

12/23/2013

County interested in West Side COG

By Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

The West Side Council of Governments could soon expand into a dramatically different political body.

Luzerne County and the City of Nanticoke have voiced interest in joining the COG that was created by 12 West Side communities.

Eileen Cipriani, COG president, said COG members have agreed to allow Nanticoke to join the police equipment project and the COG will vote on the membership request at the next meeting.

Robert Lawton, county manager, attended the recent meeting held at Kingston fire headquarters and said he would like to look for ways for the county to work with the COG. He expressed interest in the county joining the COG.

Cipriani said COG delegates discussed ways for the county and the COG to work together such as purchasing, administrative assistance and use of the county DPW equipment. Public works equipment was the focus of the initial West Side COG grant of \$475,000 obtained earlier this year from the state gaming funds program. That money was used to buy public works equipment that the towns can share.

Meeting last week, the COG approved its 2014 gaming funds grant application in the amount of \$1.27 million. COG communities hope to obtain police cruisers and more public works vehicles and equipment.

Cipriani said the grant seeks funds for 12 mobile data terminals, 12 thermal imaging cameras, 12 dash camera and 12 CAD software packages, one for each town.

"We are working toward improving communication and coordination among the municipal police departments," she said. "The county purchased the CAD system, but many towns have not been able to purchase the software and the associated equipment to use it. This will greatly improve police communication."

Gary Mack, an Edwardsville councilman and COG delegate, said he held a public safety meeting and discussed ambulance service responses. Another session will be held in January. Ambulance response times and the great variation of basic life support versus advanced life support capabilities has been a topic at COG meetings.

The COG decided to hold quarterly meetings of DPW department heads and bring in speakers on topics of interest.

The next meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Jan. 23 at Kingston fire headquarters, 600 Wyoming Ave., Kingston.

Towns represented at the last meeting were West Wyoming, Wyoming, Edwardsville, Kingston, Forty Fort, West Pittston, Plymouth, Luzerne and Larksville. Swoyersville and Exeter also are members.

Nanticoke would give the COG a presence on the east side of the Susquehanna River. Despite the success of the West Side COG to date, there has been no movement toward a COG on the east side. The Back Mountain and Hazleton areas also have cooperative groups.

12/20/2013

CPA says Nanticoke's finances in order

SUSAN BETTINGER Times Leader Correspondent

Joe Alicieni, a CPA from an independent firm, on Wednesday gave the city's finances a lean bill of health.

He reported on the city's single audit. He said the city's finances are in compliance with all laws, regulations and grant agreements. Alicieni said Nanticoke "has a good report and is going in the right direction."

In another matter, council gave approval to submit an Local Share Account grant from state gaming funds, which would fund three specific projects. The grant would go toward the streetscape downtown revitalization program and make improvements to City Hall, specifically an American Disabilities Act access ramp, along with partially funding a new fire truck.

Council President Steve Duda thanked Council Vice President Jim Litchkofski for his eight years of service on council. Duda also thanked Mayor Joseph Dougherty for his service to the city.

Litchkofski and Dougherty will be leaving the current positions as of the new year.

South Valley Chamber of Commerce Vice President Jerry Hudak said the recent Nanticoke Santa Parade and party was the most successful of in the area. More than 500 people attended, and 282 children received gifts from Santa.

Hudak said many of the items for the party were donated by businesses from Nanticoke and the South Valley area. As well, Linda Prushinski put a tremendous amount of time and effort into the event, and was one reason that it was so successful, he said.

Hudak also said that he alone cooked 382 hot dogs for the children.

The R Bar and Grill held an Operation Santa charity event for the third year. The event benefited 166 children.

The next meeting will be Jan. 6 at 7 p.m. and will be a combined reorganization and regular council meeting.

12/12/2013

Authorities launched a search for a missing Nanticoke man Wednesday morning but called it off without finding him.

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Firefighters on foot and ATVs searched near the Broadway Street bridge for Gregory Wiepa, 61, who was last seen Monday.

Wiepa, whose home was destroyed in a fire on Nov. 29, hadn't been to work and hasn't contacted a close friend since Monday, firefighters said. After his car was found by some railroad tracks near Broadway



Bridge, police searched the area.

The search included the area from the railroad tracks to the Honey Pot section and the wooded area around the river. But after several hours of searching, firefighters were unable to locate Wiepa and the search was called off.

Wiepa is described as a white male, 6 feet tall, 210 pounds with black hair, hazel eyes and a medium build. He was last seen wearing a navy blue and white jacket, blue jeans, a snow camouflage T-shirt and

white sneakers.

Anyone with information on Wiepa's whereabouts is asked to call 911.

12/10/2013

Judge upholds LCB's ruling to deny liquor license to former bar

Citizens Voice

A Luzerne County judge has upheld a ruling by the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board that denied a liquor license renewal to the former Prospect Street Cafe in Nanticoke.

In May, the LCB voted not to renew the liquor license of the bar, which closed down in March. The LCB cited a lengthy citation history and the bar's dubious past, which included the Jan. 1, 2012 slashing of a woman, for not renewing the license. The bar's owner, Paul Halliday, 38, of West Ridge Street, Nanticoke, also was arrested several times in 2013.

Attorneys for Halliday filed an appeal of the LCB's ruling. Luzerne County Judge Richard Hughes on Monday affirmed the LCB's ruling.

"The licensee has a long history of sixteen adjudicated citations over a period of ten years and has failed to point to a single operational change to address those citations," Hughes wrote. "Furthermore, the owner of the liquor license has demonstrated personal incompetence in managing the licensed premises."

The building that housed the bar subsequently has changed hands and now is a gun store.

12/7/2013

Reward for info in Nanticoke woman's murder rises

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The reward for information in the beating death of a 97-year-old Nanticoke woman now stands at \$7,500, according to the retired police officer who started the reward fund.

Kevin Grevera, who now runs a firearms and precious metals store in the city, said the fund at PNC Bank continues to grow due to contributions by residents and business owners.

The reward will be paid to anyone who provides information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer of Gertrude Price, who police say was fatally beaten inside her 23 E. Grand St. home on Thanksgiving night.

Another unspecified reward has been offered by Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers in conjunction with the state police.

Anyone with information is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

12/6/2013

Nanticoke considers rules for sale of city-owned property

SUSAN BETTINGER - Times Leader

City Council is considering a resolution that will set restrictions on the purchase of city-owned property and the securing of grant monies from the city.

If approved, individuals who wish to purchase city property or receive grant money will have to be in good financial standing with the city, officials said. All debts, such as liens, fines and taxes, will have to be settled prior to purchasing property.

In other matters, Kosciusko Street resident Steve Zaricki asked council if anything could be done about vehicles making left turns into the CVS parking lot. The vehicles are coming from Main Street and are a safety hazard to the surrounding traffic, he said.

City resident Hank Marks said that in the past there were double lines on the road making such turns illegal.

Penn Eastern engineer Daryl Pawlush said one possible solution would be to make the parking lot accessible through one-way signs.

Police Chief William Shultz said that the city will "need to look into all options."

Council agreed and will seek to find a legal solution to the problem.

The city has posted four 25-mph speed limit signs on Prospect Road near the Middle Road intersection.

Nanticoke's Santa parade will take place on Saturday. The parade will begin at the Nanticoke Area High School at 4 p.m. The school's marching band will lead off the event, which is sponsored by the South Valley Chamber of Commerce. Free hot dogs, hot chocolate, cookies, candy and gifts for the children will be available.

Council will meet next at 7 p.m. on Dec. 18.

12/6/2013

Suit: Screw was in Nanticoke man's snack

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A Nanticoke man and his wife are suing the Kellogg Company after he allegedly swallowed a screw contained in a package of Kellogg's Rice Krispies Treats purchased at a Scranton-area convenience store.

According to a suit filed Thursday in Lackawanna County Court, William Grabowski, of 109 Loomis St., had to have the screw surgically removed after it became lodged inside him.

A call to a corporate spokeswoman for Kellogg Company, whose headquarters are in Michigan, was not immediately returned on Thursday.

William and Lynn Grabowski are represented by Cefalo and Associates of West Pittston.

In court papers, William Grabowski maintains he bought the wrapped snack on Aug. 20 at a Sunoco convenience store on Northern Boulevard in South Abington Township.

According to the suit, Grabowski "Swallowed the hidden screw embedded in the Rice Krispies Treat Bar." It then "became lodged in his esophagus, moved into his stomach and then moved into his duodenum," causing injury.

The duodenum is the upper section of the small intestine.

Grabowski required emergency room treatment and surgery to remove the screw, according to the suit.

Court documents do not indicate how large the screw was.

The suit does not indicate how much Grabowski, a truck driver, is seeking, but says he did lose "some income" due to the incident.

12/5/2013

Pa. Crime Stoppers offers new reward in Nanticoke murder case

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A second reward is being offered for information leading to an arrest and conviction in the murder of 97-year-old Nanticoke resident Gertrude Price.

Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers on Wednesday offered an unspecified reward as state police continue to search for clues in the Thanksgiving night killing of Price, the great-great-grandmother beaten to death inside her 23 E. Grand St. home.

Meanwhile, another reward in the case, established at PNC Bank by a Nanticoke civic group, has grown to \$5,000 thanks to contributions from businesses and residents.

Crime Stoppers is a volunteer organization of local businesses and community members that gather funds to reward individuals who provide information anonymously to assist law enforcement agencies with unsolved crimes, according to its website. The organization works in conjunction with state police on such cases.

State police say any information provided will be kept confidential.

Anyone with information is asked to call 1-800-4-PA-TIPS or state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

12/5/2013

Family members celebrate murder victim's life

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At the funeral for 97-year-old murder victim Gertrude Price, family members didn't want to dwell too much on the brutal way she died, but instead the way she lived.

She was kind and gentle. She remained strong and independent until the end. And she never let hate or anger enter her heart, loved ones said.

As hard as it may be to do, Price's family members said Wednesday they will not let anger for the killer consume them. That would sink them down to the murderer's level, they said.

Police say an intruder beat the great-great-grandmother to death on Thanksgiving night during a home invasion robbery at her 23 E. Grand St. home, where she lived alone.

"When I learned of her death on Black Friday, of course we were all so shocked about the horrible way she died," Price's granddaughter, Debbie Piper, 56, said during services at the Davis-Dinelli Funeral Home in Nanticoke. "The question that kept going through my mind over and over again was, 'How could this happen to our family or someone that was so loved and so wonderful.'"

But she said the deeply religious family soon accepted the fact that evil exists and, in the end, it's up to God to judge.

"It's hard for us who are left back here to have to remember the way she left and the violence that she saw, but I think the harder part for us is that we have to have forgiveness in our heart, because if we don't we can only spread the evil that we saw happen to her. And that's not what she would have wanted," Piper said. "I'm not saying I don't want justice, I do want justice. But there is no better, sweeter justice than the justice that is provided by God."

People can ask why this happened to an innocent woman inside her own home, but there are really few answers except that "we live in a fallen,

broken world that desperately needs to be redeemed," the family's pastor, Eric Miller, of the Bloomsburg Christian Church, said. Price lived "97 beautiful years" and remained "strong and independent" until her final day, great-grandson Keifer Moskaluk said. He called her the "rock of the family."

While family doesn't know all the details of the attack, Piper said the family has reason to believe Price stood up to her killer. "I believe she was strong in the end and she was able to stand up to what she came against and go out with dignity," Piper said.

Now, it's time to carry on the way Price lived for nearly a century, Piper said.

"My grandma taught me by example. One of her greatest legacies was that she could forgive her worst offenders. She experienced violence and anger a lot in her life, and she repaid it with kindness and forgiveness and love," Piper said. "If she were here today, I'm sure she would be showing us by her example to forgive and not let the evil overtake us and not let it overpower our joy for her life."

12/5/2013

GNA board swears in new members

SUSAN BETTINGER - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board held its re-organization meeting Tuesday night with District Judge Donald Whittaker swearing in Wendy Kotsko-Wiaterowski and Megan Tennesen as its newest members.

The two replace Cindy Donlin and Jeff Kozlofski. Chet Beggs, Robert Raineri and Frank Shepanski Jr. remain as board members, along with Ryan Verazin, president; Ken James, vice president; Gary Smith, treasurer, and Tony Prushinski, secretary.

Vito DeLuca was re-appointed as the board's solicitor from December 2013 to December 2014 at an annual salary of \$20,000 per year.

During the regular school board meeting, Superintendent Anthony Perrone announced the senior high school's annual Christmas drive is in process and "any donations would be appreciated."

Perrone added that many of the district's students are from low-income households, and there is a great need for donations from the community.

Board member Chet Beggs highlighted the school's Nov. 25 blood drive that was held in conjunction with Geisinger. Beggs said 72 students, faculty members and staff donated a total of 58 units of blood. The blood will be used to treat 174 sick or injured individuals.

12/4/2013

New reward in hunt for 97-year-old Nanticoke woman's killer

By Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Gertrude Price, 97, was beaten to death Thanksgiving night in an apparent home invasion.

Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers will be offering a reward for information leading to an arrest in the murder of 97-year-old Nanticoke resident Gertrude Price, according to state police at Wyoming.

The unspecified reward comes as state police continue to search for clues in the murder of Price, the great-great-grandmother beaten to death on Thanksgiving night inside her 23 E. Grand St. home.

It's the second reward posted in the case and more than \$3,000 has been pledged to a reward fund established at PNC Bank.

Crime Stoppers is a volunteer organization of local business that gather funds to reward individuals who provide information anonymously to assist law enforcement agencies with unsolved crime, according to its website.

State police say any information provided will be kept confidential.

Anyone with information is asked to call 1-800-4-PA-TIPS or the state police Wyoming barracks at 570-697-2000.

12/4/2013

Verazin remains president of [Greater Nanticoke Area board](#)

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

Two new members joined the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board on Tuesday, and Ryan Verazin will remain board president.

The board also chose Ken James to remain vice president. Tony Prushinski will serve as board secretary, and Gary Smith will be board treasurer.

The board representative on the Luzerne Intermediate Unit board will be Chet Beggs. The LIU provides various services to area schools, including special education, and has a board of representatives from the school boards of the 12 member districts.

New Greater Nanticoke Area School Board members Megan Tennesen and Wendy Kotsko Wiaerowski won four-year terms in the November election. Smith, Bob Raineri and Fred Shepanski Jr. were re-elected last month. Verazin, James, Prushinski and Beggs won four-year terms in 2011.

12/2/2013

Fund established for reward in beating death of 97-year-old Nanticoke woman

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A fund has been established at a local bank so residents can contribute to a reward being offered for information regarding the Thanksgiving night beating death of a 97-year-old Nanticoke woman.

The reward stands at \$3,000 for anyone who provides information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer of Gertrude Price, according to the organizer of the reward fund, retired Nanticoke police officer Kevin Grevera.

Grevera offered the first \$1,000 hours after news broke Friday of Price's killing and others pledged contributions in the following days, he

said.

The reward fund, set up at PNC Bank, is being administered by the Nanticoke non-profit group, Fraternal Order of Eagles.

Donations can be sent to:

FOE Just Rewards Fund

c/o Gertrude Price

PNC Bank

600 S. Market St.

Nanticoke, PA 18634

Any PNC bank can accept cash and checks for the reward fund, Grevera said.

Grevera, who now runs a firearms and precious metals business in the city, said the community has rallied around the idea of a reward. "I think we all have a sense of pride in the fact Mrs. Price was able to live in Nanticoke all those years and work hard and contribute as a taxpaying resident. She should have been able to enjoy that liberty and peace until God chose to call her home," Grevera said. "Nanticoke is a community that cares about its residents and doesn't tolerate this type of behavior."

Price's great-grandson, Jason Piper, said the family was appreciative of the reward effort.

"The family heard about it. We were surprised," Piper said. "It's good people are pulling together for that."

Investigators say an intruder beat Price to death at 23 E. Grand St. in what investigators are calling a random home invasion robbery. It appears the killer entered the house through a basement window that had been broken out, police said.

Family members found Price dead inside her home just before 10 a.m. Friday, about 12 hours after they last knew she was alive.

Investigators believe the killing occurred around 11 p.m. Thanksgiving night — because lights were on in the house at a time she would be sleeping.

"The purpose of this fund is to honor her memory, organize a community effort to show a zero tolerance for violent crimes perpetrated against our residents, and primarily is an effort to help provide information to investigating law enforcement officials concerning this crime," Grevera said.

Anyone with information — especially anyone who saw something between 10 p.m. Thursday, November 28, 2013 and 10 a.m. Friday, November 29, 2013 — is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000.

12/2/2013

Tragedy within sight of the holidays

1885 Nanticoke cave-in entombed 26 just days before Christmas

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On Friday, Dec. 18, 1885, scores of men and boys went to work just as they did every other day at Nanticoke's Susquehanna No. 1 slope mine. Their thoughts were surely focused on the duties of the day in the deep coal mine, as well as Christmas, which was a week away. Twenty-six of them would not live to celebrate the holiday.

A mine cave-in quickly filled the mine with quicksand and water, and The Wilkes-Barre Record reported on Dec. 21 that 26 of the workers were entombed 500 feet below the ground.

"Up to 7 p.m. last evening, not a trace of the imprisoned men, not a sign or sound to indicate that they were still alive," the newspaper reported.

Chester Zarembo, founder of the Nanticoke Historical Society, said tragedies in mines were common. The deep mines were not regulated, and were worked despite the danger.

"That was the nature of the work," Zarembo said. The mine workforce at the time numbered in the thousands, "so the odds were that somebody was going to get hurt real bad or get killed," he said.

Despite the odds, John Hepp, associate professor of history at Wilkes University, said the tragedy was not all that unusual. Like Zarembo, he said mining for anthracite coal was extremely dangerous, and workers and communities alike knew about the risks.

Community response

The Wilkes-Barre Record described the town's distress as such that "cannot be described with the pen." The paper reported that one young woman, Maggie Sarver, had two brothers, Isaac and John, who perished in the cave in. She became extremely weak after the incident, and died on Dec. 19, 1885.

Of the dead, many were fathers and sons of families throughout Nanticoke.

One family lost three sons in the disaster, with the fourth being rescued "with difficulty," according to the Wilkes-Barre Record.

"Their parents, an aged couple, are nearly frenzied with grief," the newspaper reported.

The stakes were high for the families if men did not come out alive. The dynamics of families were similar to a business in those days, according to Hepp. Each member of the family contributed in some way. If something happened to one or two members of the family, he said, it was often devastating for the family economically.

Zarembo said many families were housed in company-owned housing. If the breadwinner of the family died in the mines, the family would then have no choice but to leave. That is why so many boys and young men took jobs in the mines, Zarembo said — to protect the family's home.

The coal companies also had a stake in disasters. They had to replace workers. Zarembo said the companies often sought workers that knew the trade well, so they often brought workers in from England and Wales. Mining was also popular among the Irish, who sought a new life away from the potato famine.

Zaremba called it a “win-win” situation — immigrants needed somewhere to go to start a new life, and coal companies needed workers.

Retrieving the bodies

The Wilkes-Barre Record reported on Dec. 22, 1885 that rescue operations stopped when a sudden rush of culm (coal waste) and dirt partially overwhelmed some of the rescuers. On Dec. 26, the bodies would be reached through the gangway from Slope 2. But the threat of additional sand coming down over rescuers thwarted any rescue or recovery attempts.

“The company is very anxious to recover the bodies, but shrinks from sacrificing any more of the men,” the Wilkes-Barre Record reported on Dec. 28.

Zaremba said rescues were often called off if conditions proved to be too dangerous or if the bodies were unreachable.

“At some point, somebody makes the call and that’s terrible as far as the families are concerned,” Zaremba said.

The bodies remain somewhere underground at the site of the mine to this day. Among the 26 that The Wilkes-Barre Record listed as lost in the cave in was a Hungarian worker whose name could not be confirmed.

What caused it?

Zaremba said the cave in could have been the result of workers hitting an unknown danger, or the barrier wall protecting them from dangers not being wide enough. Zaremba said the engineering documents the miners had at the time were surprisingly advanced.

Hepp, however, said the cave in was the result of the miners hitting an underground stream, according to a report by the Pennsylvania Mine Commission in 1891.

“Sadly, this strikes me as just a tragic mistake,” he said. “In this case, I honestly don’t think ... that anyone knew that this submerged creek was there.”

Despite the tragedy, workers were once again mining for coal on Dec. 23 according to The Wilkes-Barre Record. It was business as usual for an industry with high demand for its product. The work did little to dissuade men from returning to work, Zaremba said, as they had no alternatives for employment.

As a result of the disaster, Hepp and Zaremba said, miners were better prepared on how to approach similar situations from then on. An example Zaremba gave was how valuable rats were to miners — if miners saw mice scurrying out of the mine, they knew a cave-in was imminent.

Hepp also said miners began to trace where the underground streams were after the cave-in.

The incident, as tragic as it was, also serves as a benchmark in the community’s history.

“I think every place and its people are sort of defined in some way by its history,” Hepp said.

THE TOLL IN NANTICOKE

The following is a list of the deceased in the December 1885 Nanticoke mine disaster:

- Thomas Clifford, 14, doorboy
- William Delaney, 14, driverboy
- William Elkie, 19, runner
- Edward Hargraves, 21, miner
- John Hawk, 30, laborer
- Wadislaw Jelgoshinski, 23, laborer
- Oliver Kivler, 27, miner
- William Kivler, 17, laborer
- Frank Kivler, 32
- Maux Longolki, 17, driver
- Abram Lewis, 42, miner
- Andrew Lowe, 25
- Vincent Luke, age unknown, laborer
- Edward Mathews, 20, laborer
- August Matule, 45, miner
- Peter Mattlewicz, age unknown, laborer
- Joseph McCarty, 23, miner
- John Nowach, age unknown, laborer
- Abram Rubinski, age unknown, laborer
- Isaac Sarver, 28, miner
- John Sarver, 21, laborer
- John Shutt, 28, miner
- Thomas Williams, 21, laborer

12/1/2013

Nanticoke fire caused by careless smoking

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

Careless smoking is the cause of a blaze that ripped through a Nanticoke home Friday night, according to Nanticoke Fire Department officials. Nanticoke lieutenant firefighter Mark Boncal said an occupant of 42 W. Field St. was smoking a cigarette when he fell asleep and an ashtray spilled on a mattress.

Boncal said the man then found the mattress on fire and instead of calling the fire department, the resident attempted to put the fire out himself. Boncal said the resident removed the mattress from the home and left bedsheets in a bag, along with a smoldering cigarette that the man assumed was out, on the front porch. The blaze then reignited on the front porch, according to Boncal. The fire has been ruled accidental and damage to the home is categorized as "extensive," Boncal said. The American Red Cross Wyoming Valley chapter provided food, seasonal clothing, shoes and lodging for one individual living in the residence, according to a news release. Two firefighters were injured at the scene, as one was treated at the scene and the other was taken to the hospital with a shoulder injury, according to Boncal.

11/30/2013

Retired police officer sets up \$1,000 reward in case

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A retired Nanticoke police officer is offering a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person responsible for the killing of a 97-year-old Nanticoke woman.

Kevin Grevera, who now runs a firearms and precious metals business in the city, said he plans to open a bank account for the reward so local merchants and residents could add to the bounty.

Grevera, a lifelong Nanticoke resident and owner of The Hunting Depot, said the apparent robbery and killing of Gertrude Price at 23 E. Grand St. drew parallels to a case years ago when his 93-year-old grandfather was beaten and robbed in a home invasion on Noble Street. That crime was never solved.

"I'm a Nanticoke resident, I'm a retired policeman, I own a business here and my grandfather was beaten and robbed years ago. I wasn't in position then to offer a reward, and the person was never caught," Grevera said.

Grevera said he's putting up the initial \$1,000 and will release details about how others could contribute when he starts the fund at a local bank. In the event the crime should not be solved, the fund shall serve as a permanent one for use at discretion of the police for victims of violent crime in Nanticoke, Grevera said.

Nanticoke's captain of detectives when he retired in 2010, Grevera said he felt compelled to do something after hearing Price was killed in an apparent random home invasion robbery on Thanksgiving night.

"This is my hometown," he said. "I don't have words to express how I felt. Law enforcement only has so many tools and sometimes the people have to come together and help."

Anyone with information is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000 or Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.

11/30/2013

Flames rip through homes in Nanticoke

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A blaze consumed a home on West Field Street in Nanticoke on Friday evening, then spread to a residence next door as fire fighters battled flames in frigid temperatures.

Fire heavily damaged a home at 42 W. Field St. and also spread to a neighboring home at 44 W. Field St.

J.D. Verazin, who lives next to the homes, said he was driving to his house when he spotted flames at 42 W. Field St.

"I was driving up the street, the porch was on fire and no one was around," Verazin said, noting he flames were getting close to him. "I was rapping on the door and they finally came out."

Verazin said the family who lives there got out safely, but a family dog was unaccounted for.

Tom Vitale, who lives across the street, said his family was sitting in his living room watching television when his dog climbed on the couch and started barked out the window.

"All I saw was a ball of orange," Vitale said.

Fire crews arrived quickly but the fire moved fast, he said.

"They came here in force," he said.

11/29/2013

Fire damages two Nanticoke homes

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Flames tore through a home on West Field Street Friday night and scorched a neighboring house.

Neighbors at the scene said they believed everyone safely escaped the homes at 42 and 44 W. Field, but police and firefighters at the scene said no information was available prior to press time.

Crews from multiple departments were dispatched before 9 p.m. to a call in which multiple homes were initially thought have been ablaze. The worst damage appeared to be at 42 W. Field, with the front porch and windows badly charred as thick black smoke continued to billow from the structure more than an hour after firefighters arrived.

The home next door at 44 W. Field appeared to have sustained damage to its porch and siding. A home on the other side of 42, with more distance between the two, did not appear to have been affected.

Firefighters also had to contend with freezing temperatures, with streams of icy water flowing down West Field Street as neighbors gathered around

the police tape to observe the scene.
The Red Cross was being called in to assist the affected families.

11/26/2013

'End of Watch' glasses filled at Nanticoke bar Pints recall slain corrections officer Eric J. Williams

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Some pint-sized glasses making the rounds at Tommyboy's Bar & Grill pay tribute to a corrections officer killed in the line of duty. The commemorative "End of Watch" glasses honor officer Eric J. Williams, who worked at U.S. Penitentiary, Canaan, in Wayne County. Williams, 34, formerly of Nanticoke, had been a customer at the bar on North Market Street, said co-owner Adeline "Cookie" Smith. "He was very, very nice," said Smith. "He was so happy when he got the job." His fellow federal corrections officers still frequent the bar Smith has owned with her husband, Steve, for more than four years. It's a family affair and their daughters, Stephani and Jillena, also work there. Smith bought a case of the glasses imprinted with U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons emblem banded by a black bar above Williams' name and last day on duty, Feb. 25. They were made up by AFGE Local 3003, the union representing the officers, she said. "My customers are asking to buy them," Smith said. They're not for sale at the bar, though she's planning on ordering more due to their popularity. Smith said they've been circulating at the bar for about two weeks and customers have taken to them. A few have been given away to friends, she said. "Everyone has a comment," she said. "They love them." Williams had been working at the prison since September 2011. In June a federal grand jury indicted inmate Jessie Con-ui on a charge of first-degree murder and possessing contraband. The indictment alleged Con-ui repeatedly stabbed Williams with a sharpened weapon in a premeditated attack. Con-ui has been transferred to the Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colo., a supermax prison housing the most dangerous inmates under the tightest controls. Con-ui has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial in U.S. District Court, Wilkes-Barre.

11/24/2013

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Citizens Voice

Keystone senior forward **Samantha Littleford (Nanticoke Area)** was recently named to the Capital One Academic All-District IV team. |She became the first student-athlete in Keystone history to earn the honor and is eligible to be named an Academic All-American. Littleford, a psychology major, carries a 3.87 GPA. The first-team All-CSAC selection led the conference with 19 goals 44 points. She led the CSAC with six game-winning goals. **Brittany Sugalski (Nanticoke Area)** was named honorable mention All-CSAC and Ashley Smith (Meyers) was named to the sportsmanship team. Sugalski, a freshman mid, started all 16 games and was third on the team with 14 points. She had three game-winning goals. Smith helped the Keystone defense post a 1.75 goals-against average and five shutouts.

11/23/2013

Nanticoke Zoning Board OK's variance for planned apartments

SUSAN BETTINGER Times Leader Correspondent

The Nanticoke Zoning Board on Thursday night approved an application for use and height variances to a parcel of property on Kosciuszko Street. The request for variance was made by Lexington Associates II LP in connection the establishment of two three-story, 24-unit apartment buildings it wants to build. The development will add 48 additional units to Lexington Village. The variance approval will entail changing the property from its current R2 status to R3. The R2 status limits structures to 35 feet in height. The three-story buildings will be 48 feet high. Lexington Associates was represented by acquisition analyst Paul Mizack, who said the units will only be available for rent to applicants who meet the firm's "relatively strict criteria." Mizack said the applicants must pass a credit and criminal check, have no prior evictions and meet income guidelines. The monthly household income must be three times the amount of monthly rent for one person or a combined income for related persons who live in the unit. The income must be at least four times the monthly rent for roommates or unrelated tenants. Rents will be approximately \$900 per month for a one-bedroom unit, and \$1,200 per month for a two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit. Residents voiced concerns the property would possibly be sold in the future and turned into subsidized housing units. Mark P. McNealis, solicitor for the Zoning Hearing Board, added an amendment to the approval that stated the current and subsequent owners will not include subsidized or tax credit housing in the development. McNealis added the only way the amendment could be changed is with the Zoning Board's approval. Mizack willingly accepted the amendment. The land development plans will now have to go before the city Planning Commission and City Council.

11/22/2013

Nanticoke budget would raise property tax

SUSAN BETTINGER - Times Leader Correspondent

City Council on Wednesday unveiled a proposed budget for 2014 that includes a tax hike.

The spending plan proposes a millage rate of 4.8785 (4.2514 mills for general purposes, .6077 mills for debt service, .0194 mills for the library).

There is a property tax increase of .8191 mills.

A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed valuation. A resident with a \$50,000 property who paid \$202.97 in 2013 would pay \$243.93 in 2014, for an increase of \$40.96.

Officials said the city will be involved with several improvement projects throughout the new year. The increased tax rate will help to offset some of the associated costs not covered by grants. Also, residents will be paying \$15 per year less for refuse.

City Council gave approval for the administration to begin sending the sewer bills to residents twice per year, instead of the current quarterly bills.

The sewer fee will remain the same at \$100 per year.

In another matter, Jerry Hudak, vice president of the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, told council the city has been selected as one of 10 communities in the state to be in the CGI Communications Community Showcase.

The Community Video Showcase Program, a video marketing effort, works in partnership with the National League of Cities and U.S. Conference of Mayors. Participation in the program is free, and the video will be viewed by businesses that are searching for a suitable location.

