By 2008 about half of the community's population returned as the village, including the church, was rebuilding. That fall Hurricane Ike hit, again causing severe damage to the church.

Our Lady parishioner Jennifer Jones began scouring the Internet after receiving approval from her priest for the church to purchase new pews.

Our Lady Priest Timothy Goodly contacted Father Jim Nash at St. Faustina parish, after seeing an e-Bay advertisement created by St. Faustina members to sell the pews. St. Faustina is a new parish created in July after the consolidation of the six Nanticoke Catholic churches.

Jones then shared her church's history and Cameron's mantra, "We will never, never, never surrender," in a letter to Nash and Nanticoke parishioners.

"Our beautiful pews are the symbol of our recovery, the symbol of permanence, the symbol of those of us who are determined to come home no matter what," Jones wrote..

Jones and her fellow church members received quite a surprise, as they are currently using folding chairs in their church.

"It's very important for us to have our pews because we feel like we are really in church. You don't really feel like you are in church when you are sitting on folding chairs," she later said in a recent phone interview.

Nash presented the sale offer to the parish's implementation committee after conversing with Jones and Goodly.

Nanticoke parishioners were so touched by Our Lady Star of the Sea's story that they didn't hesitate to drop the plan to sell. They instead wanted to donate the pews.

"They thought it would be a nice gesture out of our loss, so to speak, that someone else will benefit from it. They liked the idea in them being used in another Catholic church and continue to be used for Catholic worship," Nash said.

Jones was overwhelmed when she learned that her hometown church was getting such a gift.

"I burst out crying at my desk. I couldn't believe the generosity. That was so wonderful. We are so thrilled to get them," she said.

So, the pews stored in the remaining St. Francis Assisi Parish building began their journey Friday morning. Church members and two Louisiana truck drivers spent roughly three hours loading 23 wooden pews safely into the 18-wheeler. Friends Ann Marie Cardone and Connie Bienkowski, both of Nanticoke, traveled to the site by 8:30 a.m. Friday to "say goodbye" as they watched their beloved pews carefully loaded into a tractor-trailer bound for southwestern Louisiana. As life-long members of St. Assisi they received all their sacraments at the church, which was originally built in 1874. "I'm thrilled they are going to be used in a church," Cardone said.

8/6/2010

Nanticoke toughens parking, peddling

City council is urged to move on demolishing a dilapidated building on Pine Street.

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Council members conducted the second reading of two ordinances regarding parking and business licenses during Wednesday's regularly scheduled meeting. Both ordinances take effect immediately.

Parking is now prohibited on the east side of Nanticoke Avenue from Coal to Hill Streets. Earlier this year there was a temporary parking ban enacted and due to its success the city decided to make it permanent.

A previous ordinance, Transient Retail Business Ordinance, regulating businesses or peddlers selling items door-to-door, was strengthened and approved, City Administrator Holly Quinn explained.

"It will be easier to track the vendors. If a person has someone going door to door selling encyclopedias they want to know if they are legitimate, as opposed to a scam artist. They can call the city building and say, hey do they have a permit or are they licensed to actually go door-to-door in the city. It also protects the citizens as well to make sure they are not taken advantage of," Quinn said.

Under the ordinance, sales people can only go door-to-door between the hours of 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., except on Sundays or a legal holiday, when the sales person must have an appointment to visit the residence. Businesses selling goods in such a manner must obtain an annual license fee for \$300. The city's code enforcement officer will be in charge of administering and enforcing the ordinance.

City Solicitor Bill Finnegan suggested the city prepare to put out a bid for a demolition company to tear down an old dilapidated property on Pine Street in the Hanover section. He told council members he delivered a \$915 check to the county's Tax Claim Bureau to cover past-due taxes on the property. Once the city receives the deed, it can hire a contractor to tear down the burned out garage.

"When we go to sell it (the land) we will recoup what we paid for it. People have complained it was a blighted condition. This is a way to get rid of that condition," Finnegan said.

City Clerk Betsy Cheshinski said the funds came from an account where homeowners repaid loans to the city. She explained the Home Program Account, established roughly two decades ago, allows homeowners to get low interest 3-percent loans from the city to repair their homes.

People were reminded about the Pow-Wow being held at the Wanamie Recreation Park on Aug. 14 and 15. The event is being sponsored by the South Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Newport Township Fire Department.

7/30/2010

Driver indicted in Kuwait crash

Mishap killed Nanticoke reservist, severely injured reservist from W-B.

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For Amy Patton, the crash that killed her husband last year cannot be erased from her memory.

For David Morgan, it can't be recalled.

Morgan, 35, of Wilkes-Barre, is in an "emerging coma" and undergoing therapy, said his mother Peggy.

Her son was a passenger in the sport utility vehicle driven by Brian Patton, 37, of Nanticoke, when it was struck head-on while the two Navy Reserve military police officers were traveling between military camps in Kuwait on Nov. 19, 2009.

Federal authorities in Newport News, Va., Tuesday unsealed a grand jury indictment charging former U.S. Army contractor Morgan Hanks with involuntary manslaughter in the death of Patton and assault resulting in serious bodily injury against Morgan.

The charges provided some relief for Amy Patton. "I've been waiting for this for quite a while," she said Thursday.

"I take it one day at a time. It's going on nine months in August," she said. "Time does help. It will never take away what I lost and Brian's whole family lost."

Morgan's family has been with him at Moss Rehab Facility in Elkins Park outside Philadelphia where he is undergoing therapy for his injuries.

Peggy Morgan said she does not think her son understands that charges have been filed. He cannot talk or walk, but can make hand signals. "He is improving," she said from her son's bedside.

When it is explained to him that he was in a crash in Kuwait, "He gives a thumbs up that he does not remember," she

said.

Morgan and Patton deployed with a unit based in Rochester, N.Y. The two men also worked together at the State Correctional Institution at Dallas.

At the time of the crash, they were traveling to Camp Virginia from Camp Buehring in northern Kuwait.

Federal authorities alleged Hanks was speeding at over 120 miles per hour when he attempted to pass an eight-vehicle convoy. His sport utility vehicle was going uphill when it collided with the Dodge Durango driven by Patton on Alternate Supply Route Aspen, an asphalt road through the desert connecting the camps.

Hanks, 25, of Newport News, Va., was a canine handler with Combat Support Associates and Combat Support Associated Ltd. and provided security for troops and at camps in Kuwait.

In a prepared statement, CSA said, "As this matter is a criminal investigation there is little we can say that would offer insight into this tragedy."

Hanks was arrested, charged and detained under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act. Under the law, crimes committed outside the country by U.S. Defense Department contractors or subcontractors can be prosecuted in the United States.

In January, prosecutors applied the law to charge two men who worked as contractors for a subsidiary of former Blackwater Worldwide in the May 5, 2009 shooting deaths of two Afghan nationals in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The families of Patton and Morgan said they will travel to Virginia to attend some of the court hearings for Hanks.

"We definitely have to be there for our son and Brian," said Peggy Morgan. In the meantime she and her husband, Chuck, and their other children will be at the rehab facility to support their son.

"It makes it so much easier for recovery if the family is around," Morgan said.

Her son gets exhausted by the therapy, but he's "very, very strong and he's strong-willed," she added.

In preparation for his release from the facility, the family plans to make physical adjustments at home and obtain a van to transport him.

"We want him to be able to recover enough to spend time at home and be with (his daughter Ariana)," Morgan said.

Patton is survived by a son Nicholas, 8, stepson Tyler and another son, Brian James, from a previous marriage.

"The reckless actions of one man changed the lives of so many people," Amy Patton said.

She vowed to attend the trial for Hanks and said she intends to discuss his sentencing with prosecutors if he is found guilty.

If convicted on the charges, Hanks faces up to 10 years in prison, federal authorities said.

"If you ask me no sentence will be strict enough," she said.

7/27/2010

GNA agrees to settlement; district worker terminated

Superintendent says he doesn't expect a strike when teachers pact ends Aug. 31.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board met on Monday night to resolve four personnel issues before getting ready to start the 2010-11 school year.

The board held no formal discussion about the upcoming expiration of the district teachers contract.

The board voted unanimously with all members present to accept a settlement between the district and employee Michelle Jones. Substitute counsel John Audi said the settlement was connected with a "labor dispute."

Both sides agreed to complete confidentiality on the specifics of Jones' case, but the board accepted the settlement, which included an "irrevocable" termination.

Also, the board voted to accept the retirement of elementary teacher Christine Lorzynsk and to hire Carol Kelly and Amy Maciescak as elementary teachers at a starting salary around \$32,000 per year.

After the meeting, Superintendent Anthony Perrone said he does not fear a strike when the current teachers contract expires at the end of August.

The district and the teachers union have been meeting during the last few weeks, Perrone said. They will resume meeting next month, he said.

Perrone said the "money is tight" in the district, especially after a \$258,000 cut in funding from the state Department of Education as the result of state budget cuts.

But he said he is optimistic about the district's financial shape for this coming year. The recently approved district budget did not include a tax increase, he added.

Perrone said the teachers understand the current financial situation, and he is optimistic they will work with the district.

The superintendent also lauded the board in its dealings with the teachers. He said the board members are "very careful" when they hire. "They aren't satisfied until they find the right people," Perrone said. Perrone said the district "has an enrollment of 2,350 students. He said its buildings are in good shape.

7/27/2010

Greater Nanticoke, secretary reach settlement over labor dispute

Kristen Gaydos - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board has reached a settlement with an employee over a labor issue, but an confidentiality agreement prevents them from discussing the negotiations, an attorney from the district said. The board accepted the "irrevocable resignation" of district employee Michelle Jones during a brief meeting Monday to act on personnel matters. John Audi, district labor counsel, said the board agreed not to release specifics on the negotiations.

Jones was the secretary to the Superintendent Tony Perrone.

"We've agreed to confidentiality," Audi said.

Board president Jeff Kozlofski and Perrone referred all questions on the matter to Audi.

The board also accepted the resignation of reading teacher Christine Leszynski. They hired Amy Maciejczak as an elementary school teacher and Carol Kelly as a business office secretary.

7/23/2010

Warrior Run looks to Nanticoke police

Some borough residents at a second meeting contracting out services.

slong@timesleader.com

The tiny borough of Warrior Run might receive full-time police service before the end of the year. Warrior Run is contemplating disbanding its four-member part-time police force in favor of having the Nanticoke Police Department provide around-the-clock protection services to the 2-square-mile borough's roughly 800 residents. As borough and Nanticoke officials answered questions from about 20 residents during a town hall meeting Thursday night at the Warrior Run Volunteer Fire Hall, the idea of the borough having a payment plan with Nanticoke arose. Borough Solicitor Jim Pyrah explained the borough would not have to pay Nanticoke in one-lump sum, but rather might be able to set up a provision allowing borough officials to make payments. Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty said he didn't anticipate a problem with a payment plan.

"We could do it monthly, quarterly and two times a year," Dougherty said.

Residents expressed interest in having Nanticoke start serving as soon as possible after they commented and asked questions regarding how the deal would affect property taxes and what type of service would be provided.

A few residents at the meeting screamed out, "The sooner the better" and "By all means, bring it on."

Warrior Run native Tony Kolativa explained his frustration when he couldn't reach a police officer over the Christmas holiday to file a report regarding an incident involving his car.

"Is it worth it to you for 24/7 protection? I think it would be a wise investment," Kolativa said.

Nanticoke Police Chief Jim Cheshinski assured people that any time they call 911, an officer will respond.

Cheshinski also said he would be willing to come to the borough once a week for a few hours to address any questions or concerns from residents.

Arlene Kish, an 80-year-old lifelong resident, recalled a time when the borough had just one police officer, a chief, who patrolled the area on foot.

During that time she felt safe. Now, not so much. Living on a fixed-income she's concerned about taxes, but at the same time wants to feel secure again.

"We need the protection. We don't have anything," she said. "How are we going to pay for this? If they have to keep paying for our taxes to pay for this protection our taxes will keep going up and up and up. But maybe in the meantime something else will come up where we won't have to be taxed to the hilt. We can't afford this, but we need it. We need the protection."

Pyrah said he doesn't know if the borough will have to raise taxes because there might be other cost-saving measures the borough can enact.

7/19/2010

Nanticoke woman rolls out the gold

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Doris Merrill, 86, of Nanticoke earned four medals at the 30th annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Denver earlier this month. Merrill, who was paralyzed in a swimming accident while serving in the Navy and diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, participated in air guns, slalom, motorized wheelchair rally, ramp bowling and the Powerchair 200. Doris Merrill took a trip from Nanticoke to the 30th annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Denver in early July and the 86-year-old returned with four medals.

But gold and silver medals aren't new for Merrill - she's been winning them for the past decade. The excitement comes when people overlook her disability, she says.

"It's a bridge to the walking world," Merrill said. "People forget my disability and that is the greatest compliment."

Merrill was paralyzed in 1944 in a swimming accident while serving in the Navy. Two years later, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

At 86, neither medical condition has slowed Merrill completely. She has regained the ability to move her limbs slightly and has been competing in Veterans Wheelchair Games since 1999.

The games, the largest annual wheelchair sports competition in the world, offers 17 sports to paralyzed veterans or amputees from the United States or Great Britain who use wheelchairs due to spinal cord injuries, amputations and neurological diseases. The competitions promote rehabilitation through rigorous competition in such events as basketball, rugby, softball, hand cycling and others.

At the recent wheelchair games in Denver, Merrill participated in several events, including the slalom, motorized wheelchair rally, ramp bowling and the Powerchair 200.

In the motorized wheelchair rally, Merrill had to use a map to find check points and answer trivia questions at each one.

In the slalom, Merrill maneuvered her wheelchair through cones, slopes and other obstacles to a finish line.

The games were held in Denver from July 4 to 9. Most of the events were took place at the Colorado Convention Center and other local venues, including Brunswick Zone, Invesco Field and the Hyatt Hotel.

Next year, Merrill plans to attend the 31st Wheelchair Games in Pittsburgh. She has participated in places such as Alaska, Puerto Rico, San Antonio, Cleveland and New York City.

Merrill earned a bachelor's degree in business education in 1955 from Wilkes College and taught at Wilkes and at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. After one semester teaching psychology at Penn State University, "The whole class came to the conclusion that everyone is abnormal," she said laughing.

During her time teaching at Nanticoke, students helped Merrill from her car to the classroom. She said the students at Nanticoke were amazing and always a great help.

Merrill said she is also an excellent swimmer. She said Susan Paterno, the wife of Penn State football coach Joe Paterno, has been her greatest inspiration to continue swimming. She met Susan 10 years ago.

"I tried swimming and I could feel my legs," Merrill said. "I started getting better."

Merrill swam two years ago in the Senior Olympics and she plans enter the Golden Age Games in Hawaii next summer.

She said men sometimes give her strange looks after she beats them in races.

"I can swim like a dandy," Merrill said. "I love beating the men."

The Veterans Administration Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre has funded her trips for eight years and Merrill has paid for her son, Paul "Pepper" Merrill, of Kingston, to accompany her each time as her coach and "biggest critic."

Merrill said her long-time goals have been to live to become a great grandmother. She now has three great grandchildren and three grandchildren.

Now her goals are to continue making new friends and attending the Veterans Wheelchair Games every year.

"I don't want to quit," Merrill said. "I have been truly blessed, and as long as God's willing, I'm willing."

7/18/2010

Community effort helps fest succeed

Times Leader

Sometimes in our haste thanking people for a job well done someone is overlooked.

For the past nine out of 13 years I have been part of the Annual Nanticoke Music Fest committee, and this year I wrote to thank all that were involved.

Since the Music Fest began 13 years ago, the Nanticoke Street Department has been very helpful during all facets of the

event.

They are there to put up the dancing stage, check the electrical boxes, paint the benches and do the overall upkeep of Nanticoke's Patriot Park.

The Street Department is also instrumental in getting our park cleaned and prepared for our annual Nanticoke Citywide Yard Sale, which is held every year and will be held this year on Saturday, Aug. 7 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

I and the entire Music Fest committee want to thank these unsung heroes for their help and all the work they do for the City of Nanticoke.

J.D. Verazin

Nanticoke Music Fest Committee

7/16/2010

Nanticoke, Warrior Run reach police agreement

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Nanticoke and Warrior Run officials reached a verbal agreement Monday for the Nanticoke Police Department to provide full-time police protection for Warrior Run and eliminate its four-officer police department.

Warrior Run Mayor Jim Brodginiski said it was the best option for the borough.

"It's an opportunity to get 24-7 police protection," he said. "It's an opportunity you can't let pass."

Brodginiski said the Warrior Run Borough Council gave a commitment to residents at Monday's meeting when Warrior Run officials made a verbal agreement to have Nanticoke police patrol the borough. The new officers could be in Warrior Run by Jan. 1, 2011.

Warrior Run Borough Council will host a meeting at 6:30 p.m. July 22 to give residents the opportunity to ask questions concerning the cost and the service. The meeting will be held at the Warrior Run Volunteer fire hall.

Warrior Run has four part-time police officers and Nanticoke has 13 full-time officers. The agreement would have Nanticoke's 13 officers take over patrolling Warrior Run. Warrior Run's four-officer department would be terminated.

Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty said he is happy both municipalities found common ground.

"It was good to hear that we agreed upon it," Dougherty said. "I think it will be good for both communities."

Brodginiski said the two municipalities still have to sit down and draw up a proposal to determine the cost and how payments are going to be made. He said finances and payment arrangements are the only thing holding up the process.

After they are settled, councils from both municipalities will formally vote on the proposal.

He said the borough is unsure if it will have to raise taxes. He said the budget for police services in Warrior Run was around \$34,000 last year and Nanticoke is asking for about \$42,000.

"The budget is so low that a couple thousand dollars makes a difference," Brodginiski said.

7/15/2010

Warrior Run wants Nanticoke cops

Borough council OKs plan for full-time coverage. Public may air views at two meetings.

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Warrior Run's council is moving forward with plans to secure full-time police protection for the borough's roughly 800 residents by making a deal with Nanticoke.

Mayor Jim Brodginiski said the council voted unanimously Monday night to take advantage of Nanticoke's offer for around-the-clock protection because council says that taxpayers need full-time protection.

"The idea is to do it for one year and see how it goes and then take it from there, instead of committing long term, because it may be too much for Nanticoke to handle, and we want to make sure we are happy with what we are getting," Brodginiski said.

Officials from the two communities began discussing plans for a one-year service agreement in March. Once agreements are written by each municipality's solicitor and approved by council members, service could begin on Jan. 1, 2011, Brodginiski said.

Warrior Run spends about \$34,000 per year on police protection with four part-time officers. Shifts not covered by the borough officers are handled by state police. Nanticoke officials are requesting Warrior Run pay \$42,000 per year for police services.

A town hall meeting, set for 6:30 p.m. July 22, will provide an opportunity for residents to ask questions of the Warrior Run and Nanticoke council members about the service and costs. The meeting will be either at the Warrior Run

Borough Building or the Warrior Run Volunteer Fire Hall, Brodgerski said.

Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty noted that during next Wednesday's council meeting he plans to ask for feedback from city residents about the plan.

He said he believes the idea would benefit both communities and said Nanticoke officers can easily provide service because the 2-square-mile borough is roughly a mile from the Nanticoke border. He said Nanticoke officers often turn around in Warrior Run when patrolling the city's Hanover section.

"It will benefit Warrior Run by providing them full-time police protection and it will help us increase our finances without going to the residents of Nanticoke," Dougherty said.

State Rep. John Yudichak, whose 118th District includes Nanticoke and Warrior Run, said that if leaders in both communities can approve an agreement it could serve as a model for other communities.

"This project would be a good example of shared municipal services to maximize the limited resources that local government have and give taxpayers the best bang for each tax dollar," Yudichak said.

He said his office has offered its assistance in any technical matters or to secure grant funding for future projects with the department.

7/14/2010

Nanticoke powers way to championship - CONGRATULATIONS!!!

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Nanticoke showed Tuesday that it could play longball as well.

Brett Havens hit a grand slam and Kyle Pokrinchak added a three-run homer as part of a nine-run second inning as Nanticoke overwhelmed Mountain Top, 11-1, to **win the District 16 Little League major baseball championship. The victory gave Nanticoke its first district title in major baseball since 1988. Moreover, it came two days after Mountain Top smacked six homers against Nanticoke in a 10-4 victory that forced Tuesday's game.**

"The Mountain Top organization is a class act," Nanticoke manager Jeff Piontkowski said. "They always field a good team. This year was no exception."

Nanticoke also earned the right to host the Section 5 tournament. Play begins Friday with D31 champion Kingston playing D17 champion North Pocono at 5:30 p.m. followed by Nanticoke vs. D32 champion Lakeland at 7:30 p.m. Nanticoke did most of its damage in the second with one out. Pokrinchak walked, Alec Norton and Connor Cormier walked to load the bases for Havens. The left-handed hitting Havens hit a liner to center that initially looked like it wasn't going to clear the fence. But the ball sliced abruptly to the left and went over.

Pokrinchak, also a lefty, later added a three-run shot to left for a 9-1 lead.

"We had a little scouting on the pitcher," Piontkowski said. "We knew he threw a lot of curveballs, a lot of curveballs that were outside. We were patient and trying to get them to wait on the fastball. A lot of the curveballs were starting over the plate and curving outside, so the guys weren't going to hit them anyway."

Nor was Mountain Top going to hit Nanticoke right-hander Brent Piontkowski, Jeff's son.

Piontkowski started a little rough as Mike Vital led off the first inning with a bloop single to right and moved to third on two wild pitches. Jimmy Martino, the next batter, singled him in with a dribbler in front of the plate.

But that was the end of Mountain Top's offense. Piontkowski retired 11 consecutive batters, striking out five, to finish off the game. Marcus Joseph's flyout to right with one out in the fourth was the only time Mountain Top hit the ball out of the infield.

"He's like a horse," Piontkowski said of his son, who allowed just two hits. "He gets better as the game goes on. The longer the game goes, the stronger he gets."

The game didn't get past the fourth inning because of the 10-run rule. Steve Kreitzer hit an RBI single and Piontkowski added an RBI double in the third, boosting Nanticoke's lead to 11-1.

"It was just one of those days where nothing went right," Mountain Top manager Marc Mickowski said. "There were about four of five things in this game that didn't go our way. It was just one of those days where the stars didn't align."

7/11/2010

An emptiness in Nanticoke's heart and soul

Mark Guydish - Opinion - mguydish@timesleader.com

Turn onto Green Street in Nanticoke at the junction with Kosciuszko. Drive past College, Christian, Chestnut and Walnut Streets. Pull over. Look left. There it is.

“Empty sky.”

It's the phrase Bruce Springsteen used in his song about the destruction of the twin towers in New York, and no, I'm not comparing the scope of that tragedy to what happened in Nanticoke recently: The demolition of St. Francis of Assisi Church. But as I stared at the vacant lot where the edifice once stood, the words popped into my head. The sidewalk leading past nothing, black fill where a basement had been, and a clear view of blue air and white clouds where a steeple once soared.

Empty sky.

One wonders what it's like to live in a house across the street and wake up one morning, step out for the paper or on your way to work, and see nothing but the firmament, a view unavailable for more than 130 years. Or to sit on the porch at night and see stars where a bell tower had stood since before you were born.

Parishioner Connie Bienkowski loaned me a copy of the church's 100th anniversary book – a publication that is itself 36 years old – which included impressive statistics: 1,824 marriages, 5,917 baptisms, 5,974 First Communicants, 5,628 confirmations, 2,732 deaths.

Like so many other shuttering parishes, St. Francis had hosted, at one time or another, a plethora of community organizations: Altar and Rosary, Holy Name, Sodality, Catholic Daughters of America, Legion of Mary, St. Vincent DePaul, Knights of Columbus, Italian American Club, The Cadets, the Boy Scouts, the School Mothers Club and The Father Matthew Temperance Society, to name a few.

A documentary tells the tale

Bienkowski also provided a DVD documentary which offered homage to the memories the church created for thousands of people over 13 decades. One religious sister raised in the parish – a “daughter of the Church” as girls who grow up to choose a religious vocation are often called – recounted Sunday morning children's Mass, boys to the right, girls to the left ... her father the scoutmaster of Troop 418 ... Friday night skating trips with the Sodality club ... Piano lessons from a nun who “constantly prayed out loud, ‘Jesus, Mary and Joseph’ ” while trying to teach.

“Our lives centered around our church,” she said.

On the DVD, Connie herself recalled how families would volunteer to make crullers for fundraising, delivering them to sewing mills and a cigar factory – one time using sleds in a snowstorm. Inattentive sisters in the parish school could leave telltale signs they had indulged in the confection: Powdered sugar had a habit of, well, powdering their habits. One photo showed a girl and boy who didn't know each other, posing with a group at a vacation Bible school. The narrator noted the two met years later in an adult religious class and married ... In St. Francis, of course.

An attempt to make pierogies for raising money ended disastrously when the pasta pockets fell apart, leaving a doughy potato soup ... eager volunteers pulled the ropes that rang the bells for Mass each weekend ... one priest painted the kitchen himself ... Spaghetti dinners twice a day, twice a week ... newlyweds departing under an arch of gladiolas held by friends ... a lector recounting his flub when reading “Saul with his army of 10,000 pickled men” (its “picked men”)

...

Where a community's heart once beat, now there is empty sky.

7/9/2010

LCCC culinary site is cookin'

The college expects the new training building to be ready on schedule by mid-August.

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NANTICOKE – Within less than six weeks, construction on Luzerne County Community College's Joseph A. Paglianite Culinary Institute will be completed and it will be ready for students.

Contractors under the direction of Mark Construction Services are following the design plans of architect Scott Douglas Allen of SDA Architects as the drywall, ducting, electrical, window installation and other work is being completed on the 22,000-square-foot, two-story building.

Joe Grilli, LCCC's vice president of training institutes, external affairs and planning, said as he toured the facility Thursday that he is pleased with how the construction is progressing since the buildings that once sat on the location were demolished in early November.

“We are very pleased with the way it is coming along,” he said, adding the college has been told it will be completed on schedule on Aug. 15.

“We are very confident that is going to happen,” Grilli said.

Students will learn their trade in two labs – the teaching and pastry labs on the building's second floor. A restaurant-style dining room with seating for 30 to 40 patrons will be on the second floor, adjacent to the main-line kitchen.

The restaurant will not be open to the public at first, but the college is looking at opening it at a later date to provide students experience in handling food orders in a fast-paced kitchen environment.

A first-floor auditorium that will include 75 theater-style seats will have a demonstration kitchen, as the college hopes to attract top-tier national chefs to present cooking shows. The auditorium also includes a television taping center, where LCCC television students will refine their skills by taping the cooking shows and other events.

The developer is responsible for handling the construction contracts for the building, but it is the college's responsibility to bid out and award contracts for cookware and other specialty items officials wanted, including an emergency generator and dumbwaiter.

Once students report to class on Aug. 30, they will have access to more than \$873,901 worth of restaurant-quality, industry-grade equipment. Of that total, \$782,438 is being spent on large food service equipment such as two walk-in coolers, nine char-boilers and eight griddles, among other items. Rite Temp Associates Inc. Mechanical Contractors of Dalton was the only bidder on the project.