Hudak told City Council that the program will "promote the community and the good things that are going on in it."

There will be a Christmas parade at 4 p.m. on Dec. 7, starting at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School. Santa will bring gifts for the children. Hot dogs and hot chocolate will also be provided.

There will be a single stream recycling education program at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Dec. 4 at City Hall. The program will inform residents about the requirements of the city's new recycling program.

Also, the Crime Watch meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday at City Hall.

Council will meet next at 7 p.m. on Dec. 4.

11/12/2013

On Campus

Times Leader

LITTLEFORD HONORED

Keystone senior Samantha Littleford (Nanticoke) was named the Colonial States Athletic Conference first team in women's soccer after a standout season. The 5-foot-8 midfielder led the conference in scoring with 44 points (19 goals and six assists) and had a conference-high six game-winning goals.

"Sam was tremendous for us the whole season," coach Noel Cox said. "She proved to be a very dangerous scoring threat but it was her ability to make the other players around her better that carried the Keystone program to its best record (10-5-1) since becoming a Division III member."

Freshman Brittany Sugalski (Nanticoke) earned honorable mention honors while senior Ashley Smith (Meyers) was Keystone's Sportsmanship award winner.

11/8/2013

New recycling plan to save Nanticoke residents money

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Residents can expect to see approximately a \$15 reduction in their monthly refuse bill beginning next year, thanks to an ordinance passed at Wednesday night's council meeting.

The ordinance establishes a mandatory single-stream recycling program, which will result in the savings.

City Council passed another ordinance, which authorizes the purchase of 319 E. State St. from Luzerne County's tax claim repository for \$500. The price covers the cost of the necessary paperwork.

The property will be demolished as part of Nanticoke's effort to eliminate blighted properties within the city.

City Council also approved for St. Stanislaw Catholic Congregation a revised tax assessment in the amount of \$100,000. The reduction has been approved by Luzerne County and the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty proclaimed Nov. 16 as "Race for the Readers Day." High school students Kayla Gronkowski and Rebecca Morgis are organizing a 5k run/walk, which will benefit the Mill Memorial Library.

An ordinance is being worked on that will establish rules and regulations for the use of parks and recreation areas, prohibiting certain conducts. Smoking and skateboarding are among the issues that will be addressed.

Council President Stephen Duda said that the rules will be "good for the city and the youth."

Council Vice President Jim Litchkofski suggested looking into security cameras as a way to further deter crime and make the areas more family friendly.

Council will meet next at 7 p.m. Nov. 20.

11/2/2013

Trojans are playoff bound

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

By the time [Nanticoke Area's](#) Blake Balderrama took the handoff, blasted through a hole created by his offensive line and landed in the end zone, he did more than just help the Trojans win a football game.

He helped erase the memory of 10 consecutive losing seasons and, by all accounts, may have clinched a berth in the postseason, a place the Trojans have not been to since 1999.

Balderamma's 3-yard run with 11 seconds left in the game gave the Trojans a 29-26 victory over Hanover Area in the regular season finale for both teams. The Trojans improved to 5-5 while Hanover Area ends its season at 4-6.

According to the Eastern Conference standings released earlier this week, the winner of Friday night's game would clinch a spot in the tournament. The Trojans overcame a 19-7 deficit with 5:25 left in the third quarter when Hanover Area's Isaiah Taylor took a draw play 72 yards for a touchdown.

Nanticoke Area responded on the ensuing drive when Pat Hempel took a fourth down screen play 17 yards for a touchdown to get the Trojans within five.

After Kyle Gavrish picked off a Hanover Area pass, J.T. Levandowski capped a four-play 24-yard drive with a 2-yard run to give Nanticoke Area its first lead of the night.

"These kids showed great character," Nanticoke Area coach Ron Bruza said.

"They really wanted this one. It was an all around great win for the program."

Following a Ya'Sir Jones 25-yard touchdown run put the Hawks back on top, by four, the Trojans went 58 yards in 11 plays with Balderrama delivering the game-winner with 11 seconds left.

"It was designed for him, he is our power back in short yardage," Bruza said. "He is a strong kid and we knew he would put it in."

Hempel rushed for 160 yards on the night giving him 1,091 for the season.

The Eastern Conference standings are expected to be finalized Sunday afternoon.

11/2/2013

Condemned buildings force businesses to exit

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Two downtown business owners are forced to close their doors thanks to decaying, city-owned buildings.

Two engineering firms recommended this week that four vacant buildings on South Main Street be demolished immediately, calling them an "imminent threat to public health and safety." The firms blamed extensive stormwater damage for the buildings' condition, which Mayor Tom Leighton called "dangerous and unsafe."

City officials condemned the buildings on Friday and notified the owners of Place One at Hollywood, 67 S. Main St., and Frank Clark Jewelers, 63 S. Main St., they had five days to vacate their stores. Those buildings are in good condition, according to the reports, but the city wants the area clear while it razes the surrounding buildings.

"They want me to vacate and move 22 years in five days," said Place One at Hollywood owner Michaelene Coffee, who has run the downtown dress shop for more than two decades. "They let their building go into disrepair, and I'm paying the price for it. Why should I pay the price?"

Leighton held a press conference at City Hall on Friday afternoon and said he didn't know how much the demolition would cost taxpayers. He said the city will do whatever it can to keep the business intact.

The city has marketed the properties as residential and commercial spaces for years. A developer recently expressed interest in the properties, so the city hired the engineering firms to assess the condition of the buildings. The reports found the properties in extreme disrepair, collapsing in some portions, and concluded they needed to be demolished as soon as possible.

Leighton said the developer, who he wouldn't name, was probably no longer interested in the deal.

Although the city owns the buildings, Leighton refused to admit fault for their condition. He also said it was "speculative" to suggest their unsafe conditions would have gone unnoticed if a developer didn't come forward and spur a comprehensive inspection.

"We have somebody looking at them, making sure they're no homeless in there," Leighton said. "Quite honestly, we've been trying to develop those properties since 2004," Leighton said.

Coffee said Leighton personally told her the news Thursday. She said the visit followed years of ignored complaints.

"I have been calling the city for the past five years or more because their shingles would blow off the roof and ripped my awning," Coffee said.

Coffee recently closed a store she owned in Scranton and wanted to expand her business to a second floor. She said it was frustrating to be forced to leave after committing herself to the downtown, which Leighton has long cited as his crowning achievement as mayor.

"I've been one of the only businesses that has stayed down here at my choosing," Coffee said. "Now, the City of Wilkes-Barre is throwing me out," she said.

Nanticoke couple Ilona and Michael Taylor just reopened the historic Frank Clark Jeweler building as a new jewelry store in May. Ilona Taylor said city officials also told her that she needs to vacate in five days, right before the holiday shopping season.

"I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do and how I'm going to do this without losing business," Taylor said. "I didn't expect the signs to be in the dead center of my windows."

Coffee said the city told her it would be too expensive to save her building because they share a common wall. One engineering report listed several alternatives to demolishing her building, but said razing everything was the cheapest solution with regard to construction costs.

Leighton said the city's attorneys would figure out how to repay the business owners for their losses and said it would "probably be figured out in the legal system." Coffee said she has contacted a lawyer.

The Frank Clark Jeweler building is a free-standing building, and engineers found it structurally sound.

The city purchased 71-75 S. Main St. in 2011 from a county tax upset sale for \$16,500, according to assessment records. It purchased 69 S. Main St. in 1996 for \$50,000. The city's Redevelopment Authority purchased 61 S. Main St. for \$50,000 in 1997.

Barriers will be placed around the properties Saturday morning, Leighton said. He said he didn't know when the demolitions would begin, how long they'd take or and when the business owners could return.

10/27/2013

Greater Nanticoke Area: Six candidates compete for 5 slots

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Six candidates are running for five spots on the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board.

The candidates who responded to The Citizens' Voice said they're satisfied with the district's property tax rate - 10.177 mills - and last year's percentage of students who went from high school to a four-year college - 69 percent.

Candidates Cindy Donlin, Bob Raineri and Gary Smith said the district should maintain its budget and avoid raising or lowering taxes. Fred Shepanski Jr., Megan Tennesen and Wendy Kotsko Wiaerowski could not be reached for comment.

The school district kept property taxes the same for 2013-14 school year after raising the rate by about 2.5 percent the previous year.

Board president Ryan Verazin - who is not up for re-election - has said that a dearth of commercial properties in the district means a property tax increase does not raise much money for the schools.

Donlin, Raineri and Smith also said the percentage of Nanticoke students who matriculated to a four-year college was satisfactory.

Not every student may see their future in a four-year college, Smith wrote.

"I believe a better assessment of our educational system would be to ask graduating students if they feel their education has prepared them for their future endeavors," he wrote in The Citizens' Voice online voter guide.

A big task for any school board is already finished: The current board and the teachers union agreed in September to a five-year contract.

The new contract will see teachers begin paying part of the premium for health insurance. The school district will pay all health-care premiums for the next two years, but teachers will pay 1.5 percent of the premium in the 2015-16 school year and 2 percent in the last two years of the agreement.

Teachers will also see a pay increase. Teachers will remain at current pay steps for the next two years, but salaries on each pay step will increase by \$1,260. Teachers will advance pay steps in the final three years, and wages in the those years will increase 2.99 percent a year.

10/26/2013

Local companies are feeling the heat

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When Nanticoke Volunteer Fire Company Chief Michael Bohan became a fire fighter in 1976, the city's many departments each had a waiting list of those wanting to be members. Today the help wanted sign is up in each of those departments as membership has dwindled and the time constraints on existing members has increased.

"Nobody's banging down our doors right now," Bohan said. "And those that do show up and they hear what they have to do, they're not so sure."

Between the 168 hours of training, fundraising, equipment and vehicle maintenance and actual fire duties, the job is not an easy one and it's time consuming.

"The guys have jobs, kids, wives, family obligations," Bohan said. He understands that life is more hectic than days of yore and the volunteer organizations including fire companies suffer.

"We used to respond to fires and volunteers would line the street and watch because there wasn't a job for them to do. Today, everybody that shows up has a job to do and we could use more help," Bohan said on Friday.

A middle of the night fire this July at Reilly Finishing Technologies on Alden Road was contained by the nine firefighters that responded to the alarm. Decades ago four or five times that number would have been the average response total.

Nuangola Volunteer Fire Department Chief Anthony Wilczynski has been on the (unpaid) job since 1964. He said when he started, there were 25 active members who would respond to any given call. That number is down to about 10 today.

"I just don't think the people have the time for it," Wilczynski said. And though there are some junior members that sign up, retaining them isn't so easy.

"They get older, get married, move away from here and then we have to replace them with someone else," the chief said. The inability to do too much fundraising because of lack of time also impacts the operating budget and since Nuangola Borough donates about \$1,200 per year — less than the cost of gas for the trucks, the chief notes — it's a tough situation.

The annual bazaar the company held had to be scrapped five years ago because of a lack of men to staff it. In its place a Crab Fest was established each August. The one-day fundraiser requires less man power to staff it and is the largest annual generator of funds for the department.

The number of hours spent fundraising is a drag on members and something Pennsylvania Fire Commissioner Edward Mann said he's heard as a key reason why volunteers quit.

"In all honesty, I never had a former volunteer firefighter tell me they quit because there was too much training. I hear one of the following reasons why people leave: They grew tired of the lack of leadership in the firehouse or they spent more time doing work to raise funds to support the fire

company then the time actually responding to emergencies," Mann said.

"Our firefighters have been sounding the alarm for years: they are running on fumes. Their volunteer pool is dwindling, and they have literally burnt through their funds. Chicken barbecues, pancake breakfast and sportsmen's raffles just aren't raising enough revenue to keep the lights on and engines running. Equipment and training costs have skyrocketed," state Sen. Lisa Baker, R-Lehman Township said.

But it's been the manpower issue that is perhaps having the most impact.

In Luzerne County, multiple departments have signed mutual aid agreements and some have signed formal merger agreements including those in the Back Mountain and Mountain Top. Rice Township decertified its volunteer department this year and supervisors there signed a 10-year-deal with neighboring Wright Township to provide fire services.

10/21/2013

GNA Support Professionals thank board, superintendent

Citizens Voice

Editor:

I want to thank the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board and Superintendent Anthony Perrone for the finalization of our 2012-2016 contract. During our negotiations we sometimes agree to disagree, but always come to an agreeable solution.

Our support professionals, in a unanimous vote supported this contract after almost two years, and we believe it was a fair offer to both the union and the school district. Our support staff have always given back to our school district. Over eight years ago our staff agreed to help pay for our healthcare, and we were one of the first that did it. This contract for the 2012-2016 school year we agreed to go one year without back pay.

Once again, I want to thank the GNA School Board, Mr. Perrone, our negotiating team and all of the members of the Greater Nanticoke Area Support Professionals for a job well done.

J.D. Verazin

President, GNA Support Professionals

10/18/2013

Legins remembered as 'born leader'

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

The situation was looking pretty bleak for the 1961 Nanticoke boys basketball team.

With the Trojans down five in the Eastern final against Reading High School, fans started to leave the Harrisburg Farm Show.

Legendary head coach Syl Bozinski figured he would put on the press, something Nanticoke Area didn't need to do in its regular season games because the margin of victory was so large. However, the press led to an easy bucket for Reading and a seven-point deficit for Nanticoke Area with under two minutes left to play.

But, all of a sudden, Reading began to throw the ball away and Nanticoke started coming back. With about 30 seconds left in the game and the score tied, the Trojans needed a big basket.

And everyone on the floor knew where the ball was going.

Ken Legins made the shot that gave Nanticoke the lead and the victory in the Eastern final. The Trojans went on to win their next game, 56-46 over Hickory Township, to win the state championship.

Not only did the fade-away jumper by Legins put the Trojans in the state championship game, but it put Nanticoke basketball on the map.

Legins died Saturday at the Tufts Medical Center in Boston from complications due to a stem cell transplant for leukemia. He was 70.

"I remember Kenny. He played varsity and in those days freshmen didn't play varsity," said Rich Rutkowski, a 1957 Nanticoke graduate. "They had an outstanding record when he was playing. He was strong mentally and physically, a very tough player. He was a great rebounder and a great offensive threat."

A 6-foot-4 post player, Legins was a four-year starter for the Trojans and played on Pennsylvania's Big 15 basketball team.

He accepted a scholarship from George Washington University where he went on to be named team captain his senior year and was selected to the All Southern Conference team.

His size made him an intimidating presence on the floor and his leadership helped carry the team on and off the court through the good times and the rough ones.

The sixth man on the 1961 team, Jack Dudrick, recalled a time when Legins got the team together after a loss to Sharon in the first round of a tournament in Johnstown.

"Kenny was a born leader," Dudrick said. "He was like having a coach on the floor. When he saw the team going south he let us know. One of the turning points in the 1961 season was when we lost to Sharon. We had a meeting and talked about a lot of things and Kenny was the main contributor to that meeting. We went out and beat Chester by 10 points. Kenny always came up with the clutch shot. He was an excellent player and a great communicator. He worked hard on his game and kept the team together."

Legins's intimidating presence made it difficult for anybody to want to take the ball down low. He was athletic enough to grab a rebound and instead of hitting the outlet man, he could run the break himself. His unselfish nature often led him to dishing the ball off rather than just taking the shot himself.

"It was rough in practice, rarely did you feel like going underneath the basket, but he could run the floor," Dudrick said. "Everyone had nothing but respect for Kenny. With basketball and his work ethic, we felt confident with him in the game. In the state final, Kenny was in foul trouble so I got in the game for him. We had the lead when I got in and we were able to maintain it. I felt good about that."

In 2005, The Citizens' Voice selected the top 100 athletes in the Wyoming Valley. Legins was No. 91.
In 2012, Legins was inducted into the Luzerne County Sports Hall of Fame.

10/15/2013

Newport Twp. severs ties with ambulance

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Starting Nov. 1, Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance will no longer answer calls in its own hometown. The five-man township board of commissioners voted unanimously to make neighboring Nanticoke Ambulance Association its full-time provider at its meeting last week.

"(Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance) could obviously continue to operate independently, but they're not going to operate in the township," Commissioner Michael Roke said.

Jason Kowalski, an ambulance captain in Newport Township, said the vote was "demeaning" to community members who had volunteered and that it would "put us right out of business," because the company will no longer be able to earn money by billing residents for answering emergency calls.

Currently, Newport Township only has an ambulance for basic emergencies, while an advanced life support ambulance - carrying a paramedic who can administer drugs - from Nanticoke must be summoned alongside the township truck for more serious calls. Also, ambulances from Nanticoke, which are staffed 24 hours a day, already cover the township in the evenings and nights for the most part, Roke said, because Newport Township only staffs an ambulance crew from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The change, Roke said, was spurred by a letter from the Nanticoke Ambulance Association telling the township it was canceling its mutual billing agreement with its ambulance company, which would result in residents receiving bills from both organizations, leading to higher costs.

The canceled agreement stems from a financial dispute between the two ambulance organizations, which has mushroomed into a lawsuit. The two organizations split the payment from bills on advanced calls, and the Nanticoke association has accused the Newport Township company of owing it more than \$30,000.

The spat nearly led to disaster in January, when a little girl suffering a seizure had to wait for an advanced life support ambulance to arrive from more than 10 miles away in Shickshinny, because the Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance had decided to bypass the much closer unit based in Nanticoke, less than 2 miles away.

The debacle made headlines and embarrassed the commissioners, who quickly switched back to the ambulance in Nanticoke. Roke and Commissioner John Wilkes Jr. sidestepped questions asking if the change was related to that incident, saying Nanticoke's ambulances would provide the township with better service.

But some argue against that stance. Dan Kowalski, the father of Jason Kowalski and a longtime member of the Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance, warned that response times to emergencies in the township would increase due to the other responsibilities of the Nanticoke ambulances, which serve as the backup for several other communities. He noted that ambulances from the township often answer calls in Nanticoke because of those other commitments.

Township commissioners and Nanticoke ambulance officials responded that the ambulance in Newport Township often isn't able to answer calls even during its staffed day shift, while Nanticoke will provide 24/7 service.

The township does not supply any funding to either ambulance organization, but does currently give Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance space in the administration building for its trucks and offices. As it stands now, they will be getting an eviction notice in a few weeks. Jason Kowalski, who admitted the organization has been struggling with the county-wide problem of a lack of volunteers, said it may be forced to sell its trucks to pay off its outstanding debts.

Ambulance companies make money through billable calls, state grants and community fundraising, such as membership drives.

As a result of the change, individual ambulance memberships, which protect residents from out-of-pocket fees not covered by insurance on ambulance bills, will increase from \$35 to \$45, and family memberships will go from \$45 to \$75, but the Nanticoke Ambulance Association will honor valid memberships from Newport Township, President Bernie Norieka said.

10/13/2013

Municipalities realize recycling savings

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Nanticoke City Manager Pam Heard looked around the sprawling Northeast Cartage & Recycling Solutions plant site, with trucks coming and going and the constant rumble of machinery.

"I didn't realize all of this was here," she said before starting a tour of the facility.

On Wednesday, Nanticoke council plans a vote to make single-stream recycling, where residents can put all their recyclables in one bin for collection, mandatory.

The city is the latest local community to adopt the procedure, which municipal officials say saves money and is more convenient for residents.

Northeast Cartage, part of longtime metal recycler Louis Cohen & Sons located off Fellows Road in Hanover Township, was developed in 2005 as a way to process recyclables including plastics, cardboard and paper, aluminum and steel cans.

The company has 25 full-time employees who receive benefits including health care and retirement plans, Nockley said.

He said there's a fleet of 30 trailers, a fleet of tractors and hundreds of recycling collection containers - Northeast Cartage will transport recyclables, but won't do curbside collection routes.

"This plant has the capacity to serve every municipality in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties," said the plant's co-owner, Frank Nockley Jr. Some communities, like Butler, Dorrance and Jenkins townships, collect the recyclables in containers, which Northeast Cartage drops off and picks up. Other municipalities, like Old Forge, Edwardsville and Wilkes-Barre, bring their recyclables in. Wright Township started single-stream recycling a year ago. So did Black Creek Township.

Northeast Cartage also works with school districts, including Dallas, Pittston Area and Wyoming Valley West. The company provides the school buildings with wheeled totes and collects them when they're full, he said.

Businesses also use the facility's service. "With our private fleet, we bring in commingled recycling from almost every industrial park around here," he said.

The communities all have one thing in common, according to Nockley: they all say within a 12-month period they're sending more to be recycled and less to the landfill.

"To me, that was the biggest compliment - that we made recycling more accessible."

Seeing savings

Dallas Area Municipal Authority, which provides refuse collection services to about 6,850 Dallas Borough, Dallas Township and Kingston Township residents, was the first in the area to start single-stream recycling.

"For us it's been working really, really well, and we're thrilled with it," DAMA Executive Director Larry Spaciano said.

The state Department of Environmental Protection is trying to get municipalities to recycle 25 percent of the total refuse they collect. DAMA members averaged more than 40 percent last year, Spaciano said.

The higher the volume of recyclables, the larger the DEP recycling performance grant municipalities are eligible for.

In Kingston, the first West Side municipality to go single-stream, recycling is also up, by 10 percent, and garbage being landfilled is down 7 percent, Administrator Paul Keating said.

"I think it's an overwhelming success with the residents. I've had nothing but positive feedback since its implementation," he said, noting that it's a "big success and improvement in terms of convenience and quality of service to residents."

Single-stream recycling has freed up public works employees for other projects and resulted in some fuel savings by going to Hanover Township instead of the landfill, Keating said.

The only drawback is, "it beats the hell out of our equipment," he said. The truck is used harder, so has more wear and tear due to the increased quantities of material. Keating hopes the municipality will get a DEP grant for new collection equipment.

Currently, Nanticoke residents have recycling each week, but one week is cardboard pickup, the next is plastics.

Seeing how single-stream recycling worked for DAMA and Kingston gave Heard the idea of trying it in the city.

And when Nanticoke officials found out they could get money - at least \$25 per ton of recyclables, depending on market value - by switching, they opted to put out a request for proposals.

Refuse hauler J.P. Mascaro & Sons will collect the recyclables and drop them off at Northeast Cartage. In September, council awarded Mascaro a new contract starting at \$843,678 the first year, saving the city \$104,178.

Nanticoke officials hope to be able to make \$50,000 to \$60,000 through the new commingled recycling, which will not only help cover the cost, but Heard believes it will enable the city to knock at least \$10 off residents' annual refuse collection fees. These start at \$220.

Not only is it better for the environment, it's cheaper for municipalities to send recyclables to be reprocessed than to a landfill.

When Wilkes-Barre's more than 25,000 households first began single-stream recycling a year ago, there were a few bugs and glitches, Director of Operations Butch Frati admitted.

But things are running smoothly now.

"We're very pleased with the way it's been going so far," Frati said.

Sales of Wilkes-Barre's distinctive blue garbage bags are down, and the amount of recycling the Department of Public Works is delivering to Northeast Cartage in Hanover Township has increased, while the city is saving on tipping fees at the landfill, Frati said.

"I think the more communities that sign up for this, the better for everybody," he said.

How the facility works

Appropriately, the recycling business, which represents a \$6 million investment, grew on recycled land: The Earth Conservancy sold Northeast Cartage a parcel of reclaimed coal mining property, Nockley said.

"It's a very noisy, very dirty place," Director of Operations Al Gulitis told Heard on the tour. "However, we're proud of it and we love what we do here."

As trucks come in, they are weighed before being sent down to the tipping floor to unload. This floor is covered to keep the recyclables as clean and dry as possible, Nockley said. They don't stay in there long enough to freeze, according to Gulitis.

Part of the sorting is done manually, part automatically.

Front-end loaders move the recyclables into a drum feeder, which spreads them on a conveyor belt so hand-pickers at the pre-sort station can go through it to see what's in there, Gulitis said. Plastic bags are fed into a vacuum and sucked into a container for a different recycling process.

From there, cardboard, paper and glass are sorted automatically. Cardboard goes to a holding bunker for baling, Gulitis said. Plastic drops to a second conveyor belt for the colored, high-density plastic - such as laundry detergent bottles - to be manually separated from the lighter, more "natural" plastic like water bottles.

A powerful magnet carries off the steel food cans. A machine creates a negative charge that pulls out the aluminum, Gulitis said.

When the recyclables are processed, Gulitis said there are seven or eight different commodities.

For example, the paper is used for such things as insulation, sheetrock and hand towels, he said. The bales are ready to ship for domestic sale, and the export paper market is also very good, Gulitis said.

Heard left the facility impressed. She said Nanticoke will probably have public meetings to educate people about the new recycling procedure, and

order refrigerator magnets that list what can be recycled. Since garbage and recycling are on the same day, it will make it even easier for residents, she said. "If people get into this and comply, in three years, we could see more savings," she said.

10/11/2013

Nanticoke Area superintendent will continue to serve unpaid

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Anthony Perrone, superintendent of the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, turns 72 in December and is putting retirement off at least another three years.

The school board voted Thursday to appoint Perrone to a three-year term that ends June 30, 2016. Perrone will continue to work without receiving any pay, and the district will continue to provide his health benefits, school board President Ryan Verazin said.

"He puts the district first. This is his life here," Verazin said.

The salaries of other school superintendents in Luzerne County last year ranged from \$92,000 to \$150,000, records show. Perrone has been the Greater Nanticoke Area superintendent since 1996.

Chet Beggs was the only school board member to vote against Perrone. Beggs didn't comment at the meeting on his vote and could not be reached for comment later.

Earlier this year, board members got in a dispute over spending roughly \$4,300 on a brick sign dedicated to Perrone. The superintendent was honored in 2011 when the district named the entire school campus after him and renovated a large brick sign to reflect the change. Some board members said they were led to believe private donations funded the sign renovations.

Union agreement

Also at Thursday's meeting, the school board approved a four-year labor agreement with the union that represents support staff.

The union represents about 100 employees, including custodians, cafeteria workers and secretaries.

The union's last agreement expired in July 2012. Union members will not get a retroactive pay increase for the 2012-13 school year.

Raises kick in this year, retroactive to July 1. Pay rates will increase 40 cents this year, 45 cents next year and 50 cents in 2015-16, Verazin said.

10/7/2013

Nanticoke alum Myers shining with Mansfield squad

BILL ARSENAULT For The Times Leader

Linebacker Jake Myers is having a great senior season playing for the Mansfield sprint football team.

Myers (Nanticoke) leads the 1-3 Mountaineers in tackles with 40. He also has a forced fumble and has two pass breakups. He had a game-high 15 tackles in a 41-0 loss to powerful Navy. A two-time Collegiate Sprint Football League second team selection, Myers entered this season with 148 tackles, including 65 solos.

"Jake dedicated himself to come back and assert himself as a defensive force in our league," head coach Graham Johnson said. "He is one of our four captains and is the vocal leader of the group. He works hard both on the field and off."

The coach believes that Myers is a great role model for the younger players on the team.

"Jake pushes and demands effort out of his teammates," Johnson said. "He works hard in the weight room. He expects much of his teammates while demanding more of himself."

Myers is also a key performer on special teams.

"Jake is always ready to step up whenever and wherever we need him to," the coach said.

10/4/2013

Nanticoke gets ready for winter

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

City Council on Wednesday night passed a motion to hire contractors for snow plowing.

Those hired and their hourly rates are: Voyton Contractors, Nanticoke, \$65/hour; Paul Zoltewicz, Nanticoke, \$70/hour; and Matt Owzany, \$77/hour.

The differences in the hourly rates are due to the type of equipment the company uses, council Vice President Jim Litchkofski said. Specific types of equipment are required for the heavier work.

In the event of a snowstorm, the lowest bidders will be called out first.

Separately, the Engineering Department reported there are eight construction projects on the agenda. One is the Lower Broadway Recreation Project, which is being funded by a Community Development Block grant.

In addition to the state funding, the city is trying to get the federal government to match the grant, so that the project can be completed. So far, the soccer field has been renovated.

In other matters:

- The Hanover Recreation Club will meet in the Club Room at 7 p.m. Monday. The club is a community group that hosts activities for children such as soccer, football and various playground activities.
- The Honey Pot Fire Department will host "Wing Night" from noon to 5 p.m. Oct. 13. Proceeds will benefit the volunteer fire department.

The next council meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Oct. 16.

10/3/2013

Back in Tyme: Cover band sticks to '70s, '80s hits

Cecilia Baress - Citizens Voice

Don't expect to hear any Lady Gaga at a Tyme Band show.

It's not that lead singer J.D. Verazin of Nanticoke doubts his ability to hit the high notes. He used to perform Donna Summer songs during disco's reign, after all. And he's quit smoking since then.

"I feel like I could hit higher now than I did back then," he said.

Members of the band, comprised of Verazin on lead vocals, Tom Cipriani of Ashley on bass and vocals, Rick Wells of Mountain Top on lead guitar and Steve Cipriani of Plymouth on drums, prefer to stick to the classic rock hits they started playing the year they formed, 1979 - before the songs were classics. Their setlists followed the music charts, from Springsteen to Devo to The Doors. They wrote one or two original songs, but never released them.

"We would go with the flow," Verazin said. "Whatever was popular at the time, we did."

Verazin departed the band in 1988 to devote more time to his business, a video store in Nanticoke. More than two decades later, the band is back together playing the same old songs for their loyal fan base, called the Tyme Travelers.

"We feel like there's a need for classic rock out there," Verazin said. "Everybody appreciates that more."

The band was busy in its heyday, playing three nights a week in bars and booking as many as 15 bazaars during the summer. Members had separate songs lists for every place they played, and carted special effects equipment like gigantic speakers and a fog machine to larger venues.

These days they still play bazaars and weddings, but limit their bar gigs to two a month. They're currently booked through the end of the year and accepting 2014 bookings, Verazin said.

The current band features original members Verazin, Wells and Tom Cipriani. Tom's son Steve Cipriani, who grew up listening to the original band play backyard parties, fits in well as the group's new drummer.

The group reformed a few years ago, after an ex sound guy suggested a reunion at a pig roast in Mountain Top, Verazin said. After that show, the members decided to reunite annually. The following year, they decided to get the band back together. They may be drinking water instead of beer, but they're still having a good time.

"It's all a mesh of music, and everybody enjoys each other. We're as one," Verazin said. "It's pretty cool when we get together because it's just like a family."

At their first practice, they knew the same old songs right away and decided to continue performing their favorite rock tunes from the '70s and '80s, now classics. Their repertoire includes more than 70 cover tunes, and they rotate four, 15-song sets during live performances. If it's not a song people can dance to, they won't play it.

"When we play, it's danceable music," Verazin said. "It's very rare that you see people sitting when we're playing."

It's also rare to see Verazin remain on stage for an entire song. He'd rather be in the crowd.

"I have a wireless mic, I'm out there all the time," he said.

The band doesn't travel too far from its home base for shows. Members don't feel like they have to go far - they know their fans are here. They maintain steady interaction with the Tyme Travelers by posting on Facebook.