The remaining \$91,463 is divided among two companies – U.S. Food Service of Allentown and Sysco Central Pennsylvania in Harrisburg – for small ware items, such as 48 sets of knife kits, 36 angel food pans, 32 iron skillet, 24 oven mitts and 12 pastry blenders among nearly 400 other items.

Grilli said college employees reviewed bids for furniture and small ware items line-by-line to find the lowest bidder as the college tried to save on costs.

Not all the culinary arts equipment that students will be used is brand new. Some existing equipment is being moved from the college's main campus to the new facility. The equipment includes a 60-quart mixer, oven steamer, convection oven, banquet broiler, soft-serve ice cream machine and a 10-burner range.

The college is paying \$31,000 to G.R. Noto Electrical Construction Inc. of Clarks Summit for an emergency generator; \$37,000 for a dumbwaiter elevator shaft system to Otis Elevator in Allentown and a total of \$83,978 to three companies for furniture for the building's lounges, classrooms, dining area and offices.

7/9/2010

State has major role in new LCCC building

Three Pennsylvania grants are financing construction of the culinary arts site.

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Luzerne County Community College's Joseph A. Paglianite Culinary Institute in downtown Nanticoke is being built by private developer Mark Construction Services Inc. of Moosic; however, the project has required state overview.

Since three state grants are being used to construct the two-story 20,000-square-foot building the developer, owned by William Rinaldi, must abide by certain state mandates.

The \$7.5 million building will be built in part using a \$1.5 million Local Share Gaming grant, \$1 million from the Growing Greener II grant and \$2 million from the Pennsylvania Redevelopment Assistance Capital grant.

There are at least 15 subcontractors working on the project, Rinaldi estimated as he noted his firm bid out various trade segments of the project. After reviewing the submissions, the bids were awarded to the lowest, most responsible bidder, he said.

City of Nanticoke Finance Director Pamela Heard said all the contracts were reviewed and approved by a state employee.

A review of the contracts found that the: metal studs, sheathing and insulation bid was awarded to Duggan & Marcon Inc. of Luzerne for \$213,538; demolition services bid was awarded to Grinnell Recycling Inc. of Sparta, N.J. for \$67,000; sitework and excavation services bid was awarded to Bowen Enterprises of Scranton for \$332,300; masonry services bid was awarded to James W. Gerard Inc. of Scranton for \$408,864; steel fabrication and erection services bid was awarded to Rise Construction Service of Jefferson Township for \$311,500; roofing services bid was awarded to Olivetti Roofing System Corporation of Scranton for \$97,600; electrical services bid was awarded to G.R. Noto Electrical Construction Inc. of Clarks Summit for \$587,000; plumbing services bid was awarded to Yanuzzi, Inc. of Hazleton for \$399,000; fire protection services bid was awarded to G. C. Fire Protection System of Lake Winola for \$49,600; elevator services bid was awarded to Otis Elevator Company of Allentown for \$74,000; HVAC (heating and the air duct system) bid was awarded to Marx Sheet Metal and Mechanical company of Wilkes-Barre for \$1.16 million; GWB and ceiling services bid was awarded to JVS Specialties LLC of Taylor for \$154,750 and gazing (windows) services bid was awarded to Joseph Slater and Sons dba S&S Glass of Mayfield for \$89,485.

Some contractors submitted multiple bids to be considered for several trades.

Spano Construction Company of Scranton won three bids for concrete services for \$379,000, door and hardware

services for \$97,500, finishes and related services for \$313,200 for a grand total of \$789,701.

Rinaldi said most of the bids came in higher than he originally anticipated, but noted he overlooked that because he wanted to do an outstanding job since this is his first project for the college.

“This is the first project we did for the Luzerne County Community College and we wanted to make sure it is successful.” Luzerne County Community College is expected to take over control of the building in mid-August to prepare for classes on Aug. 30.

When LCCC takes over they will pay Rinaldi \$3.12 million in a lump sum payment. The college is financing the project by taking out a 20-year fixed interest rate loan from FNCB bank.

7/8/2010

Nanticoke council proposes \$50 fee to rent city property

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Residents wanting to use public property for events may have to pay a rental fee to the city for use of the property. Council postponed a vote Wednesday to instate a \$50 fee for those using public property for gatherings, wanting to further review the resolutions.

Those who desire to host an event on city property could fill out an application prior to the event, to be approved by city Administrator Holly Quinn, according to the proposed resolution. Residents may also pay a \$100 deposit - to be returned if the event causes no damage to the property. A release would also be signed absolving the city from any liability.

Solicitor William T. Finnegan Jr. said a request to have a wedding in a city park prompted the resolution.

Council also appointed a planning committee to assist with the city's comprehensive plan update, zoning ordinance and zoning map. The plan sets the tone for a community's growth over the next several years.

The committee will include Quinn, Councilman Michael Borowski, Director of Finance Pamela Heard and city engineer Darryl Pawlush. They will work with planning consultant John Varaly of Michael J. Pasonick Jr. and Associates Inc.

7/6/2010

GNA to start English skills curriculum

English Language Learners program to help district's growing number of non-English native speakers.

slong@timesleader.com

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District will start its own English Language Learners program this fall to serve the growing number of non-English native speakers while saving the district \$40,000 a year.

Previously, Nanticoke received services from the Luzerne Intermediate Unit, which provides services in language assistance and special education, among other services, to area school districts. The educational program has previously been known as English as a Second Language.

These ELL classes help non-native English speaking students learn and master the English language. It doesn't matter from what country the students or their families are from.

GNA District Principal Michael Pawlik said the district has received an influx of students who speak Russian and Chinese over the past few years.

He said the district spent more than \$100,000 last year for LIU teachers to work with the students.

He added he and other district officials were pleased with the LIU's assistance, but the district now feels it has enough students needing services to assign an existing district teacher with an ELL certification to work with the students.

“We were looking for ways to be as careful as we could with our financial resources. One of the avenues we started to explore was if we had our own teacher, would we be able to save money? The ultimate answer is yes we could save money instead of contracting it out,” Pawlik said.

Last year LIU had four teachers, some part-time, assigned to work with 30 GNA students on their English skills, said Joelle Lussi, LIU English as a Second Language coordinator. Another nine students did not attend ELL classes, but were monitored by the LIU staff to ensure they were keeping up with their peers in class.

This fall the district is anticipating more than 30 students will need services, Pawlik said.

That's up significantly from one or two students needing language skills classes about seven years ago, when the district first contracted for these services with the LIU, he said.

GNA officials plan for the district teacher to work with students two to three hours a day in a small group setting. Students would return to their classrooms after each session.

“It is important for them to establish relationships with kids in classes. What we find, kids are amazing at overcoming the language barrier,” Pawlik said.

Under the LIU program, ELL teachers are typically assigned to a district. By interacting with students from kindergarten through 12th grade, the teacher moves around between different campuses throughout the day, Lussi said.

“We as an Intermediate Unit support districts and provide services they can not provide themselves. Whenever a district feels they’ve developed the capacity to run the program on their own and it would benefit them greatly to do it on their own, then we continue to provide support to them,” Lussi said.

With GNA still being a part of the LIU as students receive other services, GNA’s ELL teacher can participate in ongoing teacher training seminars, she said.

Hazleton Area, Wilkes-Barre Area, Wyoming Valley West, Pittston Area and Tunkhannock also have their own ESL programs, Lussi pointed out.

Every spring the students must take state-mandated tests to evaluate their English skills.

Federal education mandates require a review of these and other test results, which, combined with a teacher-prepared evaluation of the student’s skills, are used to determine when students have mastered the English language enough to allow the student to be enrolled in an English class with their peers.

7/5/2010

S. Valley Parkway on agenda

Draft of Transportation Improvement Program sees long-delayed road receiving funds in 2013, 2014.

slong@timesleader.com

Public hearing

A public hearing will be held at 10 a.m. July 21 at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation District 4-0 office, O’Neill Highway in Dunmore. Call (570) 963-4052

The South Valley Parkway might become a reality after years of delays.

The Parkway was originally designed as a Sans Souci Parkway-style route to run from Route 29 to Kirmar Parkway in Newport Township, paralleling the at-times extremely narrow two-lane Middle Road.

But some area residents and officials say they’ll believe it when they see it.

A draft of the 2011 Transportation Improvement Program released last week by The Lackawanna/Luzerne County Metropolitan Planning Organization shows the

project could receive \$13.5 million worth of funding in 2013 and 2014. An additional \$29.7 million of funding could be supplied from 2015 through 2019 for a total of \$43.2 million. There is no planning of money being set aside in 2011 or 2012.

The project was once estimated to cost \$30 million to \$40 million in 2005, significantly down from a cost of \$48 million to \$60 million in 2004. The current budget figures are draft amounts that could be changed based on comments received during a public hearing scheduled for 10 a.m. July 21 at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Headquarters in Dunmore.

Don Casterline, of Hanover Township’s Askam section, noted the roadway is desperately needed after being proposed for what he said has been more than 25 years. Yet he also pointed out that no one can be certain the money will be allocated due to the state’s financial problems.

“It would be great, but I don’t really foresee it happening. We’ve heard this so much for so long. With the financial condition of the state and PennDOT, I don’t foresee this happening any time in my lifetime,” he said.

Several years ago, Casterline served on a committee offering suggestions on how the road should be designed in hopes the new parkway would ease the heavy traffic on the two-lane narrow Middle Road less than two feet from his front door.

If the project moves forward, it might be conducted in phases, according to PennDOT spokesperson Karen Dussinger. Due to construction costs and the complexity of the project, the original four-lane roadway might be pared down to two lanes, with an occasional expansion to three to four lanes in some areas.

Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty believes the parkway, if built, could also solve traffic congestion problems on the Sans Souci Parkway, Main Street through Nanticoke, as well as Middle Road. Yet, like Casterline, he’s skeptical.

About a little more than a year ago, the South Valley Chamber of Commerce pushed for PennDOT to turn its focus back to the project because chamber officials view it as an escape safety route for the South Valley region.

South Valley Chamber of Commerce President Jerry Hudack said he was happy to hear the project is slated to receive funding.

He pointed out if a biological or biochemical hazard occurred on the railroad tracks and caused the Sans Souci Parkway

to shut down, it could prevent Nanticoke and other South Valley residents from being able to quickly evacuate because the only other route would be Middle Road.

“You could in effect cut off your main evacuation route cutting off the Sans Souci. It would leave your only alternative being this small two-lane road. It would be an extremely difficult evacuation,” Hudack said.

He said the parkway could benefit the region economically because businesses may open shopping centers or industrial parks along it. He noted if PPL builds a third reactor in its Salem Township location, professionals building the unit will need places to sleep, so hotels might dot the parkway.

“There is really going to be a dire need for this road and for highway and construction just to keep things running normally and smoothly,” Hudack said.

7/4/2010

Church razing delays funeral home move

Times Leader

The owners of Kearney Funeral Home planned on moving to their business to its new location in Nanticoke, but due to some damage from the St. Francis Assisi Church demolition, they are planning on staying at their South Prospect Street for several months.

Mary Ruth Schwartz, from the Kearney Funeral Home, 22 S. Prospect St., Nanticoke, says that due to the conditions of their new building at 173 E. Green St., Nanticoke, they will postpone their move in order to support their patrons.

7/4/2010

Little league

Nanticoke girls reign in softball

Times Leader

Morgan Briggs had two doubles and drove in three runs as Nanticoke won the District 16 Little League minor softball championship on Saturday with a 5-4 victory over Plains.

Miranda Dunn also had a double and drove in a run for Nanticoke. Lindsey Rowles had two singles. Lauren Cann and Leandra Ramos combined for 10 strikeouts.

Plains was led by Madison Pugh, who pitched six innings and struck out six; and Bailey Cunningham, who had a double and drove in three runs.

7/4/2010

Nanticoke bike race puts a positive spin on the city

The event attracted bike enthusiasts and promoted downtown revitalization and development.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

Bicycle enthusiasts from all over the United States and some from as far away as Canada and New Zealand gathered on Saturday to race in the streets of Nanticoke at the second annual Nanticoke Criterium Race and Jack Williams Tire Youth Challenge.

They sped along Kosciuszko Street turned on Union Street and circled behind the Nanticoke Area John S. Fine High School with speeds reaching almost 30 miles per hour. Dressed in brightly colored suits astride high tech racing machines, they cut through tight corners with barely inches separating them.

Ten different racing categories were set up. In the youth development categories, the races included a 200-meter race for 6 year olds and under, a one-mile race for 7 to 10 year olds and a three-mile race for 11 to 14 year olds. The youth development races were sponsored by Jack Williams Tire.

The adults competed in 21-mile races for juniors aged 17 and 18 and 45 years old plus masters; a 25-mile race for women and a 36-mile race for top professionals.

Event promoter Phil Cable from Facet Cycling in West Pittston said what started as a way to bring city youth out to enjoy healthy outdoor activity grew into an event for participants of all ages.

Saturday's race not only provided an opportunity for local bicyclers to race in a USA Cycling event but also promoted downtown revitalization and community development, Cable said.

Mike Borowski, a councilman from the City of Nanticoke, called the event a “shot in the arm” for all of Northeastern Pennsylvania. It was a chance to bring in people from all over to see what the area has to offer as well as to patronize

local businesses.

"It's a great turnout on a beautiful day," he said.

Borowski added the event did not cost taxpayers in anyway except for services provided by the city police and fire, city housing and recreation departments, and Greater Nanticoke Area School District, which provided the venue. It's good to see the various agencies working together for the community, he added.

Nicole Kruszek, chairwoman of the Nanticoke recreation board, said city youth were offered a chance to take part in a healthy activity. Residents were also able to enjoy watching the event, she said.

Jean Ditzler, director of the city housing authority, who initiated the event two years ago, said she hopes it will expand over the coming years. It could change the image of Nanticoke as a "distressed city," she added. She hopes the children living in the city housing will become more involved.

Andy Mount, 15, who came from Virginia to participate, said the course was very fast with sharp turns. The back straight behind the school presented a challenging hill climb, making the racers push to keep their power going.

Kerry Potter-Gydosh, from Wyoming borough, said she participated to support the local cycling community.

"Cycling is a social sport with lots of camaraderie," she said.

7/1/2010

Nanticoke start date of upgrades postponed

Downtown improvements, road repaving pushed back to next year. Mayor frustrated.

slong@timesleader.com

Construction on two major projects originally planned to be completed before Luzerne County Community College students attend classes in downtown Nanticoke this fall have been delayed again, city officials said.

The latest decision is a long list of delays that would repave some bumpy city streets and give the downtown area a facelift.

A project to resurface Alden, Union and Prospect streets has already been delayed for at least five years.

It is now scheduled to start in February. The project to install old-fashioned-style street lighting, improve the sidewalks and add more parking in downtown might not begin until March, according to a draft of the 2011 Transportation Improvement Program released Tuesday by The Lackawanna/Luzerne County Metropolitan Planning Organization. The resurfacing project, using a combination of state and federal funding, is anticipated to receive \$2.26 million in 2012. Another \$7 million is expected to be pumped into the other project in 2011 and 2012, with the majority of \$6.25 million coming in the second year.

Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty expressed his frustrations with the delays. He said he knows residents want these projects to move forward as well, but the city has to wait for the state to bid out the projects because the state is handling the expenditures.

The projected start and the funds allocated to these two and other roadway and bridge projects in the two counties has not been solidified.

"These are streets that are in dire need of repair. There is nothing we can do. We were told this was going to be done this year," Dougherty said, adding that the state handles the bid process and how the money is spent.

Joe Boylan, staffer for state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, said the city, college, Yudichak's office and PennDOT are holding monthly meetings on the projects.

7/1/2010

Inaugural St. Faustina Parish Festival coming this weekend

Nanticoke rebounds

slong@timesleader.com

There is an old saying that when God closes one door, he opens another.

Website: www.nanticokecatholic.com

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Parishioners in Nanticoke are taking that message to heart as members from six recently closed Catholic churches work together to present the inaugural St. Faustina Parish Festival this weekend.

News of the Diocese of Scranton's plans to consolidate several churches broke the hearts of many parishioners because they felt they were losing their church.

The Rev. Jim Nash said he was proud at how the members from the closed Nanticoke area churches – Holy Child, Holy

Trinity, St. Francis, St. Joseph, St. Mary of Czestochowa and St. Stanislaus – were handling the consolidation. “I’m really grateful to the people for trying so hard to make this happen, despite their heartbreak. Positive things are happening, one of which is this church festival,” Nash said.

Festival Chairman Dennis Morgis of Mountain Top said church members are viewing this consolidation and creation of St. Faustina Roman Catholic Church as the dawn of a new era. He added that it is due in no small part to the local leadership of Nash, who was a teacher in Wilkes-Barre Area schools for more than 20 years before entering the priesthood 21 years ago.

Nash, a 68-year-old Hanover Township native, began serving as pastor in Nanticoke churches five years ago. “This is a great opportunity for the community of Nanticoke to come together as one. The Catholic community of Nanticoke is very faith filled. Even though there are churches that have been closed, in (parishioners’) hearts they’re thankful we have a priest like Father Jim to lead us, and it really doesn’t really matter what the name of the parish is or what building we are, but that we do have an opportunity to worship freely,” said Morgis, a Nanticoke native who grew up in Holy Trinity parish.

St. Faustina started serving the community on Saturday, Nash said. An inaugural Mass for St. Faustina will be held at 11 a.m. July 18 at the former Holy Trinity site.

There are other signs the consolidation is already strengthening the community. Nash pointed out the new parish’s combined choir, what he called the “vibrant” youth program, and the 300-plus youth religious education program would not have been possible with each church operating separately.

“That’s a sign of what can happen when we all come together. Even our Masses are filled more than they were before. It’s nice to come together with a church that is filled with people. We are going to make it,” Nash said.

The St. Faustina Community has two worship sites. The primary site is the former Holy Trinity Church at 520 S. Hanover St. St. Mary’s, down the street, will be the alternate site.

The implementation team made up of four members of each parish worked together to submit names to the diocese of what they would like the new church to be called.

Their first request, Divine Mercy, was already designated for a church in the Scranton area, so the Nanticoke cluster of churches was given the name St. Faustina, who is the saint of divine mercy.

In the past, each of the former parishes held its own bazaar every summer. In the last few years, only Holy Trinity and St. Mary’s have put on church festivals.

Morgis said they are making this event, the St. Faustina bazaar, a combined festival of all the former church bazaars. Members from all the old parishes are working to merge a collection of ethnic foods that will be held Friday and Saturday at the Holy Child Grove in Sheatown.

Morgis said the St. Faustina bazaar has already raised more money in the pre-sale of food tickets than Holy Trinity raised each year in its pre-sales for the last four to five years.

“I think there is a momentum by the people in Nanticoke to come together. We’ve seen that through the businesses that have sponsored stands, through the people who have come together to make the food,” Morgis said.

6/27/2010

Nanticoke Music Fest Committee extends thanks to community

Editor: Citizens' Voice

Putting on the Nanticoke Music Fest is very costly! Every year we depend on our advertisers and band sponsor to help us financially present the Music Fest.

Without the following sponsors this annual fun event would not take place: Asco Financial Group Inc., Luzerne County Convention and Visitors Bureau, PPL, PNC Bank, J.P. Mascaro & Sons and the many patrons, organizations and vendors from all around Nanticoke and the surrounding communities.

Our volunteers start organizing the Music Fest in early January. Thank you to Yvonne Bozinski, Doc Halliday, Jim (J.D.) Verazin, Matt Forgach, Theresa Sowa, Brenda Sowa, Joseph Walter and Tracy Tushinski and especially Betsy Cheshinski and all of the office staff at City Hall for all of their help.

Without Mayor Joseph Dougherty and city council, this could not have been possible. We also want to thank them very much.

The Music Fest committee will be having fundraisers to defray the cost of next year's Music Fest within the following months. Please see our website www.nanticokecity.com for upcoming information.

Every year for the past 13 years, the Music Fest committee has vowed to bring you a bigger and better Music Fest the following year. Watch out for our Music Fest next summer!

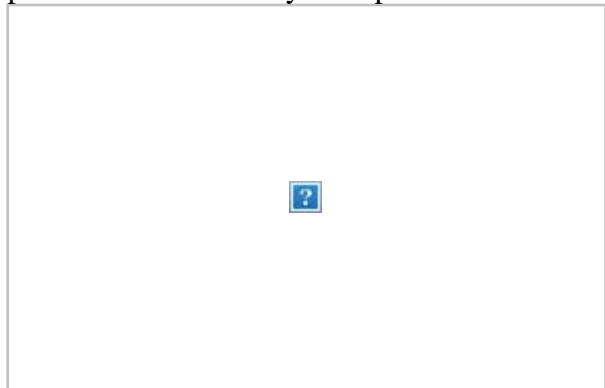
Thanks again.
Jim (J.D.) Verazin
2010 Music Fest Committee

6/25/2010

Church comes down, but faith goes on

mhughes@timesleader.com

NANTICOKE – The walls of another closed church have toppled and been reduced to dust, and on Thursday, parishioners reverently took pieces of the building with them to honor in their homes like the ashes of a beloved relative.



Charles Marcella, who was a parishioner of St. Francis of Assisi Church all his life, takes a keepsake brick from the rubble of the Nanticoke church that was being demolished Thursday afternoon. St. Francis of Assisi was the first Catholic church in Nanticoke, built in 1874.

S. JOHN WILKIN/THE TIMES LEADER
Select images available for purchase in the
Times Leader Photo Store

As crews demolished the St. Francis of Assisi Church in Nanticoke on Thursday, members of its congregation came to pay a final visit.

Charles and Mary Ann Marcella of Sheatown watched as the walls of the only church they ever knew came down. “It was just so sad. I cried when I watched,” Mary Ann Marcella, 68, said. “It’s hard to describe how you feel. You know, empty.”

St. Francis of Assisi officially closed in 2009 due to structural problems in the building’s roof that made it unfit for occupation.

The Marcellas served on a committee to raise money to repair the roof. Though they were able to raise about \$125,000, the funds did not even come close to the amount necessary for the repair.

Charles Marcella, 70, said he took four bricks from oldest sections of the church, dating to its construction in 1874. St. Francis of Assisi was the oldest Catholic church in Nanticoke.

Charles Marcella said he plans to keep one in the home he shares with his wife in Sheatown. He said he wants to have a plaque embossed with an image of the church made to attach to the brick, something he did with a brick from his alma mater, Nanticoke High.

The Marcellas were both baptized in the church, as were their two children and one grandchild. They were also confirmed and married in the church, which Mary Ann Marcella called “the only church we ever knew.”

Mary Ann Marcella remembered crowning a statue of the Virgin Mary with flowers as a child and more than 50 years of spaghetti dinners at the church.

“We always had a lot of fun working together,” she said.

She said the women with whom she used to organize the dinners have maintained contact through a “forget-me-not club,” meeting several times a year to share a meal and discuss old times.

She said she hopes the group will stay together and gather new members when parishioners join the newly created St. Faustina Parish in July.

“We want to stay together with our people from Nanticoke,” Mary Ann Marcella said.

6/25/2010

Church demolition tears down rectory wall

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Bill Kearney just finished taking a shower and was about to leave his house for lunch. On his way down the steps to the first floor, Kearney walked into a room full of debris.

“I saw a cloud of dust and I thought, if all my windows are closed, how did the dust get in here?” Kearney said.

When he entered the room, he found bricks and broken glass and a huge hole in his wall. As a construction crew demolished the St. Francis of Assisi Church next to his home, a first-floor wall in Kearney's home was knocked out while he was inside.

Kearney recently purchased the rectory next to St. Francis of Assisi Church in Nanticoke. Kearney was moving the Kearney Funeral Home from the old location at 22 S. Prospect St. to the first floor of the rectory because it was more spacious. The room that was going to serve as the new viewing room was damaged.

The "brand new room" was recently renovated and decorated with new drapes and new carpets, he said.

"Everything is gone," he said. "They told us to pack a bag and get out."

Kearney said he was told the house was not "structurally sound" and it wasn't safe to stay there. The wall that was knocked out held up the second floor, where Kearney and his wife, Maryann, live. He said he didn't have an estimate as to how much it would cost to rebuild the room.

He said he was just grateful no one was injured. Maryann, who attended the church for 65 years, was sad it was being demolished.

"I was at work and I didn't want to see it get torn down," she said, "but I had to see it when I went to get clothes."

Kearney and his wife said they would be staying in a hotel until their home is fixed.

Across the street from the church, about 10 people gathered to catch one last glimpse of their former church before it became a pile of rubble.

Sylvia Keber of Nanticoke attended the church for 60 years and went to school there. Keber walked on the property and grabbed a brick from the pile of debris.

"I just can't get over it," Keber said. "I got the brick as a reminder."

People ranging from children to high school students to senior citizens gathered to see their church one last time.

Bernard Kolodziej of Nanticoke was driving by and stopped to snap pictures. Though he wasn't a member of the church, Kolodziej said he attended it periodically over the years.

"Many, many of my friends had their baptism here," Kolodziej said. "I got the pictures for memories."

The new funeral home was supposed to open July 1, but since the room was destroyed, Kearney said the old funeral home will remain open until the new location is fixed.

"Thank God nobody got hurt," he said. "The building can be fixed."

6/19/2010

Mom's persistence helped student graduate

Family of Gina Piccotti upset over district's oversight regarding senior year events.

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The persistence of Gina Piccotti's mother ensured Piccotti graduated with other members of her senior class at the Greater Nanticoke Area School District earlier this week.

Piccotti, who has Down syndrome, attends the Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center, but her home school campus is Nanticoke Area. Her mother, Dorothy Briggs, said a June 3 call from her daughter's teacher at the vo-tech school alerted Briggs that 18-year old daughter had satisfied the requirements for graduation. The teacher went on to inform Briggs that she had not received a message back from school officials to learn more about graduation activities for Piccotti.

Yet Briggs of Wapwallopen said she never received a call, paperwork or any other type of information from the district alerting the family that Piccotti would graduate.

Briggs feels the district just forgot about her daughter. She said she wonders what happens to the district's other special needs children.

Briggs is upset that no one from the district made any effort to include her daughter in the various senior activities and traditional graduation preparations of being fitted for the cap and gown, get a yearbook picture taken, participating in the senior class trip to Florida or getting paperwork to order a high school class ring.

"It is too late for me and Gina, but I don't want to see another special needs child go through this. They are all children and they deserve as normal as you can get. To me she is normal," Briggs said.

Nanticoke Area Superintendent Tony Perrone strongly disagreed that the district knowingly forget about any of its students. He noted he learned of the incident Friday morning.

Perrone said the district had a breakdown of communication with a school official that handles the accounts regarding special needs students. That official should have informed the district that Piccotti was eligible for graduation, yet in this case it fell through the cracks, Perrone said.

He said the issue has been addressed to make sure this does not happen to another student.

“That won’t happen ever again. Does she have a right to be angry? Yes, she does,” Perrone said.

He added if he or Principal Stuart Tripler had known Piccotti was eligible for graduation she and her family would have been informed of all the activities involving the senior class.

To make matters worse Piccotti’s last name was misspelled in the graduation brochures and on her diploma, her mother said. It was missing the second c. The school issued another diploma for Piccotti, this time with the correct spelling, Briggs said.

She is happy the school apologized, found a cap and gown for her daughter and allowed her to graduate with her class. Yet she still wants to make sure other students are not overlooked in the future.

“You have to speak up for the children because they don’t speak up for themselves. You have to have someone speak up on their behalf,” Briggs said.

6/18/2010

notes on music

‘Tyme’ to make a comeback

After a triumphant return at Nanticoke’s Musicfest earlier this month, Tyme Band is ready to rock again.

Brad Patton For The Times Leader



The reunited Tyme Band made its debut at the most recent Nanticoke Musicfest. Members are lead vocalist Jim (J.D.) Verazin, Tom Cipriani on bass guitar and backup vocals, Rick Wells on lead guitar and backup vocals and Steve Cipriani on drums.

The group, which originally consisted of singer Jim (J.D.) Verazin, Tom Cipriani (bass and backing vocals), Rick Wells (lead guitar and backing vocals) and drummer Pete Wanchisen, was a popular fixture on the local-music circuit in the late 1970s through 1988, when Verazin left to pursue other endeavors. (The other guys soldiered on until 1996.)

After meeting up at a couple of pig roasts over the past few years, the guys decided to get back together.

“They got me to sing at the first pig roast, and then we started talking about getting the band back together,” lead vocalist Verazin said.

“Eventually we started practicing (last June), and we already knew 10 songs. We just kept adding to that.”

Because original drummer Wanchisen travels a lot for business, the guys drafted Cipriani’s son Steve to fill in.

“He grew up with Tyme Band, so he already knew the songs,” Verazin said.

The reunited quartet is now looking to get back on the circuit and willing to play weddings, anniversaries and reunions.

“We don’t want to do bars because we had enough of that before,” Verazin said.

“And there’s really not a lot of bars and clubs to play these days, at least not like in the ’70s and ’80s.”

Verazin said the band is ready to go with the music it used to play, mostly classic rock of the 1970s and 1980s.

With a DJ to take over when the band goes on break, Tyme Band can provide four hours of continuous music.

“You could check out our full song list on our website, but we are playing the songs of the late ’70s and early ’80s, some country rock, and we also do some polkas because when we were together we used to play a lot of bazaars,”

Verazin said.

“We were very popular back then,” he continued.

“I played in bands off and on since 1969, Tom’s been in bands for 35 years, and Rick is the same way. We bring a lot of years of experience, and the harmony is still there.”

For more information on Tyme Band, check out its website at tymband.net or e-mail tymband@yahoo.com for bookings and information.

6/18/2010

GNA taxes won’t be increasing

The school board hires 10 new teachers for the 2010-2011 school year.

slong@timesleader.com

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board on Thursday unanimously approved a \$25.4 million budget with no tax increases for the 2010-2011 school year.

Board member Sylvia Mizdail was the only member absent.

The property tax rate will remain at 9.9295 mills. A mill is a tax of \$1 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. Most of the district's revenue comes from the state at \$15.9 million, with \$7.7 million generated from property and earned income taxes and \$1.8 million from the federal government.

The district's largest expenses are salaries of \$10.3 million and benefits of \$4.4 million.

Board member Tony Prushinski said he was pleased with the budget being able to provide quality services to students without raising taxes.

"I am just very happy that we don't have to have a tax increase for our citizens of the Greater Nanticoke Area. I think the budget is 100 percent perfect and I could not be happier," Prushinski said.

The board also approved a year-long contract with J.P. Mascaro for \$210.98 per day for trash service. Superintendent Tony Perrone said the district received three bids for the trash removal. He said that while Mascaro was not the lowest bidder, the other companies were only slightly cheaper.

"It was a difference of \$144 per year. They choose Mascaro because Mascaro has been with us and they have given us good service when we needed it," he said.

The board also approved two contracts through the state minimum pricing through the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Food and Nutrition division. Those contracts went to Butter-Krust Baking Co. for bread and West Side Dairy for milk.

The amounts of the contracts were not available.

Ten new teachers were hired for the 2010-2011 school year. Jason Prushinski, Jessica Cashner and Megan Leonard were hired as special education teachers. Jennifer Ferro, April Williams, Jesica Holton, Mahnon Smith and Kelly McCabe were hired as elementary teachers. Megan Momenzadeh and Nicholas Rauh were hired as secondary math teachers. All will be paid as specified in the teachers contract, but those amounts were not available. Prushinski is not related to board member Prushinski.

6/14/2010

When 'plunk' goes the ball and 'splash' goes the victim, money goes 'ka-ching' to a good cause, and it's all in fun Dunking for dollars

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Ten-year-old Ryan Sauers wanted it more than presents on Christmas morning.

His favorite 5th grade teacher, Ron Bruza, was sitting just inches above gallons of murky, cold water.

When his turn came, Sauers couldn't decide whether six or nine balls would get the job done to dunk his math, science and social studies teacher.

"Hey Mr. Bruza," the 10-year-old screamed with anticipation at the Nanticoke Music Fest held June 3, 4 and 5. "You're gonna get wet!"

Bruza, a Greater Nanticoke Area teacher and head coach of the high school's varsity football team, smiled as Sauers took his first throw, taunting him every step of the way.

"You throw like a girl," Bruza joked, as each ball missed the plunger that would send Bruza dropping into the dunk tank.

Sauers gave up on the balls, and chose to go the easy route – running up to the plunger, releasing Bruza into the murky depths below.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Bruza said, as Sauers walked away, pouting at being unable to successfully dunk his teacher with his pitching arm.

But Bruza, and the nearly dozen of other fellow teachers that would become dunkees over the three-day period wouldn't get away that easy.

The dunk tank, rented from Fundraising USA in Wilkes-Barre, held gallons of water and was set up by Bruza to support the football team's booster club.

Bruza explained that the dunk tank was formerly operated by the high school girls soccer team, and coach Ryan Amos, who decided to give it up this year.

But Amos didn't get that far away, as he, too, became a dunkee and was prey to dozens of students eager to dish out some payback to teachers.

Bruza said he decided to take it over, and learned how to rent the tank, rent the space at the music fest and operate the contraption.

"The money raised will eventually trickle down to the kids to pay for uniforms, pads, shoes and a yearly pizza party,"

Bruza said, adding the money will help other booster club events as well. But before Bruza took the seat in the dunk tank, teacher Ed Lukowski was up first. Wearing a shirt that said "Can't dunk this," Lukowski, a technology and computer instructor, heckled his students passing by. "If we dunk you, will you fail us?" one girl asked. Another yelled Lukowski was afraid. "I don't want to be in that water," Lukowski said. "It's cold!" Then, an announcer at the band shell at Patriot Park said the dunk tank was open for business. And it wasn't long before the booster club had a stack of money and a long line of eager students. Bailey Cunningham, 12, took a number of tries at dunking her computer lab teacher, but all proved unsuccessful. "I will try again, I think it's rigged," she said, which seemed to be the theme of each student who failed to douse their teacher. Then, a smart 14-year-old Raymond Rittenhouse enlisted his best buddy, Steven Uravage, 17, to do his dirty work. Raymond, a student of Lukowski's, provided his friend with the funds. And Uravage provided the means. After three balls failed Uravage, he decided to use brute force in pushing the plunger, sending Lukowski into the cold water he so dearly wanted to stay out of. "I wanted (Urage) to dunk him like a donut!" Raymond laughed. But then, it was 5-year-old Sophie Lukowski's turn. The three balls she and her mother, Wendy, purchased to dunk their father and husband hadn't worked. So, the 5-year-old implored the help of Bruza in pushing the plunger to dunk her dad. It worked. And it worked again on a second try. "I pushed him in again!" Sophie shrieked with excitement. But Sophie didn't get away scot-free. Her father returned the soaking by splashing his daughter as she ran away. "So much for the 'Can't dunk this' shirt," a passerby said.

6/12/2010

Benefit today for Nanticoke woman battling cancer

kgaydos@citizensvoice.com, 570-821-2118

When the light glints off the bald heads of Michelle Myers' friends, she'll know she has their love and support as she continues her battle with terminal cancer. Myers, of Nanticoke, was diagnosed with terminal cancer and has been undergoing chemotherapy since last October. Her friends are hosting a benefit for the 48-year-old today at the Quoit Club in Nanticoke to help Myers pay her medical bills. Marlene Hermanofski had the idea for the benefit through the Nanticoke Quoit Club, with the help of Myers's son Shawn, sister Ann Marie Alberola, and their other friends. Marlene's daughters, Angela and Heather Chapman, and their aunt, Corrine Hermanofski, will shave their heads in solidarity with Myers. Myers lost all her hair in November due to the evasive chemotherapy she must endure weekly for the past eight months. She is afflicted with stage 4 ovarian and pelvic cancer, which has spread to her liver, pancreas and abdomen. Still she remains upbeat, determined to make the best of her last days. "I'm not going to lay down and die," she said. "I just keep going." Angela Chapman said she agreed to chop her hair after it came up in conversation one day. She's always kept her tresses long, so a clean-shaven head will be a big change. Still, it's worth it, she said. "She's very excited that people are willing to do that for her, to walk around basically bald," she said. Chapman's hair, in a ponytail, measures 11 inches, enough to donate to Locks of Love, the organization that fashions wigs for cancer patients who lose their hair during chemotherapy treatments. Shawn Myers, 22, began growing his hair for Locks of Love once his mom was diagnosed, but "I still have a long way to go," he said. He was impressed with the women's bravery and commitment to his mother. "It's actually crazy. That girl has hair down to her knee caps," Shawn Myers said of Angela Chapman. Myers said the support she's seen since her diagnosis has been overwhelming. Her former colleagues at Birchwood Nursing and Rehabilitation Center held a fundraiser for her. On Wednesday night, a friend gave her \$400 to buy

supplies for today's benefit. Their kindness as well as that of the benefit's organizers should be recognized, she added. "You don't see that too often," she said.

The benefit for Michelle Myers, diagnosed with terminal cancer, will be held from 1 to 7 p.m. today at the Nanticoke Quoit Club, 422 Railroad St., Nanticoke, behind Lacey's Bar, Main Street, Nanticoke. Tickets for the event are \$20 per person, which includes food, refreshments and a DJ. Tickets will be available at the door.

6/7/2010

St. Stan's is Nanticoke's 5th recent closing

St. Stanislaus, Luzerne County's oldest Polish parish, to become part of new St. Faustina's.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

Another church closed as the consolidation of the Catholic Community of Nanticoke continued. The Church of Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr conducted its closing liturgy on Sunday afternoon. It was the fifth church to close in the Nanticoke area with the last one, Holy Child in Sheatown, closing next week.

The six will be combined into one larger parish named St. Faustina's.

The pastor of St. Stan's, Rev. James Nash, and the future pastor of the new St. Faustina's asked for tolerance and forgiveness from the dedicated congregation.

The 135-year-old parish was founded by Polish immigrants in 1875 and is the fourth oldest Polish parish in the United States, the oldest one in Luzerne County.

Nash acknowledged the importance of the rich history involved in the church. He added Sunday was a very "heart wrenching" day.

"I was fortunate to be your pastor," he told the parishioners, some who were openly weeping. "Your welcoming faith and spirit encouraged me. You are good holy people."

Looking forward to a new assignment overseeing St. Faustina's, Nash pleaded with the parishioners to support the change.

"Let's make it vibrant and spirit-filled," he said. "Take your power and strength to the new parish."

He also asked for help. "I can't do it alone," he said. "I need each one of you to make it happen," he said.

The congregation applauded as he reminisced about the many different pastors who have served St. Stan's over the years. Several sat on the altar during the closing ceremony to revisit their old flock.

After the ceremony, the congregation somberly walked about two city blocks to Holy Trinity Church, where St. Faustina's will be based. Holy Trinity had spun off from St. Stanislaus in 1894.

The choir sang Polish hymns and members of the youth group carried the religious artifacts and books over to be placed on the altar at the new church. They also brought a statue of St. Stanislaus that now sits at the new altar.

Leon Simoncavage, a parishioner of St. Stan's for 30 years, said most of the members at St. Stan's wanted it to remain open even if the name changed.

He said the church has no steps, a strong climate control system and easy access to rest room facilities for the older members.

More than anything, Simoncavage said the closing left him feeling "terrible."

Barbara Wideman, of Luzerne, attended St. Stan's for more than 30 years before moving out of Nanticoke. She made the trip back for the closing.

She pointed out how "less and less" people attended services there over the last few years. She often wondered how they were able to manage the church with so few active members.

She went there on Sunday to say goodbye to the priests she's known over the years who have baptized her son, buried her parents and her first husband.

"It's a sad day," she said.

6/7/2010

Allure of the Big 6 is not about winning the jackpot

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Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs is poised to open its new table gaming section and bring Vegas-style action to the Wyoming Valley, but the crowd gathered round the Big 6 at the Newport Township Volunteer Fire Company and Newport Little League Bazaar May 28 could care less.

They have all the excitement they need, the excitement that has always been there.

There is a warmth gathered round the Big 6 stand, an easiness in the posture of the players and a friendliness in conversation that a casino, despite its higher stakes, its bright lights and jingle-jangle, just can't match. Perhaps it's because the bazaar Big 6 wheel in all its many incarnations is not about winning it big at all. It's less about the excitement that casinos and racetracks peddle than it is about a purer form of fun.

A large part of that atmosphere is provided by the person spinning the wheel.

At a casino, you won't see your dealer spin the roulette wheel and pass out chips with one hand and cup of beer with another. Your dealer won't jostle you when you lose, or tell you "keep it coming." Your dealer won't stash a stack of potato pancakes on the edge of the game table to snack on between spins.

In short, you won't have a dealer like Eric Spencer.

Spencer, 35, a network engineer and volunteer coach of the Newport Phillies Little League team, spends his weekend shuffling between the wheel's side and game tables, joking with players as he counts out ones and quarters.

Spencer says he likes the personal element of the job and interacting with the public, getting to know repeat customers who oscillate between the beer stand and the wheel.

The 2010 bazaar was Spencer's first manning the big wheel, but not his first volunteering. Spencer says he earned his post by putting in two years working in the bazaar's kitchen.

It's not an easy job, or a light responsibility. Spencer says he estimates more than \$500 crosses his tables each of the bazaar's three nights. He will work seven hours each night, not including setup and cleaning, and though he can eat and drink on the job, his only breaks come when no one wants to play. Breaks didn't come often Friday or Saturday night. Spencer spins the wheel about once a minute when the stand is busy and he needs to collect and pay out up to 10 bets. Still, Spencer says working the wheel beats the heat of the kitchen, saying he likes interacting with bazaar-goers and "the click of the wheel."

His arm still doesn't hurt by the end of his first night, he says.

Players come in all shapes and sizes. One young man appears at the table, slaps \$1 down hard atop the number six, and hollers his number in a clipped hoarse grunt. The wheel turns up trip fives, and he is gone as swiftly as he materialized. Another is less obvious. Straddling the corner with one foot in, one foot out of the game, he keeps a low profile during his 15 minutes at the table.

"That guy just lost about \$40," Spencer says after he leaves.

Spencer says the player is a rarity. With a \$2 max bet, few shirts are lost at the bazaar Big 6.

"The average person loses five, ten bucks and walks away," Spencer said.

Brian Lawall, 17, a student at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, spends an hour at the table, divided between 30-minute stints. Betting only in quarters, he works his way to \$7 up.

He says he likes the rush he gets when the wheel lands on his number, but has only had the courage to make the \$2 max bet once.

"I was getting daring," he says, adding that he doubled his money.

Of course, most don't step to the Big 6 rail hoping to take the house. Bazaars are, after all, fundraisers, and winnings often find their way back to the bazaar coffers. A few bucks won might mean a second helping of pierogies, taking another chance on a door prize or one more beer.

Barbara Keener, Plymouth, goes on a hot streak, getting up a few dollars on 50-cent bets. Though she will eventually lose it all, Keener says she wouldn't mind taking a little back. Also a volunteer at the bazaar, Keener said she spent about \$40 Friday night and another \$20 Saturday.

"It's for the kids," she said, and, win or lose, Keener, like others gathers around the Big 6, has a smile on her face.

She isn't ecstatic with the rush of a big win or tantalized by the prospect of it, she's just happy to be there.

Her pleasure is one that isn't contingent on winning or losing, but sits purely in helping out a worthy cause.

The little league, the volunteer fire department, and, at other bazaars, the local parish, they are the lucky ones.

6/6/2010

Nanticoke parishioners lament church consolidation

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When the symphony of church bells no longer chimes throughout Nanticoke, Jerry Hudak believes residents will realize what they lost.

Hudak, a member of the now-shuttered St. Joseph's Church, said silence at the noon and six o'clock hours in parts of the city will be a daily reminder that the Catholic worship sites have been drastically whittled down.

"It's coming down to a solitary one or two," he said. "It's sad for the whole community."

As church doors close for the final time, parishioners of the six Roman Catholic churches in Nanticoke will come together, much like the pieces of a puzzle, to create a new religious identity at St. Faustina's.

"This has been a difficult process. For many people it's like a death," said the Rev. Jim Nash, pastor. "But for the most part, I have people to embrace the change in the midst of their sorrow. We want our faith to survive."

St. Francis of Assisi Church was the first to shut down in May 2009 after structural problems hastened its closure. The parishioners held their final Mass in a tent outside the 137-year-old church, then assimilated into St. Joseph's. The members of three more, St. Joseph's, St. Mary of Czestochowa and Holy Trinity, bolted their churches' doors last month in a series of emotional closing Masses. St. Stanislaus will hold its final Mass today at 3 p.m., while the parishioners at Holy Child will hold theirs June 27, three days before deadline to consolidate.

The new parish will take the moniker of St. Faustina, a Polish nun who reported Jesus appeared to her in a vision as the King of Divine Mercy.

The name is fitting, Nash said, since the parishioners' first choice was Divine Mercy, a Roman Catholic devotion focused on the mercy of God. That name was taken by another church in the diocese, however, Nash said.

Josephine Bashista has worn many hats during the more than 50 years she's attended St. Stanislaus. She's contributed her services as a lector, eucharistic minister, and generally pitched in wherever help was needed.

Bashista believes on Sunday, churchgoers will have heavy hearts, but it's just part of the changes of life people have to expect.

"Everybody hang in there, pull together and be one," she said. That's what we can do and that's how we should do it."

Arlene Matthews has attended St. Stanislaus for 73 years, since the day she was baptized. She became more active in the church since around age 10, when her father told her "it was my church and I needed to work for it," she recalled.

At choir practice last Tuesday, Matthews said she was surprised to find herself overcome with emotion at losing the church that's been the site of her life milestones.

"I couldn't stop the tears," she said. "It's not Sunday yet."

Still, Matthews and her family are ready to take their places in the pews at St. Faustina's.

Four of the six parish churches were built by Polish immigrants and their descendants. St. Stanislaus was the first, and over the years three more churches formed as the population grew. Holy Trinity was formed in 1894, after a rift between parishioners drove many from St. Stanislaus. St. Mary of Czestochowa later split off from Holy Trinity. Holy Child, built in 1939 as a chapel for the children at St. Stanislaus orphanage, was transformed into a parish church. The orphanage closed in 1972. In the meantime, St. Francis Church became the site of worship for the Irish and Italians, while St. Joseph's Church was the Slovak stronghold.

Nash drew a parallel between the closures and the churches the founding immigrants left behind as they came to America.

"When they came here they had nothing but their faith and created these beautiful churches," he said. "And now we have to do the same thing."

More and more parishioners have begun referring to the parish as St. Faustina's, Nash said, a sign that acceptance may be under way. A welcoming Mass for the about 2,800 families in the new parish will be held June 18, at the former Holy Trinity Church on Hanover Street. The former St. Mary of Czestochowa will become an auxiliary site for the new parish.

"It's starting to happen," he said.

To honor the history of the individual churches, statues, banners and fixtures from each will find a home at St. Faustina's, Nash said. The various church communities have already been cooperating for years, Nash said, sharing missions like the religious education and youth ministry programs, and a combined choir for special occasions.

Matthews, her husband, Edwin, and her granddaughter Morgan have been flitting between the churches for some time, offering their services when required. Matthews said her 10-year-old granddaughter always jumps at the chance to be an altar server, no matter where.

"She would serve every day if she had a choice," she laughed.

Hudak, a life member and sexton at St. Joseph's, said its parishioners thought they had a good chance at remaining open, until the final decision on closures came down in 2009 as a result of the diocese's restructuring plan.

"For five years we were really fixing it up for the future," he said. "That was a little special hurt along the way."

After St. Joseph's closure, Hudak and his wife, Dorothy, journeyed to Ocean City, Md., to get some rest, relaxation and time to mull over which parish they will be joining on their return to Nanticoke. He said they aren't certain yet if they will join St. Faustina's parish or choose another.

"It's a traumatic thing," he said.

6/4/2010

Former Nanticoke football coach sues district

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A former Greater Nanticoke Area football coach is suing the district to recover more than \$7,000 in pay he claims he is owed for the 2009 season.

After dealing with health problems during the season, Lou Cella resigned as head coach in November.

According to a lawsuit filed Tuesday by attorney Thomas O'Connor, Cella was to receive a \$6,800 football coach salary and an \$800 stipend for supervising football players' weight lifting training, which began in early January and stopped at the end of the coaching season.

At the end of the season, Cella put in a formal request for his salary and stipend. He made several additional requests and received no payment.

"The main point is he didn't receive a dime for all of it," O'Connor said. In September, Cella told The Citizens' Voice that his doctor was keeping him away from Nanticoke Area football games after he suffered a heart attack in August. O'Connor said Cella's work began well before the football season.

"Men and women are acting coaches the whole year," he said. "It's not just a closed period of time."

Cella wants the district to pay him his salary, the stipend and attorney's fees, at a total cost not to exceed \$50,000.

Steve Bennett, staff writer, contributed to this report.

6/2/2010

Warrior Run mulls cop options

Borough officials investigating whether Nanticoke city police can provide patrol services.

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With 10 Warrior Run residents and borough council members present at a town hall meeting Tuesday night, Nanticoke officials answered questions about how the city would provide 24-hour police protection to the borough.

Warrior Run and Nanticoke council members are in negotiations to determine if Nanticoke will provide police coverage to the 2-square-mile borough that is roughly a mile from the Nanticoke border.

If a contract is eventually approved, it would be for one year and then reevaluated at that point.

Nanticoke Police Chief James Cheshinski and Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty answered questions for about 15 minutes at the meeting at the Warrior Run Volunteer Fire Hall.

The borough spends about \$34,000 per year on police protection with part-time officers. Nanticoke officials now think the city could provide services for about \$42,000 per year, but the final figure has yet to be worked out.

Dougherty noted negotiations were in the "infant stages right now" and there were some things still to be worked out, including the finances.

John Buckland, a borough resident for 30 years, pointed out it recently took the state police 2 1/2 hours to respond to a call of a burglarized home. He said he was also concerned about how many squad cars would patrol and if police would respond to every call or just high-profile incidents.

"I had questions because they are taking on the additional responsibility of 800 residents here, but it's still spreading the butter thin and not putting on any additional people, so the butter is getting spread thinner," Buckland said.

Cheshinski said the department, which operates 24 hours a day, has two to three officers who patrol at night, but they would not have to go out of their way to patrol the borough when they make their rounds through the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

He said he also felt the Nanticoke department could provide protection without any problems or having to add officers.

"We don't feel it would be a burden for us to patrol this section of Warrior Run. It's not a big area, it's a very small area and adjunct to where we already patrol. ... It does make a lot more sense to have a full-time police force working for you," Cheshinski said.

After the meeting, Buckland said he was willing to at least give Nanticoke a shot at trying to provide service.

"On the surface (it seems like it would work), but you have to have a trial period. In two months I might say, 'holy crap, this sucks,' but at the moment, on the surface, why not give it a try," he said.

Warrior Run Councilman Larry Siejak said he was pleased with how the meeting transpired, but he noted both communities were still discussing the issue and "getting all the facts."

6/2/2010

2 home rule efforts set to begin

Study panels for Nanticoke and Plymouth Township to swear in members.

slong@timesleader.com - Edited by Nanticoke City Webdesign

The two local home rule study commissions approved by voters in May are taking their next steps forward.

The seven members of the Nanticoke government study commission will be sworn-in during today's 7 p.m. council meeting at the Nanticoke Municipal Building.

At that time the members will decide when and where they will hold their first meeting, commission member Linda Prushinski said.

In Nanticoke, the seven commission members are: Yvonne Bozinski, William F. Brown, Gerald J. Hudack Sr., Leonard Omolecki, Robert J. Katra, Prushinski and Gary Smith.

The first meeting of the commission must be held within 15 days of the county Board of Elections certifying the official votes from the May 18 primary. The votes were certified May 27.

Members of the commission will begin meeting for the next nine months to conduct an in-depth study of their municipal governments to determine their governments' weaknesses or defects and to look at how other municipalities operate.

After that commissioners will either decide that no changes are needed or they will draft charters detailing how the governments will operate. If they decide charters are needed, members will meet to draft the charters before presenting them to voters in each municipality to be approved or rejected.

6/1/2010

Closing of historic Polish church nears

Nanticoke's St. Stanislaus to shut doors Sunday as part of consolidation.

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It was founded by Polish immigrants fleeing a Prussian occupation that barred them from speaking their own language. It grew big enough to help support a school, a convent and an orphanage – and to split in 1894 when an angry faction of 2,400 parishioners left to form another parish down the road, Holy Trinity.

At the venerable age of 135, St. Stanislaus parish in Nanticoke is the fourth oldest Polish Roman Catholic church in the nation, and the oldest in Luzerne County – a distinction that will disappear as the doors are shut for good June 6.

“It has such a history,” long-time member Frank Mrufchinski said as he sat in a pew on a recent weekday afternoon, sun streaming through the stained glass. “People don't even know what we're losing.”

St. Stanislaus is just one of scores of churches being closed in the Diocese of Scranton, but Mrufchinski feels the age and saga of St. Stan's makes the loss particularly hard for him and some others in the parish. He feels it's also the end of an important part of the county's history.

“I believe in obedience to the pope and to the bishop, and I wish Bishop Joseph Bambera the best,” Mrufchinski stressed, “But it's painful. I never thought I'd live to see this kind of day.”

Understandable, considering the church has been a fierce survivor, according to a history written on its centennial in 1975 by the late Jule Znaniecki, a Nanticoke native and local historian who lived to be 100 herself.

St. Stanislaus survived through two world wars that saw Poland overrun by conquerors – the church's pastor was visiting his native land in 1939 and barely escaped via Budapest shortly before the Nazi invasion. It survived a flu epidemic that led to the establishment of St. Stanislaus Orphanage in 1918, which, while supported by many parishes, got its biggest boost from St. Stan's.

It survived not only the 1894 rift that led to a new parish, but a 1912 dispute over who should be pastor that led to a Catholic “interdict,” or closing of the church, for more than a year.

Despite such setbacks, St. Stanislaus grew to well over 2,000 parishioners at its apex, spawned multiple religious societies, hosted a Boy Scouts of America troop, launched one of the earliest annual church bazaars in the area and boasted a choir that won awards, Mrufchinski said.

He concedes the numerous church closings are “partly our fault.

“Too many of us are caught up in the material world and consumerism. We don't encourage our children to enter the religious life. We're not giving enough for the upkeep of the churches. The issues are so complex.”