MEET TYME BAND

Founded: 1979; reformed 2009

Genre: Classic rock

Members: Tom Cipriani, bass and vocals; Rick Wells, lead guitar and vocals; J.D. Verazin, lead vocals; Steve Cipriani, drums

For fans of: Talking Heads, The Cars, Bruce Springsteen, The Doors

Online: tymband.net, facebook.com/tymbandclassicrock, reverbNation.com/tymband

Up next: Saturday, October 5th 7-10 p.m., at Cooper's Cabana, 304 Kennedy Blvd., Pittston and Oct. 19, 8-11 p.m., at King's Restaurant, S. Mountain Blvd., Mountain Top

9/20/2013

Nanticoke bar owner no fan of drink tax

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At R Bar on Union Street, owner Lauren Maga was preparing for Thursday night.

If a plan floated by a government task force becomes law, Thursdays could be quieter at her neighborhood bar.

A drink tax of up to 10 percent is one of the proposals from a group examining legislation designed to help cash-strapped municipalities improve their finances.

Maga thinks her business would suffer if every drink were 10 percent more expensive.

"Ten dollars on a hundred bucks, if you think about it that way," she said, "it adds up."

Across Pennsylvania, more than 20 municipalities are "financially distressed," meaning they are under the jurisdiction of a law called Act 47. A 20-person group made up of state lawmakers and representatives from various statewide government associations is drafting recommendations for changing the law.

The changes could affect three municipalities in Luzerne County: Nanticoke, Plymouth Township and West Hazleton.

"I hope they don't do it," Maga said of a potential drink tax. "It would be good for the community to get us to become more financially stable in Nanticoke, but I think maybe they could find other ways instead of doing it to little businesses like us."

Maga said it wouldn't be difficult for her bar to comply with the new rules. That's a matter of doing a simple equation.

"It's more (about) people wanting to pay it," she said.

The Act 47 study group is proposing recommendations that would be the first major rewrite of the law since it was enacted in 1987. One proposal is imposing a deadline on municipalities in financially distressed status.

An eight-year timetable would govern municipalities that enter the program. Nanticoke entered Act 47 status in 2006, Plymouth Township in 2004; and West Hazleton in 2003. Scranton, one of the largest cities in Act 47, has been in the program since 1992.

Under proposed changes to the law, Act 47 towns could ask county court for permission to levy a higher earned income tax, or they could ask to enact one of three options: the drink tax, a higher local services tax or a payroll preparation tax for businesses.

Nanticoke previously had a commuter tax, but that was difficult to collect and didn't bring in much revenue, said city administrator Pamela Heard. A local services tax collects a dollar every week from everyone who works in the city and earns more than \$12,000 per year. That tax brings in about \$100,000 a year to the city, according to Heard.

Of all the tax options proposed, an increase of the local services tax would be the most palatable, she said.

"We consider all sources of revenue. (A drink tax) would be up to the mayor and council when they pass a budget, if such a tax became available, if they want to levy it or not," Heard said. "You could be getting tax revenue, but then you could also be putting a stumbling block in front of your economic recovery. It's a tough call. I can't say yes, I can't say no, but it'd be something we'd consider if this law passes."

Heard said Nanticoke is home to 20 bars and restaurants that would be subject to a drink tax.

Heard and Plymouth Township Secretary Steve Grzymiski said they don't know how much money bars and restaurants earn through alcohol sales and don't know how much revenue a potential drink tax would collect.

Larry Karnes, the owner of Larry's Pizzeria in Nanticoke, estimates he brings in about \$1,000 to \$2,000 a week in alcohol sales, but said pizza brings in the bulk of his business. He's not in favor of the drink tax proposal.

"I call it a sin tax," Karnes said. "Why are they singling out alcohol?"

Frank Kotz, 46, of Nanticoke was in R Bar on Thursday afternoon to pick up some cheesesteaks. Kotz said he visits for dinner about twice a month and would still patronize the bar if it were subject to a drink tax.

He thinks other people might drive elsewhere to avoid the tax. Kotz remembers driving down to the Vanity Fair outlets in Reading with his parents to take advantage of lower prices for school clothes. In an area where people aren't making a lot of money, that's the mentality, he said.

"I'd still come here. I like this place. I like the bartenders. But I think a lot of people would think the opposite," he said. "Why pay more?"

9/19/2013

Nanticoke awards recycling contract

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

City Council on Wednesday night approved the awarding of a three-year recycling contract with two one-year extensions to Northeast Recycling Solutions.

Northeast gave the city a guaranteed floor price of \$25 per ton and current average pricing of \$35.78 per ton. This price is for the single-stream contract in which all recyclable materials are placed in one bin.

Council also awarded a contract for demolition of 45-47 W. Grand St. to Brdaric Excavation of Luzerne, which submitted the lowest bid of \$14,900.

In other matters:

- Council has approved the construction of a salt shed by Green Tree Pole Buildings at a price of \$15,950. City Manager Pamela Heard said the shed is necessary to cover the city's winter road salt supply, after the tarp blew off and walls were damaged at the previous road salt shelter during a recent storm.

The state Department of Environmental Protection recommended that the city purchase a new structure before the start of winter.

Heard also said the city will receive approximately \$13,000 from the insurance claim resulting from the damage to the previous shelter. With the insurance money applied to the cost of the new shed, the balance to be paid by the city will be minimal, Heard said.

- Officials said Comcast cable has informed the city that it has it will provide broadband service to Nanticoke as a courtesy for the city's business. The value of the broadband is approximately \$3,000.

Service Electric Cable has stated that it is not interested in expanding its services to the city.

- The Nanticoke Crime Watch meeting will be held Sept. 25 at 7 p.m.

The next City Council meeting will be Oct. 2 at 7 p.m.

9/19/2013

Nanticoke native on mend after NYC assault

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The New York radio personality originally from Nanticoke who was severely beaten earlier this month was released from the hospital Wednesday and is in his hometown recovering, his brother said.

Brian Carey, 52, a news anchor on CBS station 1010 WINS, was found semi-conscious in the lobby of his apartment building at East 61st Street on Sept. 9, police said. According to police, an acquaintance of Carey's attacked him in his apartment and Carey was able to get down to the lobby for

help.

New York media reported an acquaintance of Carey's, Anthony Elton, 48, was charged with second-degree assault in the case.

Carey was taken to New York Presbyterian Hospital and initially required a ventilator due to the severity of his injuries.

He underwent operations to repair his eye socket and jaw on Monday evening, getting eight screws in his jaw, which is wired shut, said Carey's brother, Jim Carey of Nanticoke.

Brian Carey is now back in Nanticoke for a recovery expected to last several months, he said.

"He wants to go back," Jim Carey said. "He expressed the sooner the better."

Carey is a Nanticoke native and award-winning journalist who joined 1010 WINS in 2000 and anchors afternoon newscasts during the weekday commute.

9/19/2013

New wellness center aims to shake up diets

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Tucked into the rear of the Bicentennial Building's first floor is a new wellness center that opened this week. However, patrons won't find pieces of exercise equipment, yoga mats or workout videos for sale; the business centers on drinks — three to be exact.

A three-pronged diet of aloe, green tea and a shake are touted as viable breakfast and lunch options for those people looking to avoid poor food choices while not finding themselves hungry between meals.

Operated by Dennis Machuca and his fiancée, Christina Caraballo, of Nanticoke, the business is called Nutrition Made Easy and it's part of the retail operations of the Herbalife brand of products.

John Prokopovich, of Butler Township, has operated a Nutrition Made Easy in Hazleton and had been searching for more than a year for someone to set up shop in Wilkes-Barre. "We didn't want to find just anyone, we wanted to find the right people," Prokopovich said.

In Machuca and Caraballo he believes he found the perfect people to pitch what he calls "a lifestyle, not a diet."

[Caraballo has been using the system for six months and said she loves how it's impacted her life.

That feeling of energy and lack of hunger are selling points, Caraballo said, noting that the location on Public Square was chosen because of the nearby foot traffic: a large number of college students, on-the-go-workers and people who use the nearby YMCA. Already this week, with no advertising other than word of mouth, Caraballo said business has been good and there's already a small group of regulars who have been in each day.

The cost is \$5 per visit, and there are take-home products available if customers choose to make their own products and use it on the weekends.

Caraballo said she sees a bright future with Herbalife, a global nutrition and weight management company that's already selling in 89 countries. By entering the Wilkes-Barre market, she believes there is a big potential to not only make money but also change lives.

The store, across from Jordan Shoes inside the building at 15 Public Square, is open 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

9/14/2013

GNA teachers agree to new five-year contract

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Greater Nanticoke Area School District teachers agreed to start paying a portion of premiums for health insurance, according a new collective bargaining agreement for Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

It's a five-year agreement, and the school district will continue to pay all health-care premiums this year and next year, officials said.

Teachers will pay 1.5 percent of health-care premium in the 2015-16 school year, and 2 percent in the last two years of the agreement, said attorney and district negotiator Jack Dean.

The school board and teachers union approved the new agreement Thursday. The previous agreement with the teachers union expired Aug. 31.

"It's fair and reasonable, and everybody benefits," school board President Ryan Verazin said.

The district employed 116 teachers last year at an average salary of \$56,832.63, according to the state Department of Education. Teachers will remain at current pay steps for the next two years, but salaries on each pay step will increase by \$1,260, Dean said.

The district's pay scale has 20 steps, and each step has a salary range based on education credits. Teachers will advance pay steps in the final three years, and wages in the those years will increase 2.99 percent a year, Dean said.

"It was a nice job coming to this agreement," Dean said. "They gave a little. We gave a little."

Administrators and teachers in the district "have good labor relations" and "work together well," said Virginia Cowley, a negotiator with the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

"It's fair to our teachers and the taxpayers," Cowley said of the new five-year deal.

9/13/2013

Insurance premium sharing included in new Greater Nanticoke Area teacher contract

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Greater Nanticoke Area teachers and the School Board quietly hammered out and approved a new, five year contract that will have teachers paying a percentage of their health insurance premiums in 2015-16, District negotiator Attorney Jack Dean said.

The contract also keeps teachers at their current "step" for the first two years, denying many of them raises built into the contract annually for the

first 19 years with the district. Dean said the average step raise is 1.5 percent. In exchange for the step "freeze," teachers will get flat raises of \$1,260 each of the first two years.

The contract calls for total raises the remaining three years of 2.99 percent each year, Dean said, noting that half of that is already built into the step system, so the deal essentially gives an additional raise of almost 1.5 percent above the existing pay matrix.

Teachers are paid in a "step/column" system, getting raises every year for a set number of years and for increased education beyond a bachelor's degree based on number of credits earned. Greater Nanticoke's matrix has a total of 20 steps and nine columns.

The premium sharing, still a rarity in local teacher contracts, begins with teachers paying 1.5 percent of their premium in 2014-16. The rate goes up to 2 percent for the last two years of the contract.

Teachers had already agreed to increased deductibles and co-pays in the last contract, which ran from 2010 through this summer.

Dean said the two sides approved the contract last night and minor wording is still being worked out, so the documents are not yet public.

Negotiations were primarily done directly between teams set up by the board and the union, Dean said. The two sides would come to an agreement and then ask Dean and his union counterpart, Virginia Cawley of the Pennsylvania State Education Association Northeast Region office, to hammer out language details.

"The board committee and the professional staff committee were really the driving forces," Dean said. "They did a nice job."

9/12/2013

Big cheese: Johnny D's makes cheesesteaks speciality

By Kristen Gaydos - Citizens Voice

When they set out to open a restaurant, the owners of Johnny D's South Philly Steaks knew they wanted to stand out.

Owners Jonathan and Heather Dinstel chose their speciality - cheesesteaks - and quickly found customers of the Nanticoke restaurant appreciated their take on the sandwiches, potato pancakes and more.

"We try to be creative," Jonathan Dinstel said. "Every pizza place does a cheesesteak, but doesn't specialize in it. We wanted it to be our speciality."

The couple recently reopened the restaurant after taking a summer vacation to welcome their second son. They originally opened the restaurant in 2008. Jonathan, who spent much of his career in the restaurant business and pursued culinary arts in college, had been working for Chef Boyardee outside Williamsport.

"They were moving to Omaha," he said, "and I didn't want to go to Omaha."

Heather also spent time in the restaurant business as a server at a Times Square chain restaurant. When they returned to the area, the couple lived down the street from their future business, a former hoagie shop.

When they decided to open their own place, they updated the decor and turned the wall above the counter into a huge blackboard. The chalk-written menu sometimes includes specials like a Jack Daniels burger or Italian chicken sub.

"We can change it up and add new things," Heather said. "Add a little variety."

Their core menu highlights their namesake - cheesesteaks, roasted and sliced in house and served with a choice of American, provolone, swiss and, of course, cheese sauce for that true, South Philadelphia taste.

Want more? Try the Mighty Mighty, Jonathan said.

"It's steak, buffalo bites, Cheez Whiz and french fries," he said.

They make their burger patties by hand for selections like Mamas Burger, topped with barbecue sauce, bacon, cheese sauce and onion straws. They hand-bread their chicken for buffalo bites and make homemade beef jerky. They also developed their own potato pancake recipe.

"Since we started the homemade potato pancakes, they've been really popular," Heather said.

They also experiment with sauces for the buffalo bites, offering traditional hot and mild alongside choices like mild Cajun blue cheese or salt and vinegar.

"We just experiment and find combinations and flavors that work," Jonathan said.

Want fries with the bites? They throw them in and call it a Mess.

"You eat that with a fork," Heather said.

9/12/2013

Radio personality found beaten in NYC

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A well-known radio personality originally from Nanticoke was severely beaten by an acquaintance at his New York City apartment, according to the New York City Police Department.

Brian Carey, 52, a news anchor on CBS station 1010 WINS, was found semi-conscious in the lobby of his apartment building on East 61st Street about 10:30 p.m. Monday, police said.

Carey sustained facial injuries including a possible fractured jaw and left eye socket, according to police. He was taken to New York Presbyterian Hospital in stable condition.

Carey's brother, Jim Carey of Nanticoke, confirmed his brother had a broken jaw and said that he had been on a ventilator for about 15 hours but he was again breathing on his own Wednesday.

Brian Carey may need several surgeries in coming days, but he is expected to survive, his brother said.

"He's had a number of injuries to the head and face, and he's looking at quite an extensive rehab, I believe," Jim Carey said.

Brian Carey is able to communicate very little, and while he is able to recognize family members, a nurse told his brother he has impaired short-

term memory, Jim Carey said. He doesn't remember anything about the attack, he said.

According to police, the assault took place in Carey's apartment, but he was able to get himself down to the lobby before being found.

Police said Carey's cellphone was missing but that his wallet had not been taken, as reported in other media outlets. Police had not made any arrests as of Wednesday but said the investigation was continuing.

"It seems he got into an argument with someone that he knows, it got physical and he sustained some injuries and went to the hospital," NYPD Sgt. Lee Jones said.

Carey is a Nanticoke native who got his first job at WNAK "not so much because of his talent but rather because he agreed to also cut the grass," according to his profile on 1010 WINS' website.

He got a part-time job with WBRE while attending King's College and became the news director at WILK Radio in his 20s, the profile says.

He became anchor of an hour-long evening newscast for WARM Radio and was the morning anchor for Magic 93 FM before moving on to anchoring jobs in Philadelphia, according to the site.

Carey went to New York in 1996 and joined 1010 WINS in 2000, his profile says. He currently anchors afternoon newscasts during the weekday commute.

"Brian has a long way to go but he is making remarkable progress and we expect that he will make a full recovery," said Ben Mevorach, 1010 WINS director of news and programming, in an email. "He is aware of all of the love and support that has been pouring in from around the country. He was deeply moved and deeply grateful. It has lifted his spirits immeasurably."

Brian Carey's profile says he anchors news nationwide on ABC Radio. He is the recipient of several awards, including the Achievement in Radio award for best news anchor in New York City in 2005 and the Associated Press Award for best regularly scheduled newscast.

King's College in 2006 gave him an award for outstanding professional achievement, the profile says.

Jim Carey said his brother's colleagues at CBS have been supportive, the police have been very good and hospital workers have been like an "all-star team."

"We have so many calls and well-wishers," Jim Carey said. "He's getting great care and we've had a lot of support, so we're encouraged. There's a silver lining in every cloud, I guess."

9/12/2013



911 Memorial service at Luzerne County Community College's Walk of Honor at the Regional Public Safety Training Center in Nanticoke.

9/11/2013

|Father tells of bullying's deadly toll

GNA students hear about tragic consequences of physical, online taunting

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Speaking before hundreds of Greater Nanticoke Area students in eighth through 12th grades, John Halligan emotionally told the story of his son, Ryan, who committed suicide in 2003 at the age of 13.

He detailed the story of physical and cyber-bullying his son went through that ultimately led to him taking his own life.

"I can't fix everything with a speech," said Halligan, a nationally touring speaker. "But my hope is I can help at least one of you."

Despite a few problems with the sound system, Halligan's message seemingly came through loud and clear to the students. Many asked questions after the presentation and several remained to have one-on-one teary conversations with him.

Halligan and his wife, Kelly, have a website — ryansstory.org — and they personally respond to emails to try to help wherever they can.

"This community, this school, has lost a few kids in recent years," Halligan said after his presentation. "A lot of the students are having a difficult time finding their way through the experience of losing a friend. They asked me for advice on how to move on after the loss of somebody."

Halligan will be in Luzerne County for three weeks speaking to students in all its school districts and to parents groups. The former IBM worker from New York has dedicated his life to trying to eradicate bullying and to prevent suicide, especially among young people.

Personal story shared

Standing alone on stage, Halligan relates Ryan's story as pictures of his son and family flash on a screen behind him. Halligan then tells the story of his son's tragic journey that began in the fifth grade and ended at the start of eighth grade.

Halligan talks about the his son's innocence — his autism, his awkwardness, his failure in athletics and his struggle to fit in with “the cool kids.” The hour-long presentation takes viewers through the family's attempts to resolve the conflicts in Ryan's life, the guilt that followed his death and the forgiveness of those who directly impacted Ryan and influenced his decision to end his life.

Beginning with the frantic phone call Halligan received from his wife informing him that Ryan committed suicide to struggling to answer the question, “Why?” Halligan painted a clear picture of his son. There was the difficulty in accepting what had happened and the self-blame for not being able to do whatever it would have taken to prevent it.

Among their considerations: self-defense lessons, possible home-schooling, counseling, confrontation and computer safeguards.

Halligan said one his son's supposed friends proved to be untrue — she led Ryan to believe she cared about him as a friend, when in reality she was talking behind his back. When she called Ryan “a loser” in front of her friends, Ryan was distraught, Halligan said.

Internet rumor

That and an untrue rumor Ryan was gay that spread like wildfire in school, and on the Internet, eventually pushed Ryan to his unfortunate end.

“There is no greater pain than that of a parent who has lost a child,” Halligan said. “All of you are loved beyond belief. Don't ever believe for a second that you don't matter.”

Halligan said there are no perfect families; that there are people in everybody's life who truly care.

“Ryan's death was the result of a disease called depression,” Halligan said.

After Ryan's death, the boy who was the main bully was still spreading untruths about his son, Halligan said. He went to the boy's home and sat with him and his parents. “I looked at him and told him he had no idea the amount of pain he had brought into my son's life,” Halligan said. “I told him there is no do-over here; my son is gone forever.”

Halligan said he hasn't spoken to the bully since that day and he just wants to tell Ryan's story to as many people as he can with the hope that some will listen and change their ways or their intentions.

“Don't be a bystander,” he said. “Be an up-stander. This is not about throwing punches; it's about throwing words. Be a friend.”

Halligan said he and his wife still struggle with Ryan's death, as do their two other children: Megan, now 27, and Conor, who is in the 11th grade.

Halligan, who has spoken at hundreds of high schools across the U.S., said telling Ryan's story takes its toll on him. “By the end of the school year, I'm physically and emotionally exhausted,” he said. “Sometimes I wonder how much longer I can do this.”

For now, his mission to prevent further family and community tragedies continues. “These are all good kids,” he said. “They just need to have the courage to talk to somebody.”

9/9/2013

Messages blowin' in the wind

Banner towing a high-flying art for family

Pilot Joe Scrobola banked over the Susquehanna River, turning back toward the airport.

“See those two posts? We're going to have to get right between them,” he crackled over his headset.

He tossed a grappling hook from the cockpit and started a steep descent toward the grassy field, only to shoot skyward after passing over the posts. A gentle tug on the 1995 Husky aircraft let him know his first attempt at catching a banner advertisement from its docking posts succeeded.

“We got it,” he said with an air of satisfaction.

Valley Aviation at the Wyoming Valley Airport offers aerial advertising, towing banners with messages up to 50 characters long.

They charge \$350 per hour with discounts for longer flights. They also fly graphic banners on request.

The Scrobolas make running the county-owned airport a family affair. Just about everyone prepping for Saturday's banner flight had the same last name.

Assembling the banner took four young pilots about 25 minutes.

They fly a lot of personal messages, happy-birthday wishes, congratulatory messages for college graduates and an occasional marriage proposal.

Dorothy Scrobola, who is known around the tarmac as “Gram,” said one such customer was successful in winning his bride.

Advertisers crow over the exclusive advertising avenue's response, said Jim Scrobola, the airport's caretaker. Luzerne Bank noted a rise in new customers in the days after they flew a banner past Mohegan Sun Casino's Party on the Patio, Jim said.

Commercial pilot **Ed Topper of Nanticoke** got the Scrobola's banner-towing enterprise off the ground.

Topper earned his pilot's license towing ads along the Jersey Shore and got to know the business.

He taught the Scrobolas how to set up the banners, what kind of plane was best for pulling them and, most important, how to catch them with a grappling hook.

He was always friends with the Scrobola family and now he offers guidance for Valley Aviation's aerial advertising.

“We started the operation last June and it really took off,” Topper said. “No pun intended.”

9/6/2013

Mascaro awarded Nanticoke trash collection contract

Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

Council members approved the city's new refuse and recycling contract Wednesday, awarding it to J.P. Mascaro & Sons.

The family-owned waste management company was one of two firms to submit bids for the contract.

Mascaro served as Nanticoke's previous trash collector, and the new contract will allow it to stay on from 2014 to 2016. The contract also includes a two-year renewal option.

The city's current collection and disposal costs total \$947,856. The new contract will reduce those costs to \$843,678 in the first year, saving the city \$104,178.

"In the worst-case scenario, residents should not see an increase of a penny in the next five years," Solicitor William T. Finnegan Jr. said. In conjunction with the Mascaro contract, the city approved a single-stream recycling contract with Municipal Recovery, which will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2014. It will allow residents to put all of their recyclables out together. Under this contract, Mascaro will pick up residents' recycling and deliver it to Municipal Recovery. Finnegan said that if residents obey the law and all goes well with the single stream, the city may be able to reduce costs even more during the second year.

8/23/2013

Nanticoke mayor eyes new fire engine for city

Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty and members of the city council will request specifications for a new engine for the city's fire department. According to Dougherty, the city is in possession of a fire engine that is about 40 years old but whose life expectancy is only 20 years. "It's an antique," Dougherty said. "What we'd like to do is replace that engine and the rescue truck with one vehicle." The city has approximately \$100,000 set aside for the purchase. It would also like to sell the engine and rescue truck and put the money from each sale toward the new vehicle. Dougherty estimated that it would take a little over one year to get the vehicle if the city can fund it.

8/22/2013

Nanticoke's historic Mill House focus of preservation societies

Susan Bettinger- Times Leader

Jerry Hudak, vice president of the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, announced at Wednesday's City Council meeting that the three local preservation societies will make a joint effort to begin repairs to the historical Mill House. The building houses the offices for the Nanticoke Historical Society and the South Valley Chamber of Commerce. The two organizations, along with the Mill Memorial Library will begin to refurbish the historical Mill House within the next few months. Hudak said the preservation societies also would like to collect some additional historical items to keep on display at the Mill House. Also, Hudak said that once the building is renovated, it just may attract "possible business" to the area, as outsiders will see that Nanticoke has something of historical importance to offer, and that it is a "good way to promote the city." Interested citizens may call the chamber 570- 735-6990. In other matters, council approved awarding the demolition contract for Arch Street to Stell Enterprises in the amount of \$23,000 contingent upon the solicitor's approval. Council also approved a motion for the HUD Home Program 2009 grant extension request. City Clerk Mary Beth Cheshinski said there is more than \$23,000 left of the grant that must be used by the Oct. 25 deadline if an extension was not granted. Cheshinski said seven projects have been completed and that there are an additional seven that are underway. She said several of the applications were not able to be used due to factors such as income ineligibility or incomplete information. The city's crime watch meeting will take place on Aug. 28 at 7 p.m. at the Municipal Building. The next City Council meeting will be on Sept. 4 at 7 p.m.

8/16/2013

Greater Nanticoke Area picks Metz for food service

Students and parents will be able to access menus online @ www.gnasd.com

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Metz Culinary Management will take over the Greater Nanticoke Area School District's cafeteria menu beginning this September, with no change to the current staff members. Superintendent Anthony Perrone said at Thursday night's school board meeting that Metz is "probably the best (food service company) on the East Coast." Students at every grade level will have a variety of meal choices from sandwiches to full meals, he said, and students will be able to access the menu online. Perrone said last month that contracting Metz won't cost the district money because the company guaranteed a minimum \$100,000 profit from cafeteria sales. In other matters, Perrone announced that the Life Skills Program was a success over the summer school session, and that "students learned basic life skills such as cooking and supermarket shopping." He said the program is "working out tremendously." The School Board approved the following appointments for the 2013-2014 school year: Sean Carey, English teacher; Joshua Manley, physical education/health teacher; Jessica Marusco, music teacher; Matthew Meade, physical education/health teacher; and Ellen Rutkowski, high school chorus director.

Approval also was given to appoint Eric Speece as high school dean of students. Christine Matthews' elementary secretary job has been changed from a 10-month position to a 12-month position.

The board also approved the posting of bus numbers/stops and pick-up times on the district website. This information will be removed after the start of school.

Half Act 80 days for the 2013-2014 school year are as follows: Sept. 15, Oct. 31 and Jan. 29.

The next board meeting will be at 7 p.m. Sept. 12.

8/16/2013

Nanticoke Area adds to students' lunch options

Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

Published: August 16, 2013

Greater Nanticoke Area students will have more lunch options this school year thanks to the district's new partnership with Metz Culinary Management.

According to board member Jeff Kozloski, high school students will have about seven lunch choices a day. Superintendent Anthony Perrone said these choices will include various sandwiches and regular meals.

Middle school students will have four to five lunch choices.

"Even the elementary kids are going to have at least three or four choices to make," Perrone said.

The district will retain its cafeteria employees under the new partnership.

8/15/2013

Custom steak entree tops bill at Madison's in Nanticoke

Kristen Gaydos - Citizens Voice

Scene-setter

Madison's Vodka Bar and Steakhouse in Nanticoke offers a cool refuge from the summer heat. Drinks and dinner are available at the interior bar and polished dining room. For those who would rather sit outside, owner Tony Graham recently opened a patio, converting a garage into a covered retreat.

Pre-show cocktails

The restaurant lives up to its name with a vast selection of vodka flavors. While they have several summertime speciality drinks, the pineapple sunrise cocktail always satisfies customers, Graham said.

Opening act

When it comes to appetizers, the restaurant's version of a margherita pizza is a standout, Graham said. It is made with fresh mozzarella, fresh tomato and fresh basil, he added - they use as many fresh ingredients as possible in all their dishes.

Headliner

Customers who love to customize their meal will love the steakhouse entrée selection at Madison's. First, choose a cut, like the Delmonico. Next, pick from several types of toppers such as dry rubs, cheeses, veggies and seafood - the Cajun crawfish is an excellent choice, Graham said. Finish it with a demiglace or sauce.

Each entrée comes with two side dishes, picked from about 15 choices including asparagus, roasted garlic mashed potatoes and orzo pilaf. All sides except the french fries are made fresh, though the french fries are still a top choice.

"You won't get a better french fry," Graham said. "And everything else is made to order."

The many choices keep the staff hopping in the kitchen, but they are more than willing to do it so every customer gets exactly what they want.

"I could have 16 pans on the stove for one fourtop table," he said.

Big finish

When it comes to dessert, Graham knows the folks at [Sanitary Bakery in Nanticoke](#) make the best. So, he partnered with them to bring in some sweet delights for Madison's dessert list.

"I can't make a cake as good as theirs," Graham said, adding their peanut butter mousse cake is a must try.

Encore

In addition to mixed drinks like the white peach sangria cocktail, the restaurant serves several beers on tap.

Madison's also features seafood entrees like lump crab cakes topped with chipotle aioli and chicken dishes like saltimbucco, topped with prosciutto ham and provolone cheese, finished with a marsala wine sauce, among others. It offers a line of sandwiches and soups, and appetizers including Mexican selections and pierogies. Wednesday is Buffalo Night and Thursday is Polish Night.

Sanitary also makes seasonal baked goods for the restaurant throughout the year.

"Their fresh strawberry pie is amazing," Graham said. "They do something special every season."

Dinner Theater, a monthly feature, explores what's on the menu at local restaurants. Send suggestions to jumpstart@citizensvoice.com.

QUICK INFO

Location: 396 E. Washington St., Nanticoke

Hours: Mondays-Thursdays, 3 p.m. to midnight; Fridays, 3 p.m. to 2 a.m.; Saturdays, 1 p.m. to 2 a.m.; Sundays, 4-10 p.m.

Contact: 570-735-2654

Online: Madison's Vodka Bar and Steakhouse on Facebook and Google Plus

8/15/2013

Women ages 14-19 will vie for the title of Miss Pittston Tomato Festival Queen at the 2013 Miss Tomato Festival Queen Scholarship Pageant, held Saturday at 1 p.m

Citizens Voice

Scoring is based on an on-stage interview, talent performance, personality, poise and appearance. The winner receives a \$500 scholarship, and the runner-up receives a \$250 scholarship. All participants will receive gifts.

Contestants will also participate in the festival parade, which takes place Saturday at 10:30 a.m.

Winner's duties include greeting festival guests through its conclusion Sunday night. Past winners have also engaged in volunteer service throughout the year. Contestants are not required to be from the Pittston area.

Pageant coordinators are former Tomato Festival Queens Angel Noone and Jessica Linskey. Dr. Joseph Lombardo will emcee the event.

Contestants include:

Rebecca Colwell

Residence: West Pittston

School: Senior, Wyoming Area High School

Favorite subjects: Math and physics

Interests: Dancing, band and Girl Scouts

Talent: Tap dancing

Taylor Kane

Residence: Plains Township

School: Junior, Holy Redeemer High School

Favorite subjects: Science and literature

Interests: Dancing, modeling and cheerleading

Talent: Lyrical dance

Jacqueline Buckley

Residence: Nanticoke

School: Freshman, Misericordia University

Major: Nursing

Interests: Singing, Youth Group and working

Talent: Singing

Celeste McCarley

Residence: Kingston

School: Freshman, Wyoming Valley West

Favorite subjects: English, language arts, orchestra, social studies and science

Interests: Singing, violin and orchestra

Talent: Singing

8/10/2013

Finally, coal miners get a stamp of approval

woboyle@civitasmedia.com

Alma Berlot and Julia Vengien sat in the front row and gleamed as they listened to the speeches about the U.S. postage stamp they and many others fought hard for over the last 25 years.