But Mrufchinski respectfully suggests a parish that thrived for the better part of 13 decades should get more consideration before being shuttered. “A church is here over 125 years, and they do a study and in a year they make a decision?” The church, he notes, was spruced up 10 years ago for the parish's 125th anniversary, including new windows – one, in the choir loft, was donated by he and his sister in memory of their father.

Along with a rich history, St. Stanislaus boasts a massive, ornately carved pulpit with an uncertain fate. "That pulpit is priceless," Mrufchinski said. The parish saw more than two dozen of its members go on to become priests or religious sisters. Mrufchinski himself is a lay brother of the Franciscan Order, devoted to a life of prayer and service, and earning the right to be buried in the order's garb.

When the diocesan closings were unveiled, Luzerne County faced the loss of about half its churches. Nanticoke was slated to lose five of its six. St. Stanislaus joined six diocesan churches that filed formal appeals to reverse the closing decision, but the appeal was rejected.

Mrufchinski said the pain from the closing was more than he was willing to take, and that he recently joined St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Wilkes-Barre, where other members of his family belong. But his heart still clearly longs for the area's first Polish Roman Catholic Church, a parish that arguably exemplifies how much the faith impacted the county over the last century – and how much those closing parishes impacted the tens of thousands of individuals watching the doors lock.

"It's part of your life. All those years," he said. "It's a part of us."

5/31/2010

Memorial Day becomes 'portal of grief'

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While placing some patriotic decorations at her husband's grave, Amy Patton reflected on how the meaning of Memorial Day changes as a war widow.

The granddaughter of two World War II veterans who died before she was born, she fondly recalls visiting their graves every Memorial Day to place flowers and pay her respects. Then, like most Americans, she'd enjoy the unofficial opening of summer with a fun day with family and friends.

From now on, she'll spend the holiday paying homage to her fallen husband, Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian Patton, who died Nov. 19 in a vehicle crash while serving in Kuwait with the U.S. Navy Reserves.

"This is something totally different," the Nanticoke woman said. "The gateway to summer has now become my portal of grief."

"I always knew what Memorial Day was about, but, of course, I did the picnicking thing - go here, go there. Now, it's more a day to reflect on those who lost their lives and are still serving," Amy Patton added.

Brian Patton, 37, was laid to rest in St. Adalbert's Cemetery in Glen Lyon next to his mother, Janet, who also died at age 37 in a 1987 vehicle crash. The military offered to honor him with burial in the revered Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, but his family chose to keep his remains local.

His gravesite, still awaiting a headstone and military foot marker, is adorned with several U.S. flags, a white cross delivered by a comrade and several cards and drawings made by his 9-year-old son, Nicholas. On Friday, Nicholas placed his latest creation, a colored drawing of the U.S. flag with his father's picture attached and the message, "Daddy, I miss you and love you. You are my hero. Love Nicholas."

Amy Patton said her son was forced to learn the meaning of Memorial Day "pretty quick."

"I have to play mom and dad now. It's tough. His father always would take him to play catch. I do it, but I know it's not like his dad. It has changed our lives forever," Amy Patton said. "My children and I will always remember the sacrifice that he and so many others have made. It is a sacrifice that, in my mind, began on the day he left our arms, but for the rest of the world, it was a sacrifice made on the day that he died."

An active duty Navy veteran of the first Gulf War, Brian Patton volunteered for the Kuwait mission to serve as a military police officer with Rochester, N.Y.-based Navy Reserve unit. He was responding to a call in a fully marked military police vehicle when his vehicle was struck head-on at high speed by a U.S. government contractor trying to pass a convoy at the crest of a hill, his family has been told.

He was pronounced dead at the scene. His passenger, Dave Morgan, 35, of Wilkes-Barre, was critically wounded in the crash and remains in a Philadelphia rehabilitation hospital.

The accident occurred roughly an hour after Amy and Brian Patton spoke on the telephone to share greetings on their ninth wedding anniversary.

"I think about it every day," Amy Patton said. "It makes me feel closer to him by coming here."

Amy Patton's Memorial Day ritual will never be the same. Since she was a child, she recalls it as a day she, her mother and grandmother would honor her grandfathers - Joseph Hynoski Sr., an Air Force veteran, and Darwin Roberts, an Army veteran - and place flowers at their graves.

Now, she'll work to keep her hero husband's memory alive.

"Unfortunately, until something like this happens, it's hard to realize the true meaning of Memorial Day," Amy Patton said. "It is impossible to put your emotional arms around thousands of war dead, but when you are connected with a single casualty, it becomes tragic. It's not about numbers anymore because now one of those numbers just so happens to be my husband."

5/28/2010

'Never Too Old to Rock'

Nanticoke Music Fest embraces youth with varied lineup, performances

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As the members of the circa-1970s/'80s Tyme Band enjoyed a pig roast and a DJ a few years ago, they encouraged lead singer J.D. Verazin to get up on stage and sing a tune.

"They said 'Wow, you can still sing after 25 years,' " Verazin recalled, and that affirmation put in motion the reunion of a group that had disbanded almost a quarter century earlier.

"When you get the music in you, you can't get it out of you," said Verazin, who also plans the music schedule each year for the Nanticoke Music Fest in Patriot Park. This year's event kicks off at 6 p.m. Thursday and continues through June 5.

"I just love working with music and bands and talking music," said Verazin, whose group will play the festival at 8 p.m. June 5.

"I think it brings people together more than anything."

Several local bands are booked for the event, which is themed "Never Too Old To Rock 'N' Roll."

Also on the bill are students from the Greater Nanticoke Area Educational Center's Idol contest, M80, Tom Slick & the Converted Thunderbolt Greaseslappers, Flaxy Morgan and the Original Star Fires with Eddie Day Pashinski.

Many of the groups draw good crowds, Verazin said, particularly the Star Fires, set to play from 8 to 11 p.m. June 5.

"People know them from way back when," he said.

"Eddie Day gets out there and mingles with the crowd. He's a fantastic singer and performer."

The "way back when" Verazin spoke of was when the group played at Hanson's Amusement Park at Harveys Lake and other local spots in the 1960s and '70s.

"(Pashinski is) from Nanticoke and taught in Nanticoke," Yvonne Bozinski, another organizer, said, explaining the loyalty to the group, which will play the festival for the third year in a row.

On top of all the music, food vendors, crafters and children's games will round out the offerings.

"Everybody is welcome," Bozinski said. "I even have a friend who lives in the Norristown area who comes every year to visit her relatives around this time so she can attend it."

The music fest started 15 years ago when Bozinski was on city council and John Toole was mayor.

"People are surprised with all the activities we have here in Nanticoke," Bozinski said, mentioning Christmas and Halloween parties, as well as an upcoming Christmas in July party in Patriot Park at which Santa Claus will wear shorts.

At the yearly festival, though, Bozinski said one of the most popular attractions is the dunk tank because teachers from Nanticoke schools often take the hot seat, which attracts students.

A small Ferris wheel and a duck pond attract younger children.

"It's a good time for everybody to get together and come out because a lot of people don't get to see each other in the winter," Verazin said. "I've been doing it for nine years, and I want to see it get as big as it can."

If you go

What: Nanticoke Music Fest

Where: Patriot Park, Broad and Market streets, Nanticoke

When: 6-10 p.m. Thursday, 5-11 p.m. June 4-5

Music: "Ed Center Idol on Tour" at 6 p.m. and M80 at 7 p.m. Thursday;

Tom Slick and the Converted Thunderbolt Greaseslappers at 5 p.m. and

The Original Star Fires with Eddie Day at 8 p.m. June 4;

Flaxy Morgan at 5 p.m. and Tyme Band at 8 p.m. June 5

More info: 735-2800 or nanticokecity.com

5/24/2010

Nanticoke's St. Mary's holds final Mass

It's the latest parish in town to close under restructuring

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

On Sunday St. Mary of Czestochowa joined the list of Catholic parishes closed by the Diocese of Scranton, which began a restructuring initiative a few years ago.

The church held its final Mass followed by a procession to Holy Trinity Church about two blocks away. Holy Trinity will eventually be the main worship site in the city and take on the new identity of St. Faustina.

As of 2009, there were six Catholic parishes in Nanticoke. By the end of June, there will be one, said Bill Borysewicz, member and organizer for the youth ministry.

St. Francis closed last year and St. Joseph's closed last week. Holy Trinity will conduct its closing Mass next week, with St. Stanislaus and Holy Child in Sheatown holding their closing Masses in June.

Borysewicz said some of the older parishioners are taking the changes a little hard. For example, St. Stanislaus is the first Polish parish in Northeast Pennsylvania and one of the first in the country, he said. Some of the older parishioners relish that distinction, he added.

For the most part, the congregations in Nanticoke are unifying, Borysewicz said.

"A good majority of them know this has to happen," he said. The shrinking population in the city coupled with the costs associated with maintaining six parishes made the changes unavoidable, he said.

Borysewicz pointed out the name change to St. Faustina's helped keep the people "at ease" by making a fresh start instead of keeping one existing parish name at the expense of all others.

Dan Owazany, a member of St. Mary's for about 50 years, said he feels a bit sad to be losing the church he attended regularly for so many years. He echoed Borysewicz, saying most of the members knew the changes had to come.

Owazany said the Nanticoke parishes are all "one family" though, who work together during the annual picnics and various social societies.

He admits things will be "a little different."

Joan Wall, a member of Holy Child, said she does not harbor any ill feelings because of the cutbacks. She said she is happy there will still be an active parish in the city.

"Not a lot of people go to church," she said. "Plus there are not enough priests. It's hard," she said.

She believes with proper leadership and participation, St. Faustina's will maintain many of the church traditions in Nanticoke for the future. The participation in the youth group shows how the church will go on.

After the procession, the members of St. Mary's enjoyed a final gathering at the American Legion in downtown Nanticoke.

The "closing committee" thanked the parishioners who made St. Mary's successful from 1901 to 2010. Through St. Faustina's they will continue to remember their roots.

On July 2 and 3, St. Faustina's will conduct its first annual homecoming festival as a combined Catholic community church in Nanticoke

5/21/2010

Council will buy property in Hanover

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Police Department is looking to receive accreditation from the Pennsylvania Police Chiefs Association. Council approved a resolution formally adopting the police officer's code of conduct. Receiving the accreditation would help the department cut down on its insurance costs.

City Council approved resolutions Wednesday to acquire a property in the Hanover section and to aid the police department's effort to receive an accreditation it's seeking to save some money.

The city will pay \$1 to the homeowner to purchase the blighted, burned-out property and then pay roughly \$900 on the property to the county and the sanitary sewer authority, according to city Solicitor Bill Finnegan.

He said the property was put up for county tax sale twice but never sold.

Once the city owns the property, officials can use government funding to demolish the building and then sell the land, Finnegan said.

"We will recoup what we put into it," Finnegan said.

The Nanticoke Police Department is looking to receive accreditation from the Pennsylvania Police Chiefs Association.

In order for it to do so the council approved a resolution formally adopting the police officer's code of conduct, detailing professional standards for the department.

Chief Jim Cheshinski said the two-year process is voluntary, but receiving the accreditation would help the department cut down on its insurance costs.

"In order to qualify for this you have to follow their rules. Their rules say even though you have a code of conduct, it has to be written and passed by council. It is just very specific things that have to be passed by council," he said.

The department is already certified by the state, Cheshinski said.

Council members also learned the city's earned income tax appears to be on track as \$218,000 was collected in April, bringing the year-to-date total of \$707,000 being received.

South Valley Chamber of Commerce Secretary Linda Prushinski made an announcement toward the end of the meeting alerting people to be aware of a scam targeting local businesses.

She said the chamber received complaints Monday from business owners who were being asked to pay \$636 for 80 T-shirts that would include the business's name and logo.

Business owners are being told a portion of the costs will be donated to the chamber and fire departments.

Prushinski said that is not true and the chamber does not have any such agreement with any firm.

Cheshinski said the department received calls earlier in the week about people approaching businesses to sell T-shirts.

When officers interviewed employees at the businesses, there was no mention of any money being directed back to the chamber or fire department.

5/19/2010

Nanticoke, Plymouth Twp. OK study commissions

Seven members won seats in each municipality to decide whether to propose home rule charters.

Gino Troiani - Times Leader

Residents from Nanticoke and Plymouth Township gave the green light on Tuesday to form study commissions to assess the structure of their local governments.

By overwhelming numbers, citizens from both municipalities voted in favor of forming study commissions composed of seven members each.

The commissions will meet regularly throughout the next 18 months to study how effectively the municipalities operate and conduct in-depth studies. They will then decide separately whether to propose home rule charters.

If they decide to move forward with such measures, they would craft charters which would be presented to voters in the 2011 general election.

In Nanticoke, the seven candidates who earned a spot on the home rule study commission were Yvonne Bozinski, William F. Brown, Gerald J. Hudack Sr., Leonard Omolecki, Robert J. Katra, Linda Prushinski and Gary Smith.

In Plymouth Township, the elected candidates are Leonard Bartosiewicz, Linda R. Kenney, Joseph D. Lloyd, James P. McDermott, Eugene R. McKeown, Edward F. Nowak and Mark J. Vnuk.

Hudack, a member-elect of the Nanticoke study commission, said they will assess the community and come up with a plan.

"If they don't like the package, that's it, it's over ... if they like the package, we'll move on and try to create a pattern for a form of government that can be put onto the ballots and approved by the population," he said.

Kenney, a Plymouth Township study commission member, said the group's goal is "to help the people in the township. "Without a home rule study (the township) would have to lower the EIT (Earned Income Tax), which was already raised to help deal with us being in Act 47."

As a result, she said the township would look to increase property taxes. "Since so many people in the township are on fixed incomes, I can see it being catastrophic for people that live here to have their taxes raised 209 percent."

Throughout the last several years, the city and the township have been facing a host of budgetary problems. As a result, they have each been declared financially distressed, or Act 47 communities, by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

The act also governs municipalities' ability to obtain government funding and authorizes them to participate in federal debt and bankruptcy adjustment actions under specific circumstances.

Because both municipalities have been declared financially distressed by the state, they were granted the ability to raise their earned income taxes above the state limit from 1 percent to 2 percent to generate revenue.

"Right now, Nanticoke city is in financial distress," said James Litchkofski, a member of the Nanticoke city council who is responsible for accounts and finances.

Litchkofski, a proponent of home rule, said if the city did not implement a home rule charter it would be forced to increase property taxes.

5/17/2010

St. Joseph's becomes the first of five Catholic churches in Nanticoke to close, with parishes set to consolidate in the current Holy Trinity

First of five church closings in Nanticoke

Gino Troiani - Times Leader

Members of St. Joseph's parish gathered one last time Sunday afternoon in a commencement ceremony to say goodbye to their parish before the churches' doors were closed for good.

The closing of St. Joseph's is the first in a series of five Catholic churches in the Nanticoke area scheduled to close as part of a consolidation effort drawn up by the Diocese of Scranton more than two years ago.

Jerry Hudak, sexton at St. Joseph's, explained the closings are a result of a declining member base along with a lack of priests to properly staff the parishes.

"A final vote was taken on what churches were to close and what churches were to remain," said Hudak, "This is a combination of a two-year study by the diocese; unfortunately they're depleted in the ranks of the priesthood, so they don't have enough priests to service all the churches."

St. Mary's will be closing on May 23, Holy Trinity on May 30, St. Stanislaus on June 6 and Holy Child in late June.

According to Hudak, Holy Trinity on Hanover Street in Nanticoke will serve as the new location which will accommodate all five of the churches set to close. The new parish will be called St. Faustina Parish and make the Holy Trinity building its home.

"We're basically reduced down to one priest in the Nanticoke area," said Hudak. "The prognosis for the Scranton Diocese was that for the year 2010 (there should be) one priest for every 2,400 practicing Catholics," a number Hudak said is significantly lower in the Nanticoke area.

On Sunday afternoon, more than 75 members attended a special closing Mass at St. Joseph's and directly afterward proceeded down the street to their new location, where they were welcomed by a large crowd of members from Holy Trinity and participated in a joint Mass.

Hudak explained members from the various parishes set to close have expressed mixed feelings. "It's a very traumatic situation," said Hudak. "Parishes have their own particular identities and people generally associate themselves with particular identities of each parish, so I think people are going to be looking around a little bit in choosing where they're going to be going to church."

For Dorothy Edanko of Nanticoke, the closing signifies a major loss after being a lifelong member of St. Joseph's, where she was baptized, received her First Holy Communion and was married. "We're all upset, there's ... no words for it," said Edanko. "I was wishing that this day would never come."

"It's almost like a death in the family, it's very hard for all of these parishioners," said Marie Passetti, a member of St. Joseph's. "I've been a member of St. Joseph's for a little over 33 years but I can't imagine the people who have been there for baptisms and weddings and funerals to feel what's tugging in their heart strings now."

In conjunction with the closings, many of the original members of Holy Trinity said they are both welcoming the new parishioners and are optimistic for the merger.

"Some people are for it, some people are against it, but you can only say that it's got to go forward and I would hope that it would succeed. Maybe it'll take a period of time, but I believe it will come together," said Edward Kerbaugh, of Nanticoke, who has been a member at Holy Trinity for more than 50 years.

As for the new location, Hudak said Holy Trinity was chosen because it is one of the largest churches in the merger. However, he explained there are a few issues that need to be addressed throughout the consolidation process.

"It's (Holy Trinity) not in good condition," said Hudak. "It needs a lot of repairs (and) an upgrade." Hudak explained the parish will be working over the next several months to ensure the building is capable of accommodating the influx of new members while working to address any necessary upgrades.

"We're all going to have to find our new niche in the new community of St. Faustina.

"St. Faustina will watch over us, and we'll get through this," said Passetti.

5/14/2010

GNA doesn't plan a tax increase

District's property tax millage rate remains unchanged in budget proposal.

B. Garret Rogan - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board on Thursday discussed budget issues for the 2010-2011 school year and learned there should be no increase in property taxes.

Business consultant Al Melone Jr. presented the board with a proposed final budget for the upcoming year that includes total revenues of \$25,541,095 and total expenditures of \$25,226,235 with a surplus of \$114,860.

The district's current property tax millage rate of 9.9295 remains unchanged in the proposal.

Salaries and benefits account for the lion's share of the budget expenditures.

Numbers for those budget areas may vary before the plan is finalized because contracts are still being negotiated, but Melone said he is confident that any change will be extremely minimal and will not affect the overall structure of the proposed spending plan.

In other business, Superintendent Tony Perone announced there will be two in-service sessions this summer that have generated a lot of interest not only among Nanticoke teachers but those across the area as well as state officials.

Anita Archer will hold a session on student engagement for Nanticoke's elementary school staff.

Archer is an award winning educator and author of several books on education methodology. She regularly lectures throughout the country and serves as a consultant for several school districts.

Grant Wiggins, president of the education reform group Authentic Education, will also be holding a session this summer.

Wiggins along with co-author Jay McTighe wrote the book "Understanding by Design," which according to Middle School Principal Joe Long, is an essential text in modern American education.

Long said officials from the state Department of Education expressed a strong interest in attending Wiggins' in-service session as soon as there was a rumor that one would be held.

In another matter, the board reluctantly accepted the resignation of math teacher and athletic director Jerry Bavitz.

Perone described Bavitz simply as "a great man." Those sentiments were echoed by board members as well as audience members at the meeting.

Board Vice President Kenny James recalled his long relationship with Bavitz that started when Bavitz, then a senior in high school, tutored the sophomore James.

"He will be greatly missed," James said. "I don't want to accept his resignation but I will."

Bavitz's retirement will mark the end of a career in education that lasted more than 30 years and will take effect after the last day of the 2009-2010 school year.

5/13/2010

Nanticoke mayor urges voters to back home rule panel

Times Leader

As mayor of the city of Nanticoke, I would like to impress upon residents the importance of the May 18 primary election. On the ballot that day is a government study commission referendum question.

The question states, "Shall a government study commission of seven members be elected to study the existing form of government of the City of Nanticoke, to consider the advisability of the adoption of a Home Rule Charter; and if advisable, to draft and recommend a home rule charter?"

I urge voters to choose yes, and to select seven members to serve on the study commission, for a number of reasons, which I will detail.

For years, the city spent more money than it brought in to pay for the basic services of administration, public works and public safety to its taxpayers. The city would borrow money each year in order to balance the budget, being forced to incur long-term debt to pay the current year's bills. And each year the gap between revenues and expenses grew. In 2006, facing critical cash flow issues, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) designated the city an Act 47 community, under the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act.

The Pennsylvania Economy League was selected by DCED to serve as the city's recovery coordinator, and the League drafted a recovery plan that was accepted by council in 2007. A major portion of the recovery plan was based upon generating new revenue for the city by allowing the city to seek court approval to collect an additional 1 percent of Earned Income Tax (EIT) from residents each year, due to the City's Act 47 status. (The city is organized and governed by the provisions of the Third Class City Code, which limits the earned income tax collection rate to 0.5 percent.)

At the time the city entered Act 47, property tax millage rates were capped at 30 mills, and that is what the city set as its collection rate every year to generate the maximum property tax revenue. With the countywide reassessment, the city's

2010 property tax millage was set at 2.43 mills. The reassessment allows greater flexibility for the city to raise property taxes in order to generate more revenue.

DCED has reviewed the city's Act 47 status, and now that the city has more options to generate revenue beyond the court-approved higher EIT rates, it has been recommended to the city to phase out of Act 47 by increasing the property tax rates and decreasing the EIT rates. Basically, the city was in a bind in 2006 and could not legally collect any additional taxes to provide for basic services. Now the city can, but the burden will be shifted to property owners from working residents.

If the city were to reduce the EIT collection rates back to 0.5 percent, it would have to raise an additional \$1.5 million per year to balance the budget. Currently, the average household pays \$210.35 in city property taxes per year. If the EIT were reduced to 0.5 percent and the property taxes increased to bridge the gap, the average household tax would increase to \$604.55 per year, nearly tripling.

Voting yes on the government study commission referendum question is the first step for the city to move toward a more flexible home-rule governance system. Seven of the candidates that have put their names on the ballot would be elected to the commission to study the current government structure and decide if changes should be made. If they decide yes, they will draft a charter that will be placed on another referendum for voters to make the choice. Personally, I feel that the current city government structure is sound, but the taxation limits in the Third Class City Code are restrictive, and the city can benefit from home rule by drafting a charter with minor changes.

The choice is up to the voters, and I urge you to give the government study commission a chance in the city of Nanticoke, in order to maintain a fairly balanced tax structure and to continue to provide an excellent level of services to city residents.

Joseph A. Dougherty Mayor, Nanticoke

5/13/2010

Full-time Warrior Run cops mulled

Next week's meeting to look into possibility of Nanticoke sharing force with borough.

slong@timesleader.com

Warrior Run residents could have a full-time police force soon if officials from Nanticoke and the borough can work out an agreement for the city's officers to patrol there.

Next week, officials are set to meet to discuss specific details of how a service agreement would allow Nanticoke to provide police protection to Warrior Run.

The meeting is just the beginning of negotiations, both sides point out, saying each council would have to approve an agreement at a later date.

Warrior Run has four part-time officers whose shifts change depending on when they can work outside their regular full-time jobs, Warrior Run Mayor Jim Brodginiski said Wednesday. The state police provides patrol services and emergency response when a Warrior Run officer is not on duty.

It can take state police sometimes up to 45 minutes to respond to a call, but Brodginiski estimates it could take six minutes or less for a Nanticoke officer to arrive.

Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty said the city's police chief, Jim Cheshinski, came to him two months ago with the idea of providing police services to Warrior Run. Although the towns don't share a border, less than a mile separates them. The council members agreed to consider an offer, so a meeting is being scheduled.

"We just don't have the budget to provide the protection the borough needs. We don't have a full-time officer. We don't have the money to have a full-time officer," Brodginiski said.

At the meeting, both sides will discuss how much Warrior Run must pay for the service, exactly what type of services will be provided and how both communities will incorporate their ordinances together.

Dougherty said that sometimes Nanticoke officers will turn around in Warrior Run as they drive down Front Street while patrolling the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

"We can patrol that whole borough in a matter of minutes," he said.

Dougherty said there would be a town hall meeting to get input from residents after officials talk next week.

Sharing services could also help the two communities become eligible to apply for some local shared services grants, Dougherty said.

5/11/2010

Navy Times

13 female mids excited to be first on subs

By Lance M. Bacon - Staff writer

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The 11 Naval Academy and two NROTC seniors picked to be the first women to serve aboard submarines are looking forward to life in the undersea service.

The Navy's announcement of the selections came May 6, one week after the change was made official. But these women began getting ready when news broke last fall that a change was coming.

The 11 academy midshipmen, scheduled to graduate later this month, had already received their fleet assignments before being rerouted into the sub force. Eight were to become nuclear officers aboard aircraft carriers, one was to be a conventional surface warfare officer, one was headed to the Marine Corps and one was to be an aviator.

The selectees downplayed their roles as pioneers, but spoke excitedly when talking about the challenge and camaraderie inherent in a sub crew.

"I am really excited about the leadership opportunities and the technical side of submarine service," said Midshipman 1st Class Marquette Ried, who had originally planned to fly helicopters. "This is the perfect opportunity. The stars aligned, and I was at the right place at the right time."

Although Ried has never been on a submarine, she smiles wide when discussing "being part of the sub team and leading a division. Deckplate leadership is exactly what I want."

For Midshipman 1st Class Elizabeth Hudson, breaking barriers has become a way of life. No women attended the academy when her father graduated in 1971, and no women served on subs with him. Now, Hudson is poised to to accomplish both.

"If anything, he might have envisioned [his] son was going to grow up and do this, probably not his daughter," said Hudson, who had planned on becoming a Marine. "He is excited about it now. He was able to relive his glory days coming to reunions here; now he has another five years of that."

A 24-hour familiarization cruise on an attack sub was what changed Midshipman 1st Class Abigail Gesecki's mind.

"The crew had a great vibe and a closeness about them that I didn't think I would find on a carrier with 3,000 people," she said.

The women expressed no concern about entering a community that has been exclusive to men for 100 years. They said crews were very professional when familiarization tours were conducted for all mids between their sophomore and junior years, and expect the same over the long term. Gesecki, the academy's indoor track captain, then offered a light-hearted perspective to acknowledge the women's responsibility in the change.

"I think it is important for us to keep in mind that we're going to impose a little bit of a change on the sailors now," she said. "We have to be very conscientious of their daily routines and try to make it as smooth a transition as possible. If we're going to be using their bathrooms ... we're going to have to be quick and expeditious and not stay in there for an hour while they're all waiting outside."

Midshipman 1st Class Kristin Lyles added that her fellow mids have been supportive, and sub officers at the academy have been helpful in preparing them for selection boards, nuke school and sub service.

Though 11 academy mids were selected, one will have to wait two years to join the sub fleet. Midshipman 1st Class Kayla Sax was one of 32 Americans, and the only midshipman, to receive a Gates Scholarship for Cambridge University this year. There, she will earn a master's degree in nuclear engineering.

"By the time I get to a boat, all these other women will be qualified," she said. "But I worked really hard to earn this scholarship, and the sub force will be there when I get back. With some shortened shore tours I'll be able to catch up with my year group, so in the long run it works out."

North Carolina State University seniors Megan Bittner and Karen Achtyl on Friday will graduate magna cum laude and be commissioned as ensigns, and will join the their academy counterparts for 15 months of nuke school — a six-month academic course, six months of operational curriculum and three months at the submarine officer basic course. Up to eight female supply corps officers will also join the submarine force in late 2011.

"I don't believe the Navy could have picked two finer females to pioneer the entrance of females in the submarine community," Lt. Col. Timothy Nichols, executive officer of the North Carolina Piedmont Region NROTC consortium, said in a press release.

The female officers will be assigned to one of eight blue and gold crews aboard ballistic- and guided-missile submarines. The assignments involve two submarines on the East Coast and two on the West Coast. The larger Ohio-class subs were selected because the introduction of co-ed crews will not require extensive modifications, as would be required on the smaller attack subs.

First to go

The 13 women chosen to join the sub force include 11 Naval Academy midshipmen:

- Tabitha Gant, Bowie, Md.
- **Abigail Gesecki, Luzerne, Colo.**
- Elizabeth Hudson, Plymouth, Mass.
- Peggy LeGrand, Amarillo, Texas
- Rachel Lessard, Newburyport, Mass.
- Kristin Lyles, Fairfax Station, Va.
- Laura Martindale, Roselle, Ill.
- Marquette Ried, Fort Collins, Colo.
- Kayla Sax, Richland, Wash.
- Misty Webster, Wesley Chapel, Fla.
- Jessica Wilcox, Honesdale, Pa.

Two NROTC midshipmen at North Carolina State University also have been picked:

- Megan Bittner, Chesapeake, Va.
- Karen Achtyl, Rochester, N.Y.

5/9/2010

Church Matriarch

MOTHER'S DAY: The Rev. Sylvia Thomas, a minister who is also a mom, discovers that being a pastor is similar to being a parent

Matt Hughes - Times Leader

With three children grown and a husband recently retired, many 66-year-old women might think of traveling, or perhaps buying a home somewhere warm.

The Rev. Sylvia Thomas bought a church.

Thomas, now 72, of Wilkes-Barre, is a mother of three, grandmother of eight, great-grandmother of two, and pastor to about 25. A native of Trucksville but a resident of the Wyoming Valley for most of her life, Sylvia Thomas is co-pastor of The Berean Lighthouse Church on the corner of Green and Market streets, Nanticoke.

Standing only 5 feet, 1 inch tall, Thomas is a slight woman with piercing golden brown eyes. She does not look her 72 years, perhaps because she has never slowed down.

"She's so full of energy," friend Phyllis Warren, 65, said, "no matter if it's raining or snowing, she will be there if she needs to be."

Church has been the center of Thomas' life since she became a Christian at 18. Raising her children, she also brought them into the church, and brought Christianity into their home.

"It was a very big part of our lives growing up," daughter Susan Wardecki, 49, said. "We went to church three times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening."

"I counted it a privilege to have children," Thomas said. "They are the most precious things that God gives you."

Her children describe her as a strong, but sympathetic and supportive mother.

"She's a tough mother. She's very upfront and she will tell you exactly what she thinks," Wardecki said, "but she'll be behind you 100 percent."

"She will hold your hand and let you cry if you need to cry and not say anything," daughter Ruthann Kreitzer, 46, said. Sylvia Thomas' husband, the Rev. Daniel Thomas, 73, said these same qualities have made his wife a successful pastor.

"When people come to you, they come to you for one thing: they want someone to listen," Daniel Thomas said. "A lot of women come to my wife looking for just that."

Sylvia Thomas said she has also found being a pastor similar to being a parent.

"Just as you like your children to learn and grow physically and mentally, you want the people to grow in their love of Christ, to be strong in their faith, and you want to know you can count on them," Sylvia Thomas said.

In 1959, around the time her first daughter, Wardecki, celebrated her first birthday, Sylvia Thomas and her husband moved to New London, Conn., where they would stay for the next 11 years. The Thomases soon joined a local church, and Sylvia Thomas began teaching Sunday school. She began in the nursery program, and progressed through the grade levels with her children. All told, she taught Sunday school for 30 years.

As her children grew older and started families of their own, Sylvia Thomas became a caregiver to others, working as a certified nurse's aide providing home healthcare support. It was in this position that the seed of her church was first

sown.

In 1991, Thomas' friend, Warren, a nurse, was caring for one of Thomas' neighbors. Thomas decided to stop by one day to see if her homebound neighbor would like to hear and discuss the Bible. On Sylvia Thomas' second visit, Warren joined the group, and soon other friends and neighbors began to stop by as well. The group grew to a dozen, and continued at a Nanticoke senior citizens high-rise even after the neighbor's death.

These afternoon meetings sparked an interest in Bible study that would, nearly a decade later and at an age at which most retire, lead the Thomases to study to become pastors.

In 2000, the Thomases completed a two-year home-study course and were ordained as pastors by the Rev. Weldon Hettesheimer and the Rev. Thelma Hettesheimer, pastors of the Larksville Mountain Full Gospel Church. They then began serving as assistant pastors at that church, a position Sylvia Thomas said they were quite happy with. Sylvia Thomas said she was not looking to start her own church. The church found her.

In 2004, a friend told Sylvia Thomas that the Bethel Congregation United Church of Christ in Nanticoke had gone up for sale, and she and her husband decided to take a look. The first time Sylvia Thomas set foot in the building, she fell in love.

"I said 'Oh, my God, this is a church,'" Sylvia Thomas said, holding back tears, "and I felt the presence of God so strong, and all I could say was 'Oh God.' I felt home."

The Thomases purchased the church with \$90,000 of their own money, then sold the church to the congregation they had assembled for \$1.

"I would have sold the shirt off my back if I had to," Sylvia Thomas said, "This one was that special."

They rechristened the church The Berean Lighthouse. Daniel Thomas wanted the church to be called a lighthouse to suggest a "beacon of hope," he said. Sylvia Thomas chose the name Berean to reflect her love of and commitment to Bible study, taking the name from the episode in the Acts of the Apostles in which the Apostle Paul preaches to the Jews of Berea. The Berean Jews listen to Paul, then search their scriptures to verify what they have heard.

"I liked that," Sylvia Thomas said. "If you tell me a thing, I'm going to say 'all right,' but then later I'm going to search my scripture to find out if it's true."

The Thomases now have a congregation of about 25 at their church. Each preaches on alternate Sundays. When she is not preaching, Thomas plays the organ and leads songs. She also leads Walking off the Pounds exercise programs on Tuesday and Thursday nights, and a Wednesday afternoon Bible study group.

Though The Berean Lighthouse is a Protestant church, all are welcome, and many members of her Bible study and exercise classes are Catholics.

"It's not a strict, 'you have to be this way' kind of thing," Wardecki said.

"It broadens your mind, and it's a good thing," said Lucille Sullivan, a member of the Bible study and exercise groups and a Catholic.

Thomas describes her current position, as pastor and grandmother, as the climax of her life. She could not be more satisfied, she said, and, energetic as ever, shows no signs of slowing down.

"I will never retire," Sylvia Thomas said, "I will go out rejoicing, but I'll never quit."

4/27/2010

Lawsuit muddles plan for Nanticoke parking

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Municipal authority members say they have a "plan B" to provide Luzerne County Community College with downtown parking, after a lawsuit complicated the issue.

The authority has a lease-purchase contract with LCCC for the former Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, which the college will renovate to house its new Health Sciences Center.

Municipal authority members had an agreement to buy the Nanticoke Villa personal care home at 50 N. Walnut St., along with the adjacent former Y-T Hardware property, both owned by the Darlak family trust, for \$800,000. The authority wants the site to help provide LCCC with the 272 contractually required parking spaces.

The authority is mainly interested in the Y-T property and wasn't planning to tear down the nursing home, Chairman Hank Marks said.

Attorneys for the Darlak family trust have filed a suit in Luzerne County Court against Nanticoke Villa Real Estate Associates, the company of Ronald Halko, who operates the personal care home with Robert Hughes.

Halko is opposing the sale of the building to the municipal authority, but authority members have been talking with him, Marks said. Halko, Hughes or other representatives from Nanticoke Villa Real Estate Associates did not attend

Monday's municipal authority meeting.

According to the suit, Joseph and Helen Darlak entered a sales agreement with Halko for Nanticoke Villa in July 2008. Halko defaulted on it, and an amendment was drawn up in June 2009, along with papers for a loan to operate the facility.

But Halko defaulted again, so the parties negotiated an additional agreement on Oct. 13, 2009. Under its terms, if the Darlaks chose to sell Nanticoke Villa to a third party, they could do so without restrictions and Halko no longer had the right to purchase the property first or share in proceeds from the sale.

The Darlak trust agreed in March to sell the property to the Nanticoke Municipal Authority. The Darlaks' attorneys demanded in writing that Halko acknowledge the termination of the agreement with him and to vacate the premises within 60 days. Halko did not, the suit alleges. Nor did he notify the state Department of Public Welfare, as is required when a nursing home is closing.

The Darlak Trust is asking the court to grant a judgment to eject Nanticoke Villa Real Estate Associates from the property and give the trust possession.

Halko is meeting with the Darlaks' attorneys on Thursday, municipal authority Solicitor James Mangan said.

In case they discussion do not go well, municipal authority members say they have enough land to pull off a "plan B" to satisfy their contractual requirements to LCCC.

Besides the lot next to the Kanjorski Center, which the authority owns, Arch Street can be used, Marks said. Overflow parking can be put on Lower Broadway, authority member Chester Beggs said. If needed, the city-owned former CVS building next to the Kanjorski Center could also be demolished for more space, authority member Dennis Butler said.

4/26/2010

Nanticoke team captures Engineering Olympics title

Citizens Voice

Ten juniors from Greater Nanticoke Area captured first place and \$1,000 scholarships each at the Engineering Olympics at Wilkes University on April 16. Students from Meyers High School placed third in the seven-school competition. They participated in five events that included a balsa wood airplane, egg drop with parachute, resistor manipulation, bridge building and a "MacGyver" competition.

The Greater Nanticoke Area team was led by teacher Anthony Fleury and consisted of Alexandra Bolinski, Alexander DelGuercio, Arielle Domashinski, Lucas Domulevicz, Chris Kropiewnicki, Claire N. Saunders, Brett Schenck, Tom Slusser, Matthew Smith and Michael Yalch.

Each member of the winning team received \$1,000 scholarships from Wilkes University.

4/25/2010

109th receives training notice

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Following the Sept. 11 terroristic attacks, soldiers from the 109th Field Artillery were summoned for security duty at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport and the nuclear power plant in Salem Township.

In the years since, members of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard battalion have been deployed to Germany, Iraq, Kuwait, the Sinai Peninsula, Afghanistan and to Iraq a second time.

Some troops have served on two or three of those missions.

With the nation still at war, the 109th may be needed to serve once again.

The unit has been given a training notice of a possible deployment to Kuwait in the late summer or fall 2011, unit leaders confirmed.

A training notice is the first step in the long process that could lead to a deployment 18 months from now, said Sgt. 1st Class John Paul Karpovich.

Karpovich said the notice requires the unit's training be modified to fit the needs of the mission if the 109th is needed. If the call does come, the battalion will be ready, he said.

"We, as a unit, have been able to tackle anything that has been thrown at us and we're doing it well. We have trained with the best and continue to excel," Karpovich said. "There's a reason we get chosen for these missions."

Amid the multiple deployments and expected turnover of soldiers during wartime, the unit continues to be praised by military brass. The spokesperson of the state National Guard recently penned an article that said the 109th has been collecting awards at the pace U.S. swimmer Michael Phelps was winning gold medals in the 2008 Summer Olympics.

They include:

Nanticoke-based Battery B recently was awarded the Hamilton Award, given to the best field artillery battery in the nation.

Spc. Jonathan Hontz was named the Pennsylvania National Guard's 2009 Soldier of the Year.

Capt. Joseph Ruotolo received the 2009 Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award, an award that goes to the top 26 company grade officers in the entire Army, both active duty and reserve. Capt. Cliff Morales won the award in 2008.

Capt. Neil Ravitz was given the 2009 Brig. Gen. William Bilo Leadership Award for the top field artillery officer in the National Guard.

In addition to wartime assignments since 2001, the 109th was activated six times for stateside duty for snow storms and flood emergencies.

The 109th is comprised of four units: Headquarters Battery in Wilkes-Barre; Battery A in Plymouth; **Battery B in Nanticoke**; and Company G, 228th Support Battalion, also in Wilkes-Barre.

It currently has 480 soldiers, which is 98 percent of full strength.

After the initial tour to Iraq, the battalion saw an exodus of soldiers who chose not to re-enlist. As of September 2005, the unit was only at 82 percent of its allocated goal. Every year since, the unit has maintained strength between 97 and 103 percent of its goal, according to statistics provided by the unit.

"We have come so far in the last 10 years. We are modernizing. We are evolving," Karpovich said.

4/24/2010

Bieski has career day at regional event

Bill Arsenault on Campus

University of West Virginia's Amy Bieski had a career performance in the NCAA Southeast Regionals recently in Morgantown, but the junior from Nanticoke (Northeast Gymnastics) fell 0.15 points short of earning a berth in the NCAA Championships.

Bieski posted a 39.1 in all-around, her best outing ever in the Regionals. She finished ninth as all-around performers from Stanford and Michigan as well as two others earned a berth to the Nationals. Bieski's total was aided by a career-best mark of 9.85 in the balance beam.

The 39-plus mark was her eighth of the season and 15th of her career. That ties her for fifth place on the Mountaineers all-time 39-plus all-around scores list. She also stands 17th all-time in career points with 1,474.9

4/17/2010

GNA approves two employee contracts

Board unanimously passes administrative compensation plan and support staff pact.

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Two employee contracts were approved by the six Greater Nanticoke Area School Board members attending Thursday night's meeting.

Three members, Sylvia Mizdail, Frank Vandermark and Tony Prushinski, were absent.

The administrative compensation plan and the support staff contract were approved unanimously.

The administrative compensation plan is valid from last July 1 through June 30, 2013. The plan details compensation benefits for the district's administrators and principals. District Superintendent Tony Perrone does not have an employment contract.

The support staff contract is retroactive to July 1, 2008, and continues through June 30, 2012. Contract details were not available Thursday night because the support staff union members had not yet approved the pact. Union members were expected to vote on the contract Friday.

The board also approved an audit of the district's finances by the Al Melone Co. A copy of the audit was not available because, district officials said, it couldn't be provided until Thursday's meeting's minutes are approved next month.

In other business, it was announced that K.M. Smith Elementary will hold a kindergarten registration 9 a.m. to noon May 1. Principal Mary Ann Jarolen said the school is having the Saturday registration because many families have told her they can't make it to during the week.

Children entering kindergarten must be 5 years old on or before Sept. 1. Parents must have the child's birth certificate, two forms of residency and proof of current health and immunization records.

If the child is adopted, a foster child or has been awarded custody to the parents, those legal documents should also be

brought to the registration.

The board also approved the 2010-2011 school calendar. Teachers will report back to work for in-service days on Aug. 30 and 31. Students report to class on Sept. 1.

Graduation will be June 7, 2011.

4/16/2010

Geisinger TV rep can't get a Geisinger policy Stroke brings rejection when insurance sought

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Local musician Lou Marino, a recent TV spokesman for the Geisinger Health System, has been rejected for insurance coverage – by the affiliated Geisinger Health Plan.

Lou Marino was informed by the Geisinger health insurance program that he could not be covered, having suffered a stroke. Earlier, Marino had praised the affiliated Geisinger Medical Center in TV spots.

Marino, 35, of Nanticoke, suffered a stroke in 2008 and has recovered to the point that he has lost weight, works out vigorously and is looking to return to the workplace.

Marino was insured by Aetna at the time of his stroke and was treated at Geisinger hospitals in Plains Township and Danville, and he will tell you the treatment he received was fantastic.

“I guess that’s the irony here,” Marino said. “I guess I was good enough to be in a television ad for Geisinger, but I’m not good enough to be covered by their insurance.”

Marino said doctors have told him that his stroke was “completely random” and “a fluke” and “rare.” He said he has been told there is little likelihood of it happening again.

Marino raved about the doctors, nurses and staff at the Geisinger facilities where he was treated, and that’s why he agreed to share his story with the world.

“I was happy to do pro-Geisinger commercials,” he said. “They aired during the Olympics and on the premiere episode of this year’s ‘American Idol.’”

So when Marino was laid off recently from his job as an information technology network administrator – a job he held for 10 years – he thought first of Geisinger when he was seeking health insurance.

But on Wednesday, when Marino opened his mail, a letter he thought would confirm his coverage with Geisinger Health Plan turned out to be a rejection. Signed by William Byron, vice president for customer service operations for Geisinger Choice, Marino was told his application for insurance was declined.

Geisinger Choice is one of the coverage options within the Geisinger Health Plan, which operates separately from Geisinger Health System.

“Our decision to decline your application for insurance was based on the following reasons: STROKE,” the letter stated.

“According to the non-group underwriting standards and guidelines, the above mentioned condition is disqualifying.”

The letter stated Marino’s medical information was reviewed and did not meet the medical underwriting criteria required by Geisinger Choice.

“I’m not angry,” Marino said. “I guess I kind of expected it. But I am disgusted, hurt and offended. When I needed health insurance, I immediately thought of Geisinger, and I really thought it would be easy. I thought it would be a no-brainer.”

Now Marino is worried about himself and his two kids – Aleigha, 8, and Lou, 4. He said he has been offered COBRA benefits through his former employer, but at \$600 per month just for him, Marino said it’s cost-prohibitive.

“I’ve stopped working out and riding my bike,” he said. “What if I get hurt – break a leg? How can I afford the cost? Somebody told me, and I guess it’s true, we’re all one sickness away from bankruptcy if we don’t have health care.”

Marino said he does not agree with the new national health care program, but he said if it were in effect, he would qualify for health care because pre-existing conditions would not preclude him from gaining coverage.

He has not yet looked anywhere else for coverage. He said he was hoping the rejection letter was an administrative mistake.

“Me and my kids were used on TV to preach how great Geisinger is,” Marino said. “They knew who I was. You would think I could get approval.”

Dr. Howard Grant, executive vice president and chief medical officer for Geisinger Health System, issued a statement on the situation.

“Geisinger Health System provides care for all patients who seek services from our medical professionals, without regard to their ability to pay for that care,” Grant said. “We have been and will continue to be privileged to provide

health care services for Lou M., as well as every patient who comes through our doors.”

Grant said the denial of individual health insurance coverage for Marino and other people with pre-existing medical conditions seeking individual coverage highlights a national problem that he said will “hopefully be corrected” as the recently enacted health insurance reform is implemented.

“Geisinger supports health insurance coverage for all; however, in order for Geisinger Health Plan to offer a product in the voluntary individual market, the health plan must apply medical underwriting guidelines on a uniform basis,” Grant said. “Further, current insurance regulations prohibit Geisinger Health Plan from treating like individuals differently. As a result, exceptions cannot be made for Lou, who was not previously covered by Geisinger Health Plan, or other similar patients.”

Grant said Geisinger is proactive in working with patients to explain potential coverage options, and also offers “a generous charity program to assist patients who are unable to pay for the medical services we provide.

“We are reaching out to Lou to explain these options and assure him that we will continue to care for him regardless of his ability to pay,” Grant said.

Dave Jolley, Geisinger Health System spokesman, said the story of the care provided to Marino by Geisinger medical professionals – and Lou’s personal recovery – “is very compelling, and we were happy to share it with others.

“We stopped using the ad at Lou’s request.” Jolley said.

Marino said a Geisinger Health Plan representative suggested that he file for disability – an option Marino flatly rejected.

“I rock climb and I ride my mountain bike,” Marino said. “I’m not disabled. The ads said how far I’ve come, and now they want me to say I’m disabled?”

Marino has not returned to performing – he’s a singer and guitarist. His last appearance was at the Arena Bar and Grill a few days before his stroke.

4/14/2010

State, Nanticoke offer grants for business facelifts

Commercial property owners may receive up to a total of \$10,000 to improve their facades.

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Owners of commercial properties along Main Street may be able to get the exterior of their buildings revamped using a combination of government and private funding.

The Main Street Grant Program funded by the state Department of Community and Economic Development is contributing \$30,000 in conjunction with the City of Nanticoke’s matching amount of \$30,000.

Businesses on Main Street between Jifken and South Market streets are eligible to apply for grant money to help the property owners make improvements that beautify their building’s appearance. Commercial property owners are eligible to receive up to \$10,000. In order to be eligible for the grants, property owners must contribute at least \$5,000 toward the renovation of their business facade.

“This is going to work in conjunction with the streetscape and with the improvements the (Luzerne County) community college is making to their properties in downtown. It is going to be another step in the process of beautifying downtown Nanticoke,” City Administrator Holly Quinn said.

She noted there is no deadline for business owners to apply, but added the sooner they apply the better chance they have to secure funding.

“Once we get a decent pool of applicants to review, we can make a better determination of what is the most worthwhile way of spending the commonwealth’s money and the city’s capital money,” she said.

Property owners can pick up the grant application from Nanticoke City Hall. In the application process, the property owners must present all proposed design plans, goals and budgets.

The property owners also must contact the city’s zoning officer to see if a permit is needed.

Projects that will cost a total of more than \$25,000 can’t be considered for the program.

A design committee consisting of Quinn, Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty, South Valley Chamber of Commerce President Jerry Hudack and an as yet unnamed downtown business owner will review the applications.

City council members will be responsible for awarding the funding based on recommendations from the committee.

Any approved work must begin within 60 days of the business receiving the grant and completed within three months.

4/14/2010

Gesecki helps Navy track and field sink Army

Bill Arsenault on Campus

Throughout her career, Abby Gesecki (Nanticoke Area) has helped the Navy women's track team defeat rival Army in the indoor and outdoor Star Games. She finished second to teammate Jess Palicio in the 800 and helped the 4x400 relay team score a victory as the Midshipmen topped the Cadets 107-93 last weekend. Navy, which won the meet indoors last winter, have won five of six outdoors. In the indoor meet, Gesecki won the 500, 800 and anchored the winning 4x400 relay team.

"Abby has been a tremendous team leader and captain for us this year," coach Carla Criste said. "She has always been the consummate sportsman-like competitor, which makes her an ideal role model for her teammates."

Criste feels that Gesecki is best when the chips are down.

"You can always depend on Abby to give 100 percent," the coach said. "Over her four year career at the Academy, she has been an eternal optimist and will do whatever it takes to help out."

Criste knows Gesecki will do well in the future.

"Abby has been selected to become a member of the first class of female submariners," the coach said. "Given her history in track, I have no doubt she will continue to do great things."

4/13/2010

Warrior Run considering police offer

Iam Campbell - Times Leader Correspondent

Borough officials will look into an offer from Nanticoke to provide full-time police coverage at the same price the borough now pays for one part-time shift a day.

Mayor Jim Brodginiski noted that the services the borough would get included detectives, drug squads, a canine unit, and an overall level of coverage that the borough had no chance of providing on its own.

Federal and state grant revenues designed to encourage municipal shared services would give Nanticoke the funds needed to provide coverage over the \$34,000 Warrior Run currently spends, Brodginiski told council.

Nanticoke vehicles come through parts of the borough in order to complete patrols in parts of the outlying areas of the city, council noted.

To follow through on all the calls made to the department would effectively break the municipality's \$219,000 annual budget, council members noted. The officers handled 47 complaints over 30 shifts during the month, but outside the hours of evening coverage the part-time staff provides, the residents have to rely on state police responses.

The change would likely mean that residents would have to use the 911 system, council noted. Many currently call the borough directly, but under a new system that would not work.

Council agreed to look further into the proposal, set up meetings with Nanticoke to discuss the matter and look at how the system would work. Council could also set up a town meeting so residents could address representatives of both municipalities with their questions, members suggested.

In other business, council will look into possibly establishing its own yard waste facility after being advised that Earth Conservancy sought a \$700 fee to cover what it said were \$7,800 worth of costs related to yard waste operations.

Council members noted that mulch that was available in previous years to residents of the area now appeared to be trucked out of the area, leaving none for the people who provided the raw material the mulch was created from.

4/10/2010

Nanticoke mulls parking ban on Christian St.

Ordinance must be read and approved a second time before taking effect.

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The council unanimously approved an ordinance that restricts motorists from parking on the east side of Christian Street from Broad to State streets at Wednesday's meeting. This was the first reading of the ordinance, so it must be read and approved a second time before taking effect.

[The parking limitations were originally tested earlier this year at the request of Police Chief James Cheshinski.

Capt. William Shultz said that when two vehicles are parked on the street there is not enough room for Mascaro garbage trucks and fire trucks or other emergency vehicles to go down the road. People can still park on the west side of the street.

Street department employee John Popeck was "discharged for non-disciplinary reasons based on his permanent

disability,” according to a motion made by Councilman Jon Metta.

City administrator Holly Quinn declined to comment further on the discharge or on whether Popeck had been on any type of paid or unpaid leave.

“It is a private matter and we respect that person’s disability, so we really can’t discuss it,” she said.

Council accepted a \$700 donation from Dogs Helping Other Animals, a nonprofit organization.

As a thank you for the donation, Mayor Joseph Dougherty presented all the organization’s members and their dogs with certificates for “bringing happiness and cheer to people, young and old.”

Teresa Anthony, spokeswoman for the organization, said that twice a year the group selects another nonprofit animal-related cause to donate money to.

Quinn said the money will be used for food and medical expenses for the police dog, Vice.

4/5/2010

Keeping a tradition

The old art of pysanky, coloring eggs to mark Easter, is maintained in a Nanticoke studio by Mark Wolfe.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

Pysanky is a method of coloring eggs in religious honor of Easter. It is a long-standing tradition for the Ukrainian culture as well as many others, according to Mark Wolfe, 51, of Nanticoke.

Wolfe learned pysanky from his mother and aims to keep it alive passing it on to future generations.

He specializes in pysanky egg coloring where he painstakingly crafts egg shells with elaborate colors and designs. It’s an art that “dates back to antiquity” according to Wolfe. He works out of his artistic shop called WolfeFrames, located in a nondescript half-double house in Nanticoke.

He believes painting eggs is relaxing and admits he enjoys the finished product.

Depending on the range of colors an egg can take several hours to color, Wolfe said. But the process can be stopped and picked back up at any time, making it stress-free.

The trick to pysanky is having a steady hand to draw the intricate designs, he said. He draws the traditional Ukrainian religious symbols such as the ribbon around the egg representing eternity, ladders that suggest prayer, flowers suggesting life and growth, and crosses.

Wolfe learned pysanky from his mother and aims to keep it alive passing it on to future generations. He conducts shows to demonstrate the art to those who may wish to learn it, he said. He also sells pysanky from his office or online at a cost of about \$15 to \$30 each.

Besides making hand-drawn designs, pysanky requires a talent for coloring, he said. Wolfe uses “kitska” tools with varying tips to apply beeswax to each shell. Dipping the shell in dyes from lightest colors (yellow) to darkest (black), the wax acts as a barrier to the dye. The color is applied to the areas on the egg other than the waxed areas so the artist can choose the color for each part of the design.

When done dipping, the wax is removed and Wolfe sprays the colored shell with a clear coat finish which acts as a preservative. He said a completed egg provides “great joy and pleasure.”

He suggests blowing out the contents of the egg shells after coloring them. A full egg is easier to handle, he said. He highly recommends emptying them soon after being finished to avoid bursting.