Berlot's father was killed from injuries suffered in a coal mining accident, and Vengien, with her late husband John, sent hundreds of letters and petitions to elected officials and the U.S. Postal Service to convince it to issue the stamp.

Friday, under a tent placed along South Main Street next to the city post office, Berlot and Vengien sat wide-eyed as the stamps commemorating the hard work of coal miners and 11 other trades were unveiled.

State Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, D-Wilkes-Barre, was joined by other elected officials or their representatives to reveal the USPS stamps titled: "Made in America: Building a Nation."

"This is fantastic," Vengien said. "I feel relieved."

"I'm excited," said Berlot, of Nanticoke. "I almost started crying."

The issuance of the stamps — especially the one showing a coal miner wearing a lantern cap and holding a pick — brought out a lot of emotion in those people who have strong ties to the industry credited with fueling the Industrial Revolution.

Wayne Namey of Wilkes-Barre, a longtime advocate of the stamp, said he never thought the day would come when he would see mining commemorated on a stamp. One of Namey's grandfathers was killed in the anthracite mines and the other died of black lung disease. On a day of celebration and thanks, Namey spoke from his heart.

"When I was a kid I tendered my neighbor's coal furnace," he said. "I've heard so many stories about coal miners and the conditions they worked under in the mines. This day is for all of them and their families."

Decades-long campaign

Namey said he fought for the stamp's issuance for nearly two decades, and he said he was told that "only heroes are put on stamps." Namey said his

grandfathers and all coal miners who struggled to build a region and a country are heroes to him and many others.

"I never worked in the coal mines," he said, "but I am proud of all who did and I am extremely happy to see them honored today."

Former U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski said he got involved with the campaign to get a coal mining stamp issued in 1986 when constituents came to his office to ask for his help. "It became a political battle," he said. "But the stamp has finally been issued."

The collection consists of 12 stamps in three rows of four. Individual stamps feature an airplane maker, a derrick man on the Empire State Building, a millinery apprentice, a man on a hoisting ball on the Empire State Building, a linotyper in a publishing house, a welder on the Empire State Building, a coal miner, riveters on the Empire State Building, a powerhouse mechanic, a railroad track walker, a textile worker and a man guiding a beam on the Empire State Building.

Eleven of the 12 stamps are images of photographs taken by photographer Lewis Hine, a chronicler of early 20th-century industry. The coal miner image is the only one not taken by Hine. The image was provided to the USPS by the Kansas Historical Society.

Kansas coal miner

Bobbie Athon, public information officer at the Kansas Historical Society, said the photo was taken of a southeast Kansas coal miner in the 1940s or 1950s. The photo was donated to the historical society in 1966, she said.

Pashinski said coal is in the blood of nearly everyone in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Because of the "blood, sweat and tears" of the region's forefathers, he said, a great country was built.

"This is a great day," Pashinski said. "And this day would not be possible without the effort of so many people who for literally decades signed petitions, made calls, visited elected officials, demanding this stamp be issued. It took a team effort and the team is you."

Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tom Leighton said coal built and powered the country. "We owe a debt of gratitude to these men — and boys," he said.

Vengien, of Plymouth, said she felt her late husband's presence at the ceremony.

"Like so many, John had something to do with this," she said. "This day will be remembered forever."

Berlot, 75, remembered her father — Edward John Salvadore — a parent of five who left early one morning for his job in the Glen Lyon coal mines. On that day in November 1955, said Berlot, there was an explosion. Her father, 42, helped rescue three men who were injured. On his fourth return to the mines, Salvadore was injured and taken to the hospital where he later died.

"My one brother never knew our father," she said. "I wish my father's picture was on that stamp."

8/9/2013

County approves Nanticoke disaster relief

Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

Published: August 9, 2013

For years, West Union Street residents have dealt with flooding resulting from the overflow of Forge Creek. Now, help has arrived in the form of a \$205,350 grant from Luzerne County.

The West Union Street Bridge Rehabilitation Grant will be used to dredge the creek in hopes of keeping nearby homes flood free. The county approved the grant after much consideration.

City Manager Pamela Heard and residents affected by the flooding attended the county's July 23 meeting to voice their concerns. Heard believes that their attendance worked in the city's favor.

Heard previously said that the city would begin securing the necessary permits from the Department of Environmental Protection once the grant was approved but could not estimate how long the process would take.

8/8/2013

Come one, come all for this suppertime

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Lillian and Sean set the table, Emily and Zoe mixed the salad, and soon 10 children were sitting down to supper in a tidy home on Church Street in Nanticoke.

"Did everybody wash their hands?" Fran Spencer asked her gang, whom she affectionately calls The Church Street Chilipeppers.

Hearing a chorus of "yeses," the motherly retiree began to dish out pasta and meatballs for her husband, Steve, and grandchildren Emily, 13, Sean, 11 and Ethan, 7, as well as seven other young friends from the neighborhood.

It was just another typical summer weekday at the Spencer household, where next-door neighbors Lillian Galazin, 11, Evelyn Bassett, 5, Lucas Jaskulski, 6, and Aidan Jaskulski, 9, were visiting, along with 10-year-old Alexis Rhodes, who came from across the street, 10-year-old Sydney Zaykoski, who came from down the street, and 11-year-old Zoe Coble, who came from a little farther away.

"We have rotating kids," Fran Spencer said with a smile, explaining she often doesn't know exactly which of her grandchildren's friends will stay for supper.

But those who do get to practice the art of conversation.

"We have a rule: no cell phones, no iPhones, no computers," Spencer said. "I try not to answer the phone myself."

Instead of staring at little screens, the Church Street Chilipeppers talk to each other, taking turns around the table telling each other their favorite and least favorite parts of the day.

Lillian's favorite part? "Playing with everybody." Her least favorite part? "I didn't have one," the 11-year-old reported.

Emily's favorite part? "Playing with everybody." Least favorite part? "When Ashley had to go home," she said, naming yet another friend who had stayed for a sleepover the night before but left before this night's supper.

Seven-year-old Ethan said the best part of his day was playing with Lucas. The worst part, he added, was when "Evelyn said mean things."
"No, I didn't," the little girl protested. "Yes, she did," someone interjected.

"She's only 5," 10-year-old Sydney Zaykoski pointed out.

Sharing food and banter reminds Fran and Steve Spencer of their own youthful suppertimes. She grew up as one of seven siblings; he was one of nine, so meals were lively.

When their grandchildren and all the other children go back to school, "It'll just be the two of us," Fran Spencer said. And, maybe that will be too quiet.

The large flock around their table grew gradually, they said. Steve retired in 2005, and Fran retired in 2010, both from the U.S. Postal Service. They liked to have their grandchildren, who live about two blocks away, come over. And it was fun to have their young friends join them.

"When it's time for supper," Steve Spencer said, "you can't tell the other kids 'no.' What's one more anyway?"

"I don't mind at all. I'm happy to do it," Fran Spencer said. "You just split everything up."

Before the meal ended, the Spencers suggested Emily go next door and "bring back the baby," who is a younger sister to Evelyn and Lillian. Emily came back with 10-month-old Katelyn, whom Steve Spencer held and fed a bit of rice pudding.

"He so enjoys children," Fran Spencer said. "It's a good thing, or we couldn't do this."

8/5/2013

Renaissance underway in Nanticoke

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Kim Coffee's dream is to see more businesses downtown and have people filling the city's streets - a return to the Nanticoke her grandparents used to talk about, the one depicted in the vintage postcards her father collects.

"I'm hoping Nanticoke becomes like Pittston. Pittston's downtown is absolutely beautiful now," she said.

It's getting there: After more than a decade of false starts, failed plans and frustration, downtown Nanticoke's revitalization is finally underway.

"There's still a long way to go, but I'm quite happy with what's happening," Mayor Joe Dougherty said.

"People are starting to look around because they're seeing things getting done," he said. "They're not just driving by any more."

There was a setback with the closure of a Main Street fixture, 78-year-old Bartuska's Furniture, in June 2012. But new businesses are starting to open, a few are getting facelifts - including Coffee's own, Coffee's Coffee on Main Street - and a new medical facility is under construction.

"We've been moving forward," City Administrator Pam Heard said. "I can't say we're moving fast, but it takes a long time (to get all the approvals)."

One of the business owners showing faith in Nanticoke is John Vishnefski, who is poised to open his new shop, Tarnowski's Kielbasa, this week. It's just off Main Street on Lower Broadway, between Broadway Jewelers and Tommyboy's restaurant, across from Weis Markets.

"This is going to be awesome. It's right by the grocery store," Vishnefski said on Tuesday as he paused in his work of getting the shop ready.

"People are beeping and honking and knocking."

Vishnefski has been running the business, started by his grandfather 65 years ago and named after him, for two years. Although he's going to continue to make the kielbasa - using an old family recipe - in Glen Lyon, he thought Nanticoke was the perfect location to sell it.

"I'm psyched," he said. "Nanticoke's a kielbasa town, too."

New buildings, new looks

For businesses in older buildings on Main Street, city officials encourage participation in the façade grant, which allows owners up to \$5,000 - half of which is covered by the state - to rehab their exteriors.

"We really would like Main Street businesses to take advantage of it," Heard said.

Allied Services-John Heinz Rehab got a new coat of plaster and paint through the program. Coffee was another who took the opportunity to get a new look.

"I'm actually kind of surprised that nobody else took advantage of the facade grant," Coffee said. "I was happy to get the free money. Of course I had to put up some of my own money, but they gave me more."

She says the new canopy she installed as part of the makeover is an asset. It catches the eye and has attracted people who never knew the cafe existed.

"I have people telling me, 'how long have you been here?' I say it's been a year in March," Coffee said.

Business owners who missed the boat the last time have a new chance to sign up: The city just got another facade grant for \$30,000 from the Keystone Communities Program, Dougherty said.

"All they have to do is go see Pam Heard," he said.

Market Street is even seeing new life, with JoAnn Bierdziewski opening the Styles and Smiles boutique and the old Peoples' Market falling to the wrecking ball.

In fact, as new businesses come in, some old fixtures have gone out: The former CVS building and Bartuska's furniture warehouse on Main Street are both down, and in their place, Geisinger Health System is erecting a new \$3.8 million, 12,000-square-foot facility that is scheduled to be complete in November.

"I'm looking forward to Geisinger opening their doors. They're moving pretty quickly down there," Dougherty said. "Geisinger will be a good partner for our community."

A stone's throw down Main Street, Luzerne County Community College's Francis S. and Mary Gill Carrozza Health Sciences Center opened for classes in September 2011. Besides labs, classrooms and faculty offices, the 51,000-square-foot facility is home to the Benco Dental Clinic. Its building sat vacant for years as the Kanjorski Center.

LCCC locating its Health Sciences Center and the Joseph A. Paglianite Culinary Arts Center - where the Susquehanna Coal Co. offices once stood - downtown has acted as a catalyst and increased traffic, Heard said.

"Now we're going to add Geisinger to that," she said.

Coffee said she already owned the building on Main Street, but when she heard LCCC was moving downtown, it prompted her to open the cafe. It's "consistently busy" when classes are in session, mainly with customers from the Health Sciences Center, but Coffee said she also gets some from the Culinary Arts Center and even the main campus. Coffee provides them with healthy alternatives to fast food, free WiFi and, when some students expressed interest in having outdoor tables, she added them.

"I've heard so many of them say they're so happy we're here," she said.

In addition, Coffee said she's building up her local customer base, including from the senior high rise down the street.

"It's growing; I see it growing every day," she said.

More to come

One hurdle still to clear is the long-awaited, much-belated streetscaping. The city has grant funding for new streetlights, sidewalks, and other improvements for Main Street, but the project is still in the design phase, according to Heard.

There's still a lack of parking downtown, but some help is on the way. City officials used federal funding to buy an old house and former ice making plant on Arch Street, which will be demolished and replaced by a parking lot.

UGI owns a former manufactured gas plant next to the site at Arch and Walnut streets, and has an agreement with the state Department of Environmental Protection to remediate the site.

"The goal is to return these sites to something functional," UGI spokesman Joe Swope said in an email. "A number of these sites in other locations have been used for parking, parks, etc."

Dougherty believes the city's downtown will continue to evolve.

"The momentum's there," he said.

8/1/2013

Supporters to attend unveiling of coal miners stamp

bwellock@citizensvoice.com

Alma Berlot remembers her father.

Wayne Namey remembers his grandfather.

Many other Northeastern Pennsylvania residents have their own memories of loved ones working in the region's many coal mines when the industry was booming in this corner of the state.

Berlot, Namey and others tried to honor the coal miner on a postage stamp, but were unsuccessful for years. Now that the U.S. Postal Service is recognizing coal mining with a stamp due out this month, they say they're happy they were able to see their goal realized.

They'll be in the crowd Aug. 9 to see the stamp recognized at a ceremony at the Wilkes-Barre Post Office. The coal miner is one of 12 occupations honored in a soon-to-be-released series called "Made in America." The image of a miner provided by the Kansas State Historical Society shares the glory with a mechanic, textile worker, linotyper, derrick man and other workers who labored in 20th-century America.

Berlot helped bring a coal miner memorial to her hometown of Nanticoke and said the stamp is an overdue tribute to men like her father who worked and sometimes died in the mines.

She said her own father always came home happy and singing until one day in 1953 when he rushed back into the mines after an explosion to help rescue people. Berlot said he helped bring out three people before he was injured and taken to a hospital, where he died at age 42.

"Our children don't know anything about coal miners. They know about the iPod, they know about Facebook," she said. "Now with the stamp coming out, they'll say, 'Who is this? What did he do?'"

Some of the people who pushed for the recognition aren't around to see the stamp finally available, said Namey of Wilkes-Barre. He plans to go to the post office ceremony and buy plenty of stamps, some for mailing and others to frame as a collector's item.

For all the men and women who labored in the Wyoming Valley - as miners, textile workers and everything else - and their descendents, it will be a special honor, he said.

IF YOU GO:

WHAT: Ceremony for United States Postal Service stamp series "Made in America: Building a Nation"

WHEN: 9 a.m. Aug. 9

WHERE: Wilkes-Barre Post Office, 300 S. Main St.

7/30/2013

GNA School Board awards bus contract

The [Greater Nanticoke Area School](#) Board met Monday evening to discuss bids for the district's bus service for the upcoming school year and wound up awarding the contract to a longtime provider, White Transit.

Keystone Bus Service withdrew its bid proposal during the meeting. A representative for Keystone stated it would not be fair for the parties involved, and the company did not feel it would be in a position to effectively take over the district's transportation program with less than 3 1/2 weeks before the beginning of the new school year.

The representative added Keystone and the district have been in discussion since May 17, and the matter could have been resolved at an earlier date.

White Transit, which has served the district for the past 25 years, was the remaining bidder. After a lengthy conference, White Transit and the board came to an agreement.

The board approved White's five-year contract at the cost of \$1,115,977 for the first year, followed by a 3 percent annual increase for the remainder of the contract period.

Also, White will provide 10 new buses. The district will have to reimburse the company for any fuel over the cost of \$4 per gallon. \

The existing cameras will remain on the buses, but any new cameras will have to be paid for by grants given to the school district.

Secretary Cindy Donlin said she took a survey of some of the surrounding school districts on their satisfaction with their transportation company on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest score. In her findings, none of the companies received a score greater than 7.

Donlin took the same survey with families in the GNA District, and 7 was the lowest score given to White Transit, by any of the participants.

7/30/2013

Local veteran brings home gold from National Veterans Wheelchair Games

Citizens Voice

Doris Merrill, Nanticoke, the oldest participant in the Wheelchair Games, won three gold medals and one silver medal in the competition, held earlier this month in Tampa, Fla.

A Navy WWII veteran arrived home to Nanticoke with three gold medals and one silver medal from the 33rd National Veterans Wheelchair Games held in Tampa, Fla. July 13-18. Doris Merrill, the oldest participant at the Wheelchair Games, participated in swimming, bowling, motorized rally and the motorized slalom.

Nearly 600 athletes came from the United States, Great Britain and Puerto Rico to compete in the world's largest annual multi-sport wheelchair event for military service veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations or neurological problems.

Merrill has been participating in the Wheelchair Games since 1999, when they were located in Puerto Rico. Each year, she returns to enjoy the positive atmosphere and competition. "You feel the camaraderie," she said. Merrill plans to participate again next year, when the games will be held in Philadelphia.

The competition featured 18 different medal-awards events and two exhibition events with athletes competing against their peers according to wheelchair sports experience and agility. The event is held with a goal to improve the quality of life for veterans with disabilities and foster better health through sports competition. The games produce national and world-class athletes and provide opportunities for newly disabled veterans to gain sports skills and be exposed to other wheelchair athletes.

The games are presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America. The James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital and the Florida Gulf Coast Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America co-hosted the 2013 event.

For information, visit www.wheelchairgames.va.gov or contact Jordan Schupbach, (202) 664-3733 or jordan.schupbach@va.gov. For information about the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, contact Gail Ziegler at (570) 830-7086 or gail.ziegler@va.gov.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events is the recognized world leader in rehabilitative and recreational therapies for disabled veterans. For information on VA's adaptive sports programs and partnerships, visit www.va.gov/adaptivesports.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center (WBVAMC) is a 173-bed, teaching facility located in Luzerne County. Each year, WBVAMC serves more than 40,000 veterans in approximately 18 counties in Pennsylvania and New York with more than 378,000 outpatient visits. In addition to the main facility, the facility operates five community based outpatient clinics which are located in Allentown, Williamsport, Sayre, Bangor and Tobyhanna.

7/23/2013

Nanticoke residents seek creek flooding fix

By Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

Joe Hrobak stands outside his West Union Street home, wondering how much longer he will have to deal with the muck that rises from nearby Forge Creek whenever it rains.

The creek, whose waters were barely visible last week amid the vegetation growing within it, has been flooding nearby homes on West Union Street for years.

Hrobak's home and the garage where he runs his automobile business felt the creek's wrath during a recent storm.

"The house had 5 inches (of water) in it, and the garage had 8," Hrobak said.

Since speaking out at a city council meeting on July 3, Hrobak and other residents have waited for a solution to the flooding.

Now, there may be an answer on the horizon, as Luzerne County tonight will consider Nanticoke's application for a grant to dredge the creek.

"That (is) a positive sign," said Hrobak, who plans to attend the meeting.

The city has asked for a \$205,350 grant, which it would use to dredge 3,000 cubic yards of the creek.

"We are very hopeful that the grant will be approved so that our residents won't have to suffer flooding during severe weather," city Manager Pamela Heard said.

If the grant is approved, the city will begin securing permits from the Department of Environmental Protection, Heard said. She could not estimate how long the process would take.

"The south branch of the creek is completely choked with vegetation and sediment," said Andrew Reilly, executive director of the Luzerne County Office of Community Development. "Storm events cause the creek to not only overflow but flow over the surface of the bridge."

Since dredging the creek would only solve the problem temporarily, the city has looked for other solutions for residents, including relocation

packages from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

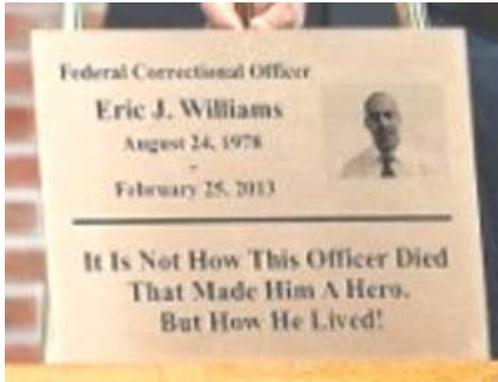
The wall of Hrobak's garage bears a mark indicating a previous water level of 2 feet, which occurred before he moved in more than five years ago. Hrobak said that in the past five years, his home has flooded once, and his garage has flooded twice.

Hrobak, like other creek-affected residents, was not interested in a government buyout. "Is someone (going to) benefit from our loss?" Hrobak said. Hrobak also values the proximity of his business to his home. "I have a good thing going here, and (relocating) would just make things more difficult," he said.

Christine Tolodzieski, whose house is adjacent to the creek, has felt its effects for 11 years. The city has not offered any long-term solution to the flooding during that time, she said.

Heard said that in addition to relocating, residents can apply for funding to elevate their houses, and firefighters will continue to pump residents' basements for free in the event of flooding.

Luzerne County Council meets tonight at 6:01 p.m. at the county courthouse.



7/21/2013

Slain prison guard honored

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The place where Eric Williams is memorialized is a spot he must have passed by frequently. Growing up in Nanticoke, he would have been close every time he drove down South Prospect Street. He wouldn't have been far away during his time as a student at Luzerne County Community College.

[A plaque commemorating Williams, who died after an attack while he was on duty at the U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan, now hangs in the college's Walk of Honor. Family, friends, fellow correctional officers and government officials gathered Saturday to remember him.

"It's nice to know that there's a plaque in his honor in the town he grew up in and the school he attended," said Donald Williams, Eric's father. "That's particularly comforting."

Williams, 34, grew up in Nanticoke, graduated from Greater Nanticoke Area High School and attended Luzerne County Community College and King's College, where he earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. He worked as a security guard and police officer before becoming a prison guard.

In February, he was the only guard on patrol at the federal prison when police say an inmate attacked and killed him. That inmate, Jessie Con-ui, was a member of an Arizona gang serving an 11-year sentence for his part in a drug trafficking operation. He was scheduled to complete that sentence in September and return to Arizona to serve another prison sentence for murdering another gang member in 2002.

Con-ui pleaded not guilty Tuesday to Williams' murder.

The death prompted an outpouring of support from government, law enforcement officials and the community that had known Williams since he was a young boy. On Saturday, they gathered again to remember the man who died in the line of duty.

Two fire truck ladders hung a large American flag above the road in front of the memorial while bagpipers led a procession to the site. State Sens. John Yudichak and Lisa Baker spoke about Williams' sacrifice before family members unveiled a plaque reminding future visitors that it was not how Williams died that made him a hero, but how he lived.

The support after his son's death has been a comfort to the family, Donald Williams said.

"We just have a lot of gratitude for that," he said "I think the word 'gratitude' is the main thing. People have been wonderful. It's helped us move forward."

7/21/2013

Baby Peggy and Dainty June visit Nanticoke

By Jan Souther (special to the Sunday voice)

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Faithful reader John D. Sherrick checked in with news from the Nanticoke Armory and the State Theater. Here's what he has to say:

"I was surprised to see your article on the forgotten Baby Peggy in The Citizens' Voice Sunday edition of July 7. The actress made a couple of appearances in the area in 1923 when she was on the verge of becoming a star in Hollywood.

"According to the Wilkes-Barre Record of Nov. 12, 1923, 'the 5-year old dancing doll will appear at the Nanticoke Armory tonight. She is the same person who entertained at Governor Pinchot's reception and dinner held at Wilkes-Barre recently.'

"This was the old Nanticoke Armory on Broadway, which was also called the Broadway Opera House for many years and hosted local talent and road shows. The building was demolished decades ago.

"Nanticoke's State Theatre, which was constructed as a vaudeville house in 1922, also had its share of visiting actors who later became famous. In 1923, Dainty June, The World Famous Hollywood Baby, made her first appearance at the State, then returned in 1926 and 1927 as Dainty June and Her Newsboy Songsters.

"Dainty June was June Havoc (Hovick), later a noted Hollywood actress, and her sister was Rose Louise Hovick, who later became Gypsy Rose Lee. Their story was told in the Broadway and Hollywood musical drama, 'Gypsy.' It's always a pleasure to re-discover local history that has been lost and forgotten."

Thanks, John; it's also a pleasure to hear about a few forgotten people (or those who later became stars) who made their way through Our Fair City.

I don't want to turn this into a memory lane column, as its main focus is on music, but a friend mentioned Baby Peggy and asked me what I could find.

Speaking of Dainty June, here's something I took directly from "cemeteryguide.com." Normally, I'd paraphrase it or do a complete re-write, but this is too good. It's about Louise, June and Mama Rose:

"When Louise was 7 and June was 5, Rose put together an act with her daughters and six young chorus boys called 'Baby June and her Farmboys,' which was moderately successful on the vaudeville circuit. June was the star, and Louise played one of the farmboys. After performing for nearly 10 years, June was getting a little old to be called 'Baby June,' so she became 'Dainty June,' and the act continued as 'Dainty June and her Newsboy Songsters,' with Louise as one of the newsboys. But June was getting tired of performing, so she ran off with one of the chorus boys from the act when she was 13 and they got married."

Life was different in those days. Rose Louise (later Gypsy Rose) had a striptease act at 15. At first, she sort of danced around and only later took it off - took it all off - as the drunks in the audience would shout. Or maybe she didn't; the best in the business left them guessing and that's what the smart strippers did.

It was definitely lowbrow, but fun (they tell me) and occasionally the cops would raid the joint just when things got interesting.

7/18/2013

Nanticoke resident appeals for right-of-way map

Times Leader

John Newman, of the Hanover section of Nanticoke, on Wednesday night voiced his frustration that the city apparently does not have a street map displaying who has the legal right of way on any given street within the city's boundaries.

Newman began searching for a map with this information on Aug. 19, 2011, when, he says, he spoke with former City Manager Holly Cirko. He was told the city's engineer would contact him, but never received a phone call, he said.

City Engineer Daryl Pawlush, who was in attendance at Wednesday's council meeting, said he had no knowledge of Newman's request.

Pawlush gave Newman his cellphone number, but Newman said he wanted to discuss the matter after the meeting. Pawlush agreed with the request.

Pawlush added that of the 40 municipalities he is in contact with as an engineer, none has a street map of rights of way.

In other matters:

- Council approved a resolution that authorizes the filing of a proposal for funds for the Downtown Street Facade grant program.
- A resident expressed concern that the property at 681 E. Main St. might be being used as a group home. The property is maintained by a Step by Step family and will be checked by code enforcement to determine whether the property is actually being used as a group home, said Council President Steven Duda.
- Safety day will be held at Luzerne County Community College's Public Safety Institute 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday.
- The Nanticoke Crime Watch will meet at 7 p.m. July 31 in City Hall.
- The next council meeting will be at 7 p.m. Aug. 7.

7/11/2013

GNA restores trimmed programs

Physical education, library services, music and art classes will be back this fall.

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The [Greater Nanticoke Area School](#) Board voted unanimously Wednesday to restore physical education, library services, music and art classes in elementary grades, to resume an old practice of contributing \$5,000 annually to the Mill Memorial Library, and to revise the [dress code](#) to allow jeans and collarless shirts as long as they are clean.

During a special meeting the board also voted to contract cafeteria services out for the first time in the district's history, hiring Metz Culinary Management, one of two companies that handle most cafeteria contracts in Luzerne County school districts.

"This is like a new beginning for the district," board member Tony Prushinski said of the decision to bring back programs cut two years ago after the state slashed public education funding under Gov. Tom Corbett.

Prushinski said the education committee, which he chairs, had pushed for the restorations and figured most of the cost can be covered the first year at least by savings realized when the district brought two classes in-house that were being handled contractually by the Luzerne Intermediate Unit. The LIU provides a variety of services to area districts, primarily special education.

"We saved between \$250,000 and \$300,000," Prushinski said, which should cover 90 percent or more of the cost of bringing back three workers furloughed two years ago: physical education teacher Eric Speece, music teacher Ellen Rutkowski, and part-time library aide Monica Kochanski. Any additional cost can be covered using money from the district fund balance, a reserve built up over years that currently stands at about \$7 million.

The board also voted to post for three positions, another physical education teacher, an English as Second Language teacher, and a high school assistant principal. Prushinski said the ESL teacher is needed because a current teacher, Michelle Kordeck, will switch to the elementary art position and will have to be replaced.

Superintendent Tony Perrone said contracting Metz won't cost the district money because the company guaranteed a minimum \$100,000 profit from cafeteria sales. He also noted the workers remain under district control.

Long-time board watchdog Hank Marks questioned the wisdom of restoring the programs when the district still has \$22 million in debt from massive construction and renovation projects done years ago, but both Prushinski and board President Ryan Verazin defended the decision.

"This is personal for me," Verazin said. "I'm not going to deprive kids in this district."

"My fear was that we would have a child come to kindergarten and they would have no art or music until sixth or seventh grade," Prushinski said. Perrone said the board decided to loosen the dress code because of the high percentage of low-income student enrollment. "Some of these families have jeans and can't afford anything else," Perrone said, stressing the clothes still had to be neat and clean.

7/11/2013

Art, music, gym returning to Nanticoke elementary schools

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Tony Prushinski was obviously pleased.

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board member reminded reporters that it was the board's education committee that pushed for a change to the district's curriculum coming this fall: Bringing art, music and physical education classes back to elementary school students after a two-year hiatus. The board voted unanimously to bring back from furloughs a physical education teacher, music teacher and part-time library aide who will teach students from kindergarten to fifth grade. A high school English as a Second Language teacher will move to the elementary school to teach art classes.

"My fear was that there would be no music, art or phys ed for students until seventh grade," Prushinski said during the brief board meeting Wednesday, and for two years, those fears were realized. The board cut those programs, laid off 11 employees and furloughed ten teachers when it passed its budget for 2011-2012.

At the time, business manager Tom Melone said the state provided about 60 percent - \$14.6 million that year - of the district budget, and the state funding had decreased by about \$1.7 million that year. Board members said they were forced to make cuts. That year's budget did not raise taxes and made up a \$300,000 deficit with the district's fund balance, which stood at \$6.2 million after the dust settled.

In the years since then, the district moved some classes from the Luzerne Intermediate Unit back to its campus, which allowed it to save about \$250,000 that will help pay for the reinstated programs.

The district will also advertise for a new physical education teacher, an English as a Second Language and assistant high school principal, and the board hired Kristy Guastella as a special education teacher.

In other business:

n The district is contracting out its food service for the first time. Metz Culinary Management will take over cafeteria service in the fall. The company will pay the district \$100,000 for the first year of the contract, and the district's cafeteria staff will keep its jobs. Superintendent Anthony Perrone said the move will make money for the district compared to the last several years of self-management, when revenue from the program was flat.

n The board approved a dress code that now allows jeans and collarless shirts.

7/4/2013

After rain, Nanticoke residents concerned about creek flooding

Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

Residents pleaded with city council members Wednesday to take action to prevent the overflow of Forge Creek, which has caused flooding in nearby homes for some time.

Residents felt the effects again after a rain-heavy week.

"Every time it rains, I get water," Nanticoke resident Don Albertson said. "I had 3½ (feet) of water in my garage last Thursday."