The method of coloring pysanky eggs was handed down for generations all over Eastern Europe, he said. Pysanky is becoming increasingly popular in the United States and offers the artistically inclined a hobby that can hold their interest for hours, he added. For more information, visit www.WOLFrames.com.

4/2/2010

Attorney who worked to revitalize South Valley dies

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Attorney Joseph Lach, whose dedication to the South Valley region he called home spurred his involvement in the area's revitalization, passed away unexpectedly Monday.

In Plymouth Township, officials and employees mourn not only the loss of the solicitor who helped the township through its darkest days, but also a resident who cared about the community.

Lach became solicitor for the township in 2004, during what Supervisor Chairwoman Gale Conrad called “traumatic, trying times.” The supervisors had to lay off the police force, the township was declared financially distressed by the state, and there were floods in September 2004, April 2005 and June 2006 to cope with, as well as a December 2004 fire

at the public works garage.

"I don't know how we could have gotten through it all without his help," Conrad said. "He was such a good solicitor, and additionally I believe he handled things in such an extraordinary way because he was a resident."

She said Lach was always professional, but took township matters personally.

"He also became everyone's friend. That's something that doesn't happen all the time," Conrad said.

Lach was a partner in the Kingston-based law firm of Koff, Mangan, Vullo, Gartley and Lach. Attorney James Mangan of the firm called Lach "very civic-minded" and a "consummate gentleman."

"Joe was what we call a lawyer's lawyer: someone a lawyer would turn to for advice," Mangan said.

Lach was a founder of the nonprofit South Valley Partnership, a group dedicated to regional redevelopment and future planning. He briefly served as Nanticoke City solicitor, and since July 2007 he has been solicitor for Nanticoke's municipal authority.

"He was a great man, a gentleman all the way. He did a lot of pro bono work for us when we were broke," municipal authority acting Chairman Hank Marks said.

One of the tasks Lach undertook without pay was consolidating many parcels of land into one, for the South Valley Partnership's 134-acre regional park on Lower Broadway in Nanticoke.

In his capacity as municipal authority solicitor, Lach's legal work included helping draw up an agreement for Luzerne County Community College to lease-purchase the Kanjorski Center on Main Street in Nanticoke for a new Health Sciences Center.

"I can assure you the projects that are happening in Nanticoke, where buildings are going up and jobs are being created and the community is being given a new life, that would absolutely not be happening without Joe Lach," said State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

He said Lach was always willing to give, whether of his time, professional services or money.

"Even though his life has been cut short, he led a very full life and he leaves a wonderful legacy of success, both professionally, and, most important, in friendship," Yudichak said. "We're going to carry on his work, carry on his legacy, and continue to build up the communities he loved so much."

State Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, D-Wilkes-Barre, got to know Lach in the days when Pashinski taught at Greater Nanticoke Area with Lach's wife Barbara.

Lach was part of Pashinski's health care reform task force. Pashinski said on Monday he, Lach and other members of the task force were exchanging e-mails about the new federal health care bill and planned to hold a meeting on how to "plug in the holes on the state level."

"This is a tremendous loss," Pashinski said. "It's difficult to comprehend."

3/24/2010

Nanticoke municipal authority, operators at odds over nursing home
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News that the sale of Villa at Nanticoke to the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority is pending came as a surprise to several parties.

Ronald A. Halko and Bob Hughes, who operate the personal care home, were surprised to find out it was being sold to someone else. Nanticoke Villa Real Estate Associates LLC has had a purchase agreement for the building since becoming licensed by the Department of Public Welfare and taking over the facility from the Darlak family in July 2008, Halko said.

"We received no official notification of anything which would constitute their right to sell this," he said.

Municipal authority members said at Monday's public meeting they also have an agreement, dated March 12, to purchase the property, along with that of the now-demolished Y-T Hardware building at Main and Walnut streets, from the Darlak Trust and Joseph Darlak's appointed guardian for \$800,000.

"It really surprises me that they weren't notified by Darlak's attorney," acting authority Chairman Hank Marks said of the personal care home operators.

Municipal authority member Dennis Butler was also surprised to hear about Halko and Hughes' potential claim on the property.

"The issue they have is with Darlak, because Darlak signed the agreement of sale. Their issue is not with us: we are just purchasing something that was represented to us as being for sale," he said.

Perhaps the most surprised were Nanticoke Villa's residents, according to Hughes.

"I've been in this business 40 years, and this is the most cruel thing I've ever seen done," he said. "We had little old

ladies crying, we had a husband and wife who were panicked and calling other facilities. There is a real possibility there is a (deleterious) effect on their health."

Halko and Hughes stated in a letter sent Tuesday to residents and families, "We hold the license and own the business, we have a legal asset purchase agreement for the building and we plan to continue to operate the Villa at Nanticoke far into the future."

Luzerne County Community College is taking over the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street from the municipal authority through a lease-purchase arrangement, and the college is renovating the building into a Health Sciences Center.

The municipal authority wants to buy the Villa at Nanticoke and former Y-T property because the authority is contractually obligated to provide at least 272 parking spaces to the college.

"Personally, myself, I would let them (Halko and Hughes) there even if we purchase it, but according to the project managers, that's not the way to go. We'll have to work that out somehow," Marks said.

Halko and Hughes indicated the municipal authority can have the former Y-T property.

"We would love to continue operating in this building. The other peripheral land we don't care about," Halko said.

Nanticoke Villa was run by the Darlak family, but the state indicated in 2008 the license wouldn't be renewed unless Halko's company took over, Hughes said.

He said he and Halko made improvements to the building, including painting and installing new floors. Residency jumped from 34 people to more than 50 and is continuing to grow; the facility has more than 25 employees, Hughes said.

"It's a real kick in the groin. We worked so hard and the reputation was so terrible," he said.

Halko said he and Hughes are willing to cut a deal.

"We're going to pursue every legal option available to us to maintain the operations here," Halko said, adding, "We're open to other options than 'let's fight for two years to see whose contract will prevail.'"

3/23/2010

Nanticoke moving forward with downtown projects

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Nanticoke Municipal Authority members hope for a May 15 closing in the purchase of properties near the Kanjorski Center at 38 E. Main St., which are needed to help fulfill an obligation to Luzerne County Community College.

The municipal authority has articles of agreement to buy for \$800,000 two properties owned by the Darlak family of Tobyhanna: the site of the now-demolished Y-T Hardware store, and the Nanticoke Villa personal care home at Walnut and Main streets, authority Chairman Hank Marks said Monday.

The catch is ensuring residents of the assisted-living facility move out by May 15.

"I don't think we can close until it's empty," Marks said.

LCCC officials plan to turn the former Kanjorski Center into the college's Health Sciences Center; they have a lease-purchase agreement with the municipal authority for the building. Under the contract, the authority must provide LCCC a minimum of 272 parking spaces.

In 2005, the municipal authority bought and demolished commercial buildings at 108-124 E. Main St., next to the Kanjorski Center, including the Coffee Shoppe and Lecher's Hardware.

The former Y-T Hardware site will be added to those properties for the parking lot, but authority members do not plan to demolish the Nanticoke Villa building. However, they don't plan to keep it open, either.

The authority now will advertise for contractors to install the lot, including paving, line painting, lights and a stormwater catch basin, architect Scott Allen said.

LCCC advertised Monday for bids for renovations and an addition to the Kanjorski Center. Allen said he would contact the college for a plan to see where the new addition will be, but authority members don't believe it will eat up too much parking space if it is behind the building.

The municipal authority took out a \$1.2 million loan from Community Bank and Trust to pay for the property acquisition and parking lot construction. Allen said the authority would like for work on the parking lot to start in May, but didn't know how much it would cost.

3/22/2010

Nanticoke man combines love of writing, coins

Matthew Harris - Citizens Voice

Scrounging beneath couch cushions doesn't suit Ed Reiter.

No, his hobby of coin collecting was a humble pursuit, a way to handle metallic pieces of history with their tale of how they were designed and struck by mints. The farthest the 72 year old ever went in hunting for rare pieces of spare change was cashing \$25 of his paycheck to mine rolls of change for his quarry.

"It was the idea that growing up you could find something of value in spare change," Reiter said. "I found Lincoln cents that were worth up to \$40 or \$50 just going through rolls of quarters."

Reiter may have been a lightweight to his peers in Numismatics, as the hobby is officially known, but he found another way of holding their attention. For 40 years, the journalist has quietly documented and commented on all matters tied to coin collecting as a newspaper columnist whose insights earned him weekly spaces in The Asbury Park Press, The Bergen Record in New Jersey along with The New York Times.

These days, the Nanticoke resident pens a modest monthly column in COINage, a magazine dedicated to topics such as reviling the use of manganese in the Sacagawea gold dollar.

"What I try to do is write for the reader who doesn't even collect coins," Reiter said. "Everybody has an interest in money. There's no point in getting so technical that you turn 90 percent of people off rather than bringing them into the subject."

Selling people on taking an interest in the loose change jangling in their pockets started in 1973, when Reiter approached an editor at the Park Press with the idea of column. There was one for gardening, why not coins? Over six years, he went to local meetings of coin-collecting clubs and wrote pieces he thought received some passing attention.

"It was journalism first and coins second," he said. "Now, it's both."

In the realm of obscurities, degrees of separation are smaller and Reiter's work came to the attention of the Numismatic Literary Guild, who bestowed several writing awards to Reiter and a chance to write freelance columns for Coin Magazine. His work also caught the discerning eye of his colleague at The New York Times who was set to retire and passed Reiter's name along to the editor of the paper's Arts and Leisure section editor.

Reiter found the offer surprising, considering he had never met the man who recommended him.

"Whatever he read, I don't know," Reiter said. "All I know is that they offered me the chance to do the column every Sunday."

And Reiter wasn't going to turn down the \$200 a week in income for a Sunday column that supplemented his earnings from writing freelance columns and working part-time at The Bergen Record after The Park Press let him go.

His start date with the Times - July 1, 1979 - was fitting. It was the day after the introduction of the Susan B. Anthony silver dollar. Over the next decade, Reiter approached his task diligently, finding that the simple writing style he honed writing for television broadcasts in the early 1960s was tweaked for the Times' urbane style.

"You do write differently," he said. "You find yourself using certain phraseology or words that you might not use in a magazine. If you don't, they might just change that for you."

His decade with the Times ended in 1989, and Reiter spent the remaining 19 years of his career with The Record as a copy editor and dutifully churning out more coin columns. A stroke in 2002 left him with some limited mobility on his right side, and massive layoffs at the paper in 2008 convinced him it was time to take a buyout and retire.

Nanticoke wasn't the premiere locale on he and his wife's list of retirement destinations when they moved from northern New Jersey. But his mother-in-law lives in Drums, and the thinking went that she would sell her house and move in with them.

A year after the move, the mother-in-law still owns her home.

Yet, Reiter stays busy editing features for COINage and writing his own material in a voice that age and experience have tinged with a bit of dissent. He uses parentheses to explain what the obverse (the face) of the coin is or what the Eagle Dollar (a golden coin) are to readers.

In one column, he lambasted a new design on the back of the cent piece, and in his latest considers plans to honor national parks on the reverse sides of quarters to be ludicrous. How are you going to represent an entire expanse of land on a canvas so small, he wonders.

"I've become sort of a grouchy old man in the eyes of some readers and the U.S. Mint," he said. "Theoretically, since I write for a hobby magazine I should be upbeat, but I still think it's my duty to say what I think."

And he still loves Buffalo Nickels and the Liberty Quarter, showing a Lady Liberty wielding a sword and shield to ward off foreign enemies who would threaten U.S. isolationism on the eve of World War I.

His passion aside, Reiter's columns and views reflect a hobby that has evolved from a simple pursuit of history to a form of specialized investment with an appraisal process that grades and assign a dollar value to each artifact. People won't settle for a coin that's been in circulation, and a slight downgrade in quality can drive the value down by hundreds or

thousands of dollars.

"As a kid, I was just happy to find any coin that was old and had a history," he said. "Now, you have to buy it."

3/21/2010

Aching to play after sitting out the Big Dance Paul Sokoloski Opinion

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All this NCAA excitement going on around here is starting to make Aly Byorick a little anxious.

She just can't wait to stick a jump shot, scoot down the lane or stuff one of her pinpoint passes through a sea of arms and legs and into the hands of one of her Lehigh University teammates.

When it comes to games like the one Lehigh will play today, in the opening round of the NCAA women's college basketball tournament against Iowa State, Byorick was never that good at holding back.

But she'll have to.

Because the bad knee that took away her whole season turned out to be the same thief that will rob her of her dream to play in the biggest women's basketball tournament going.

"It's been hard, not being able to play," Byorick said. "It's been difficult watching the games."

The word difficult doesn't begin to describe her college experience.

As a freshman, she didn't play much at her first stop, Xavier, after scoring more points than anyone in Nanticoke Area High School's illustrious girls basketball history.

She transferred to Lehigh for the start of the 2008-09 campaign, but NCAA transfer rules forced her to sit out that full season, when Byorick played the part of a spectator as the Mountain Hawks swooped into the tournament for the first time in 12 years. Then her knee kept her out of another season, and another Big Dance.

Just before Lehigh's 2009-10 opener, Byorick suffered a torn left ACL, snatching away any shot the 6-foot guard had to make Lehigh's starting lineup in what turned out to be a 29-3 season so far. Or even contribute to it.

"It's been an exciting, exciting year," said Byorick, who intends to apply for a medical redshirt that, if granted, would give her three more seasons of college athletic eligibility. "Obviously, I wanted to be a bigger part of it, when it comes to playing."

Byorick is most comfortable knocking down big shots and getting her teams through big games.

She scored a school-record 2,272 career points at Nanticoke while taking the Trojanettes through two unbeaten regular seasons, two state playoff appearances and a pair of 29-1 records during her final two high school seasons. The 21-year-old daughter of Dan and Trish Byorick of Nanticoke was a four-time high school All-Star, a three-time Street & Smith's Magazine honorable mention and a two-time All-Pennsylvania player who averaged 22.5 points in 2006-07, the final season of her fabulous high school career.

She's used to leading the charge, not leading the cheers.

"When I got hurt, I was a little upset," Byorick said.

Now she'll try to help 13th-seeded Lehigh pull an upset against No. 4 Iowa State in a 9:30 p.m. game today at Hilton Coliseum in Ames, Iowa.

Byorick won't be able to break down a defense with her slick shooting or slithery moves just yet. She's still in the stage of her rehab where it'll be a big moment if she can begin unlimited shooting drills by the end of the week, and is more than two months away from being cleared to practice. Lehigh's season will be over by then.

But Byorick will do her best to make sure it doesn't end tonight.

She'll be at the end of the Mountain Hawks bench, the way she's been for every Lehigh game this season, trying to pick up some tips and offering advice to her teammates in an attempt to help her team and head coach Sue Troyan find an opening to the second round.

"My coach has allowed me to take on kind of an assistant coaching role," Byorick said. "You see a lot more. You learn a lot more. I'll say things like, 'Take her baseline,' and my team has really accepted that, they believe what I say. It's made me so much hungrier to finally get out there next year."

It's also made her thirst for a long future in basketball.

"Coaching is something I can definitely be interested in," Byorick said. "Even my teammates said, 'You'd be a really good coach.' But that's a ways away yet."

She still must wait to contribute for Lehigh with baskets, but right now Byorick tries to make points without ever touching the ball. Because that's the best shot leaders take to even the score with fate.

3/18/2010

**Home rule study commissions interest South Valley residents
Leading municipalities into future the goal of Nanticoke, Plymouth Twp. candidates.**

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Eight residents each in two South Valley communities hope to lead their individual municipalities into the future by serving on home rule study commissions.

Candidates for the Nanticoke home rule study commission are: Yvonne Bozinski, William F. Brown, Wayne Llewellyn Getz, Gerald J. Hudack Sr., Robert J. Katra, Leonard Omolecki, Linda Prushinski and Gary Smith.

Candidates seeking a seat on the Plymouth Township commission are: Leonard Bartosiewicz, Linda R. Kenney, Joseph D. Lloyd, Michael S. Masakowski, James P. McDermott, Eugene R. McKeown, Edward F. Nowak and Mark J. Vnuk. Commission members are not paid. They will meet on a regular basis on a schedule to be determined by the members. Nanticoke and Plymouth Township residents will decide during the May 18 primaries if the non-partisan commissions are formed to study how effectively Nanticoke and Plymouth Township governments operate. Voters will also select seven candidates to serve on each commission during the May elections, if the commissions are approved.

If the commissions are approved, members will begin meeting to conduct an in-depth study of the city and township government, look into the procedures of the government to determine its weaknesses or defects and look at how other municipalities operate.

After commissioners meet for several months, they will either decide that no changes are needed or they will draft charters detailing how the new city or township government will operate. The charters would then be presented to Nanticoke and Plymouth Township voters to be approved or rejected.

Prushinski, of Nanticoke, admitted she doesn't know a lot about how about a home rule commission works. She does know that she wants to see a change in how city government is run.

"I feel we have elected officials that are doing nothing because their hands are tied by the bounds of government. I think at the present time they are giving more authority to the appointed officials rather than the elected officials regarding important matters," she said.

Another Nanticoke home rule candidate, Omolecki, 47, said he believes his skills as an attorney would assist him in determining what would be the best form of government. Omolecki said he previously served as solicitor for Larksville and the Nanticoke Zoning Board.

"I am familiar with all the things the towns, communities have to deal with and comply with when dealing with state and federal law. I have an open mind as whether or not there should be change," Omolecki said.

The two communities share some similarities, but in other ways are dramatically different.

Both communities are in Act 47, declared by the state to be in a financially distressed situation, and both are in the South Valley area. Nanticoke is a third-class city and Plymouth Township is a second-class township.

McDermott, 67, a Plymouth Township native, said he wanted to do something that would help improve his hometown. He hopes that if he is elected to the commission he will be able to regulate how the township operates so large tax increases are not levied on the community's senior citizens.

"We are in trouble over here. We're just going to see what we have to do here. I think most of the township is senior citizens. A big tax increase is going to ruin the township I think," McDermott said.

3/18/2010

**Nanticoke wage tax decrease explained
Berkheimer official gives shortfall reasons, says city will hit projected 2010 figure.**

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The city's Earned Income Tax Revenue is down \$40,000 this year as compared to this same period last year. So, a Berkheimer Tax representative made a presentation during Tuesday's council meeting at the council's request. Normally council meetings are held on Wednesday nights, but the meeting was bumped up a day because of St. Patrick's Day.

Berkheimer Sales Director Jim Hunt reassured council members Tuesday they would hit their projected mark of generating \$2.1 million to \$2.3 million in EIT revenue.

Part of the shortfall is due to some employers falling behind in paying their taxes, Hunt said. He pointed out three specific reasons why revenues are down:

- Last year at this same time, the city received a \$14,000 tax payment from an employer who should have made the payment in late 2008.

“This inflated your January 2009 numbers,” Hunt said.

- Taxes from residents who work at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital were received about 10 days later than last year and will be reflected in the city’s March tax revenue.
- When other tax revenue companies collect taxes from employee wages, the taxes then have to be sent to Berkheimer for processing, and the collection can add up to 60 to 90 days later than normal. When Geisinger relocated some of its employees to other areas, it moved the employees out of Berkheimer’s collection ability. So now Berkheimer has to wait to receive the funds, process them and then send them on to Nanticoke.

Last year the city received \$2.27 million in revenue from the tax.

This year the city has received \$310,075 in taxes for January and February, as compared to \$349,902 collected the same period last year.

Councilman James Litchkofski, who oversees the city’s finance and accounting, said he has to take Hunt’s word that taxes will start to increase.

“We will watch it closely and in the event that things fall short, and if it looks like that trend is going to continue, we will have Berkheimer back in. This is something that has to be watched very carefully,” he said.

3/12/2010

GNA to extend the school year

Graduation tentatively set for June 16 so students can make up four snow days.

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Greater Nanticoke Area School District students will be attending school longer than normal this June due to some inclement weather earlier in the year.

The spring semester was scheduled to end on June 11, but now it will end on June 16, so students can make up the four days that the district was closed during the snowstorms last month.

Graduation is tentatively scheduled for June 16, six days later than originally planned.

Superintendent Tony Perrone explained that under state law, students must attend a pre-specified number of days or they can not graduate or pass to the next level.

“Kids have to put 180 days in,” he said.

If there are more school days canceled due to inclement weather, the date could be pushed out even further.

The district is modifying three of its bus schedules as work is scheduled to begin on the bridge connecting Nanticoke and West Nanticoke.

Starting Tuesday students using the Tilbury Fire Hall bus stop will now walk to the end of the sidewalk near 87 E. Poplar St. to catch the bus on the fire hall side of the street. Students must remain on the sidewalk until the bus blocks East Poplar Street to block all traffic. Students who use shuttle transfers on buses 124, 129 and 107 at the Tilbury Fire Hall will now catch the bus at the sidewalk near 17 W. Poplar St. Students catching the Poplar and Elkton streets bus stop will now catch the bus at 17 W. Poplar St. with the shuttle students.

This new busing schedule will remain in effect until the work on the bridge is complete, Perrone said. It is unknown exactly how long that will take.

Perrone and High School Principal Stu Tripler are planning on starting a journalism class at the high school.

Perrone also presented four school board members with certificates from the Pennsylvania School Board Association for their various years of service.

Board members Cindy Donlin and Gary Smith were both honored for eight years, board President Jeff Kozlofski for 13 years of service, and board member Sylvia Mizdail for 27 years. Mizdail was given a plaque for her service and the others received certificates.

3/9/2010

Gesecki sparkles

Bill Arsenault - Times Leader

The Navy women’s track team defeated rival Army 94-97 in a dual meet recently in Annapolis and senior Abby Gesecki (Nanticoke Area) had a big part in the victory.

Gesecki, the team captain, won the 400 meter dash (57.58) and the 800 meter run (2:21.03) and then ran the first leg on the winning 4x400 relay team. The 200 time is a new Wesley A. Brown Field House record and the 800 victory was her sixth individual title in the Star Meet (Army vs. Navy).

Sophomore Jess Palacio also won two events and helped win a relay for the Midshipmen.

"I can't say enough about the efforts of Abby and Jess," coach Carla Criste said. "To double up like that and come back to run such great relays was really something special."

Navy finished the regular season with a perfect 10-0 mark in dual meets and also captured the Star Meet for the fifth straight season.

3/5/2010

Nanticoke gets look at home rule idea

City voters will be asked in May if they want a group to study new government.

B. Garret Rogan - Times Leader

Joseph L. Boyle of the Pennsylvania Economy League laid out the basic definitions and limitations of municipal home rule governance during a public hearing Wednesday at City Hall.

Voters in the city will face a question on home rule in the May 18 primaries.

City Council adopted an ordinance in November to let voters decide whether a government study commission should be formed with seven members to review the existing third-class city form of government.

The panel would decide if it would be in the city's best interest to adopt home rule. This will be the first time Nanticoke voters will consider creating a government study commission.

Even if voters want to vote against the commission, they can still vote for seven people to serve on the board.

If the home rule question is approved, the seven-member home rule committee will then do research and make the determinations as to the best form of government for the city.

Boyle was invited by the council to give the presentation.

Most of the questions he fielded dealt with how home rule would affect the city's Act 47 status as a distressed city, and frequent comparisons were made to Scranton, which has a home rule government and is also an Act 47 community.

Boyle said information will be made available to residents so that comparisons can be made among the many cities across the state that have adopted home rule charters. But, he said, the elected committee would ultimately have to make determinations based on factors unique to Nanticoke.

"It is a big responsibility, but it is citizens creating their own government. You want a voice, here it is," Boyle said.

City Clerk Mary Cheshinski spoke out in favor of home rule.

"This is a way to modernize our city government," she said. She described Nanticoke's current status as a third class city under the state code as "outdated."

Another information meeting will be on March 16.

Residents interested in serving on the home rule committee must have petitions completed with 62 valid signatures by March 9 in order to have their names on the May ballot.

The PEL is the coordinator of Nanticoke's economic recovery plan and is working with the Luzerne County Government Study Commission, which is working on home rule charter for the county.

After the public meeting, Councilman James Litchkofski announced at the regular council meeting that the city's earned-income tax was down "just under \$40,000" from where it was projected to be following January and February.

He noted that in conversations with representatives of the Berkheimer tax collection agency assurances have been made that Nanticoke will achieve its projected goals for the year.

He nevertheless suggested that Berkheimer representatives be contacted for a meeting as soon as possible so that official concerns could be addressed in detail.

3/4/2010

Nanticoke faces \$43K deficit in revenue

Robert Olsen - Citizens' Voice

Councilman James Litchkofski expressed concern Wednesday over news that the city's earned income tax revenue is down by almost \$43,000 from the same time last year.

According to Litchkofski, Berkheimer Tax Administrators said the city is expected to meet its annual budgeted projection.

"Being down this much this early though â?!" Litchkofski said. "We better get ahead of this early."

Litchkofski asked city Finance Director Pamela Heard to contact Berkheimer and bring them into the loop to discuss the deficit.

For tax year 2009, the city collected \$349,902 in EIT. For 2010, the collected revenue is only \$307,014, a difference of \$42,888. The projected EIT revenue for the year is between \$2,050,000 and \$2,200,000.

"It's really hard to get an exact year-to-year comparison," Heard explained, "because of late payments and such. I will definitely be in contact with Berkheimer though."

In other business, Andrew D. H. Rau, an attorney with Unruh, Turner, Burke and Frees Law Firm, made a brief presentation on behalf of Royal Bank regarding the future of Lexington Village.

According to Rau, Royal Bank acquired the property from a sheriff's sale and has inspected the property, finding a "number of deficiencies" including eroding paving, unfinished curb work and more. Royal Bank is looking to put \$285,000 in improvements into the property to prepare it for sale to a third-party investor.

A motion to authorize city Administrator Holly Quinn to execute an "irrevocable letter of credit" to Royal Bank was tabled until council could discuss the matter further. An executive session was planned to be held immediately following Wednesday's meeting.

"We'll need the city to sign off on the improvements before we can sell the property," Rau said.

And a brief informational session regarding home rule was held prior to Wednesday's meeting where Pennsylvania Economy League member Joseph Boyle talked to residents about the history of home rule and the deadline's the city faces.

The city has recently begun to discuss the creation of a seven-person Home Rule Study Commission to study the effects of leaving behind the cities current commission form of government in favor of Home Rule.

Those interested in being on the panel have until 4:30 p.m. on March 9 to get their petition signed and turned in. Names will then appear on the ballot for the May 18 primary for residents to select the seven members for the study commission.

The commission will have nine months to study the current form of government and an additional year if the commission decides to write a home-rule charter for consideration.

If the commission finds the current form of government to be satisfactory, the commission would then be dissolved by February 2011.

3/4/2010

**No easy course: Autistic teen enrolling at LCCC
Auditing classes, school rules a challenging balancing act**

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Quentin Karpowicz is a kind-of-shy, 20-year-old who enjoys playing piano and holds down a job in a mail room at a local hospital.

He wants to take a couple of courses at the local community college for self-enrichment and an opportunity to socialize with people his own age.

But officials at Luzerne County Community College won't let him.

Why?

Because he has autism, said his parents, Leonardia and Edward Karpowicz, of Nanticoke.

Quentin has verbalized the desire to attend the college for the past four years, and last August, he and his family submitted an application to attend LCCC in a non-degree-seeking status. He wanted to take a computer keyboarding class and a physical education class – volleyball, Leonardia said.

When she met with a college official, Leonardia said, she was told the college does not accept students with autism and, furthermore, he could not have an aide in the classroom.

Leonardia said she pointed out that the college surely would not deny admittance to a quadriplegic who needed an aide in class to turn the pages of a book for him, but the official told her that was different because an aide could do the course work for Quentin.

Joan Bush, associate dean of counseling and student support services, said she could not comment on any specific student or applicant because of privacy issues, but she could address college policy in general.

Bush said LCCC has an "open-door" policy and "no one is denied access to LCCC." She said all students, except those who have already taken courses at another college, have to take a placement exam so they can be placed in classes most appropriate to help guarantee the student's greatest chance of success.

Edward said Quentin's college adviser initially encouraged the family to consider having Quentin audit the courses, which would eliminate the need for exams and curricular requirements that would frustrate her son, which was fine with him.

But after Quentin had received his class schedule in the mail and was preparing to buy required textbooks, three days before the start of the semester, a member of Quentin's treatment team received a call from an LCCC official indicating Quentin would not be allowed to take the courses for which he was registered.

Two members of Quentin's treatment team went to the college and met with Quentin's adviser and a college representative responsible for making accommodations for handicapped students and were told that permission of the course instructor and college provost was necessary for a student to audit a class, Leonardia said.

They were told that allowing Quentin to audit the courses would "lower the standard" of the college, and recommended that Quentin enroll in a basic reading skills course that required maintaining a C average and showing marked improvement. The class would be necessary before he could register for other courses, she said.

The team was confused because the members had been told previously that this requirement was only for students who wished to take further reading courses. The team believed the course was well above Quentin's reading abilities, Leonardia said.

Anna Mary McHugh, coordinator of special needs at the college, said she agrees with college policy that requires all students to demonstrate – through placement tests – mastery of basic reading and writing skills in order to take a course, even if the student would be auditing the course. She said the college will make accommodations for special-needs students to demonstrate those abilities.

But Quentin's parents don't believe college policies take into account that Quentin can comprehend much of what would be presented in a class – with the help of an aide – despite a lack of basic reading and writing skills. They say he has the ability to learn, given the right accommodations, and point to his piano playing and mail-room job.

Adria Shumusic, Quentin's piano teacher, said Quentin's ability to learn piano skills far surpassed her initial expectations.

"Not only does he do what I want him to do, he has accomplished the dexterity and he loves music. He is able to play decent music for himself and enjoy it, and that was the goal," Shumusic said.

Vince Riccardo, public affairs officer at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Plains Township, said he has received "nothing but positive accolades about Quentin's contributions to the mail room."

"I have a lot of respect for his desires and goals and what he wants to do with his life. We're very pleased we can assist him in pursuing his goals in life," Riccardo said.

George Shadie, who co-founded Supporting Autism and Families Everywhere, said he and Quentin's family have worked closely with state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, to help Quentin get accepted to LCCC, but his situation seems to have "fallen through the cracks" in the higher-education system.

Shadie said just as physically disabled people can learn material in a classroom setting if supplied with some special accommodations, autistic students can as well.

"I tell professionals and administrators all the time, if they doubt what a child is capable of, they need to read Helen Keller's life story again," Shadie said.

Yudichak said his office "reached out to leadership at the community college to try to fashion the best possible opportunities for Quentin" and is still working to ensure that "we're going to give this man an opportunity to have a collegiate life."

"We met several times and are trying to come to the best possible solution for Quentin's care and for folks coming after Quentin who may be in a similar situation, and at the same time understand the college has rules and regulations they have to follow," Yudichak said.

But time is running out for Quentin financially.

Greater Nanticoke Area School District will pay for Quentin's education only until he reaches the age of 21, and Quentin's parents don't have the means to provide him with any kind of college education on their own.

Edward has been disabled for about 20 years because of conditions related to his cancer, and Leonardia just returned to work in January after being laid off for two years.

2/25/2010

Bieski in top form/Gesecki sparkles

Bill Arsenault - Times Leader

BIESKI IN TOP FORM – West Virginia junior Amy Bieski (**Nanticoke**) was named East Atlantic Gymnastic League co-Gymnast of the Week after helping the Mountaineers record a season-best 195.65 score in a victory over Ohio State. Bieski had a team-leading and season best 39.25 all-around total. The EAGL award was her third this season and fifth in her career.

“Amy just keeps getting better and more confident each week,” coach Linda Burdette said. “It is great to see that all her hard work is paying off and she is having such success. We hope she can continue this upward climb and have her best gymnastics at the end of the season.”

Bieski matched her 39.25 to finish third in the all-around as the Mountaineers (11-4 overall and 6-0 in the EAGL) fell to No. 13-ranked Penn State 195.950-194.925 last Saturday in University Park. It was her fourth 39.0-plus mark this season and 11th of her career and moves her into a three-way tie for eighth place with the most career 39.0-plus scores at West Virginia.

MANTUSH, GESECKI SPARKLE – Bucknell senior Amy Mantush (Hazleton Area) and Navy senior Abby Gesecki (**Nanticoke**) had standout performances in last weekend’s Patriot League Women’s Indoor Track Championships. Bucknell won its eighth title in nine years with 168 points. Navy, the defending champion, was second with 96 points. Mantush captured the pentathlon with 3,449 points, winning the high jump (5-6) and long jump (17-8?), finishing second in the 60 hurdles (9.88), third in the shot put (34-7?) and ninth in the 800 meter run (2:42.07). She also captured the high jump in the regular portion of the meet in 5-8 and added a fourth-place finish in the triple jump (36-9?). Gesecki took the 500 meter dash (1:16.67) and helped the 4x400 relay team score a victory and the 4x800 finish second.

2/22/2010

Newport Bidy 12 y/o wins over Lebanon for title

Nanticoke Webdesign and student author

Newport Bidy 12 year old won the Newport Bidy tournament on Sunday, 2/23/2010 by beating Lebanon by a score of 30 to 28.

Newport was in the drivers seat the whole game but, towards the end, Lebanon started scoring more and then it was 28-26. Robbie Hopkins was fouled and made the two shots. Lebanon brought the ball up and was fouled. They made the 2 shots and it was 30-28. Lebanon was on the foul line again for a one and one when they missed and Newport got the rebound with 2 seconds left.

Congratulations to the Newport Bidy 12 y/o team!

Roster: Alec Norton, Steve Krietzer, Brent Piontkowski, Scott Stout, Eddie Lukowski, Nick Littzi, Robert Roth, Robbie Hopkins, Benny Sersen and Matt Labenski.

Also Congratulations to Newport Bidy 11 y/o team who took 2nd place in the tournament!

Visit [Newport Bidy Basketball](#).

2/21/2010

Fishing in Arctic conditions

Don Jacobs For the Times Leader

It all started with a cup of coffee at 7 a.m. in the heated Environmental Education Center at Frances Slocum State Park on Saturday, February 6. Anglers were invited to take part in the annual ice fishing derby sponsored by the Nanticoke Conservation Club. They were forced to move it to Frances Slocum after budget issues forced the closing of Moon Lake County Park. The Nanticoke Conservation Club is a great group of dedicated sportsmen who are involved in many environment projects and educational events for the public.

The charter for the club started on April 4, 1951. The Nanticoke Conservation Club is an active organization of hunters, fishermen and outdoor enthusiasts. Their goal is to protect, preserve, and manage the area’s wildlife and natural resources. I know for a fact they enjoy having a good time along the way.

This particular day at Frances Slocum drew more than 100 people to the hard water. They paid their entrance fee and waited patiently to walk across the frozen lake to their predetermined fishing spots. To keep it fair the tournament was designed to have everyone walk onto the ice at the same time and begin fishing at the same time.

I stood on the shore along with the excited anglers until one fisherman declared that his phone was reading 8 a.m. The mad dash across the hard water began like the gold rush out West. The silence of the frozen Frances Slocum Lake was shattered by the sound of dozens of ice augers ripping through the 10 inches of ice. One by one the ice fishing teams drilled holes, cleaned out the slush and set up their tip ups (a device put into a hole with bait that will automatically tell you when a fish is biting). It didn’t take long to dot the surface of the lake with fishing huts and sleds.

The temperature on the thermometer in our jeep was reading 19 degrees and it actually felt like it was getting colder by the minute. The wind chill factor was playing more of a roll than the temperature. By 9 a.m. it was hard to face the wind. It actually felt like my contact lens were going to freeze in my eyes. One of the hardest parts of fishing in a windy

bitter cold condition is trying to keep the holes from freezing over. It was indeed a constant struggle on this day and it was getting worse by the minute.

Ice fishing, like many sports, is much more exciting with a pay off. In this case it would be the act of catching fish but for most anglers we visited with, that was not happening. Our discussions on the ice became more about staying warm and beating the wind than it did about winning the tournament. Many anglers wrapped things up well before the 1pm weigh-ins while other braved the arctic like conditions in hopes of landing a winning fish.

Ice fishermen are a special breed who enjoy standing on a frozen lake for hours looking into a small hole in the hard water with or without a tournament. I can honestly say that I wouldn't have been out there if I wasn't covering the event for a story for Pennsylvania Outdoor Life. My morning probably would have included a much later start with a big breakfast.

Most of the anglers stopped back at the Environmental Center of a complimentary hot dog, bowl of soup or a cup of coffee. The discussion there was much the same as it was on the ice. Cold weather accompanied by the fact that the fish weren't biting that well seemed to dominate the story lines. The weigh-ins started a 1 p.m. sharp and it was clear to me it wouldn't take long to find the winners. Only a few anglers showed up with anything at all to weigh in and those that did were carrying very small pan fish to the scale.

The big catches of the day were a dozen or so pickerel and a handful of largemouth bass. I think all of the anglers should be applauded for staying out on the ice for as long as they did. It certainly reminded me of ice fishing in the arctic. You can read more about the Nanticoke Conservation Club and their annual Ice Fishing Tournament on their website at www.nanticokeconservationclub.com.

2/20/2010

11-year-old hero honored

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Alexis Guy woke up early Sunday, Jan. 24, so she could watch TV before anyone older woke up and took control of the remote.

Her mom, Lisa, woke up, saw her daughter snuggled into the La-Z-Boy and decided to grab a few more minutes of sleep.

The next thing Lisa knew, Alexis was knocking on the bedroom door. "Mommy, I smell smoke."

Alexis' quick thinking alerted her family to a blaze that had kindled on the other half of their double home at 200-202 W. Main St., Nanticoke.

"Now, if it weren't for her being awake and being on the ball, I don't even want to think about what happened. She doesn't even understand the severity of what could have happened," Lisa said.

Alexis, who just turned 11, received a Service Above Self award Friday from the Greater Nanticoke Area Rotary Club during an assembly at her school, Greater Nanticoke Area Education Center, for helping her six-member family get out of their home safely.

"I'm a former firefighter and I understand the sacrifices people have to make, and that's a hard sacrifice for someone so young," rotary President David Carey said. "She could have panicked and fled. She smelled smoke, she went and got her mommy, mommy checked it out and they got everyone out of the house and went next door and called 911."

This is the first Service Above Self award being granted by the rotary, and Carey said the idea was inspired by Alexis. After reading about the fire in the newspaper, the seven members decided they want to recognize everyday young heroes in the community.

"We do scholarships to the high school kids and the vo-tech kids and we do things for the adults, and here is something we can do for the children who do good deeds," Carey said.

Alexis received a certificate, a pin and rotary members collected toys for her family.

"I feel kind of surprised because whenever I went to awards other kids got awards and now it's my turn," Alexis said.

"What I did was pretty cool. You don't meet a lot of 11-year-olds who've done that."

When she returned to school after the fire, Alexis said, she was proud when her principal, Mariellen Scott, called her "our little hero."

Students at Greater Nanticoke receive annual lessons on fire safety, including visits from Nanticoke firefighters who bring their Fire Safety Trailer. The trailer can be filled with smoke so children can see what that would be like, and firefighters set up fire hazards, such as paper towels next to a stove burner, for the students to spot.

The fire department also has a dalmatian, Ember, who helps during presentations and can show children how to stop, drop and roll.

Alexis' family moved into their new home a block away from the Greater Nanticoke campus this week, and she is already telling her parents they need a fire safety and emergency plan, just in case something ever happens again. "Now since that happened, I'm like, 'You have to have something.'" Alexis said. "It's important."

2/20/2010

A house to call home

A Nanticoke native planned her return with a custom-built abode

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The idea came to Vern Torrey a few years ago as he was driving along a road in Florida and pondering his retirement. Because his job at Bell South would no longer tie him to the Southeast, why not take his wife back to her Pennsylvania hometown?

The more Doreese Torrey thought about it, the better it sounded.

But she didn't want to tell her sister, Megan Tennesen of Nanticoke. At least, not right away. "She would have been too disappointed if it didn't happen."

So, unbeknownst to Tennesen, her daughter, Megan Zaremba of Nanticoke, began to quietly search for a house for Aunt Doreese and Uncle Vern.

"She did all the legwork for us," Doreese Torrey said. "She'd go and look at houses and send us pictures."

Eventually, Megan Zaremba called her aunt with the news. She'd found the perfect house – ranch style, distinctive look, lots of bedrooms.

"Where is it?" Torrey wanted to know.

"It's not anyplace," her niece said. Yet.

Zaremba had spotted a description of a house in the "Cool Digs" feature of The Times Leader's At Home section and suspected her aunt and uncle would like it.

She was right – and then some.

"We love it here. We are so happy," Doreese Torrey, 56, said as she led a tour through the spacious home built to her specifications in the Cherry Hill development on the outskirts of Nanticoke.

Highlights of the home include a dining room, a breakfast nook, a fireplace in the center of the living room and a sunroom with lots of windows ideal for spotting wildlife.

"That's my favorite room," said Vern Torrey, 77. "I've seen squirrels, I've seen bears, and then there's the skunk.

"When we go out to eat, other people say they want leftovers for their dogs or cats," he said with a laugh. "I bring them home for the skunk."

The house was under construction from March through December 2008, with local contractor Jim Brodginiski handling the \$161,800 job.

"I would recommend him to anyone," Doreese Torrey said, explaining she's grateful he worked with her to modify the original plans.

The sunroom, for example, was an addition she wanted, and she opted for a shower instead of a step-in Roman bath in the master bedroom's powder room. "I had a step-in bath in Florida, and, you know, I hardly ever used it," she said. She also asked for and received wider doorways between rooms as well as a change to the original plan that would have required her to access a closet by walking through a powder room.

Thanks to the addition of one more door, she can enter the generously sized closet directly from the bedroom.

Doreese Torrey likes to point out the home's variety of ceilings, which range from barn-style to recessed to vaulted.

"I like the uniqueness," said Doreese, whose former classmates at Nanticoke High School might remember her as Doreese Lewis.

The largest room in the house is the 28-by-17.5-foot recreation room in the finished basement, complete with exercise equipment and an entertainment center. Around the corner is a cooler-temperature room filled with wine racks.

The gas fireplace in the living room adds a cozy touch. On winter days, by the time Doreese gets home from her job as manager of Bank of America's West Pittston Banking Center, Vern "has the place all toasty-warm for me."

In summer, the Torreys were pleased to reap abundant zucchini, cucumbers and other vegetables from a garden they'd planted. "We heard this area was once a pig farm," Doreese said. "That could be why it's so fertile."

"We had an Easter-egg hunt out here," Doreese added, indicating the spacious, tree-filled backyard.

"I forgot who won," said her great-nephew Braden Zaremba, 5, who is a frequent visitor.

"I think you did," Doreese assured him.

If you ask Braden and his 9-year-old brother, Tyler, the best part of their aunt's place is the hot tub on the deck.

But for Doreese, the absolute best part is living close enough to see her sister, her niece, the boys and other relatives on a regular basis.

During the 18 years she spent in Florida, Doreese and her sister said, they tended to see each other only once or twice a year.

Nowadays, it's not uncommon for four generations to be together because Doreese's mother, 83-year-old mom, Dorothy Coopey, and son, Kevin Aument, 33, live with the Torreys, and Doreese's sister and niece live close enough to visit often.

"Sometimes I miss Florida's weather," Doreese Torrey said. "But nothing beats being close to your family."

2/19/2010

Board appoints new head football coach

Camille Fiotti - Times Leader

The audience gave a round of applause to Ronald Bruza Wednesday as the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board unanimously voted to appoint him as the district's new head football coach, effective immediately.

Bruza replaces Lou Cella who resigned last November. A 2000 GNA graduate, Bruza is a teacher in the district's elementary center. As head football coach, he will receive an annual salary of \$6,900 board president Jeff Kozlofski said.

The board also accepted the retirement letter of intent from G. Mark Brown, guidance teacher, at the end of the school year.

In other business, the board voted to approve a tentative contract between the district's support staff and the board pending review by the solicitor.

2/11/2010

Open seat on Nanticoke Municipal Authority causes concern

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With the flurry of redevelopment activity going on downtown, some Nanticoke Municipal Authority members have expressed concern about a seat that has been vacant since last year.

Authority Vice-Chairman Hank Marks has repeatedly asked Nanticoke City Council members in the past month to appoint a new member to the authority. The board is supposed to have five members, but currently has only four.

Three members are needed to be present for the authority to have a quorum and hold meetings.

Marks is concerned key business could be postponed if any of the members are absent causing a lack of quorum.

Lately the authority has had three members – Marks, Hank Kellar and Chairman Chester "Chet" Beggs – attending the meetings, according to Marks. Authority member Dennis Butler attended the most recent meeting, but has missed several others in the last couple months, Marks said. Butler did not return calls seeking comment.

The last few months and next few months will be critical for the city and the board. The authority will be taking out a nearly \$1.5 million loan to provide a lot with 300 parking spaces for Luzerne County Community College's Health Sciences Center.

Also, the authority is working with Mark Development to redevelop some buildings in downtown. The firm is the same company hired by LCCC trustees to build the Culinary Arts Center.

Marks would like to see former Nanticoke mayor John Bushko appointed to the slot vacated when former authority Chairman Ron Kamowski resigned from the board late last year. He questions whether Bushko has not been named to the board because some council members and other influential residents are worried Bushko might be too independent to serve on the board.

Bushko said he would feel comfortable serving on the board because he's attended all the authority meetings in the past four years when he was mayor.

Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty hopes to have the seat filled next week during the city council meeting. He said council members are still trying to decide on three people interested in the post.

2/11/2010

ON CAMPUS BILL ARSENAULT

Nanticoke grad leading Navy women's track

There's no mistaking who the leader is on the Naval Academy women's track team. Senior Abigail "Abby" Gesecki of Nanticoke wins the honor hands down.

Gesecki is captain of the Midshipmen and does her job both on the track and off.

She has been Navy's top 500-meter dash performer in all four of her years at Annapolis. She recently finished second out of 17 runners at the Patriot Games at George Mason University, recording a time of 1:17.28. Prior to that, she ran a leg on the distance medley relay team that finished first in the Navy Invitational.

"Abby has been instrumental at setting the competitive tone for this year's team," coach Carla Criste said. "She epitomizes the traits of a team captain. She gives 100 percent at practice and in meets as well as in her academic and military performance."

Gesecki finished second in the 500 at last year's Patriot League Indoor Championships with a career-best time of 1:14.37. That meet is scheduled for Feb. 19-21 at West Point. She had figured to prep for the league meet by defending her 500 title in the Star Meet (Army vs. Navy) last weekend in Annapolis, but the meet was canceled because of the weather and has been rescheduled for Feb. 27.

Gesecki is also a standout in the 400 outdoors and captured the league title in that event last year with a personal-best time of 56.81.

Once her career in track is over, Gesecki knows where she's headed.

"As a consequence of Abby's hard work in the class room, she has been selected to become one of the first members of the future female submariners," Criste said. "She is a true pioneer who is always up for a challenge."

2/5/2010

Nanticoke OKs temporary parking restriction, sets tax rate

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City Council members Wednesday night approved parking restrictions on a narrow street after receiving a recommendation from the police chief.

"The police department has determined there could be unsafe conditions due to parking on both sides of the street and the narrow widths of the street," City Administrator Holly Quinn said.

The resolution adopted by council requires vehicles park only on the east side of Christian Street from Broad Street to State Street for a period of 90 days as the city tries to determine if this will allow for easier traffic flow on Christian Street.

At the end of the trial period, the city could make the parking restrictions permanent.

In other business, City Council approved the real estate tax rate of 2.4344 mills for 2010, the same as last year's. The general fund receives 1.4573 mills; .9577 mills is used for debt service and .0194 mills pays for the library.

A mill is \$1 in tax for every \$1,000 in assessed value.

Finance Director Pamela Heard announced people who make less than \$50,000 are eligible to receive free help in completing their tax returns. The program, sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service, is offered Thursday mornings and other days by appointment by calling 735-2800, ext. 107.

2/5/2010

Nanticoke, Plymouth Twp. voters will face question of home rule

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Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty wants to explore home rule as a way to keep the city's earned income tax rate.

When voters in Nanticoke and Plymouth Township go to the polls on May 18, they will be asked whether they want to form a home-rule study commission and select seven candidates to serve on the board.

Luzerne County Director of Elections Leonard Piazza III said Thursday he received ordinances from Nanticoke officials, who passed theirs Wednesday, and Plymouth Township supervisors, who passed theirs Monday.

Creation of a study commission would allow panels of residents to determine if the municipalities would fare better under a new form of government, or if they should keep their current forms: third-class city code in Nanticoke's case and third-class township code, in Plymouth Township's.

Officials in both municipalities want to explore a home-rule charter as a way to keep their earned income tax rate.

"Without it, where do we go? We'd have to go back to property tax," Nanticoke Mayor Joe Dougherty said.

The municipalities were designated Act 47, or financially distressed, by the state Department of Community and Economic Development. Plymouth Township received the designation in July 2004, Nanticoke in May 2006.

The status allowed both communities to raise their earned income tax to 2 percent, with 0.5 percent in each going to the [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#).

But Act 47 is only a temporary solution designed to help municipalities get back to sustainable financial stability. The only other way municipalities can raise earned income tax above the state limit of 1 percent - 0.5 percent of which must go to their school districts - is to adopt a home-rule charter.

"Without the earned income tax, Plymouth Township would have its doors closed, literally. We couldn't function without it," township Supervisor Chairwoman Gale Conrad said. "Property taxes are so regressive, and harmful especially to folks on a fixed income."

When the township was declared financially distressed, officials opted, after months of research and discussion, to raise the income tax as a way of fixing problems from the past, she said.

"I can't say enough about the folks in town who work and pay the earned income, because they're really pulling the weight," Conrad said. "That means a great deal, to keep a community solid."

Under a home-rule charter, counties and municipalities can reshape their governments in other ways, such as having an appointed manager handle day-to-day operations, like in Kingston Township, or having a strong mayor form of government, like in Kingston Borough and Wilkes-Barre City. Luzerne County's government study commission is currently in the process of drawing up a home rule charter, which members want to put on the November ballot for vote. Dougherty said although keeping Nanticoke's earned income tax at its current rate is the primary reason for the home rule initiative, "once we start having meetings and public forums, that's when we'll take suggestions" on other ways city government could be improved with a home rule charter.

Home-rule study commissions are non-partisan. To become a candidate, Nanticoke residents must obtain 100 signatures on their nominating petitions; Plymouth Township residents need 10 signatures, Piazza said. He said potential candidates should meet with him to review the paperwork.

2/4/2010

Nanticoke, Plymouth Township seek home rule study

Times Leader

Officials from Nanticoke and Plymouth Township filed ordinances this morning in Luzerne County's Election Bureau to have a home rule study question placed on the May 18 primary election ballot.

Voters in each municipality would decide whether they want to create a home rule study commission.

Candidates would also be selected May 18 to serve on the commissions, but the winning candidates will only take office if the study question passes.

2/3/2010

Citizens' trash becomes treasure for Nanticoke

One thousand tons of recycled material brings city a \$17,000 grant to be used as it sees fit.

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By recycling newspapers, magazines, plastic items and cans, residents have secured the city a \$17,000 state grant. City Administrator Holly Quinn said the city expects to receive the \$17,655 check within the next eight weeks for 1,044 tons of material recycled in 2008 after being awarded a Recycling Performance Grant from the state's Department of Environmental Protection.

Municipalities that receive the grant can use the money for anything local officials want. Nanticoke will be putting this money in its capital projects fund.

The city has received varying amounts from these grants in the last several years, depending on the amount of recycled materials. The lowest point was in 2007, when the city received \$15,337 for 960 tons and the highest amount was in 2002, when the city received \$36,221 for 1,576 tons.

Mayor Joe Dougherty said he doesn't know why there is such a large difference in the tonnage recycled. He considered the idea that people might be putting less in their recycling bins, so now he said he is determined to develop ways to promote recycling as a way to benefit the environment and the city monetarily.

"Recycling has numerous benefits, including protecting the environment, providing industry with raw materials, conserving natural resources, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving energy," he said.

Recyclable and trash pickups are conducted weekly in Nanticoke. Paper and co-mingled recycling item pickups rotate from week to week.

Aluminum, steel and tin cans, food and beverage containers made of clear, green or brown glass and plastic containers can be recycled together in a co-mingled bin. Newspapers, cardboard, magazines, office paper and phone books are picked up together the next week.

While most things used on a daily basis can be recycled, there are a few items that are not accepted.

Foil, food trays, light bulbs, mirrors, window glass, car batteries, gasoline, motor oil, oil-based paints, pesticides and home construction or demolition debris cannot be accepted.

2/2/2010

Ex-GNA teacher charges job bias

Other teachers whose certificates lapsed kept their jobs, Cathy Sadowski says.

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A former teacher in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District has sued the district in federal court for terminating her for what she characterizes as discriminatory reasons, according to the lawsuit.

Cathy Sadowski of Pine Street in Nanticoke was employed by the district from 1982 until April 2008, when she was forced to take an unpaid leave of absence or pay a fine for allowing her teaching certification to lapse without first completing another level, the lawsuit states.

She chose the unpaid leave and was told she could get her job back as a business teacher for the 2008-09 school year if she received the next certification level before the year began, according to the lawsuit.

In June, she received a letter that changed her unpaid leave to a termination, but told her to resubmit her resume after receiving the certification.

She did so, but the position was awarded to Sue Walton, who was at least a decade younger than Sadowski, the lawsuit states.

Sadowski states she was better qualified than Walton because she had 26 years of teaching experience, had the position for nine previous years, had her second-level certification, had satisfactory evaluations and was a student favorite.

During that time period, the suit alleges, two male teachers who are also younger than Sadowski were allowed to continue teaching even though they, too, had allowed their certifications to lapse without first completing the next level. The men, the suit alleges, still have not received that certification.

Sadowski alleges she was discriminated against by the district for her sex and age because Walton was hired despite her lesser qualifications and the younger male teachers didn't receive the same punishment for the same offense.

She is seeking \$150,000 and any damages the court deems appropriate.

1/31/2010

Nanticoke's revitalization plan goes into overdrive

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Last week, in the same auditorium at Luzerne County Community College where a comprehensive plan for the South Valley was unveiled four years previously, the public got a taste of the first milestone on the road to revitalization.