Albertson said the creek situation has worsened because it takes less rainfall than usual to trigger an overflow.

Council members and city officials were sympathetic to the residents' plight.

"We have a grant application in with the county (to dredge the creek)," city Manager Pamela Heard said.

Heard said the county is still considering the application and the outlook is positive. However, she noted that dredging the creek would only solve the problem temporarily.

Nanticoke resident and business owner Joe Hrobak suggested setting up an annual fund for dredging the creek in the future.

"Who can put a price on our health?" Hrobak said.

Council members offered to schedule a meeting with the county to discuss the creek issue further. Residents will be given advance notice so they can attend the meeting and voice their concerns.

6/21/2013

Nanticoke Council talks Tar Pond remediation

Times Leader

Representatives from UGI gave a presentation Wednesday night to City Council on the remediation of Tar Pond and the surrounding area.

Coal tar and petroleum are two of the bi-products from the MGP (manufactured gas product) site, which is located behind Weis Markets. UGI is working with the state Department of Environmental Protection, and has been successful in the past with cleaning the waste from these sites in communities such as Wilkes Barre, Scranton, Carbondale and Williamsport, the representatives said. The remediation process is beneficial to the community in addition to improving safety issues.

UGI is looking to begin the first phase of the process in the fall.

The phase will include the Main Replacement Project, Interim Remedial Action, Supplemental Site Investigation and Off-Site Site Investigation, the representatives said.

In other matters:

City Manager Pamela Heard said the Streetscape Project approval is in its "final, final stages" and it should be "going out to bid soon."

Heard said "PennDOT as the final approval" and that there is "no hold up on the city's end."

Council President Steven Duda said there will be a meeting at 7 p.m. June 26 in City Hall to start a Crime Watch.

The next council meeting will be at 7 p.m. July 3.

6/21/2013

Beggs beats out Guffrovich for boys basketball job at Nanticoke Area

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

The board room inside the Greater Nanticoke Area High School was filled to capacity, just like the gymnasiums Paul Guffrovich played in on his way to becoming one of the best basketball players to come out of the Wyoming Valley Conference.

Despite scoring 2,271 points during his high school career and playing at Wichita State University, Guffrovich did not have the credentials to be named the basketball coach at his alma mater.

The Nanticoke Area school board voted 8-0 Thursday night to hire assistant coach John Beggs to take over for Ken Bartuska after his position as head basketball coach was opened. Bartuska will remain the athletic director at the school. Board member Chet Beggs, a cousin of the newly appointed coach, was out of town and did not attend the meeting.

"Obviously, my whole goal when I came back here and started teaching in the district nine years ago was to eventually be a head coach," Beggs said. "I wasn't sure when it would happen or how it would happen. I'm proud to continue the tradition. I'm only the fifth head coach in the last 50 years. That's something I take very seriously."

Bartuska was an assistant coach for three years before becoming the head coach for the last 19. The Trojans won four district titles, three conference championships and finished second in the district twice during his tenure. Nanticoke Area finished the 2012-13 season 11-12.

"I think the program is in very good hands. John has been an assistant and friend of mine for a long time," said Bartuska, who will focus more of his time on administrative responsibilities. "Having somebody in the building who knows the kids and administrators will make the transition seamless and that is the most important thing."

Ken James, head of the athletic committee at Nanticoke Area, said the decision to pass on Guffrovich was a difficult one, but he's confident Beggs will help the program get back on track.

"It was a very tough decision. Paul has a great pedigree and a great name in Nanticoke," James said. "There was questions about the transition and how he would take over the program in the summer. We weren't sure that would be done smoothly. Assistants were a question. He had one name. He had a short list but really didn't have names."

6/21/2013

Nanticoke Area keeps taxes steady

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Greater Nanticoke Area is holding the line on taxes.

School property taxes in the district will stay the same in 2013-2014. The school board adopted the \$24.9 million budget by a unanimous vote at a meeting Thursday.

The millage rate will stay at 10.177 mills. The rate translates to a bill of \$1,017.70 for a property assessed at \$100,000. The school district raised taxes by about 2.5 percent last year.

The budget has a deficit of about \$127,000. Business consultant Al Melone said the district is still finalizing a transportation budget for next year and expects that costs will go down when that is finished.

Had Nanticoke raised its taxes by the index - the amount allowed before the district needs permission from the state or from voters - it would not have raised much money, said board president Ryan Verazin.

"We have no commercial taxes in here. We don't get the big commercial parks," he said. "I just didn't feel that it was necessary this year."

6/21/2013

GNA Board passes \$24.9 million budget

Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board on Thursday night adopted a final budget for the 2013-2014 school year of \$24.9 million with a property tax millage rate of 10.177.

A mill is a \$1 tax on each \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

The board also authorized that any person whose yearly income from all sources is less than \$4,000 shall be exempt from Act 511 LST (local services tax). Any person whose yearly income from all sources is less than \$2,500 shall be exempt from the Section 679 per capita tax.

In another matter, Superintendent Anthony Perrone said the new school dress code is being worked on. Perrone said "some of the changes are more liberal and some are not."

A parent in attendance asked why the school district is behind in SAT score averages. GNA's average is 964, while state wide average is 992.

Perrone said that “changes have been made.” He also pointed out that GNA had the highest jump in scores of any school in Luzerne County — up by 18 percent.

The board has approved the hiring of John Beggs as head boys basketball coach for the 2013-2014 school year. The board has also given approval for the Frank Novakowski Driving School to serve as its third party testing group.

The board also accepted the resignation of Dean Meyers, football assistant III coach, for the 2013 season.

The next meeting will on Aug. 15 at 7 p.m.

6/10/2013

63 are moved after pipe bursts

Residents of Nanticoke Villa are moved temporarily to Greater Nanticoke High School.

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A broken water pipe damaged the Nanticoke Villa personal care home on Main Street on Sunday afternoon, temporarily displacing it 63 residents. Ambulances transported them a short distance away to the Greater Nanticoke Area High School cafeteria, where they were provided meals by the American Red Cross. The last residents left the personal care home shortly after 7 p.m.

Luzerne County and Nanticoke emergency management agencies as well as public and private emergency medical services assisted in the evacuation.

Ambulances and vans lined North Walnut Street outside the entrance to the building. Emergency medical services personnel wheeled residents on gurneys to ambulances and lifted them inside.

Others in wheelchairs were taken to awaiting vans with power lifts. Residents who were able to walk boarded a school bus. Firefighters and EMS personnel loaded boxes of binders, supplies and movable cabinets onto pickup trucks.

There were no injuries, said Chester Pymowicz, Nanticoke assistant fire chief.

“At this point everything’s going real smooth,” Pymowicz said.

The initial dispatch for a water leak came around 4:30 p.m. A pipe on the third floor broke sending water to the lower floors. Code enforcement shut down the building because there was no electricity and the fire alarms and sprinkler system were inoperable.

Pymowicz was unsure when the damage would be repaired and the residents would be allowed to return.

Similar evacuations prepared emergency management personnel to handle this one, said Stephen Bekanich, the county’s emergency management director.

Cots were being brought to the high school for residents. If the stay was going to be longer than 12 to 18 hours, he said, “we’re going to make arrangements to get these folks into a more comfortable facility.

Efforts were underway to relocate some residents sooner to facilities where there was space available.

Family members of some residents were being contacted as well to see if they could take them for a couple of days, Bekanich said.

“It’ll be more beneficial to them,” he said.

6/6/2013

Lexington Village expansion planned

Nanticoke council also talks about meeting this month to establish a crime watch.

Times Leader

Paul Mizak, an acquisition analyst for Rodman Properties Inc., on Wednesday presented City Council with a preliminary sketch displaying the potential plans to add 48 units to Lexington Village.

The units would be divided between two, three-story buildings and available to renters at the market rate. The apartments will not be subsidized nor will they be age-restricted. Garbage fees, snow removal, water, sewer, landscaping and maintenance will be included in the monthly rent.

There currently are only three vacancies among the 55 Lexington Village units. The proposed construction of the units would be funded by a construction loan and not tax money, said Mizak.

In other matters, City Manager Pamela Heard has been designated as the agent authorized to execute documents on behalf of the city for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency.

There will be a meeting at 7 p.m. June 26 at City Hall for the purpose of starting a crime watch in Nanticoke. The meeting will be led by crime prevention specialist Charles Balogh.

6/3/2013

GNA union: Compromise too costly

Contract proposed for support staff rejected, meaning it’s back to the bargaining table.

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School District support-staff union rejected a fact-finder’s proposed compromise in stalled contract talks because, in the end, “it actually took money out of their pockets,” union lead negotiator Virginia Cowley said.

The support staff — cafeteria workers, custodians and others who don’t fall under the teacher or administration contracts — have worked under the terms of a contract that expired last summer.

The two sides have been negotiating since the beginning of last year. Earlier this year the union asked for fact-finding, in which a third party hears

from both sides and crafts a proposal.

The union rejected the proposal while the school board voted to accept it last week, making the report public record. The state Department of Labor and Industry posted it online. The report outlines the issues from both sides.

Before fact-finding, both sides had reached tentative agreements on longevity pay, life insurance, unused sick-time pay, personal leave, bereavement leave and use of seniority in filling vacancies. Both also agreed the new contract should run from July 1, 2012, through June 2016. But the two sides differ substantially on two issues that have become chronic sticking points in most school-district contract talks: pay and health insurance.

According to the report, the district proposed a pay freeze for hourly employees in the first two years of the new contract, with hourly pay rising 25 cents the third year and 50 cents the fourth. The union sought a 25-cent increase the first year and a 50-cent increase in each of the remaining three years.

Fact-finder Robert Gifford cited financial data from the past five years showing the district has kept spending relatively stable while increasing the fund balance — money received but not spent and thus set aside as a reserve — from \$5.13 million in 2007-08 to \$7.68 million this year. He also noted decreased federal funding, increased pension payments and the fact that Superintendent Tony Perrone retired years ago but stayed on the job with no salary.

Gifford recommended a compromise of a pay freeze the first year followed by hourly wage increases of 30 cents, 40 cents and 50 cents, respectively, in the following three years.

In health-insurance coverage, the district wants to shift support staff from the two plans they currently can choose from to the two plans offered to teachers. The district also wants to increase the amount the support staff pays toward insurance premiums from 1 percent of gross wages paid now to 1.75 percent in 2014-15 and 2 percent in 2015-16. The union wants no changes.

Gifford proposed switching support staff to the teacher plans but rejected the increase in premium sharing. Cowley said that proposal was a big reason the union rejected the report.

“These are currently the only employees in the district paying anything toward health insurance, and they are the lowest-paid of anyone,” Cowley said. “Even though the fact-finder kept the premium contribution the same, the change in the plan means changes in the deductible and co-pays, and the cost was significant.

“The fact that the wage proposal was low, combined with the insurance-plan changes, means the proposal actually took money out of their pockets.” The union’s rejection of the proposal made any decision by the school board symbolic. Fact-finding is non binding, and rejection by either side kills the proposal, though negotiators often cite the process as helpful even when rejected. Both sides will now return to the bargaining table.

5/30/2013

GNA board hires independent mediator for talks with support staff

Citizens Voice Staff Report

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board unanimously decided to hire an independent fact-finder to mediate its negotiations with one of its labor unions at a special meeting Wednesday.

Vice President Ken James was absent.

Board President Ryan Verazin said the state fact-finder was requested by the support staff union, a group which represents positions like teacher aides. That group has been working without a contract - and the annual raises that usually come with it - since its previous agreement expired last summer.

Verazin said unions often request fact-finders when they think districts are trying to "lowball" them.

As part of larger negotiations for a new agreement, union representative Virginia Cowley said the district is discussing with its approximately 30 unionized teacher aides the prospect of dropping hours to 28.5 per week while raising wages to make up the difference. The Affordable Care Act, more commonly known as Obamacare, requires all employers to offer health insurance to all employees who work 30 hours. The district, like many others, is trying avoid that mandate.

5/29/2013

UGI, DEP to clean up property in Nanticoke

Former site of a gas manufacturing plant contains contaminated groundwater, soil.

Sheena DeLazio - sdelazio@civitasmedia.com - 570-970-7333

Nanticoke recently acquired three flood-damaged properties along Arch Street after delinquent taxes were forgiven and the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved the purchase.

In a May 22 filing in Luzerne County, solicitors for the city asked for a real estate tax abatement on three parcels belonging to Edward and Elaine Rasmus and Jean Kotsko.

Solicitor William Finnegan said the properties were purchased by the city through FEMA after the September 2011 flood.

The properties received extensive damage, Finnegan said. According to the court filing, the three parcels of land had combined unpaid and delinquent city taxes of \$1,758.

In the court filing, Finnegan asked that the delinquent taxes be satisfied, which was ultimately granted by county Judge Lesa Gelb.

Finnegan said that as of last week, the city now owns the three parcels of land, but he said the city is unsure what will be done with the properties. The buildings located on the properties will most likely be razed, he said.

During the September 2011 flood, water from the Susquehanna River flooded the nearby Weis Market parking lot, located near the Arch Street

properties.

The former site of a gas manufacturing plant in the city where soil and groundwater are contaminated will soon be cleaned up by UGI Penn Natural Gas with oversight from the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The site, located at the intersection of Walnut and Arch streets, will take between two and three years to clean up and is one of 11 similar properties in Pennsylvania.

"It's a multiyear project to get all these sites remediated and returned to some sort of functional site," said Joseph Swope, a communications director for UGI.

Swope said the work at the 11 properties is due to an agreement with the state DEP dating back to March 2004.

He said soil at each property is tested for contaminants and then a plan is developed to clean each site. That may include removal of soil to return the property back to a functional state.

Swope said adjoining properties also are tested for contaminants .

He said gas used in homes was once manufactured in plants that haven't been functioning since the 1950s. The Nanticoke plant has since been demolished.

"Unfortunately, the manufactured gas process did leave some contaminated soil," Swope said.

UGI and the DEP recently cleaned a site in Scranton, and another exists on Water Street in Wilkes-Barre, Swope said. Other sites are in Columbia, Montour and Lycoming counties.

The process of cleaning up the site begins with a legal notice published in local newspapers, followed by a 30-day public comment period.

Nanticoke has until June 21 to submit a request to UGI for development of a public involvement plan.

Swope said sites of former gas manufacturing plants have previously been turned into parking lots or parks in several areas.

He said it is not known yet what the site in Nanticoke will be used for, if anything.

5/28/2013

Nanticoke Area students earn green thumbs thanks to grant

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It's not yet summer, but some students from Greater Nanticoke Area High School are already out working the fields.

Thanks to a \$1,500 "farm to school" grant from the state, the school now has a 100-square-foot vegetable plot on its grounds for students to learn to garden. They have planted a wide variety of crops and eventually the mini-farm will contain everything from tomatoes and garlic to broccoli and spaghetti squash.

Frank Grevera, building and grounds director in the school district, is overseeing the project, which included the planting of about 2,000 seeds and the resulting crops in the middle school's greenhouse. With a garden that can hold only about a tenth of those, the rest have been sent home with students, and some of the flowers have been planted on school grounds.

Several students have signed on to tend the garden, including those from environment science class who tested the pH and fertility of the soil outside the school and then added the appropriate nutrients. Others are participating as part of their senior project and have a variety of motivations for doing so, including juniors Joseph Zielinski ("It's something different") and Mike Stephanick ("It's something enjoyable").

On Wednesday, students watered the rows of small crops and pounded 5-foot stakes, nearly as tall as themselves, into the ground next to tomato seedlings, just a few inches off the ground.

"They're going to grow to the top of that, I promise â?!" Grevera said. "They will hit the top."

Students will continue to tend the crops over the summer and the resulting produce will be donated to the local family center, and may be used for projects in home economics class as well as go toward improving the quality of school lunches.

"Hopefully they'll use some of this food in there, because some of the lettuce we get isn't the best," junior Jordan Williams said with a smile.

5/28/2013

Nanticoke native part of WWII mystery

Times Leader

The morning of Jan. 30, 1944, a Sunday, the 718th Squadron of the 449th Bomb Group took off from its base in Grottaglie, a small village on the heel of Italy's boot, on a mission to bomb an airfield in Udine, site of a Nazi base near Trieste on the Adriatic Sea.

It was Second Lt. Pershing Hill's 18th mission since being deployed to the airfield just a month before. He was a bombardier on a B-24, perched in the Plexiglas-encased nose of the heavy bomber. The B-24 had a couple of nicknames — "The Flying Boxcar," for its boxy shape, and "The Flying Coffin," for the probability that the aircraft could become the crew's final resting place should it meet enemy resistance. The aircraft had only one exit, in the rear of the fuselage at the end of a 9-inch-wide catwalk, making it nearly impossible for the flight crew to escape if the plane were hit.

Hill was one of a crew of 10. The pilot was a young first lieutenant from Colorado named Ben Kendall. Fletcher Porter, a 22-year-old from Lexington, Ky., was in the co-pilot's seat. Staff Sgt. Harvey Gann, from Travis County, Texas, was the engineer.

The squadron descended on the German airbase at high noon on a cold, clear day. The moment they dropped their bombs, they were attacked by a brace of German fighters. One witness told an Italian researcher later, "From the sky began to drop everything." A young woman, walking home from Mass, saw the body of one airman hit the ground near her church. He was badly burnt. Another body, about 20 meters away, was draped over a fence.

One of the B-24s went down in flames, two of its crew bailing out, hitting the ground before their parachutes could open. Another, called "Sinner's Dream" and piloted by a 22-year-old lieutenant from Memphis named Thomas Chandler, exploded in flight after being rammed by a German

Messerschmitt.

Hill's plane took heavy fire. Flak had ripped through its wings, causing two of its four engines to burst into flames. A fighter strafed the aircraft, piercing its aluminum fuselage with a barrage of 7.92 mm rounds. The plane was going down, and since B-24s weren't built for gliding, it dropped like a stone.

Kendall signaled Gann, seated in the aircraft's top turret, to bail and he did. He landed on a beach. Nearby, he saw Kendall's body, his parachute tangled in a large scrap of aluminum. Porter also bailed, but his chute didn't open.

Gann was captured by the Germans and sent to a POW camp.

He never did see what happened to his plane.

It was always a mystery to Hill's family.

What happened to Pershing?

He was from Nanticoke, a small town west of Wilkes-Barre, best known as the hometown of Jerry Orbach, Lenny on the TV show "Law & Order." During the war, his family had moved to Maryland, finding work at the Glenn L. Martin aircraft plant in Middle River.

He was born on Nov. 11, 1918 — Armistice Day — named for Gen. John "Black Jack" Pershing.

He was 19 years older than his niece, Mary Maust. She remembers the last time she saw her uncle. It was Christmas 1943 and he was home on leave before shipping out for Italy. She remembers seeing a family photo from that gathering. Nobody was smiling in it. They all looked worried, she recalled.

A little more than a month later, the family learned that Hill had been killed in action in northern Italy. His airplane hadn't been found. His body wasn't recovered.

For years — decades — the family wondered what happened to Hill. There was some speculation that he had merely been wounded and was suffering from amnesia, wandering around Europe believing he was another man.

"We never knew," Maust, 76, who lived in Glen Rock until a recent move to the retirement village in Cross Keys, said. "That's what bothered us. We never knew."

Harvey Gann thought he knew. He thought his aircraft exploded in flight shortly after he bailed. He thought that's how the piece of aluminum got tangled in Kendall's chute. He thought that the earthly remains of his crewmates were scattered over the frozen ground of a seaside resort called Isola del Sole — Sunny Island — on the Adriatic Sea.

Gann was imprisoned in Stalag Luft VI near the old Prussian-Lithuania border. He escaped, but was recaptured when he and another POW made camp on top of a German underground gun position. He was sent to another POW camp and, again, he escaped and was recaptured. The third time, it stuck. He escaped and made his way to the Russian front and freedom.

After the war, he returned home and joined the Austin police department, retiring after 38 years on the force. He lives just outside of Austin and at 92, still thinks often about that day over Udine.

"It was just one of those bad days," he said, "just a bad day."

He wrote a book about his war experience — titled "Escape I Must!" — and his recollections of the mission and subsequent air battle, recounted in vivid detail. In his PostScript, he wondered about the fate of Pershing Hill and the six other men who died in his aircraft that day..

Freddy Furlan is an archeologist living in the village of Romans d'Isonzo. He grew up listening to his father and many others tell the story of that beautiful Sunday when an American airplane fell from the sky a short distance from the village. The story always intrigued him, and in 2005, he set out to find out exactly what happened that day, conducting dozens of interviews with surviving witnesses, scouring accounts from that time and collecting crash reports and other documents.

He also read Harvey Gann's book.

He was able to recreate a detailed account of that day.

And he was able to figure out what happened to Pershing Hill's aircraft.

He knew that one aircraft had exploded in the sky over his village. And he knew that another made a belly landing in a field outside of Campolongo al Torre, near Udine, after being ripped apart by flak. None of the crew survived. Their bodies were recovered. One witness told the story of a villager who took a watch from the body of an American airman, "a shameful act," he said.

And a third plane crashed into a swampy lagoon called Grado on a small, unpopulated barrier island called Morgo.

Witnesses told him the plane was on fire when it hit the bog, the water and mud extinguished the flames and the aircraft sank into the murk.

For years, Furlan wrote, fishermen knew the B-24 was in the lagoon, but were afraid to approach it, believing it may still contain unexploded bombs. It remained buried a mud.

Furlan's detailed report of his research made its way to the Defense Department's POW/Missing Personnel Office. The DPMO sent two investigators to Italy in February 2009 and they were able to identify the plane. They didn't notify the families of the airmen; the Defense Department doesn't do that until the bodies have been positively identified.

The defense department reviewed their findings and approval was given to recover the remains of the airmen who may be interred in the fuselage of the downed aircraft.

But it hasn't happened yet. It may take some time. The plane is under 16 feet of viscous mud and a foot and a half of water, according to the DPMO. Complicating matters is it's in a wildlife sanctuary on private land. And the plane is believed to contain unexploded bombs.

Part of the process to speed the recovery of the bodies of the airmen was being able to find a means to positively identify them. And that's where DNA comes in, specifically maternal DNA.

It fell to Mary Crowley, secretary of the 449th Bombardment Group Association, to seek out next-of-kin, specifically next-of-kin who could provide maternal DNA. She did some genealogical research on Ancestry.com. and found Mary Maust. Maust's mother, Margaret, was Hill's older sister. She tracked Maust to Glen Rock, but soon found that she had recently moved. She called Maust's neighbors and one of them told her had recently moved to Cross Keys.

So in the middle of May, about the 15th, Maust, still unpacking from her move, spoke with Crowley.

"As soon as she mentioned Uncle Persh," Maust recalled, "I could feel the tears welling up."

She called her sister and went to pieces on the phone.

"It's been so long," she said. "And now, to think we might get an answer."

They may finally be able to have a burial for Pershing Hill.

5/25/2013

Reflecting on a decade on the beat

Bob Kalinowski, staff writer since May 25, 2003, loves being a storyteller. He can be reached at bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com or 570-821-2055. Follow on Twitter at [@cvbobkal](https://twitter.com/cvbobkal).

A dear friend recently surprised me with a wonderful professional compliment, saying I have the job I was born to do.

Never really thought about it that way - because it sure wasn't my plan to be a newspaper reporter. It kind of just happened.

And when I became interested in the field, I didn't think I'd want to work at some small-town paper like The Citizens' Voice. Even after taking the job on May 25, 2003, I had no intention of staying. I was later focused on entering the U.S. Navy's Officer Candidate School.

Well, here I am 10 years later.

Today marks a decade working at the paper. And I would not have had it any other way. I'm glad I stayed. It's the best job in the world.

I document the life and times of the people I know and love in the place I know and love.

The daily challenge to best the competition down the street keeps me motivated. It's quite unique to be a foot soldier in one of the nation's few remaining newspaper wars.

There's been no shortage of big stories along the way - historic floods, corruption scandals, presidential candidate visits, blockbuster criminal trials and unspeakable crimes.

Covering the police beat has been my main job, chasing breaking news from the moment I wake up until I go to bed. It's a rush like no other racing to a major breaking news scene. On the reporting end, it's not easy getting cops to like you, trust you and tell you things. It has been my goal to be the most honest, fair and accurate person in the local news business.

As the grandson of two World War II veterans, writing about the military is another passion. I've been there when soldiers left for war and watched as they triumphantly returned home. But some of them didn't and I was tasked with the incredible responsibility of telling the stories of men who gave their lives for the country.

Most recently, my main mission has been to surface details about the murder of a federal correctional officer from my hometown of Nanticoke.

Some call me a journalist. Or a reporter. Or a writer. All those labels fit, but I think storyteller fits the best.

The archives indicate I've penned thousands of stories over these 10 years. My contact list is 50 pages, containing hundreds of names and phone numbers. All those people - all of you - brought those stories to life and made my job one I love.

So how did I end up here?

Like anyone else trying to plan their future, I guess it started in high school when it came time to decide what I wanted to do in life. I wasn't really preparing for a challenging career. While fellow seniors were taking courses like AP English, calculus, and physics, I created a cruise control final year with classes like home economics, art, woodworking and probability and statistics, where we did tasks like count the color ratio of candies in a pack of M&Ms.

I chose to major in mass communications on a whim. A friend's aunt told me one day she did public relations for NASCAR - and I loved NASCAR. I wanted to go to Penn State, mostly to enjoy the party scene, but went to King's College here in Wilkes-Barre because it offered the most financial aid.

At King's, I decided to finally start trying. I studied my tail off for four years in a variety of media classes, always earning Dean's List status, including one perfect 4.0 semester. I interned with U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski and then at ABC News Radio in New York City. It was glamorous, meeting celebrities and rubbing elbows with all the ABC stars, but I really didn't do much hands-on work to build any useful skills.

When my final college semester arrived, I still had no clue what I wanted to do in life. Following a trip to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point for a video shoot, I was pretty set on becoming a military officer even as the Iraq war raged.

I was considering another fun-filled internship in New York, but one of my college buddies led me on to a big secret: The Citizens' Voice let you write stories AND paid interns \$25 a day. We quickly applied and were accepted. As our internship came to a close, a job opened up to write the obituaries - a foot in the door for a possible reporting position. We both applied, but my friend got the job. With few options, I soon accepted a job at our sister paper in Towanda, Bradford County. A Voice editor warned me all I would write about was "rocks, rattlesnakes and Republicans" - never envisioning the natural gas boom the area now experiences.

Almost immediately after that, my friend backed out of the Voice offer to take a job in Ohio. "You're staying," the editor told me. I guess I was. He quickly called the Towanda editor to tell him I wasn't coming.

That was followed, of course, by a call from the Towanda editor who reminded me "burning bridges" isn't a wise first career move.

So that's how I ended up at The Citizens' Voice. How I stayed was fate.

Unhappy with typing obituaries and feeling little passion for the business, I followed through with my plans to apply for Officer Candidate School.

It was not easy. The academic and physical requirements were grueling. But I was accepted into the elite program for the nation's future military leaders and swore in at a Wilkes-Barre recruiting center. For months and months, I studied and trained for my report date in Pensacola, Fla., on Feb. 26, 2005. But the push-ups got to me. I traumatized my wrist, was medically disqualified and received an Honorable Discharge.

So I remained at the Voice. I'm glad I stayed.

With pedestrian journalism skills, I learned how to be a reporter from on-the-job training. Editors dispatched me to every story imaginable - from

boring budget hearings and contentious council meetings to raging fires and unfolding crime scenes. It was my duty to reel in a good story. As the months and years went by, I fell in love with the job.

I get a front-row seat to the day's most important news and have the awesome responsibility to tell the folks why it matters. And it's a whole lot of fun to craft stories in a creative, compelling way.

There hasn't been a day I dreaded going to work. In fact, I get jealous when news breaks on my days off.

Ten years later, I love what I do. I'm sure glad I stayed.

My friend's right. This must be what I was born to do.

5/23/2013

GNA students raise \$4K for family affected by fire

Citizens Voice

In one hour, students at Greater Area Nanticoke High School raised more than \$4,000 Monday for the family of sophomores Jessica and Nicole Delos Santos, whose Nanticoke home was destroyed in a fire last week.

By donating a minimum of \$5 to the family, students received a ticket allowing them to "dress down" from the normal dress code of dress pants and collared shirts to wear blue jeans, T-shirts and shorts for the remainder of the school year, principal John Gorham said. The last day of school in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District is June 11.

Participation among students, teachers and other employees was nearly 100 percent and someone even donated \$100, Gorham said.

5/16/2013

Nanticoke learns possible water rate changes

Pennsylvania American Water has proposed increases to take effect this summer.

What's next

Nanticoke council's meeting is set for 7 p.m. June 5.

Times Leader

The city has received notice of Pennsylvania American Water's proposed rate increases for residents beginning June 29.

If approved, here's how the rates would impact the average customer's water bill: Residential customers using 3,960 gallons a month would increase from \$52.51 to \$58.63 per month. Commercial customers using 22,000 gallons a month would increase from \$231.57 to \$254.10 per month. Industrial customers using 475,600 gallons a month would increase from \$3,602.78 to \$3,840.67 per month.

PA American Water is requesting the increase to help cover the cost of improving sewer reliability, water quality and fire protection for about 390 communities across the state.

Residents who want to present their views at a Public Utility Commission public meeting can obtain information by calling 1-800-692-7380.

Separately, the city has received an \$80,000 check from Benecon for the first-year health care plan savings. Benecon is a government consortium chosen as the health care plan for the city's employees.

In other matters:

* Joe Kordek has been appointed Americans with Disabilities Act complaint coordinator.

* The citywide yard sale will be held on Saturday, June 1.

* The third annual Relay for Life of South Valley will be held on June 1 and 2 at Luzerne County Community College beginning at 10 a.m. The "survivor reception" will take place at 1 p.m. on June 1, and the luminaria ceremony will be held at 8:30 p.m. For further details, call Maureen Ryneski at 570-740-0490 or James Kane at 570-562-9749.

5/16/2013

Emotions are still raw

Slashing victim says her life hasn't been same since attack

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The scars — external and internal — still remain apparent to Jennifer Mieczkowski, the 31-year-old slashing victim of New Year's 2012.

Jennifer Mieczkowski, who lives with her 8-year-old daughter, Gabby, in the township's Sheatown section, said she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and is in therapy as a result of the attack. She suffered multiple cuts to her face and neck, some of which nearly sliced her carotid artery on Jan. 1, 2012 in a Nanticoke bar, she said.

She isn't working and said all she wants is "some justice" in the case.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said Wednesday the case is not closed, but it's not likely charges of aggravated assault will be filed. Simple assault charges probably will be filed, she said, but she and Assistant District Attorney Jennifer Roberts will meet to discuss the case and decide.

Mieczkowski is dismayed about lesser charges being considered, given the circumstances of what she says happened at the now-closed Prospect Street Cafe.

In a civil lawsuit filed 13 months ago against the bar and its owner, Mieczkowski identified Melanie Figueroa, who was 20 at the time, as her assailant. Figueroa has denied any involvement.

Mieczkowski alleges in the civil suit Figueroa slashed her face after Mieczkowski went to the aid of a friend who fell off a bar stool.

At first, Mieczkowski was unwilling to testify if the District Attorney's Office was going to file simple assault charges, she said. That was six months ago; Mieczkowski called the office Tuesday to ask for an update. She was told the case had been closed because she wouldn't testify, Mieczkowski said.

DA's version

Salavantis said that is not the case. "We will meet today or tomorrow to discuss where we are going with charges," she said. "Now that Mieczkowski has decided to testify, we will go forward."

Salavantis said her office has conducted extensive interviews and gathered considerable evidence. "We know certain details of what happened that night," she said. "Aggravated assault, while a possibility, is not likely."

Mieczkowski said some level of justice needs to be served, so she will participate in any prosecution.

"The investigation, in my opinion, was not done well," she said. "The district attorney should understand why I want aggravated assault charges filed."

Mieczkowski said she was only out for an enjoyable evening on the night in question. She and her boyfriend had stopped to pick up beer when she met a friend who, said Mieczkowski, would later get involved in a fight with Figueroa.

Mieczkowski said she was assaulted and her life hasn't been the same since.

"When I was told the case had been closed, I was shocked," she said. "How can you close this case?"

5/15/2013

Fire tears through Nanticoke home

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As fire raged from the attic window of 186 W. Broad St. on Tuesday morning, friends consoled Robin Delos Santos as she looked on from across the street.

She learned of the blaze while running errands. Her twin daughters were at school. Her husband was at work.

The family would eventually unite at the fire scene - shaken and saddened, but thankful none of them were hurt. A responding police officer rescued the family's two dogs.

"When they say horrible things happen to the best people, it's the truth," said family friend Julia Robins, 33, who lives a few blocks away and rushed to the scene in her pajamas.

Sharon Hitzner, 56, of Alden, said she saw smoke while driving in the Sheatown section of Newport Township around 9 a.m. As she drove closer, she noticed the smoke was coming from 186 W. Broad St., out of the eaves and near a second-floor air conditioner. She rushed to the nearby doctor's office where she works to call 911.

"There was no fire at the time," Hitzner said. "There was just a lot of smoke."

Nanticoke Deputy Fire Chief Tom Sadowski said much of the fire was hidden in the walls of the home due to the construction of the property. He said crews almost immediately triggered a third-alarm, which dispatched fire companies from surrounding towns to assist.

"Being that it was daytime, we were at a premium for volunteers, so we went to a third alarm quickly to get more manpower," Sadowski said.

The twin girls who live at the home, Jessica and Nicole Delos Santos, were in class at Greater Nanticoke Area High School when the fire broke out. School officials, including Superintendent Anthony Perrone and Principal John Gorham, accompanied them to the scene of the fire to meet their mother.

Their father, Eduardo Delos Santos, arrived on the scene in his uniform from the Brink's armored car company. A co-worker, who drove him to the fire scene, sat in an idling armored car down the street.

The family is being assisted by the American Red Cross and staying with relatives in Wilkes-Barre.

Robins said she and other friends will organize a clothing drive and open a fire fund at a local bank Wednesday.

"It was a tragedy. So much was lost," Robins said. "They are a very hard-working family. Unfortunately, they are going to have to work even harder to gain everything back."

5/15/2013

2 dogs saved, but fire badly damages Nanticoke house

Fire tore through the roof and windows on the second floor and attic of the home.

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Two dogs were saved from a West Broad Street house that was heavily damaged by a fire Tuesday morning.

Firefighters from Nanticoke, Hanover Township, Ashley, Sugar Notch, Plymouth, Newport Township and Edwardsville responded to 186 W. Broad St. at about 9 a.m.

Flames ripped through the roof and windows on the second floor and attic. Adjacent homes at 184 and 188 W. Broad St. were evacuated.

Officer Joseph Kosch said no one was home when he ran onto the porch and banged on the door. Kosch said he was able to open the door and remove two dogs that were "ready to get out," he said.

Luzerne County property records list the homeowners as Robin and Eduardo Delos Santos. Their two daughters were at school at Greater Nanticoke Area High School at the time of the fire.

A neighbor said firefighters removed an urn from the burning house and gave it to one of the daughters, who had been released from school.

Firefighters used two aerial ladder trucks to reach the flames on the upper floors of the wood-frame house. Most of the fire damage was to the front of the house.

There were no reported injuries.
A state police deputy fire marshal is investigating the cause.

5/14/2013

Fallen prison guard honored in Harrisburg

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The Pennsylvania House of Representatives on Monday honored the life of Eric Williams, a federal corrections guard from Nanticoke who was killed by an inmate at the United States Penitentiary in Canaan Township in February.

Williams' parents, Donald and Jean, and his sister, Lauren, were in the House chamber for the vote and received an ovation after they were recognized by Speaker Sam Smith.

House Resolution 177, which was introduced by state Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, received unanimous approval.

"The cowardly act committed upon Eric nearly three months ago robbed his family of a son and brother," Mullery said during his remarks in the House chamber. "It robbed the city of Nanticoke and the 119th District of a dedicated and loyal public servant."

Williams, 34, was killed by an inmate who assaulted him with a homemade weapon. The attack happened as Williams was preparing to lock inmates in their cells for a nightly head count. A federal judge has identified Jessie Con-Ui, a gang member and convicted murderer from Arizona, as the suspect in Williams' death. No charges have been filed in his death at this time.

Con-Ui was one of seven people charged in 2003 in connection with a drug distribution ring in Arizona. He was sentenced in June 2005 to 11 years, three months in prison for his role that ring.

Mullery lamented the loss of one of his constituents.

"When we lose someone in Nanticoke, it's not just a name. It's someone we routinely see at St. Faustina's Parish on Sunday, someone we are not surprised to see at a Trojan game or someone we see at Weis Markets. It's somebody we know and care for."

Mullery described Williams as a kind person with a great sense of humor. Williams, an avid outdoorsman, had bought a cottage on Lilly Lake and dreamed of refurbishing it.

"He was able to complete the interior renovation, but was taken from us before he could complete the job," Mullery said. In his honor and as a tribute to him, Mullery said Eric's family will complete the renovation.

5/11/2013

GNA board member: 'I didn't lie to anybody' about renovation money

Ryan Klubeck - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board listened intently Thursday as Jeff Kozlofski responded to allegations that he and fellow board member Cindy Donlin lied to the board about spending public money on a brick sign dedicated to longtime Superintendent Anthony Perrone.

The district honored Perrone in 2011 by naming an area campus after him and changing its sign accordingly.

According to Kozlofski, the board agreed to pay a series of bills in November 2011 by an 8-0 vote. Among them was the bill for metallic arts, which covered the renovation.

"I have been on the board for 16 years now, and I was always led to believe that a majority vote was needed (to pay any bill)," Kozlofski said.

Kozlofski and Donlin were part of the committee in charge of the program to honor Perrone. At the time, they conferred with business manager Albert Melone, who confirmed that there were funds available for the project.

Some board members said they did not know the source of the money, and others believed it came from private donations.

"Not once at any time during the committee meetings were donations for the sign discussed," Kozlofski said.

Kozlofski added that if board president Ryan Verazin had been more involved with the program, he would have known that donations did not fund the sign.

"The problem is we thought (the money) was private," board member Tony Prushinski responded. "We were told it was private by you and Mrs. Donlin."

Kozlofski was audibly surprised by Prushinski's comment, but he did not address it. Donlin was absent from the meeting.

Verazin said that Kozlofski told him the same over the phone.

"It's not about the sign. It's not about the money. It's about us asking questions and not being told things," Verazin said.

The board will hold its next meeting June 20.

5/10/2013

GNA's preliminary budget holds line on taxes

Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area Board of Directors has adopted the preliminary school district budget for the fiscal year 2013-14.

The real estate tax rate will remain at 10.177 mills on each \$1,000 of assessed real estate valuation of properties located within the GNA school district's limits. The district is comprised of Nanticoke City and the townships of Plymouth, Newport and Conyngham.

The board voted 7-1 not to increase the tax rate. Jeff Kozlofski was the only board member who voted for an increase; Secretary Cindy Donlin was not in attendance for the meeting.

The final budget will be voted on in June.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone reported that attendance in all of the GNA schools was up. The attendance level is now more than 90 percent, he said.

The board has accepted the resignations of Christine Osmanski, Lori Ditzler, Barbara Paganucci and Jennifer Ruchinski.

The high school and middle school Life Skills classes will attend the following community-based instruction: Luzerne Intermediate Unit field day at Wyoming Valley West Stadium on May 23 and Luzerne County Transportation Authority bus instruction, followed by a bus ride to the Farmers Market on Public Square, Wilkes-Barre, on May 28 and 29.

5/9/2013

Map's adds live music

Citizens Voice

Map's Restaurant in Nanticoke will celebrate its sixth year in business with some new additions, said chef and owner Tosha Hardesty. The restaurant will introduce live, monthly entertainment in the banquet room, with a special bar menu and drink specials for the no-cover shows. The first show takes place May 17 from 7:30-10:30 p.m. featuring Millennium. The Jeanne Zano Band will perform June 1 from 8:30-10:30 p.m. In addition to the specials, the regular menu will also be available, Hardesty added. She is also expanding the restaurant's wine collection, providing more than 40 varieties for patrons to choose. The restaurant will host a Mother's Day buffet from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Sunday. For information and menus, visit mapsrestaurant.net, Map's Restaurant on Facebook, or call 570-258-0140.

5/3/2013

LCCC dorms planned for Nanticoke sites

Plans for potential dorms for Luzerne County Community College at the 400 Club and Ellis building parcels were recently discussed at a meeting between the city and a private developer, it was announced at council's meeting Wednesday night.

The plans include making a zoning change along with height variances. The developer has informed the city that it would need to offer tax incentives as well as fee waivers in order to make the project feasible.

In return, the developer is willing to commit to a 25-year student housing agreement.

Also, City Engineer Daryl Pawlush said the CVS demolition project is moving along "slowly, but steadily." Pawlush said "\$32,000 is being withheld until the project is totally completed."

In other matters:

* Council has approved the appointment of Donna Wall as chief administrative officer for the non-uniform pension plan. City Manager and Finance Director Pam Heard said there is a pension board that makes all decisions, as well as a regular audit of the non-union pension plan.

Heard said the city needs "someone to sign the paperwork," which will be one of Wall's duties.

* The deadline to register for the citywide yard sale is May 27. The event will be on June 1 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The next meeting will be on May 15 at 7 p.m.

4/29/2013

NFL players team up for good cause

Celebrity basketball game filled Nanticoke Area gym with goodwill and cheers in an effort to help MDA.

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Before they arrived at Nanticoke High School, Will Johnson had never participated in a charity basketball game while Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie played in plenty.

But whether it was the first time or they do this all the time, those NFL players found something extra special about Saturday's Clifton R. Lewis Good Life Foundation Celebrity Basketball Game.

"This is actually my first time," said Johnson, who joined the Pittsburgh Steelers as an undrafted free agent and became their starting fullback as a rookie last season. "I thought it would be good to support something like this. It's all for a good cause."

The Good Life Foundation helps people afflicted with muscular dystrophy -- including former long-time Nanticoke baseball coach John Kashatus and Nick Matthey of Kingston -- live "the good life" by providing assistance.

Much of that help comes in the form of increased mobility (by donations of motorized scooters and easily-accessible transportation) and for some children afflicted with MD, a chance to meet players and attend games of their dreams.

"It's just giving back to the community," said Rodgers-Cromartie, who left the Philadelphia Eagles secondary during the offseason to sign as a free agent with the Denver Broncos. "And when I heard what it was about, you have to say yes."

Rodgers-Cromartie knows all about struggles and dashed dreams in a professional sense.

He played as a cornerback in the nickel package as a rookie first-round draft choice of Arizona in 2008, helping the Cardinals upend the Eagles in the NFC championship game to reach the Super Bowl that season. But Arizona suffered a heartbreaking, last-minute loss to the Steelers, and never made it as far during the following years.

Over the 2011 offseason, Rodgers-Cromartie was traded to the Eagles.

That was the start of an offseason blitz by Philadelphia during a strike-shortened offseason, when the Eagles added free agent Pro Bowlers Vince Young (as a backup quarterback), cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha and defensive linemen Jason Babin and Cullen Jenkins - along with running back

Ronnie Brown and wide receiver Steve Smith.

They called it the "Dream Team" destined to win the Super Bowl. But it turned into a nightmare as the Eagles started 4-8 that season and missed the playoffs with an 8-8 record. It got worse last season, as the Eagles finished 4-12 - after a 3-1 start - while coaches were fired during the season and head coach Andy Reid lost his job afterwards.

"We had a lot of new pieces," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "Expectations were so high. There was a lot of excitement around that 'Dream Team.' You say something like that, it puts a lot of pressure on you, and teams coming in, they played harder against our team.

"We just didn't jell."

Now he's off to a new "Dream Team" in Denver - where Peyton Manning came aboard to lead the Broncos to the AFC's best regular season record before the Baltimore Ravens upended them with a winning last-minute touchdown bomb. So the Broncos brought in some big guns, adding Rodgers-Cromartie, defensive tackle Terrance Knighton from Jacksonville, ex-Eagles linebacker Stewart Bradley and offensive guard Louis Vasquez to fortify their Super Bowl hopes this season.

"You have to be careful when you say 'Dream Team,'" Rodgers-Cromartie said he's learned.

Still, he can't wait to try to turn this dream into reality.

"I'm very excited," he said. "They have a great team. What they have over there is just a blessing and an honor to be part of. I'm looking forward to it."

Johnson fully expects his Steelers to be standing in the way.

The fierce blocker believes this weekend's NFL Draft should help the Steelers rebound from last year's 8-8 finish and get them back to their perennial position of postseason contenders. Especially after Pittsburgh picked up more offensive weapons by selecting running back Le'Veon Bell and wide receivers Markus Wheaton and Justin Brown along with their first pick - linebacker Jarvis Jones.

"I'm very impressed with our draft choices," Johnson said. "I'm excited for what this season brings."

For one night at the Nanticoke Area gym, though, Johnson and Rodgers-Cromartie seemed delighted to bring joy to those less fortunate.

"It's all about giving back," Rodgers-Cromartie said, "and remembering where you came from."

4/27/2013

Pros visit Nanticoke for good cause

Evan Korn - Citizens Voice

It is not everyday that a pair of professional athletes make their way to Nanticoke.

Denver Broncos cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie and slam dunk specialist Gary Smith spoke Friday afternoon at Nanticoke Area High School, preaching social responsibility and fielding questions from students.

Rodgers-Cromartie and Smith are in Nanticoke on behalf of the Clifton R. Lewis Good Life Foundation, which raises money for those afflicted with muscular dystrophy. Lewis, a 1999 graduate of Nanticoke Area, was diagnosed with Limb-girdle muscular dystrophy in 2006 and established his foundation four years later.

Lewis' charity is hosting its third annual celebrity Bbasketball game tonight in the high school's gymnasium. Rodgers-Cromartie, Smith and a plethora of special guests will be attendance.

"We're ready to rock and roll. We're ready to go," Lewis said. "We have some great athletes coming in, 13 driving or flying in for the event. It's going to be just a phenomenal time."

Smith told the students about his difficult childhood in a rough-and-tumble area of Phoenix.

"I was a little bit more focused on my social life," Smith said during his speech.

He proceeded to talk about an incident when he was shot in the back while home in Phoenix on winter break during his freshman year at Central Lakes College (Minn.).

"You definitely want to give the crowd a certain type of emotion that they can identify with," Smith said. "For me, that was tapping into my social life and keeping it authentic and explaining to them my trials and tribulations while at the same time delivering a positive message."

Rodgers-Cromartie detailed his unlikely path to the NFL. Only one school, Tennessee State, offered him a scholarship, and he wound being a first-round pick (16th overall) of the Arizona Cardinals in the 2008 NFL Draft.

A question and answer session, including some playful trash talk from the students, followed the speeches. At one point, a group of students challenged Smith to a basketball game. Smith accepted the challenge, even as the numbers increased to five against one.

Said a grinning Smith: "If they show up (Saturday evening) and show their faces, I'll be ready to play."

4/26/2013

Nanticoke gets DEP recycling grant

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke has received a \$11,144 state Department of Environmental Protection recycling grant, state Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, announced Thursday.

The grant is based on performance and population: last year the city recycled 1,055.1 tons of material. The money is to help continue and expand the recycling program.

"I congratulate Nanticoke for having such a successful recycling program," Mullery said. "This grant program provides an incentive for municipalities to continue their good work, and keep Pennsylvania a leader in recycling, which helps our environment and our economy."

4/23/2013

Nanticoke authority head's firing upheld

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Nanticoke Housing Authority's former executive director alleged politics spurred the authority board's decision to fire her and hire former Luzerne County Chief Clerk Doug Pape in her place.

But the board indicated Jean Ditzler's termination stemmed from gross negligence and conduct unbecoming a public official - including buying makeup and other items for herself with the authority's credit card, using the authority's vehicle for personal purposes and letting the board's insurance coverage lapse.

Ditzler appealed her Jan. 20, 2012 firing to the state Civil Service Commission, alleging she was discriminated against for political reasons - that her termination immediately followed Pape losing his Luzerne County job on Jan. 2, 2012.

In a detailed 66-page ruling, the commission dismissed Ditzler's appeal and sustained the authority's decision to remove her as executive director. Ditzler declined comment because she said the matter is in litigation. Her attorney, Kimberly Borland, could not be reached.

Housing Authority Solicitor Vito DeLuca also stayed mum on the ruling.

He said no charges have been filed against Ditzler. The authority asked the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office to investigate, and even had a thorough forensic audit done, but hasn't heard anything lately, DeLuca said.

District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis did not respond to messages left for comment.

Ditzler had been on the board of the Nanticoke Housing Authority, which is responsible for six high-rise apartment buildings in the city, for several years when its director Perry Clay resigned in July 2007. The board put Ditzler in first as interim director, then permanently on Nov. 18, 2010 at a salary of \$78,000.

According to the Civil Service Commission ruling:

Ditzler regularly charged personal items including makeup and face cream from QVC on the authority's credit card. When questioned by DeLuca about the purchases during a board executive session, Ditzler denied making them until he produced credit card statements. Ditzler also used the card to buy restaurant food, including \$100 worth of shrimp for a vendor, but "asserted that the purchases were appropriate."

She did pay the authority back for the QVC purchases.

Ditzler attended a meeting of the Pennsylvania Society in New York City on Dec. 11, 2010, and charged \$635.47 to the authority credit card for a room at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The nonprofit Pennsylvania Society lists on its website that its mission is to "honor achievement, to reward excellence, to promote goodwill and understanding and to celebrate service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to humanity in general." Despite skepticism that the trip qualified as a legitimate authority expense, the board reimbursed Ditzler. But when she went on the same trip in December 2011, Ditzler had to pay the authority back for her stay at the Grand Hyatt hotel in New York.

In January 2011, Ditzler had one of the Nanticoke Housing Authority maintenance employees drive her to Harrisburg in an authority vehicle to attend the swearing-in of a state senator, who is not named in the ruling. Ditzler continued to use the vehicle to take friends and relatives for medical appointments and go out for meals.

Hearings were held on May 3 and May 23, 2012 in Harrisburg. In its March 31 ruling upholding the authority's decision, the civil service commission stated that Ditzler "failed to establish that her removal was in any way connected with a desire to provide a position for Pape."

4/18/2013

Water main, paving work set for Nanticoke streets

Times Leader

The Pennsylvania-American Water Co. will start water main work and paving of the several city streets within the next few months, it was announced at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

The locations affected are as follows: West Grand from Hanover to Line, Line Street from West Union to Grand, Prospect from East Main to Broad, East Broad from Prospect to Walnut, Christian from State to Green, East Broad from Christian to Chestnut, and Chestnut from State to Alley.

City officials said parties have contacted the city interested in constructing housing for students at Luzerne County Community College. The possible locations are the 400 Club and Ellis building parcels. A zoning change, as well as height variances would be required in order to fulfill the plans.

Council approved the installation of two "no parking" and two "tow away" signs on Main and Lower Broadway streets. City Manager/ Finance Director Pam Heard said Police Chief William Shultz asked for the signs because residents are parking too close to the corner, causing problems for emergency vehicles.

In other matters, it was announced:

* Hanover Fire Co. No. 4 is having a ham-and-eggs breakfast 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 28 at the Transfiguration Church Hall.

* A fundraising event for the Clifton R. Lewis Good Life Foundation will be held at the High School at 6:30 p.m. April 27. NFL star Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie will be among those attending the event.

4/13/2013

Directors: Decisions were made without us

Certain members claim they had no input on sign payment, camera placement.

Times Leader

Seven out of the nine directors of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board apparently believed that a sign displaying the name of Superintendent Anthony Perrone at the school's parking lot entrance had been paid for through private donations. Only two members of the board, Cindy Donlin and Jeff Kozlofski, seemingly had knowledge that the sign, which cost \$4,346.72, actually had come from the school board's general funds, according to accusations traded during Thursday's school board meeting. The directors who claim they had been kept in the dark until recently pressed for information at the meeting. The question of how the sign was paid for had been raised last week to board President Ryan Verazin. He questioned the head of the GNA school grounds, Frank Grevera, who stated that he was told that the money had come from the general funds, Verazin said. Verazin apologized to anyone who he had unknowingly given false information to regarding the sign. Board member Tony Prushinski said that he "would have personally gone out to solicit donations" for the sign if he had known that the funds were coming from the taxpayers (through the general funds). In another disputed matter, during the previous wrestling season, Donlin and Kozlofski purportedly had a camera installed in the wrestling room without notifying the rest of the board members. Donlin stated that she was concerned due to some alleged incidents in the room. An assistant coach found the camera, and it was removed the next day. Board member Frank Shepanski Jr. declared that Donlin and Kozlofski should resign from the board. The board meets next at 7 p.m. on May 9.

4/12/2013

Nanticoke school sign focus of members' ire

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Anthony Perrone sat quietly between two school board members as they barked and bickered angrily over a sign bearing his name. Perrone, the longtime superintendent of the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, was honored in 2011 when the district named the entire school campus after him and renovated a large brick sign to reflect the change. But the issue of how it was paid for exploded at the school board meeting Thursday. Board President Ryan Verazin accused his fellow members Cindy Donlin and Jeff Kozlofski of using public funds to pay for the sign and lying about it to the rest of the board. Kozlofski was board president last year. Verazin also identified Donlin as the one who unilaterally, and without the rest of the board's knowledge, ordered cameras installed in the high school wrestling room in December, which led to a police investigation that eventually found no wrongdoing. School officials had refused to name the individual who gave the command. "I think this board has lacked some serious transparency the last couple of years," Verazin said. Saying he intended "no disrespect" to Perrone, the board president produced an invoice to a company in Spokane, Wash., for \$4,346.72, paid from the district's general fund for repairs and renovations to the sign. Perrone - seated between Verazin and Donlin at the table - has worked for the last decade without receiving any salary or benefits, saving the district more than \$1 million. Donlin, who left quickly after the meeting adjourned, and Kozlofski denied lying about where the funds came from, saying they never asked. "The purpose of this board is for nine members to make decisions," board member Tony Prushinski said. "Nine." Frank Shepanski called the unilateral moves by Donlin and Kozlofski "asinine" and asked the two members to resign. Donlin and Kozlofski shot back, questioning the timing of allegations and accusing their accusers of using the issues as political weapons. The primary election for school boards is May 21, and Shepanski, Donlin and Kozlofski are all up for re-election, along with Robert Raineri and Gary Smith. Verazin said he was airing the evidence at the meeting because he discovered it this week. While the argument raged, Perrone quietly stood up and walked out of the room, not to return for the remainder of the meeting.

3/31/2013

GNA teacher vying for space trip

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Greater Nanticoke Area High School science teacher Anthony Fleury is trying to win an online contest that will send the winner on a trip into outer space, 64 miles above the Earth. Fleury is currently sitting in 30th place out of nearly 50,000 contest entrants.

Greater Nanticoke Area High School science teacher Anthony Fleury is trying to win an online contest that will send the winner on a trip into outer space, 64 miles above the Earth. Fleury is currently sitting in 30th place out of nearly 50,000 contest entrants.

It's probably fair to say that every student at one point has a teacher they would like to blast into outer space.

Some students in the Greater Nanticoke Area High School might actually get to do it.

Anthony Fleury, science teacher and space exploration geek, is currently sitting in 30th place out of nearly 50,000 in an online contest that could send someone 64 miles above the Earth.

"If I could bring that experience back into the classroom, how amazing would that be?" he said. "A part of all my students will get the chance to see

that, to feel that, to know what it's like."

Sponsored by Axe - a company better known for body spray and provocative commercials - and a private space travel firm, the top two vote getters from participating countries will win a trip to space camp in Orlando. A panel of "space experts" will then select those "worthy of a space trip," according to the rules of the contest.

The approximate retail value of a commercial space flight, according to Axe, is \$86,000. The company also gives the winner a \$25,000 stipend to help pay the taxes on the prize.

Fleury's fiancée and fellow Greater Area Nanticoke High School science teacher Amanda Schraeder said the possibility of her future husband leaving the Earth was both scary and exciting, but she's confident in the safety and professionalism of the mission because the couple has met the pilot ("very, very experienced") and has been to the floor where the firm is building the spacecraft.

Fleury, a 43-year-old Northumberland native, is currently well behind the two leaders, both of whom are minor celebrities from Internet videos with large followings, at least compared to a science teacher from small-town Pennsylvania.

But while the odds of winning the trip may seem as likely as getting hit by a meteor, the science instructor has already left the Earth's field of gravity once in his life.

Fleury often participates in teacher workshops and camps with NASA and private space contractors, one of which flew him and fellow educators high enough to experience weightlessness several times before returning to Earth.

On that flight, the teacher brought experiments - a pendulum and a bouncing spring - to test the physical difference in zero gravity and then shared that data with his students. As a more worldly example, he often uses his beat-up Pontiac Sunfire and its frequent breakdowns to teach physics.

"I really consider myself a teacher who can bring all of my experiences into the classroom, no matter how small," Fleury said.

To give his students another whiff of the edges of the atmosphere, one of his classes launched a weather balloon from Nanticoke that climbed 90,000 feet, snapping aerial photographs of the Chesapeake Bay and Long Island, before landing on a guy's porch in New Jersey. Fleury was able to recover the payload by placing a cellphone into the balloon and tracking it on a website.

Now his pupils are taking control, spreading the word by mouth and online to push to the top of the leader board a teacher who lives, breathes and sleeps space travel.

"It's just in his being," said Deanna Dinelli, a 17-year-old senior and student of Fleury's. "It's everything he does."

To vote for Anthony Fleury, visit https://www2.axeapollo.com/en_US before April 27.

3/30/2013

Nanticoke Area teacher cleared of wrongdoing

Peter Cameron - Citizens Voice

A male teacher at Greater Nanticoke Area High School who ordered three female students to change clothes in a closet that may have been visible to the mixed-gender class has been cleared of any criminal wrongdoing, Nanticoke Police Chief Bill Shultz said.

"The bottom line is, there was no contact or anything like that," Shultz said.

The teacher, whom police and school officials are refusing to name, was put on paid leave during the investigation. Solicitor Vito DeLuca said the district suspends employees whenever there is a question of student safety. He refused to comment on the situation specifically, including when the teacher will return to work or if he will face punishment from the district.

The incident occurred two weeks ago when the female students were in consumer science class and needed to use the clothing they were wearing for a sewing project, Shultz said.

3/30/2013

School News

Citizens Voice

[Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) is conducting kindergarten registration for the 2013-14 school term from 9 to 11 a.m. and 12:30 to 2 p.m. April 2-4 at K.M. Smith Elementary School in Sheatown. The child must be present so various screenings can be completed. To be eligible for kindergarten, a child must be 5 on or before Sept. 1, 2013. Parents must bring the child's birth certificate and two proofs of residency and provide health and immunization records. If there are legal documents, (custody/foster forms) a copy should be provided. If an access card applies to the child, bring it with all other necessary information. The parent/guardian also must provide a picture identification the day of registration. Registration for new first grade students will also be accepted. To be eligible for first grade, a child must be 6 on or before Sept. 1, 2013. The same information listed above must be provided.

3/28/2013

State lieutenant governor tours local development project sites

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The red brick Susquehanna Coal Company building stood on the hill above the intersection of Main and Market streets for years, a symbol first of the town's industrial strength and then its decay.

The building sat dormant for so long that a tree grew out of its side as the once vibrant town of Nanticoke shriveled, along with the rest of the region, from a vibrant town of 35,000 in the boom days of coal mid-century to a sleepier community of 10,000.

On Wednesday, as part of a three-day swing through the northeastern part of the state, Lt. Gov. Jim Cawley toured the Joseph A. Paglianite

Culinary Arts Institute, a Luzerne County Community College facility opened in 2011 that now sits on the site of the old coal company building. Nearly a third of the funds for the \$7.6 million facility were provided by grants from the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

Cawley said the administration wanted to see firsthand where the state's money is going.

"It's very important for us to make sure that we're getting value for every dollar that we invest," he said.

Guided by deans from the college and state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, the lieutenant governor, a Republican, also explored the site of what will be a \$4 million Geisinger Health Center office and lab in downtown Nanticoke as well as the college's Health Sciences Center, where future nurses and dental hygienists learn their trade.

"It's really been the foundation of what we hoped would be the turn-around of downtown Nanticoke," Yudichak said of the new buildings in Nanticoke.

With more than 8,000 workers, the college is now the largest employer in the town, Yudichak said.

The politicians and an entourage of college officials and media walked through classrooms lined with dental chairs and met a high-tech patient simulator, which lies open-mouthed in a hospital bed and can moan, sweat and change colors. The \$75,000 mannequin is controlled from an adjacent room by a "wizard," which gives it various symptoms but apparently does nothing about the dummy's unkempt head of thick hair.

"There's no hairstylist here?" Yudichak asked.

"Obviously John and I couldn't survive in this environment," Cawley joked, referring to their perfectly coifed hairdos.

In the culinary institute, the group zigzagged around flaming grills and aspiring chefs and were tempted in the pastry kitchen by students applying icing to cakes.

The group ended the downtown Nanticoke tour with a visit to the institute's television studio and watched a short "sizzle reel," a preview of the college's own cooking show.

3/25/2013

Nanticoke's application for \$250K in gaming funds denied

Anthony Melf - Citizens Voice

The Commonwealth Financing Authority denied the city's application for \$250,000 in gaming funds toward the Nanticoke Streetscape Plan, a project focused on downtown improvements including new sidewalks, street lights, shrubbery and additional parking.

When the independent state agency released its list awarding \$12.5 million toward 37 projects in Luzerne County, Nanticoke was notably missing as a recipient.