The college revealed the new Joseph A. Paglianite Culinary Arts Institute that is under construction at Market and Main streets in Nanticoke. The building, named after the co-founder of Grotto Pizza, is to open this fall.

Other parts of the approximately \$30 million downtown Nanticoke project are starting to come together as well.

Interior demolition is under way for renovating the long-vacant Kanjorski Center on Main Street into what will open in January 2011 as LCCC's new Health Sciences center. Nanticoke officials are working on a streetscape plan for the Main Street area, with \$5.6 million in federal funding obtained by U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke. Mayor Joseph Dougherty has formed a group to find the best ways to spend the money.

Plans are being made to provide enough parking for LCCC and surrounding downtown businesses. Nanticoke General Municipal Authority bought and tore down a group of commercial buildings at 108-124 E. Main St., next to the Kanjorski Center, in 2005, and is currently attempting to buy some other adjacent properties.

In addition, a private developer is interested in the former CVS building directly adjacent to the Kanjorski Center, Dougherty said.

"This is not pictures," said State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. "This is real, tangible progress."

Planning begins

In April 2006, representatives from the planning firm Facility Design & Development Ltd. presented to the public a newly created South Valley comprehensive plan, which had been two years in the making. The plan was commissioned

by the South Valley Partnership to show how Newport and Plymouth townships and Nanticoke City could have new life breathed into their urban centers.

Key components of the plan for downtown Nanticoke included finding a way to bring LCCC, one of the region's biggest assets and largest employers, into the mix, and to do something with the city's most visible intersections: that of Market and Main streets.

A few months after the plan's debut, Ken Pollock donated the former Susquehanna Coal Co. office to the Nanticoke Housing Authority, which intended to renovate it into apartments. But the structure was too far gone, Yudichak said.

"We knew we had to get an anchor tenant, something that is going to bring people downtown," he said.

The South Valley "hit a home run" with LCCC officials' decision to locate the Culinary Arts and Health Sciences buildings on Main Street, Yudichak noted: the two new schools will bring 800 to 1,000 people to the heart of Nanticoke. Several years ago the city's relationship with the college was nonexistent, and now it has blossomed into an opportunity for both parties, according to Dougherty: the college can expand its most in-demand programs, which in turn will help bring more foot traffic into the city's business district.

In 2008, William Rinaldi's firm, Scranton-based Mark Development, was given the green light by LCCC to build the culinary arts center at Market and Main streets.

"We are planning a comprehensive revitalization effort that will transform downtown Nanticoke into a statewide model of how a third-class, industrial (city) can reposition itself for a new era of growth and prosperity," Rinaldi stated.

The Susquehanna Coal Co. building and the city-owned senior center were demolished, and the foundation has gone up. The culinary center project has created approximately 200 construction jobs, most of them union, according to Chris Cawley, managing director of Northeastern Economic Development Co., which is working on Mark Development's financials.

On the horizon

There's other work going on behind the scenes, particularly involving the \$4.5 million in grants for the project. At Nanticoke City Hall prior to Tuesday's meeting at LCCC, Cawley indicated 19 binders of documentation for the culinary arts project, and said there are 20 more in the offices.

Yudichak said the partnership among the city, college, developers and others has been good; the work is hard and things take time, but everyone is on the same page.

"For once all entities involved are involved," Dougherty said. "No one's slacking off."

1/27/2010

**Culinary arts center named for \$1M donor
LCCC board accepts gift from co-owner of Grotto Pizza for new
center expected to open in fall.**

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Luzerne County Community College Board of Trustees voted Tuesday night to accept a \$1 million gift donated by an area business owner and officially named the college's new culinary arts building after him.

The state-of-the-art facility, located in downtown Nanticoke, will be

named The Joseph A. Paglianite Culinary Institute.

Paglianite is a co-owner of Grotto Pizza, which was founded in 1953 at Harveys Lake. Grotto has become one of Northeast Pennsylvania's most successful restaurants.

"It gives me great pleasure to be able to give back to the Wyoming Valley who gave me so much and allowed me to be as successful as the business," said Paglianite, who recently made a donation to the LCCC Foundation to establish a scholarship.

Jerry Champi, president of the foundation, said the college is "fortunate to have the support of Mr. Paglianite, who has worked very hard over many years to build Grotto Pizza into a successful business."

The \$7.6 million project has been a partnership between the college, community and Paglianite, said Paul A. Halesey, chairman of the board.

"Students who will enter our culinary arts program will learn the history of the man who founded one of the most successful businesses in the area," he said.

The landmark business began as Joe's Pizza and it grew with the help of Paglianite's brother-in-law and Wilkes-Barre native, Dominick Pulieri. LCCC's culinary institute is designed to give future owners, managers and professionals the

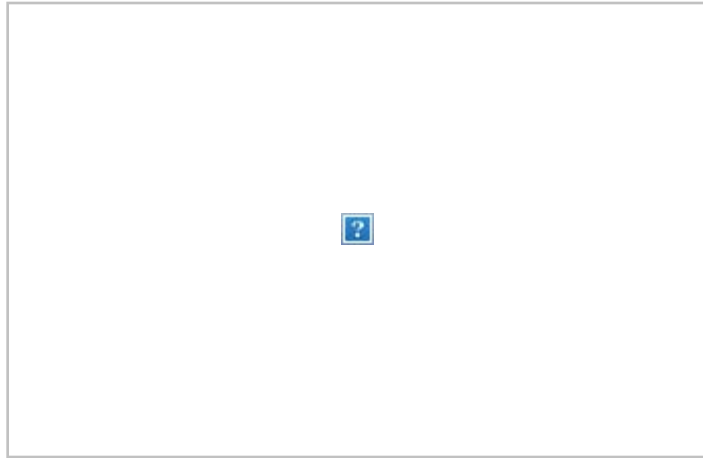
tools needed to become successful in the food business. The project was meant to accommodate the college's growing enrollments in its culinary programs, officials said.

"Our goal is to offer our students education equal to the best culinary schools in the country at a community college price," said Gary Mrozinski, dean of business and technologies.

Thomas P. Leary, LCCC president, said opening the institute reaffirms the college's commitment to training students in the most up-to-date facilities.

The facility will contain two kitchen labs and a pastry arts lab with more than 30 individual work stations. The building also boasts an elevated auditorium, which will be equipped with a television studio that will provide the ability to broadcast cooking shows and culinary events.

Construction is under way on the 22,000-square-foot, two-story facility, which is scheduled to be completed by Aug. 15. Classes are scheduled to begin next fall.



1/25/2010

Nanticoke F.O.E. 834 donates equipment

Recently the Nanticoke F.O.E. 834 donated towards necessary vehicle equipment for the Nanticoke's Police K-9 unit.

Through the Club's generosity the Police Department will be able to maintain appropriate conditions for "Vice".

Pictured left to right, 1st row are: Bob Zarembo, Chief of Police James Cheshinski, German Shepherd, "Vice", Officer Brian Kivler.

2nd row (back) Magistrate Donald Whittaker, Gene Ruminski, Francis Grevera, Joe Bargella, Fred David, Mike Havens and NPD Detective Willam Schultz.

1/25/2010

Thanks to the quick thinking of their 10-year-old daughter, the Guy family of Nanticoke escaped a blaze at their residence Sunday morning

Family flees burning home

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A young girl who smelled smoke as her family slept late Sunday morning very likely saved their lives when she woke up her mom, an American Red Cross official said.

Alexis Guy, 10, was watching television just before 10:30 a.m. Sunday when something caught her attention.

"I heard banging and I muted the TV. All of a sudden, I had this big whiff of smoke. I ran upstairs and I told my mom. She ... ran and called 911," Alexis said.

Nanticoke Fire Lt. Rich Bohan said his department was dispatched at 10:29 a.m. to 202 W. Main St. for a report of a structure fire. Firefighters quickly knocked down the fire and contained it to the 202-side of the half-double. That half of the structure sustained major fire damage, and the rest of the structure sustained smoke and water damage, Bohan said. Bohan said one firefighter was transported to a local hospital for evaluation and later released. He said the residents escaped safely. He identified the Guy family as the residents of 202 W. Main, but had no information on the resident of 200 W. Main St.

Bohan said a state police fire marshal is investigating the fire's cause and origin.

Responding were Nanticoke Fire Engines 2, 3 and 6, Truck 1, Nanticoke Fire Command and Hanover Township Fire Command and Rapid Intervention Team. Bohan's brother, Fire Chief Mike Bohan, directed operations at the scene.

Bohan said the structure was saved thanks to quick action by firefighters.

The Guy family was saved thanks to the quick action of Alexis, said Amy Gabriel, director of emergency services from the Wyoming Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross.

"She's like our hero," Brookelyn Guy, 8, said of her sister, Alexis, as they and their brother, Dylan, sat on a bed at the Red Roof Inn, where the American Red Cross put them up for the night.

Dylan, 6, was equally proud of his sister.

"She was so nice to wake my sister Brookelyn up because (Brookelyn) has asthma," Dylan said.

Alexis had also woke up her sister Rianah, 19, who was unavailable for comment.

Lisa Guy said she woke up earlier Sunday morning only because she heard the television.

“I went to see which kids were awake. Usually on Sundays, I do breakfast for the whole family. When I went downstairs, (Alexis) was watching TV,” Lisa Guy said.

Since her other three children and husband were still asleep and her allergies were bothering her, Lisa went back upstairs and went to sleep. Some time later, she awoke to Alexis knocking on her door.

“She goes, ‘Mommy, I smell smoke and I heard banging next door,’” Lisa Guy said.

Lisa also heard the faint beeping of a smoke detector and first checked her house to see if it was one of theirs. It wasn’t.

“I was like, it has to be next door. So, I went off the front porch, looked down the length of the house on their side and saw black smoke coming out of the kitchen area,” Lisa said.

She pounded on the neighbor’s front door and no one answered so she went to the back door. The screen door was ajar and there was glass on the porch. She pulled open the screen door and, because the back door was wide open, smoke began billowing out “thick as heck,” Lisa said.

“I said, ‘Get me the phone and wake everybody up.’ So (Alexis) ran in the house, woke everybody up, brought me the phone and I called 911,” she said.

“She’s my little hero,” Lisa said of Alexis.

Robert Guy, who was gathering some clothing from the home when a reporter visited his family’s hotel room, also praised his daughter in a phone interview.

“She did a tremendous thing today. I’m very proud of her,” he said.

As for Alexis, the Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Center students said she’s just happy her family is safe. “We were close as it is, but this brought us way closer. And we know now that we have to have a fire safety plan. It helped us all learn what can happen. We can replace our things, but not each other,” she said.

The Guy family was renting and had no renters insurance, so they now have few possessions and are looking for a new place to live.

1/22/2010

Nanticoke fills city council seat

Michael Borowski appointed to remaining term of new Mayor Joseph Dougherty.

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Michael Borowski was appointed as the city’s newest council member just before the close of council’s meeting on Wednesday

Borowski, 44, a lifelong Nanticoke resident, was chosen unanimously by the other council members, beating out nine other candidates.

His wife, Alice, congratulated him after his selection. The couple have a daughter, Briann, who attends Keystone College in LaPlume.

“He is very active in the community. He seems to be dedicated to seeing this city move forward,” Mayor Joseph Dougherty said as to why Borowski seemed the best choice to fill the vacant seat.

Frank Knorek Jr., James Havens, David Spencer, Linda Prushinski, Anthony Chametski, Brian Rinker, Stephen Duda, Pam Aftewicz and Bill Brown also submitted their names for the post.

Borowski will serve out the remainder of the term left vacant when Dougherty had to vacate his seat to take the oath as mayor earlier this month. The term runs through December 2011.

“It is really nice to be involved in a team that is going to move this town forward. I am pretty excited about it,” he said.

Borowski, who previously served on the Nanticoke Recreation Board, was sworn into office by Dougherty. As councilman, Borowski will oversee the Public Works Department.

He thanked council members for his appointment and said he enjoyed working with the recreation board for nearly three years, serving as its chairman for the entire period.

Borowski enjoyed serving on the recreation board so well that Dougherty approved him as the liaison between the council and the board.

City administrator Holly Quinn, who did not get a vote in the matter, said she was pleased with the council’s choice. She said Borowski was instrumental in offering guidance and advice when the city formed its safety committee three years ago to help save money on workers’ compensation insurance.

Borowski is manager of the safety, security, transportation and maintenance at the Red Rock Job Corps in Lopez, Pa.

“He’s come in, he helped us establish the committee, he gave us advice, he is always providing us informational

handouts and he has attended numerous meetings. ... So he has his job cut out for him and not just at the street department. We are going to take full advantage of all his knowledge,” Quinn said.

1/15/2010

GNA board accepts no grant vote

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The public was instructed on why the Greater Nanticoke Area School District did not apply for the “Race To The Top” federal stimulus grant funding program during the monthly board meeting Thursday.

The district’s teachers union voted against the application, which would have required three approvals from superintendent, school board president and the union.

Superintendent Tony Perrone praised the union for all the research they did before voting on the measure.

“We don’t know how much we are getting. We don’t know if it might actually cost us more money because the things they want done are human services things that run into money. There are a lot of things on there that cost money,”

Perrone said.

The federal program would provide \$4.35 billion to 12 states that would then divide the money among their own school districts.

District Principal Michael Pawlik further explained the program and how the district might actually benefit from it indirectly.

He pointed out that Pennsylvania might not even get funded because he said there was more than 30 states applying for the funds.

“We will still be able to partake in all the indirect money....They will be allowing us of the access to staff development they run, all the new research they do we will be able to have our teachers participate in those things,” Pawlik said.

So the district will benefit from the programs, but will not receive any money. This might be a blessing, however, because the district will not be forced to offer or operate any mandates that might be tied directly to receiving the funding.

January is “School Director Recognition Month,” so Perrone gave all the board directors a certificate thanking for them for their service.

He also pointed out that Vice, the K9 unit of the Nanticoke Police Department, is now trained and will be used on campus to search for drugs.

The school district purchased the dog for the police department last year with the stipulation that the dog be used for drug detection.

Board members Frank Vandermark, Gary Smith and Sylvia Mizdail were absent.

1/8/2010

A winner who finds a way to be a big loser

Dave Konopki dkonopki@timesleader.com

The play didn’t decide a championship or even win a game. It was just a simple pass play at the conclusion of a high school football game on a Friday night in September 1988.

Still, more than 20 years later, the play remains ingrained in my memory. And it could be used as a lesson today.

The Nanticoke Area football team was wrapping up a hard-fought 20-6 win against Meyers when Trojans defensive back Mike Zubritski made an interception on the final play of the game.

When Zubritski caught the ball, there was nothing but open field and several Nanticoke Area teammates between him and the end zone. But instead of scoring an easy touchdown, Zubritski went down to one knee, ending the game.

It remains one of the classiest displays of sportsmanship I’ve witnessed. And it was done by a high school senior.

Perhaps Yates High School boys basketball head coach Greg Wise could take a page from Zubritski’s playbook.

Wise and his team gained national attention earlier this week by pounding Lee High School 170-35 in a Houston, Texas, Class 4A game. That’s right, 170-35.

The 170 points broke the previous state record of 166 points and the 100 points Yates scored in the first half – to take a 100-12 lead – also set a new state record.

The No. 2-ranked team in the nation, which returns all five starters from last year’s Class 4A state championship team, used a full-court press defense and an up-tempo offense for all four quarters against its outmanned opponent.

Following the game, Wise offered no apology. In fact, he feebly tried to offer an explanation by pointing out he played

all 15 players on the roster. But he failed to mention the starting five accounted for 138 of his team's points. "We practice running, pressing, trapping every day," he told the Houston Chronicle. "If we get to a game and I tell them not to do what we do in practice, I am not coaching well.

"We are looking for another state championship, and we can't get that unless we are continuing to get better and perfect our game."

Even if that means embarrassing a bunch of high school athletes.

Listen, I'm not some kind of a purist. I know winning is important and every team should strive to win. Conference and district championships are great. State championships are even better.

But there's so much more to sports than winning, especially on the high school level. Among other things, high school athletics should provide a positive environment for students to have fun while building lifelong traits such as leadership and teamwork.

Coughlin boys basketball head coach Joe Caffrey agrees.

"How could you have a goal of winning a championship that doesn't include sportsmanship?" he said. "To me, they go hand in hand. It's cliché, but there's a right way to win and a wrong way to win."

Wise chose the wrong way.

With the game well in hand, Wise should have opted to take a knee. Instead, he thumbed his nose at the Lee players – as well as everything that is good about high school sports.

1/7/2010

The warmth of faith

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Not even the bitter cold could keep St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church members praising God over the Susquehanna River at noon on Wednesday.

As temperatures hovered in the mid-20s, the Rev. Adam Sexton and several parishioners made their way down the snow-covered sidewalk of the bridge connecting Nanticoke and West Nanticoke to honor Jesus' baptism on the Feast of the Theophany.

"The Theophany that we celebrate is the first time that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were present on Earth at the same time. The Spirit in the form of a dove, the voice of the Father saying this is my beloved with whom I am well pleased and then, of course, Christ, in the Jordan (River)," Sexton said.

He started the blessing service with a censer before leading the congregation in a series of chants and prayers and later a frozen ice cross during the service also known as the Epiphany. The cross was later thrown into the river below, hitting a pocket of water.

Saxton then sprinkled holy water on all in attendance.

This was the first time the 99-year-old church has celebrated the Epiphany over a body of water, he said.

Orthodox churches celebrate Theophany every Jan. 6. Russian Orthodox churches celebrate Theophany on Jan. 19, after celebrating Russian Christmas, Sexton said.

Church member Barbara Pascoe of Hanover Township attended with her husband, Phillip.

"It was wonderful, absolutely heartfelt, and the Holy Spirit was with us," she said after the less-than-15-minute service.

ON CAMPUS

1/7/2010

Borowski Back In Action

BILL ARSENAULT - Times Leader

Sophomore Brianna Borowski (Nanticoke) has seen action in four games for the 1-5 Keystone women's basketball team. She's averaging 15 minutes of action a game and has scored two points with four rebounds, four assists and four steals.

"Bri just started playing again after sustaining an injury to her knee during the soccer season," coach Jessica Bogia said.

"She is a great shooter and a phenomenal defender. Once she gets used to the offense and is comfortable being back on that knee, I look for her to be a much bigger scoring threat than she was last year. I also rely heavily on her shutting down the opponents' best player."

ON CAMPUS

1/7/2010

Bieski looks to excel as captain for WVU gymnastics team

BILL ARSENAULT - Times Leader

Junior Amy Bieski is ready for a big junior season with the University of West Virginia women's gymnastic team. Bieski, a Nanticoke native and a former performer with Northeast Gymnastics, has had two solid seasons competing with the Mountaineers

"I expect another outstanding year for Amy," coach Linda Burdette-Good said. "The team just got back from Christmas break and has had very good practices and I would have to say that Amy had exceptional practices. The routines were performed with confidence which is what I really wanted to see."

Burdette-Good also felt that Bieski had a solid fall practice session.

"She improved her difficulty on bars and floor and improved execution and form on beam and vault," the coach said.

"This is her third year with us and she continues to get better each year."

Bieski, who will serve as one of the three captains on this year's team, is the only returning all-around performer and will be looked on to replace graduated Meghan Morris as the team's top point-earner.

As a freshman, Bieski earned Eastern Atlantic Gymnastic League first-team honors in all-around and floor and second team in vault and uneven bars. Five times she was EAGL Rookie of the Week and finished second in the voting for league Rookie of the Year. She totaled 513.4 points and competed in all 14 events for the Mountaineers.

Last season, Bieski earned first-team EAGL honors in the all-around, vault and floor and second-team on uneven bars. Her 456.15 points were second to Morris.

In individual events, Bieski's best are 9.9 (vault), 9.825 (bars), 9.775 (beam), 9.9 (floor) and all-around (39.275).

West Virginia opens its season Friday against No. 11 Penn State, No. 24 Michigan State and Western Michigan in East Lansing, Mich

1/5/2009

Nanticoke's mayor optimistic

Joseph Dougherty sees vital projects ahead as he takes office.

slong@timesleader.com

Joseph Dougherty has been called son, husband, dad, controller and councilman. Now he has a new title: mayor.

Dougherty was sworn-in as Nanticoke's latest mayor at 10:13 a.m.

Monday in council chambers by District Judge Donald Whittaker.

He was surrounded by his four daughters, 21-year old twins, Brianne and Brittany, 14-year-old Sydney and Olivia, 5. His mother, Karen, and other family members were in the audience. "It is definitely an honor and a privilege. I love this town. I grew up here and my children are being raised here," he said when asked how it felt to be mayor of his hometown.

After six years as councilman, he looks forward to the city moving forward with the Alden Road resurfacing project and the expansion of the Luzerne County Community College into downtown during

his term. He acknowledges those projects would not be as far along without the drive of his predecessor, John Bushko. Less than five minutes after his swearing-in, Dougherty administered the oath of office to Margaret Haydock and James Litchkofski as council members. This is Haydock's first term on council, and Litchkofski is beginning his second term. Haydock, 25, is the second woman to serve on the City Council.

Yvonne Bozinski was the first woman elected in 1997. She is still active in the community as she serves on the city's Recreation Board.

Haydock says she looks forward to serving on the board as she follows in the footsteps of her grandfather, the late John Haydock, who served as the city's mayor in the late 1980s.

Treasurer Al Wytoshek and Controller Kevin Coughlin also took their oaths of office from Whittaker. All the posts are four-year terms.

At the next council meeting, Jan. 20, members must appoint a new council member to fill Dougherty's open seat..

Dougherty, who won the Democratic primary in May and faced no Republican opposition in November, was halfway



Congratulations Mayor Dougherty

Joe Dougherty is sworn in as the new mayor of Nanticoke on Monday morning, January 4, 2010 surrounded by his daughters Olivia, (not shown) Sydney, Brianne and Brittany.

Photo by: Clark Van Orden/The Times Leader

through his second term when he won the mayor's job.

Candidates have until Jan. 15 to submit their names if they are interested in serving the remainder of Dougherty's term, which expires December 2011.

After the new council was seated, members reorganized themselves with each council member being assigned a department to oversee as superintendent.

As mayor, Dougherty will oversee the public affairs/police department. He will also oversee the public works and street department until a new council member is appointed.

Litchkofski will oversee the finance/accounts departments, Haydock will oversee the fire department/public safety division and Councilman Jon Metta will oversee the parks/public properties department.

1/5/2010

Dougherty begins first term as Nanticoke mayor

Robert Olsen - Citizens' Voice

Joseph Dougherty took his place at the center of council's table Monday after being sworn in as mayor by Judge Donald Whittaker before a room of his friends, family and peers.

Dougherty said his focus as mayor will be the continued development of the downtown area.

"There are a lot of people working hard down there," Dougherty said. "And with Luzerne County Community College, they used to just be an island up there. Now they are moving down this way too. We have a great working partnership with them."

Serving first as controller for two years and then as councilman for six years has given Dougherty insight into how the city runs and helped him gain experience as he moved through the ranks, he said.

"I've always been very active with all of the departments, too," Dougherty added. "That has helped."

Another important part of Dougherty's strategy as mayor is to continue to keep a "great and open relationship with all of council."

"I hope to see no in-fighting and lots of cooperation," Dougherty said. "We can either all be part of the problem, or part of the solution, but I think we will all work together well on the same team."

Dougherty replaces outgoing Mayor John Bushko.

"Joe will do fine," Bushko said of Dougherty. "The city is in very good hands."

Bushko said he felt, during his 20 years of service to the city, and particularly as mayor, that he "got a lot done."

Also sworn in were incumbent Councilman James Litchkofski and newcomer Margaret Haydock, who replaces former Councilman Brent Makarczyk. Makarczyk did not run for re-election. City Tax Collector Albert Wytoshek and City Controller Kevin Coughlin also took their oaths in front of Whittaker for another term.

With the new board came a slight reorganization. Litchkofski was selected as the director the department of accounts and finances with Haydock taking the position of director of the Department of Public Safety and Councilman Jon Metta assuming the role of director of the Department of Parks and Public Property.

"Now that I'm working with the accounts and finances, I'm going to work very closely" with City Administrator Holly Quinn and Director of Finance Pamela Heard to watch our revenue, Litchkofski said. "We always have before, and that's very important."

Wytoshek also took a moment to thank everyone for their continued support and told Haydock she had "big shoes to fill."

Haydock is the city's second councilwoman in its history. The city's first councilwoman was Yvonne Bozinski.

1/4/2010

Posted: 1:06 PM

Updated: 2:09 PM

Joseph Dougherty sworn-in as Nanticoke mayor

Dougherty was sworn-in as mayor at 10:13 a.m. Monday in council chambers by District Judge Donald Whittaker. Less than five minutes later Dougherty administered the oath of office to Margaret Haydock and James Litchkofski as council members. This is Haydock's first term on council and Litchkofski is beginning his second term.

Treasurer Al Wytoshek and Controller Kevin Coughlin also took their oaths of office, each for another four year term.

1/4/2010

7:12 PM

Nanticoke's mayor optimistic

slong@timesleader.com

He was surrounded by his four daughters, 21-year old twins, Brianne and Brittany, 14-year-old Sydney and Olivia, 5. His mother, Karen, and other family members were in the audience.

"It is definitely an honor and a privilege. I love this town. I grew up here and my children are being raised here," he said when asked how it felt to be mayor of his hometown.

After six years as councilman, he looks forward to the city moving forward with the Alden Road resurfacing project and the expansion of the Luzerne County Community College into downtown during his term. He acknowledges those projects would not be as far along without the drive of his predecessor, John Bushko.

Less than five minutes after his swearing-in, Dougherty administered the oath of office to Margaret Haydock and James Litchkofski as council members. This is Haydock's first term on council, and Litchkofski is beginning his second term. Haydock, 25, is the second woman to serve on the City Council.

1/4/2010

Nanticoke to fill city council post

Seat held by new mayor Joe Dougherty is now open. The city is seeking applicants until Jan. 15.

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There will be an open seat on the City Council this morning when Councilman Joe Dougherty is sworn in as the city's newest mayor.

Letters of interest are being accepted until Jan. 15 from residents wishing to serve the remainder of the council term that ends December 2011. So far, only two people have submitted paperwork noting their interest in the seat.

Dougherty declined to release the persons' names until after the deadline.

Those interested in applying must live in Nanticoke, be at least 18 years old and a registered voter. Candidates should send a letter of intent or resume to City Hall, 15 E. Ridge St., Nanticoke, with attention to the mayor and council regarding the open post.

After the deadline, council members will review the list of names and select a candidate at the Jan. 20 city council meeting.

A new council person must be appointed within 30 days of Dougherty's resignation, according to the state's third class city code. If a person is not appointed within the 30 days, the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas will be responsible for appointing a new council member.

Dougherty doesn't have a specific person he would like to see appointed. He said he hopes the person selected is someone who cares about the city and its future.

He wants someone who has been active in the community in the past or is currently active in helping with different organizations, attending council meetings or other community service.

"If they are the type of person that will invest their time with the city now, I know they will certainly do it when they are on council," Dougherty said.

Margaret Haydock will take office as the city's newest council woman today. . She replaces councilman Brent Makarczyk, who served one term.