City Manager Pamela Heard said although the city was not fortunate enough to receive funds, the Nanticoke Streetscape Plan is moving forward in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the help of a federal earmark. She said the plan is undergoing final design and should be going out to bid within the next couple of months.

Heard also noted other projects that have received federal funding including money from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to demolish two houses on Arch Street and a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to acquire bulletproof vests for city police officers. She said she plans to put in another application for gaming funds next year.

Duda resigns from municipal authority

Council President Stephen Duda resigned as chairman and member of the municipal authority effective immediately.

Duda said there's a lot going on in the city and it's difficult to be involved in both the council and the board. He said he wanted to focus his energy on what the people elected him to do as council president.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty is responsible to appoint Duda's replacement with council's approval in accordance with the home-rule charter, while the board will elect a new chairman.

New full-time police officer

Dougherty hired Joseph Buchalski as a full-time police officer for the city as well as hired three part-time police officers: Mark Icker, Justin St. Clair and Michael Derwin.

Also, Sgt. Michael Roke was promoted to lieutenant and Sgt. Joseph Guydosh was promoted to detective sergeant.

3/24/2013

Red alert: Several NEPA cities struggle with debt

Jim Lockwood - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke webdesign note: This article taken from a full article in Citizens Voice Newspaper of 3/24/2013

Nanticoke

Nanticoke has \$2.6 million in city debt. An annual budget of \$4.9 million includes \$528,000 in debt service, or nearly 11 percent of the budget. Financial problems for Nanticoke began in 2004 when the city borrowed money simply to pay operating expenses.

The city was already taxing property owners at the highest rate allowed by law.

"When you're borrowing just to keep up operations, you're on the road to being distressed," Boyle said.

Outstanding debt once defined the city, which the state Department of Community and Economic Development declared financially distressed under state Act 47 in May 2006.

A recovery plan helped Nanticoke improve its financial outlook to where it no longer borrows money to pay day-to-day expenses. It's one reason

why the city is expected to be released from distressed status by next year.

"Nanticoke made substantial progress and should be let out of Act 47 by 2014," Boyle said. ""We will do an amendment (to the recovery plan) this year specifically showing how the city has made the progress they needed to."

This year, Nanticoke has a \$4.9 million general fund budget, with principle and interest payments toward debt accounting for \$528,337. The city owes \$2.6 million through 2019, when its final annual debt payment will be only \$238,638.

According to Pam Heard, city manager, Nanticoke's problems with debt began when it borrowed money to complete various sewer and road repairs, and then to pay "operating expenses incurred during the periods prior to the city going to Act 47."

"All of our debt is old debt. It has rolled over so many times," Heard said.

Although its finances are improving, Nanticoke's debt obligation could become prolonged if officials move forward with much-needed capital projects, for which the city could borrow money in the future.

"They were not able to do capital projects because they were distressed financially," Boyle said.

Otherwise, the city would have to complete projects such as roadwork with state and federal grants that require a local match.

"It is very difficult to pull the funds from interest," Boyle said. "It is difficult for a municipality the size of Nanticoke to have money laying around to pay for major road projects."

3/23/2013

Newport ambulance head: Nanticoke trying to 'bully us out'

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The president of the Newport Township ambulance service claims the medic company in neighboring Nanticoke is trying to force it out of business. "I think they are trying to bully us out and take over our territory. That's what I think," Harold DeStefano, president of the Newport Township Firemen's Community Ambulance, said Friday.

On paper, the two companies are supposed to be allies in responding to medical emergencies in the adjoining municipalities. But an ongoing internal feud reached a peak this week, as members of the Nanticoke Community Ambulance filed a lawsuit against the Newport ambulance company.

The departments have a contract in which Newport's basic life support ambulance company must reimburse Nanticoke's department each time Nanticoke's paramedic unit is utilized for a Newport emergency call. Nanticoke is entitled to receive 40 percent of the total reimbursement of a call. DeStefano does not dispute that his department owes Nanticoke money, but says it is nowhere near the \$30,000 claimed in the suit.

"We're going to always owe them money. It's like the electric company: even though you paid the bill for the money, you still owe," DeStefano said.

Nanticoke officials might not be taking into account that Newport does not get paid for every call, particularly when the patient does not have insurance.

"If we get paid - if we get paid for it - they are entitled to 40 percent. Sometimes we don't get paid. In the contract, it says if we don't get paid, they don't get paid," DeStefano said.

Nanticoke's lawsuit claims it has not received a reimbursement from Newport since June 2011.

Newport temporarily removed Nanticoke as its first-due paramedic responder in late January because of the feud, instead opting to use Berwick's Medic 95, which has an ambulance based farther away in Shickshinny. Newport Township commissioners quickly changed the protocol back to the way it was after residents complained.

DeStefano said the deal with Berwick would have been better because a paramedic would have been stationed in the Newport ambulance headquarters. The transition had not happened by the time officials returned Nanticoke as the first-due medic, he said.

"Nanticoke was missing calls. They weren't getting money. And they started screaming," DeStefano said.

DeStefano denied claims in the lawsuit that his department refused to let Nanticoke officials review its financial reports.

Efforts to reach Bernard Noreika, president of Nanticoke ambulance, were unsuccessful on Friday.

DeStefano said his company and Nanticoke ambulance officials had bickered about overdue money in the past. They then reached a payment agreement, he said. Soon after the agreement, Nanticoke immediately put another ambulance in service. That hurt Newport financially because it significantly cut down on the amount of times Newport was called into Nanticoke for basic life support calls, he said.

"It's probably better to go through the courts this time than what happened last time," DeStefano said.

3/22/2013

\$3.47M in tax revenue headed to municipalities, schools

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About \$3.47 million is finally where it belongs.

Municipalities and school districts that were still missing all their earned income tax revenue from the first half of 2012 should be made whole by today, said John DeRemer, a vice president at tax collection company H.A. Berkheimer.

Berkheimer has been in charge of distributing that money to the correct towns and schools in Luzerne County after the old collector, The Central Tax Bureau of Pennsylvania, better known as Centax or the Don Wilkinson Agency, went out of business.M

Money that was supposed to be distributed months ago was sitting in an account until a forensic accounting company determined where it was supposed to go. Now, Berkheimer can distribute the funds - \$3.47 million, according to a document provided by Pamela Heard, secretary for the Luzerne County Tax Collection Committee.

Money due to municipalities ranges from about \$598,000 in Wilkes-Barre to about \$530 for New Columbus Borough. Hazleton will receive about \$157,000, Kingston will receive about \$106,000 and **Nanticoke will receive about \$96,000**. In total, \$1.96 million is going to municipalities in the county.

The amounts back to school districts range from about \$640,000 for Hazleton Area to about \$18,000 for Northwest Area. The Wilkes-Barre Area school district will receive about \$198,000, Wyoming Valley West will receive about \$137,000, Crestwood will get about \$113,000 and Dallas will get about \$108,000. In total, \$1.50 million is headed to school districts.

The law firm appointed to handle Centax's accounts is attempting to wind down the company's business, and filed a motion earlier this month asking a judge to approve his plans.

The Luzerne County TCC money was not addressed in the order because the committee instructed Centax to put its money in a separate account, said solicitor Jeffrey Malak, which proved to be a wise decision because when Centax unraveled, it couldn't touch the money from Luzerne County. Centax's new contract with Berkheimer does not include a separate account for its money, but Malak said Berkheimer seems to work better than Centax and has other protections in place.

DeRemer said the separate account delayed disbursement of funds because it made the task more complicated.

With municipal and school district money on the way out, Berkheimer is now auditing individual tax refunds from 2011 processed by Centax. Some people got refunds they weren't supposed to get, and others may not have received their refunds. He asked that people give the company time to complete the work, which could take until at least July.

3/22/2013

Nanticoke ambulance company files lawsuit

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The ambulance wars continue in Nanticoke and Newport Township.

Weeks after it appeared the two sides mended a highly publicized breakup, Nanticoke Community Ambulance on Thursday filed a lawsuit against Newport Township Firemen's Community Ambulance.

Nanticoke's ambulance officials say the neighboring ambulance unit in Newport owes them more than \$30,000.

The suit, filed in Luzerne County Court, says the sides have a contract in which Newport's basic life support ambulance company must reimburse Nanticoke's department each time Nanticoke's paramedic unit is utilized for a Newport emergency call.

Nanticoke is entitled to receive 40 percent of the total reimbursement of a call, the suit says.

Officials with the Newport Township Firemen's Community Ambulance have refused to reimburse Nanticoke for services since June 21, 2011 and have refused Nanticoke's attempts to view the organization's financial records, the suit says.

Nanticoke Community Ambulance is suing for breach of contract and unjust enrichment, claiming Newport continues to use Nanticoke's paramedic services, continues to collect fees for calls, but has failed to provide Nanticoke with its reimbursements.

The two ambulance companies, both of which are nonprofits not operated by the municipalities they serve, have been at odds recently.

Newport temporarily removed Nanticoke as its first-due paramedic responder in late January because of the feud, instead opting to use an ambulance based farther away in Shickshinny. Nanticoke ambulance officials say they were never notified of the change, and were only alerted to it during a tense emergency call on Jan. 25 when a 3-year-old girl suffered a seizure at a Newport Township day care. Despite the fact Nanticoke had a paramedic crew ready less than two miles away, the first unit was dispatched from Shickshinny, about 10 miles away. When that ambulance was forced to stop for another crash, Hanover Township medics were the second called to take the girl to the hospital.

Newport Township commissioners quickly changed the protocol back to the way it was after residents complained.

The lawsuit is seeking to recoup reimbursements of more than \$30,000, plus interest.

3/22/2013

Area ambulance groups in legal dispute

Sheena Delazio - Times Leader

Nanticoke Community Ambulance has filed a lawsuit in county court against a neighboring community ambulance, alleging it has refused to pay for paramedic services provided.

The organization filed the suit through its attorney, John Dean, of Wilkes-Barre, against Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance, claiming it is owed more than \$30,000.

The suit says the two entities entered into a contract in June 2007, whereby Nanticoke Community Ambulance would provide services to Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance and that the Nanticoke organization would receive 40 percent of the total reimbursement for the services.

Beginning on June 21, 2011, the suit says, Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance refused to reimburse Nanticoke and to allow it to review financial records.

The suit alleges a breach of contract and unjust enrichment in that the services provided by Nanticoke Community Ambulance are of "marketable value" and that Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance "has used and/or continues to (use) service provided by (Nanticoke).

"It is inequitable to permit (Newport Township Fireman's Community Ambulance) the continued use of the services provided by (Nanticoke Community Ambulance) without having paid for said services," the suit says.

3/21/2013

Nanticoke approves police force appointments

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Mayor Joseph Dougherty has approved the hiring of Joseph Buchalski, of Shickshinny, as a full-time city police officer. In addition, Mark Ickler, of Sterling, Justin St. Clair, of Berwick, and Michael Derwin, of Nanticoke, were hired as reserve police officers. Dougherty also authorized the promotions of two officers: Michael Roke from sergeant to lieutenant, and Joseph Guydosh from sergeant to detective sergeant. The swearing-in ceremonies took place at Wednesday's council meeting.

Council Vice President James Litchkofski thanked the mayor for hiring the officers, and said their presence will help to keep the city safe.

In other matters:

Councilman Stephen Duda announced his resignation from the Municipal Authority effective immediately. Duda expressed his gratitude regarding former Municipal Authority Chairman Hank Marks' recommendation (of Duda) to the authority. Duda will continue to serve as Nanticoke's council president.

The Mill Library is selling Penguins tickets for an April 6 game. The tickets can be ordered at the library.

3/16/2013

GNA teacher: Pride in district is key

Times Leader

During the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting Thursday, Amanda Schraeder, an eighth-grade science teacher in the district, read aloud an essay she wrote for her graduate education class at Misericordia University.

In the essay, Schraeder encourages GNA students to develop and foster a sense of pride in their district.

Schraeder has heard people from outside of the area make demeaning comments regarding both Nanticoke and its school system. Schraeder stated that the among the "biggest issue that my school faces is people in the district constantly putting themselves and their community down."

Schraeder, who has been teaching at GNA for five years, said that the community has a history of hardworking people who feel that "every job is important and necessary to make the community (as a whole)." She concluded by saying the students try "to live up to the examples of the good role models in our school buildings."

In other matters: the board amended the Articles of Agreement, formalizing a school name change from Wilkes-Barre Area Vocational Technical School to Wilkes-Barre Career and Technical Center. Albert B. Melone Co., certified public accountants, has been appointed by the board as the school's business consultants for a three-year contract term from Dec. 1, 2012 to Dec. 1, 2015.

The board also has given approval for the GNA School District to become part of the Virtual Learning Network at an annual membership fee of \$16,750.

The next school board meeting will be held at 7 p.m. April 11.

3/15/2013

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board hears mother's concerns at meeting

bwellok@citizensvoice.com

A mom in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District is upset, saying a teacher called her daughter a name.

Kellie Havey, whose second-grader is in a special needs class, addressed the school board at the end of its meeting Thursday. She said her daughter came home in winter 2012 with three detentions for swearing at a teacher. When Havey asked her daughter what happened, she learned that the teacher called her a "weirdo," she said.

"Kudos to my daughter for standing up for herself," Havey said.

Havey also alleged that a note scheduling an Individualized Education Program meeting went home in her daughter's backpack, instead of through certified mail. She didn't know about the meeting, so she missed the date, and now has to go through a legal process to schedule another one. Havey said she thinks that was done out of spite.

Board President Ryan Verazin said the board's solicitor instructed the board not to publicly comment on the matter because it was a personnel issue and because it involved a special needs student. The board's actions in the issue were limited to asking questions and monitoring the situation, he said.

Havey said she took her concerns to the school board meeting Thursday because she wanted to make them public. Havey asked other parents with similar problems to email her at mkhave3@live.com.

In other news, the board eliminated a proposal to hire a special education aide. The district planned to add a new aide position, but the idea fell through because of uncertainty with the state budget and a teachers contract, Verazin said.

"It's possible next year," he said. "It's always a goal to add personnel; whether or not that happens, that's a whole different ball game."

The board also renewed a contract with the Albert B. Melone Co. as the district's business consultants. The new contract runs from Dec. 1, 2012, to Dec. 1, 2015, and has a base fee of \$75,945 per year.

3/13/2013

Student Standouts

Citizens Voice

Due to budget cuts in education and the arts, senior Trent Gray of the Greater Nanticoke Area School District took matters into his own hands to produce the school musical. To celebrate an iconic figure, Dr. Seuss, Greater Nanticoke Area preformed "Seussical the Musical" March 1-2 at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

Trent has made it his senior project to bring awareness of how much the arts mean in schools. He organized sets, costumes and playbills for the production. Trent also interviewed and recommended a director for the musical.

In addition to the musical, Trent also organized a pre-show which included Seuss based art exhibit, a bake sale, and appearances by performers from "Seussical the Musical."

Trent, a senior at Greater Nanticoke Area, is a member of the Upward Bound program at Wilkes University, a four year member of the Greater Nanticoke Area High School chorus, a member of the jazz band and concert band, he held the roll of Oz in Greater Nanticoke Area's 2011 production of "The Wizard of Oz." He is student council president, a journalist for the school newspaper The Trojan Gazette, and is member of the boys volleyball, swim, and soccer teams.

Trent plans to attend college in the fall to major in music administration and liberal arts.

3/13/13

King's duo recognized

Times Leader

Two King's athletes were honored on Tuesday as Chris Sweeney and **Maggie Gola were named Freedom Conference Player of the Week** for baseball and **softball**, respectively.

Sweeney, a senior, helped lead the Monarchs to a 4-1 record last week, making some history in the process. The Crestwood grad became the first King's player in more than 20 years to hit for the cycle, accomplishing the feat in a 16-5 win over Emerson on March 4.

For the week, Sweeney batted .619 with eight extra-base hits, including three doubles, three triples and two home runs. He also had a 1.333 slugging percentage, seven RBI and seven runs scored.

Gola, meanwhile, hit three home runs to push the Lady Monarchs to a matching 4-1 record on the week. She batted .500 with five extra-base hits and a 1.167 slugging percentage.

A Nanticoke alum, Gola hit two of her three home runs in a 4-2 victory over York College. In a game against Penn State Harrisburg, she added another homer and a three-run double to lead the Lady Monarchs to a 14-0 win.

3/8/2013

Nanticoke residents warned of phone scam

Times Leader

Linda Prushinski, secretary of the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, said during Wednesday's City Council meeting that that someone has been calling residents and asking for donations on behalf of the chamber.

"The South Valley Chamber of Commerce is not soliciting one on one for donations," she said. If anyone is called regarding the matter, he or she should call the police department immediately.

In other matters:

- Council has voted to approve three new bank accounts at M&T Bank. They are: the demolition account, fire truck account and façade grant account. Also, the motion approved one new FNB account: the fire equipment grant.
- Natalie Staron, financial/contact associate of Luzerne County Community College, announced the start of the American Cancer Society's 2013 Relay for Life of South Valley will be held at 10 a.m. June 1 at the college. Formal opening ceremonies begin at noon. The fundraising event will continue through 6 p.m. June 2.

Chacko's Bowling is holding a fundraiser for the event from 3 to 5 p.m. March 16 ; the donation cost is \$20. Another fundraiser will be held on April 20 at the arena. The \$19 donation includes a ticket to the hockey game, hat and meal.

Sponsorship is welcomed and area businesses will be contacted, Staron said. This is the third year that LCCC is hosting a Relay for Life.

The next council meeting will be held 7 p.m. March 20.

3/7/2013

Nanticoke council honors murdered prison guard

Anthony Melf - Citizens Voice

City council paused for a moment of reflection Wednesday in memory of prison guard Eric Williams.

The 34-year-old Nanticoke native was killed recently while on duty by an inmate at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Waymart. Federal and state representatives came to the area to attend Williams' viewing and funeral last week.

"On behalf of the city, we express our appreciation of public safety servants and the City was saddened by the loss of one of our own," city manager Pamela Heard said.

In other business, South Cross Valley representative Natalie Staron announced Luzerne County Community College would host the 2013 Relay for Life, beginning with setup on the track the morning of Saturday, June 1 and closing the following morning. The American Cancer Society sponsors the Relay for Life. This year's goal is to raise \$27,500 in the fight against cancer.

Staron shared the event's overall theme, which is "Welcome to the Jungle," because as she explained, "We are wild for life." There will be two major local fundraisers in support of this year's event. Chacko's will host a bowling event on March 16 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. for \$20 per person and a hockey game at Mohegan Sun Arena on April 20 for \$19 per ticket, which includes a hat and meal. In other business, the South Valley Chamber of Commerce warned local businesses about a former member who they say is soliciting dues door to door under the name "South Valley Chamber." Secretary Linda Prushinski emphasized the organization collects dues via letters in the mail. If someone comes in person looking for money, the individual or business should call the police, she said.

3/7/2013

Map's chef favors seasonal ingredients

Kristen Gaydos - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke native Chef Tosha Hardesty runs the kitchen at Map's Restaurant in her hometown, where dishes and even a banquet room are named for favored customers. One friend and frequent patron, the late Elaine Gregorowicz, once dubbed the restaurant "Nanticoke's best kept secret."

Hardesty discusses the techniques and practices she's honed over 15 years as a chef.

JS: What's your earliest memory involving food?

Hardesty: When we lived in Florida, my mother used to drive a breakfast/lunch truck. I remember being in the truck with her and she gave me an egg to crack and I dropped it on the floor.

JS: How would you describe your cooking style?

Hardesty: American/French, but I like to experiment with all cultures.

JS: Where do you get ideas and inspiration for new dishes, like the duck martini you recently featured?

Hardesty: I try to use things seasonally. I like to go to the farms and pick my own strawberries, blueberries, apples, etc., when they are in season. I take my son with me and we have a good time talking about the fruit, sounds and smells. I think it is important to show your children fresh air and fresh, locally grown food.

As for the duck martini, I thought it would be a cute way to serve duck for people who hesitate to try duck.

JS: What culinary trend do you wish would go away?

Hardesty: I don't think there is a specific trend that needs to go away. I would like more so for those who want to be chefs to take it seriously and realize that it's not like you see on television. You have to work for it. Nothing is handed to you. You have to start at the bottom and work your way up.

JS: What five ingredients should everyone have in their home kitchen?

Hardesty: Salt, pepper, fresh garlic, fresh onion and unsalted butter. Everything should be seasoned - that's why salt and pepper is important. Most good sauces start with garlic, shallots and butter.

JS: Name your most popular dish.

Hardesty: Our most popular items are the mushroom strudel, chicken francaise, haddock a la guz, and the scallops Elaine (named for Gregorowicz). Our newest favorite is John Veston, which is haddock with cheese, spinach, tomatoes and garlic wrapped in a crispy phyllo dough.

JS: Which celebrity chef do you most admire?

Hardesty: Anthony Bourdain. I think he is very real and loves food. I have read several of his books, watched his shows and had the pleasure of meeting him.

JS: What was your biggest kitchen disaster?

Hardesty: This would have to be the time I asked my cousin, Brandon, to shut the fryer off. He pulled the lever to empty the oil rather than the knob to shut it off. Hot oil came flying out. Luckily no one was hurt. Needless to say, he didn't touch the lever again.

JS: Biggest triumph?

Hardesty: Making a four-tier wedding cake by myself, in less than 24 hours, and having it turn out great.

MAP'S RESTAURANT

Location: 15 W. Ridge St., Nanticoke

Hours: Opens Wednesdays-Fridays at 5 p.m. and Saturdays at 4:30 p.m.

Contact: 258-0140, mapsrestaurant.net and Map's Restaurant on Facebook

3/2/2013

Funeral held for Williams

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United States Attorney General Eric Holder came to Nanticoke today to deliver the eulogy for murdered federal corrections officer Eric Williams. Holder praised Williams as a dedicated member of the Department of Justice before reading a letter of condolences from President Barack Obama. "I want to assure you, all members of law enforcement stand with you today and an entire nation mourns with you," Holder said.

Holder vowed that Williams' killer will be brought to justice.

Williams, 34, of Nanticoke, was murdered by an inmate Monday while working at the U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County.

Holder read from a letter written by President Barack Obama:

"Michelle and I were saddened to learn of the passing of your son Eric and we send our heartfelt condolences. As an officer of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Eric dedicated himself to the country and keeping us safe. Our nation is forever indebted to the brave men and women who place

themselves in harm's way to protect their fellow Americans, and we honor Eric for his dedicated service. In the difficult days ahead, may you find solace in your cherished memories of your times together and comfort in the support of family and friends. Please know that you and his fellow officers are in my thoughts and prayers."

Slain guard honored

3/1/2013

His flag-draped casket was displayed on the gym floor of his high school alma mater, as corrections officers from his prison stoically stood at each end to serve as honor guards for their fallen brother.

Hundreds of fellow corrections officers from his penitentiary and across the nation led the chain of mourners that flowed out of the Greater Nanticoke Area gymnasium on Friday and snaked around the school's parking.

They came to pay their respects to murdered Correctional Officer Eric Williams, who was savagely attacked by an inmate Monday while working at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County.

The public viewing was an awe-inspiring and fitting tribute to the 34-year-old Nanticoke man, said Todd Hrivnak, 35, Williams' best friend since childhood.

"Right now, he's probably laughing and smiling down on us. He knows this is his show - having everyone together," said Hrivnak, a correctional officer for Luzerne County. "It's overwhelming. They said this was going to be big. I didn't expect this big."

Hrivnak said it continues to be difficult to grasp that a lifelong friendship ended in a flash.

"It's amazing because usually you don't get to be that close with somebody for so long," he said, noting Williams was the godfather of his 8-year-old daughter.

Like nearly every one of the hundreds of correctional officers in attendance, Hrivnak wore a black piece of tape over the embroidered badge on his prison shirt, a sign of the prison community's collective mourning.

Among those who traveled to the area to pay respects to Williams' family were U.S. Bureau of Prisons Director Charles Samuels Jr. and U.S. Marshals Service Director Stacia Hylton, both based in Washington, D.C.

"Any time we lose an officer, one of the greatest respects we can show is to show up to honor them," said Hylton, who was accompanied by U.S. Marshal for the Middle District Martin Pane. "It's good to see such community support. It's heart-wrenching to see the loss the family has to experience."

With so many mourners, people waited nearly two hours to greet Williams' family, with many standing in line in frigid temperatures before even getting into the school. Once inside, mourners passed by floral arrays and photo collages of Williams, depicting him from childhood to his adult years.

"May the memory of our fallen brother be eternal," said a placard attached to flowers sent by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

Another floral arrangement, shaped like a police badge, was sent by the Jefferson Township Police Department, where Williams worked before becoming a correctional officer in September 2011.

"Your courageous service to the people of Jefferson Township will never be forgotten," read an attached card.

Other U.S. Department of Justice mementos, including an encased, folded U.S. flag, sat on a table next to Williams' closed casket.

At the other end of the gymnasium floor stood Williams' parents, Donald and Jean, and his three siblings, Mark, Kyle and Lauren, who greeted the endless stream of mourners.

It was a long, sad day for the close-knit family. Today will be another, as Williams is laid to rest following a Funeral Mass.

Williams was beaten and stabbed repeatedly at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County on Monday night as he was preparing to lock inmates in their cells for a nightly head count. Union officials say Williams - equipped with only a radio, keys and handcuffs - was working alone in a unit housing about 130 inmates when he was attacked by an inmate. No arrests have been made.

At Friday's public viewing, the prison's human resource officer, Russ Reuthe, recalled Williams as a dedicated officer who grew into the dangerous job.

"I knew Eric since day one, through the hiring process and training process. Eric started out as a shrinking violet. He was quiet, kept to himself. Within a short 17 months, he was a robust part of the prison family," Reuthe said.

Reuthe said he ran into Williams at the prison days just before the killing.

"When I saw him, as I always say to the newer staff, I said, 'Are you still digging it?' He looked at me and said, 'You know what Mr. Reuth, this is fun. I'm still digging it.'"

2/27/2013

Search for Nanticoke hit-and-run driver continues

Citizens Voice

Nanticoke police are still searching for a vehicle that struck and injured a 16-year-old boy riding a scooter Friday night, police Chief William Shultz said Tuesday.

The vehicle, which is believed to be an older vehicle with four doors and dark paint, struck the boy about 10:05 p.m. in the area of Alden Road and West Union Street, police said. Witnesses say the vehicle was speeding when it struck the boy, and it never stopped or braked after the impact, police said. The victim, Anthony Molino, was treated and released from Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Township, police said. The vehicle is believed to have passenger-side front damage, with a broken headlight or marker light, police said.

Anyone with information is asked to call police at 570-735-2200.

2/26/2013

Nanticoke corrections officer killed by inmate

Staff report - Citizens Voice

A corrections officer from Nanticoke was killed by an inmate at a federal prison in Wayne County last night, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Eric Williams, 34, was killed by an inmate who used a homemade weapon at the U.S. Penitentiary, Canaan, a federal prison for male inmates. He was transported to a local hospital, where he was pronounced dead about 11:30 p.m.

"This is clearly the darkest day in our institution's short history, and we are in shock over this senseless loss of a colleague and friend," Warden David Ebbert said in a statement.

Bureau of Prisons spokesman Chris Burke said the prison remains in lockdown and that the FBI is investigating the attack. He referred comment on potential charges to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Williams' family recalled him as a sports enthusiast who had made a career of serving his community and the law, having previously worked in security and as a police officer. They said they never imagined his life being cut short doing his job as a corrections officer — a post he had held since Sept. 11, 2011.

"He was proud to wear his uniform," Williams' mother, Jean, 65, said at the family's Walnut Street, Nanticoke, home. "He was a very cautious person. That's why I can't believe this happened to him. Senseless."

Family said they were told Williams was attacked around 10 p.m., near the end of his shift. They said he hadn't said anything recently about any problems with inmates.

"(The killer) is already in jail. So what's going to happen to him? No justice," said Williams' sister, Lauren.

While his family knew there were dangers, they thought becoming a prison guard was safer for Williams than being a cop, along with better financial stability.

Bureau of Prisons data show that serious assaults by inmates on corrections officers are fairly common. According to its data, the bureau, which employs some 38,600 people, experienced 97 serious assaults on staff members in 2009 — the most recent year available — and 93 such assaults in 2008.

"Unfortunately corrections is an inherently dangerous field," said Burke, the bureau spokesman. "Staff safety is one of our biggest concerns, if not the biggest."

But while assaults happen with some regularity, Burke said it is much more rare for federal corrections officers to be killed in the line of duty.

Bureau of Prisons data show that only 24 corrections officers have been killed in the line of duty since 1901.

The most recent fatality was corrections officer Jose V. Rivera, who was killed June 20, 2008, at U.S. Penitentiary Atwater in California. Two inmates chased him until he tripped and fell, then fatally stabbed him with a homemade knife, according to the bureau.

The only other federal corrections officer ever killed in Pennsylvania was Robert F. Miller, a senior officer at U.S. Penitentiary Lewisburg who was killed Oct. 12, 1987, as he and three other officers were transporting an inmate to Geisinger Medical Center to be treated for self-inflicted injuries.

Two of the inmate's associates ambushed the group in an attempt to free the inmate, shooting Miller five times and also striking another officer who survived. Officers chased the inmate and his accomplices for 11 miles before capturing them.

Williams' family is still trying to grasp the fact that he is gone. He recently purchased a cottage at Lily Lake in Conyngham Township, but visited his parents every day at their Nanticoke home for lunch. While there, he would stop by his brother Mark's adjoining taxidermy shop.

"It's the worst. I can't even grasp it," Mark, 38, said. "We just talked about going fishing next week."

Mark said he just restored a fish Williams had mounted in 1997 and showed it to him two days ago. Williams planned to hang the prize catch at his cottage.

A 1996 graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, Williams studied criminal justice at King's College. He worked in security for Wegmans Food Markets for more than a decade and also served as a police officer in Jefferson Township before becoming a prison guard.

"I want people to know who he was and that the young men who work for those prisons put their lives on the line everyday," Jean said.

Family members say they didn't get a lot of details about how Williams was killed. Three guards and the prison warden came to the home to deliver the news to them early this morning, they said.

They are anticipating holding a wake on Thursday and a funeral on Friday.

2/25/2013

Nanticoke boy, 6, amasses aluminum tabs for charity

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When 6-year-old Mason Gibson asked his neighbor why she was collecting aluminum tabs in her front yard, she told him they "help people."

Nearly nine months later, with the help of his classmates and teachers at Good Shepherd Academy, Mason has collected countless tabs, potentially thousands, filling a 50-gallon tub and more.

"I've never seen that many tabs in my life," Mason's father, Steve Gibson, said, holding 50 tabs in the palm of his hand.

"We were trying to fill up this," Mason said, holding up a small box, "We did, we really did!"

Mason started his collection before he knew its fate. His parents, Steve and Mandy Gibson, helped their son choose the Ronald McDonald House, an organization close to their hearts.

"When Mason's brother Bryce was born, he was very sick," Steve Gibson said.

Bryce, 4, was born prematurely and treated in the neonatal intensive care unit at Geisinger Community Medical Center in Scranton, just "far enough" from the family's Nanticoke home that they did not want to leave.

"I slept in a chair that turned out to be in a Ronald McDonald room," Steve Gibson said, "They helped us even though we didn't ask for it."

Mason will donate all of the tabs he has collected to the Ronald McDonald House of Scranton, where his family spent nine days as Bryce was treated. After recycling, the Ronald McDonald House will receive 40 cents for every 1,400 tabs Mason collected.

"They're getting a couple bucks for that, that's heavy!" Steve Gibson joked, attempting to lift the filled tubs taking up space in his family's living room.

Today, Mason will present the tabs to Ronald McDonald, who will visit Good Shepherd Academy to give a presentation on bullying.

"It was neat to see the whole school helping out," Mandy Gibson said, "They really came together."

"We thought it was a worthwhile effort," said Good Shepherd Academy Principal James Jones.

He said the students and staff, eager to support Mason and his cause, would fill a container of tabs about every 10 days.

"The personal connection is the reason why it's doing so well," Jones said.

Mason will continue to collect tabs even after he has donated his current collection.

"They make money for kids in the hospital," he said, "I'm helping people. I want to help people so I can protect them."

"That's Mason," Mandy Gibson said, "To see a little person want to give back is amazing. We're just proud."

2/24/2013

Nanticoke teen injured by Daytona wreckage

swalsh@timeshamrock.com

When Larry Spencer III of Nanticoke and his 15-year-old brother Derrick saw their seats for Saturday's NASCAR Nationwide Series race at Daytona International Speedway — Campbell Box, Section H, Row 7, Seats 17 and 18 — they were thrilled to be so close to the action.

If they only knew.

A 12-car accident on the race's final lap sent rookie Kyle Larson's car into the catch-fencing and sprayed debris into the grandstands, injuring at least 33, according to The Associated Press.

Derrick was among those hurt, suffering a cut on his cheek that required three stitches, Spencer said.

"It was as if a bomb went off. There were pieces everywhere," Spencer, who was uninjured, told The Times-Tribune in a phone interview late Saturday.

When Spencer, 20, saw Larson's car hit the fence, he said his first instinct was to turn his back and shield Derrick. Still, a piece of metal grazed Derrick's shoulder and struck his left cheek, cutting him.

Meanwhile, a tire and its assembly had flown over the fence, over the Spencers' heads and landed several rows behind them, striking a fan.

Spencer described the scene as "chaotic" with people running and yelling.

He noticed that Derrick's cheek was bleeding. But since his brother's injury wasn't as severe as others, he took Derrick to the bathroom to clean the wound. The two then left the track and went to a hospital.

"I figured let the medical personnel attend to the people who needed it more," Spencer said. "There were ambulances and sirens everywhere. It was crazy."

Spencer said Derrick was doing fine and they will still attend today's Daytona 500. This time their seats are in Row 50.

2/22/2013

Nanticoke council, PennDOT to review \$34.5M parkway project

Anthony Melf - Citizens Voice

Council will meet with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to review the South Valley Parkway project prior to the closing of the public comment period in March.

The \$34.5 million project aims to alleviate traffic safety concerns on Middle Road in Hanover Township. The plan has been in the works for almost 15 years.

The public is invited to review the project's environmental impact assessment and provide their feedback for PennDOT on forms located in the front office of the municipal building.

The city will be reallocating leftover fire year funds to two small projects including disabled accessibility and repairs to the Hanover firehouse as well as improvements to unnamed roadway and parking area behind City Hall.

Also, Mayor Joseph Dougherty will be creating a disabled accessibility committee for the city. The committee will be made up of residents and city employees and will be responsible for advising council on disabled accessibility issues, including ensuring that old construction in the city will be in compliance with new laws. Code Enforcement Officer Joe Kordek will lead the committee.

Currently, there are no issues with the collection of property taxes at the county. The county has remitted \$169,097 of property taxes to the city.

Municipal authority looking ahead

Council President and Municipal Authority Chairman Stephen Duda commented on former municipal authority member Hank Marks, who resigned recently due to health issues.

Duda said his absence at the meeting at which Marks resigned got misconstrued as a sign of the two being at odd ends, which couldn't be further from the truth.

"Hank Marks gave his heart and soul to this city for decades," Duda said. "He is a wonderful man and I'm going to miss him." Duda also said he was proud that Marks nominated him to take Marks' place as chairman of the municipal authority. Duda also described the municipal authority as the "economic arm of the city," citing their work in demolishing Bartuska's Warehouse and the old CVS building. He emphasized the authority's focus on keeping the area attractive to promote business growth.

2/21/2013

Resident wants elderly excluded from Nanticoke per capita tax

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

An elderly resident has asked that council consider changing the per capita/residence tax to exonerate the city's elderly from having to pay.

The resident made this request through a correspondence to the city.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty said the \$10-per-year tax brings in \$50,000 for the city each year. In addition, 20 percent of Nanticoke's population is over the age of 65, and 20 percent is under age 18. If those over the age of 65 were to be exonerated from the per capita/residence tax, the city's annual income would be significantly reduced.

In other business:

- Council President Steven Duda said there has been a misunderstanding regarding a statement by a council member that the city's budget is nearly bankrupt. Former Municipal Authority Chairman Hank Marks, who resigned from the authority as of Feb. 1, has previously stated that a council member was spreading the rumor.

- Duda said he is honored that Marks has recommended him for Municipal Authority chairman. Marks also has recommended Councilman Rich Wiaterowski for the position of Municipal Authority secretary.

- According to a police department report, there were 39 criminal arrests in January and police responded to 413 incidents.

The fire department responded to 73 calls in January.

What's Next

The next council meeting will be at 7 p.m. March 6.

2/17/2013

Refinancing of bond saves \$330,000 for district

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board has saved the district \$330,000 by refinancing a bond from PNC Bank this past November, it was announced at Thursday's board meeting.

Also, the board has given approval to Berkheimer Associates to collect the school property taxes from the residents of Nanticoke. The cost per bill is approximately \$2.25 plus postage. Berkheimer is also the current collector of the per capita and earned income tax.

In other business:

- The board has approved Nina Matzoni as head golf coach, Leah Lavelle as softball assistant III, Michele Fadden as assistant band I, and Barbara Lach as volleyball bookkeeper for the 2012-2013 season.

- The board accepted the resignation of Ralph Piontkowski as volunteer baseball coach.

- The Educational Center's Drama Club will hold its annual spring play on May 3 and 4.

The performances will be in the Educational Center's gymnasium at 7 p.m. on both days.

What's Next

The next board meeting will be on Thursday, March 14.

2/15/2013

Nanticoke residents may see 2.5 percent tax hike

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens Voice

Greater Nanticoke Area has positive news for taxpayers: there won't be an extreme tax hike.

The state Department of Education calculations give Greater Nanticoke Area the highest market value to income aid ratio in Luzerne County, allowing a 2.5 percent real estate tax increase for the 2013-14 school year.

The board previously passed a resolution not to raise taxes above that level, according to business manager Albert Melone.

There will be a new tax collector as well. The board approved Berkheimer Associates, which already collects the per capita and earned income taxes, to collect the district's real estate taxes at a rate of \$2.25 per bill plus postage.

Board member Ken James also had good news for taxpayers, which he announced at Thursday's meeting: by refinancing a bond, the district saved \$330,000.

Due to four inclement weather days, school will be held on June 7 and 10, and graduation will be on June 11.

2/15/2013

Appeal in Nanticoke bar decision

Attorney: LCB wrongly dismissed citation against Prospect Street Cafe

An attorney for the Pennsylvania State Police has appealed a Liquor Control Board ruling that dismissed one of the citations issued to a Nanticoke bar in connection with a woman who was accused of slashing another woman in the face.

Craig Strong, attorney for the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement, contends the LCB erred when it dismissed a citation against the Prospect Street Café for allowing a minor to frequent the establishment that was issued in connection with a Jan. 1, 2012 incident involving Melanie Figueroa.

Figueroa, who was 20 at the time, was accused by Jennifer Mieczkowski of slashing Mieczkowski during an altercation at the bar. Nanticoke police investigated, but no charges have been filed against Figueroa, who has denied the allegations.

The appeal, filed Thursday in Luzerne County Court, says the LCE cited the bar's owner, Paul Halliday, in February for several violations throughout the year. Two of the citations involved serving Figueroa, who was under the legal drinking age, and allowing her to frequent the establishment.

An administrative law judge upheld the citation in November. Halliday then appealed to the LCB board.

The board in January upheld the citation for serving a minor, but dismissed the citation for allowing a minor to frequent the establishment.

In dismissing the one count, the LCB found the LCE had presented evidence that Figueroa was permitted to enter and stay in the bar on only one occasion. The board said the law required it show evidence she was there "habitually" or on more than one or two visits.

In his appeal, Strong claims the board's interpretation of the law is in error. State police contend even one visit to a licensed premise by a minor may be considered "frequenting" a bar.

2/11/2013

Missing girl's family searches for answers

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

Nine years of mystery and questions surround the disappearance of Phylcia Thomas, but a recent discovery may lead to new answers as her family searches for closure and justice.

Thomas disappeared after leaving her Lake Township home around midnight on Feb. 11, 2004. Since that night, her family, friends and investigators have not stopped searching for signs that might lead them to the then 22-year-old woman.

"Who wouldn't look?" Thomas's mother, Pauline Bailey, challenged. "When you love somebody, you don't give up."

The Thomas family has not given up, holding a vigil each year on the anniversary of Phylcia's disappearance, ever hopeful for new information in the ongoing investigation. They plan to hold a vigil today at 5 p.m. on Patriot Square in Nanticoke.

"I refuse to believe that she's gone until it's proven," Jessie Thomas, Phylcia's brother said, surrounded by photographs and signs bearing her face in the family's Nanticoke home.

This year, investigators may have unearthed a new piece of the puzzle. A skull discovered in Newport Township during the summer of 2012 is currently under DNA analysis at the University of North Texas, and state police say they are hopeful it belongs to Phylcia Thomas.

Trooper Chris King, of state police at Wyoming's Criminal Investigation Unit, said the case has been treated as equivalent to a homicide due to the passage of time. When DNA results return on the discovered skull, police will continue to investigate the case.

Even if lab results identify the skull as Thomas's, her family says they will meet the discovery with mixed emotions.

"It won't be over until the rest of her is found," Jocelyn Thomas, Phylcia's sister, said. "Hopefully this is the beginning of an end."

Authorities echoed Jocelyn Thomas's hopes.

"A positive ID does not end the investigation," King said, "Leads continually come in and we always follow them up."

Throughout the past nine years, King and other investigators have formed a picture of what may have happened the night Thomas disappeared. Steve Martin of Ross Township was connected to Phylcia Thomas and Jennifer Barziloski, another Lake Township woman who disappeared in 2001 at the age of 18.

"These cases intertwine themselves," said Trooper Stephen Polishan, another member of state police at Wyoming's crime unit. "Steve Martin was a common denominator."

Martin was never charged with the disappearance of either Thomas or Barziloski due to a lack of substantial evidence despite multiple police searches of his home. Martin denied any involvement in their disappearances, despite claims he was the last person to see both women alive. He later hanged himself while serving time in state prison for an unrelated vehicular homicide charge.

Barziloski's remains were discovered and identified in Hunlock Township in April 2010. Polishan said remains that could belong to Thomas were discovered about 15 miles from that site.

"We have a couple of different scenarios but we are unable to substantiate them at this point," Polishan said about the theories they have about what happened to Phylcia. "We know how things start and how they unfortunately end. It's the in-between that we have questions about."

Polishan and King both hope to answer some of those questions when the DNA results come back, which could take anywhere from three to six more months. Whether the results are positive or negative, they will continue searching for justice for Phylcia Thomas.

"She's somebody's daughter, somebody's child, somebody's sister," King said. "She's a person, and she's a victim. We work for her."

The Thomas family continues to keep Phylcia's memory alive, even as they too await the results of the DNA test.

"We do what we have to do to keep her in our hearts and to save her from this horrible ending she had," Bailey said.

They will hold their annual vigil tonight on Patriot Square in Nanticoke. As the mystery slowly unravels, Thomas's family feels the support of their community as they strive to understand the unsolved events of that chill night nine years ago.

"The more people there (the vigil), the more people it proves she touched," Jessie Thomas said, "Not one day goes by that she's not in our hearts and

in our minds."

Anyone with information about the disappearance of Phylicia Thomas is asked to call state police at Wyoming at 570-697-2000. The Thomas family will hold a vigil today, the anniversary of Phylicia's disappearance, at 5 p.m. on Patriot Square in Nanticoke.

2/9/2013

Nanticoke officials fill two vacancies on city's municipal authority

Anthony Melf - Citizens Voice

Council approved Mayor Joseph Dougherty's motion to appoint two men to the Nanticoke City Municipal Authority on Wednesday.

John Kurowski and Brent Makarczyk will replace former authority members Jeff Lewis and Hank Marks.

Kurowski, who replaces Lewis, will serve on the authority until Dec. 31, 2015. Makarczyk, who replaces Marks, will serve until Dec. 31, 2014. Marks resigned at last month's council meeting after criticizing an unnamed council member for spreading false rumors regarding the authority's financial status.

Council also passed a resolution that outsources the city's tax collection. Instead, Luzerne County will collect taxes, costing the city about \$10,000. The Nanticoke Tax Department cost the city \$127,000 for salaries, benefits, equipment and supplies.

Council President Stephen Duda said the change saves the city a substantial amount of money. He said the new policy is more convenient for residents, who will now only have to send mail to one place. Council said no layoffs will result because of the change; employees will be moved to other departments.

In other business:

n Council authorized the city to foreclose on the municipal lien on 49 E. Grand St. City solicitor William Finnegan says the resolution involves demolishing the property, placing a lien on it, foreclosing on the lien and taking ownership of the property.

n Council also approved the sale of the former Rentko property to St. Faustina's Parish, contingent on legal approval, for about \$9,000.

n Council addressed public concerns over its ordinance establishing regulations for open burning, as passed in late December. Center Street resident Richard Klepadlo complained the ordinance enabled his neighbor to use a burning pit that emitted smoke into his backyard and home. Duda emphasized that the ordinance was crafted to serve the needs of the community and any violations of the ordinance could be looked into by the city solicitor; however, any personal disputes were more appropriate for a magistrate. Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski offered to meet with and mediate between the feuding neighbors to find an amicable solution.

2/9/2013

Welcome back: Pugh's return saved Nanticoke program

Future teacher could face decision between devoting time to studies or coaching.

Paul Sokoloski - Times Leader

The waters rippled with uncertainty at Nanticoke High School, and even from a distance, Stephanie Pugh grew troubled.

It seemed she had just stepped out of the Nanticoke pool when her old high school took a dip into the dilemma of trying to find a new leader.

"I didn't want to see the swim program collapse, with no head coach," Pugh said.

So she did something about it.

She applied for the position.

And her decision may have been more difficult than anyone knows.

When she was hired as Nanticoke's head swim coach for the 2011-12 season, Pugh was a sophomore at Misericordia University – where she spent her freshman year competing on the college swim team.

Suddenly, the daughter of Joseph and Alice Pugh of Nanticoke had an overwhelming workload that forced her to choose between trying to race past opponents and instructing other swimmers how to do it.

"I swam most of my life," Pugh said. "I really did not know what to do if I wasn't swimming."

But her head kept swimming with possibilities for her future.

Pugh is a history and secondary education major at Misericordia with hopes of becoming a teacher.

So she figured, why not get a head start working with students?

"I thought it would be a really good idea to work with high school kids," Pugh said, "since I'm going to become a high school teacher."

She began implementing her lessons immediately, sending seven Nanticoke swimmers to the District 2 Swimming and Diving Championships last year.

"Teaching them how I used to swim," Pugh said.

Interestingly, she had a lot of willing listeners – including girls she called teammates just two seasons before.

"We were on the same relay team (at Nanticoke)," said current Trojans senior Connie Madura, who helped grow the 2012-13 team to 18 swimmers – nearly twice as many as last season's roster – by running a swim recruiting program in her school as her senior project. "Steph was a really good swimmer back in high school. We all respect whatever advice we get from her. She does a good job."

At least, the best she can.

Pugh admits this season, her second season coaching the Trojans, has become more difficult.

First, she says, more new faces on the team meant extra effort on her part.

"It's a lot tougher this year than last year," said Pugh, who will turn 21 in May. "There were a lot more kids who didn't know how to swim. And my school work went up drastically."

She currently has a 40-page essay due by the end of this semester at Misericordia, but that'll seem like a breeze to Pugh when she begins student-teaching during her senior year in the fall.

"I'll be spending 40 hours a week at school," Pugh said.

Which is why she may not last another season as Nanticoke's coach.

But with Trojans girls swimmers Madura, Sarah Crane and Katherine Marsh headed to district competition later this month, along with Adam Ferrucci from the boys team, Pugh hopes to help them go the distance as she's part of the program.

"I think," Pugh said of her ambitious endeavor, "it's paid off."

2/8/2013

2 named to Nanticoke Municipal Authority

Neighbors complain that another's burning is causing problems for them.

Susan Bettinge - Times Leader

City Council on Wednesday night approved Mayor Joseph Dougherty's appointments of John Kurowski and Brent Makarczyk to the Nanticoke Municipal Authority.

Kurowski replaces Jeff Lewis, while Kurowski takes over Hank Marks' position.

Council also approved the motion to pay the county a tax collection salary at \$10,000 per year. This is a substantial savings to the city now that the county and city bills are combined.

City Manager and Finance Director Pam Heard said that the former cost per year was about \$127,000 when the city was in charge of the collections and the two bills were separate.

In other matters, Center Street resident Rich Klepado asked council to reverse the recently passed burn ordinance. He expressed his frustration regarding his neighbor Ken Herring's backyard burning.

Klepado said that he is "unable to bring his mother-in-law (who suffers from COPD) home from a nursing home facility" because of the thick black smoke coming from Herring's yard. Klepado added that he can't sit in his yard, open his windows or put a fan or air conditioner in due to the smoke.

Herring replied he is within the legal burn ordinance limits. He also said he is not burning garbage, only a log or two.

Another of Herring's neighbors, Sheila Semon, added she too can no longer sit in her yard due to the smoke. Semon brought in photographs of the black smoke coming from Herring's yard, and said she "can no longer enjoy her property."

Council President Steve Duda acknowledged the concerns of all parties involved, and said the ordinance was passed "to benefit the majority of the citizens of the city." Duda said he will "check the law to see if (Klepado's) rights have been violated ..."

Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski said she is willing to be the mediator so that the parties can come to a conclusion that is agreeable to all who are involved.

UP NEXT

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, Feb. 20 at 7 p.m.

1/24/2013

Nanticoke to outsource tax collection to county

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke officials decided to outsource property tax collection to the Luzerne County Treasurer's Office, a move they expect will save the city about \$90,000.

Nanticoke Administrator Pam Heard said city officials are looking for any way possible to cut expenses without cutting services - and by reducing expenses, the city won't have to raise taxes.

In addition, it will be more convenient for residents: "Now they can make one trip and pay their county and city taxes, if they don't pay by mail," she said.

Heard said Nanticoke's earned income, mercantile and per capita taxes are already collected by Berkheimer Associates, so it didn't make sense to keep city property tax collection in-house. By outsourcing, the city won't have to pay for separate bonding, computers and other expenses, and the employee who collected property tax can be reassigned.

"It really wasn't cost-effective for us to collect one tax when somebody else can do it for \$2 per bill," Heard said.

Before voters approved the home-rule charter, Nanticoke had an elected tax collector.

Under the direction of Mayor Joseph Dougherty, who appoints the tax collector under the charter, city officials put out a request for proposals. They decided to go with the county's proposal, because of the central location, the price and the service, Heard said.

"We have confidence in the county," she said. "They're qualified; they've been doing it for years for themselves. They have a good system."

Nanticoke may be ahead of the curve: Luzerne County Manager Robert Lawton has proposed eliminating elected municipal tax collectors and instead having county personnel collect county property tax revenue.

However, county council is divided on the idea, and plans to hold a special meeting for further discussion Tuesday.

Nanticoke residents' tax bills will be issued Jan. 31; discount period ends April 1.

The Luzerne County Treasurer's Office is located on the first floor of the courthouse, 200 N. River St., Wilkes-Barre; phone number is 570-830-5129.

Office hours are 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Credit and debit cards are accepted for payment, and taxes can be paid by phone. Payments may also be made online at www.paylocalgov.com/luzernecounty-pa/SelectService.aspx starting Jan. 31.

1/24/2013

Norfolk squadron gets new leader

Posted to: Military Norfolk

By Mike Connors - The Virginian-Pilot

The Navy held a change of command ceremony at Norfolk Naval Station last week.

Cmdr. Daryle D. Cardone relieved Cmdr. Timothy J. Slentz as command head of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron 121 on Friday, a Navy news release said.

"No commanding officer succeeds alone, and I have been blessed with so many talented people who make this squadron so successful with their daily contributions," Slentz said in a news release.

Slentz's next assignment will be at Strike Force Training Atlantic.

Cardone, from Nanticoke, Pennsylvania., graduated from the University of Wilkes-Barre in 1993 and received his commission from Officer Candidate School in 1995. His previous assignments include serving as 121's executive officer and on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations. Cmdr. Ryan J. Bryla assumed duties as 121's executive officer.

1/18/2013

District 2 denies transfer of Richardson to Nanticoke

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

A six-member panel of the District 2 Committee denied athletic eligibility to Maurice Richardson, saying his transfer from GAR to Nanticoke Area was athletically motivated. The hearing was held Thursday afternoon at Wilkes-Barre CTC.

The committee voted 5-1 to deny eligibility. Richardson and the Nanticoke Area school district have the right to file an appeal to PIAA headquarters in Mechanicsburg if they choose to.

According to GAR athletic director Simon Peter, Richardson and GAR basketball coach Paul Brown engaged in a verbal altercation on Dec. 6, the night before high school basketball exhibition season, which subsequently led to Richardson's dismissal from the team.

From there Richardson, a 6-foot-4 senior, moved to Nanticoke in mid-December and began taking classes at Nanticoke Area on Jan. 2. Richardson denied the move was for athletic purposes and was for personal reasons. He did admit to having a verbal altercation with Brown but said that it was not uncommon between the two and that usually after a day or two cooler heads normally prevailed.

"I think the ultimate factor is that Maurice has a lot on his plate and doesn't need basketball," Nanticoke Area principal John Gorham said. "That shouldn't be the basis of (the committee's) decision how much he has on his plate. I think they used that as a factor in deciding. That is not their place to make that decision. Their decision is to decide whether it was motivated by basketball. In our opinion it wasn't and we still believe that." The hearing was necessary after GAR did not sign the principal-to-principal waiver. Nanticoke Area did sign the waiver.

"In light of the facts it had to be up to the PIAA to make the final determination," GAR principal Colleen Robatin said. "They are the governing body. Anytime there is a question, GAR will not sign and call upon them to listen to the facts and convene and make a decision."

1/17/2013

Nanticoke authority chairman resigns, decries rumors

Hank Marks touts authority's solvency. Council members praise his service.

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

City Council on Wednesday night accepted Municipal Authority Chairman Hank Marks' resignation.

Marks cited health issues as the reason for his resignation, which will become effective Feb. 1. Marks served with the municipal authority for the past seven years, including the past four as its chairman.

In addition, Marks stated that a member of council has been spreading "vicious rumors" regarding the budget, saying the authority is near bankruptcy.

Marks said he has all financial records and bank statements available for the past four years. He displayed the bank statements to the council members, showing a balance of \$711,501.40 as of Dec. 31, "a far cry from bankruptcy" Marks added.

If the "false accusations do not cease and desist" said Marks, he will "file a civil lawsuit" against the council member who is making the accusations.

Council Vice President James Litchkofski said he is "saddened" by Marks' resignation, and that Marks always "fought for our town."

Litchkofski addressed the accusations toward Marks by saying that it takes "years to build your name" and reputation, and he advised Marks to "do whatever you need to do to guard your name." Litchkofski added that Marks "dedication over the years was amazing" and that his "heart is in the right place."

Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski and councilmen Rich Wiateroski and Kevin Coughlin each added their own words of appreciation for the all of work that Marks has done for the community, as well as expressing their sadness over his resignation. Council President Steven Duda was not in attendance.

In other matters, the Comcast account is being negotiated. City Manager Pam Heard said that "any other service providers are welcome in Nanticoke."

The next council meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Feb. 6.

1/17/2013

Nanticoke authority member resigns after assailing council member

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

A veteran member of the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority resigned Wednesday night after blasting an unnamed city council member for circulating "vicious, slanderous rumors" about the authority's financial status.

Hank Marks, a former authority chairman, said he will sue if the "blatant lies and untruths" continue.

Marks, 81, a longtime taxpayer activist, said he has the records to prove the authority is sound and he marched to the front of council chambers to hand over bank statements. He said the statements show a money market balance of \$711,501 as of Dec. 1, 2012, and \$14,323 in a checking account.

"This is pretty damn far from being bankrupt," he said.

Marks listed the authority's accomplishments over the years, including the location of Luzerne County Community College facilities in the former Kanjorski Center; creation of the LCCC Culinary Arts center at Main and Market streets and pending construction of a new Geisinger health facility.

He chided council for failing to rezone land on Kosciuszko Street for proposed LCCC student dormitories. Those dorms would have brought in thousands in tax income to the city, he said. A private developer's request for approval of a 240-bed, \$15 million dormitory project was rejected in December because of neighbor concerns and zoning limited to single- or two-family housing.

Marks lauded former Mayor John Bushko, state Sen. John Yudichak and his former authority colleagues for their work on behalf of the city over his seven years on the board.

Marks cited health issues as another reason for his resignation and he promised to help with any transition needs. The other current authority members are Thomas Selecky, Jeff Lewis and Councilmen Stephen Duda and Richard Wiaterowski.

A resident questioned the legality of council members serving on the authority. Solicitor William Finnegan said it is legal under the home-rule charter.

Councilman Jim Litchkofski said he was "saddened" by Marks' resignation.

"Hank's dedication has been amazing," he said. "We didn't always agree but his heart has been in the right place. You fought for your town."

After the meeting, Marks declined to identify the council member to whom he referred.

Wiaterowski presided in Duda's absence.

In other business, council said negotiations are ongoing with Comcast for a cable television contract. A resident asked if a competing company could use Comcast's lines just as electric suppliers use UGI and PPL lines. Finnegan said he would look into the matter.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty thanked Gerald Hudak for his work over two years on the home-rule charter.

1/10/2013

Dining out: Larry's serves comfort food mash-up

Kristen Gaydos - Citizens Voice

The owner of Larry's Pizza and Pub in Nanticoke knows area residents love chicken wings and pierogies - so who wouldn't love a combination of the two?

Larry Karnes concocted the chicken wing pierogi - available with his signature wing sauces - for the bar and restaurant on Church Street, just one of the newest offerings at the half-century-old family restaurant.

Karnes said he came across a similar dish while out and about in Scranton, and thought he could make it even better.

"We brought them down here, and put on our wing sauce on them, and we've never looked back," he said.

Karnes will celebrate his family's 50 years in the restaurant business in March. Through the decades, the business evolved from a humble pizza shop to a full-scale restaurant and bar. It started with his father, the late Sgt. Lawrence Karnes Sr., who worked as a Plymouth police officer for 30 years in addition to running the pizza shop. The family moved the business to its current location at the corner of Church and College streets in 1973.

Karnes took over in 1998.

"We're excited to get to 50 years," he said, adding the restaurant will offer special deals to mark the occasion during March. "It's definitely a family milestone."

The family added the bar to the eatery in February 2001, expanding into the property's side yard. When it opened, the bar's theme was "The Nineteenth Hole," paying tribute to Karnes' passion for golf. Since then, the captain of the Nanticoke City Volunteer Fire Department has added some firefighter touches, including a refurbished fire call box.

"It's just short of 1,000 pounds," Karnes said of the still-working antique, which would send a ticker-tape alert to the fire station.

While the most popular menu items are pizza and wings, the restaurant offers pagach and many other dinners and salads, as well as a children's menu. To warm up a cold winter night, the eatery serves soups like cream of potato and ham, crab bisque or Kansas City steak soup.

The eatery also offers weekly food and drink specials, including clam night and wings night. It serves about 12 different wing sauces, like spicy red garlic, Cajun blue cheese and butter garlic. Another sauce is in the works, Karnes said.

"We make all our own recipes," he said.

The restaurant also offers catering, and hosts private parties in a separate dining area.

Larry's Pizza and Pub

Location: 400 E. Church St., Nanticoke

Hours: Open Tuesdays-Sundays, kitchen 3-11 p.m., bar 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.

1/4/2013

Nanticoke to apply grant toward Broad St. paving

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The city has received a \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant for street paving, according to information presented at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

The grant allocation is being provided by the state Department of Community and Economic Development and will be used to pave Broad Street, starting at the park and extending to Green Street.

Also, the Public Works Department has applied 7 tons of cold patch to repair potholes.

According to the police report, there were 4,873 incidents in the city during 2012.

In other matters:

- Resident Jim Samselski expressed frustration to council regarding the lack of bids for the city's refuse collection. At the end of the year, the city's present refuse contract will end. Samselski said that administration is responsible to bring more than one company into the bidding process. But council Vice President James Litchkofski replied that "if only one company bids, then only one company bids." Council President Steve Duda added "we do the best we can (with what we have)."

Samselski said he also was unhappy with the long-term Comcast contract, saying it "hurts citizens in Nanticoke to be locked in to a contract." City Solicitor William Finnegan Jr. answered by explaining that the city is in the middle of a re-negotiation process and is "soliciting input from the public."

Former Pennsylvania State Trooper Stanley Jezewski has been appointed to the Police Civil Service Board. Jezewski's duties will include administering tests and interviewing candidates seeking to fill the five new openings for auxiliary police officers.

The next council meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Jan. 16.

1/3/2013

Nanticoke resident complains about garbage collection

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

A city resident told council to solicit more options for its refuse program when it puts the work out for bid, but city leaders said they can only do so much.

After Jim Samselski, 50, of Nanticoke complained that the city has only received a single bid for its garbage work in the past, he said council should solicit bids for the work in the future.

Doing that would probably be illegal and would definitely be improper, said Councilman Jim Litchkofski.

"We bid it out, as we're required by law. Those that respond, we can negotiate with them," he said.

The city plans to bid its garbage collection service and must run a public notice of the bid.

Nanticoke's contract with its current garbage collector, J. P. Mascaro, runs through 2013.

In other news, council also finalized a zoning ordinance that defines a section of land across from Luzerne County Community College as a medium-density residential area.